AN APPROXIMATE PRINTING DATE FOR THE FIRST QUARTO OF ROMEO AND JULIET

BY HARRY R. HOPPE

The date on the title-page of the 'bad' quarto of Romeo and Juliet is 1597. There is no valid reason for doubting the correctness of this date; but there is evidence which enables us, with reasonable certainty, to fix the time of printing within a relatively short period in the early months of this year.

The first point of evidence is the title-page itself, which states that this quarto represents the play: 'As it hath been often (with great applause) plaid publiquely, by the right Honourable the L. of Hunsdon his Servants.' It was Malone, who first remarked that Shakespeare's company was known as Hunsdon's servants for only a brief period, the interval between 22 July 1596 and 17 March 1596/7. This was after the death of Henry Carey, first Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain, and before his son and heir, George Carey, was appointed to the office following the death of William Brooke, Lord Cobham, who had succeeded the first Lord Hunsdon in that post. In Malone's opinion the reference to the acting of the tragedy by Hunsdon's men seemed 'to ascertain the date [of performance] of Romeo and Juliet beyond a doubt'. Whether Malone's inference was correct does not concern us here. What the statement more probably implies is that the quarto must

1 Doubts have been expressed by G. C. Camp, but effectively answered, I think, by R. B. McKerrow. See T.L.S., 25 June (p. 544) and 4 July (p. 564) 1936.
3 This chronology is that given by Chambers, Eliz. Stage, ii. 195; Malone and many other authorities have given the date of the second Hunsdon's appointment as 17 April.
have been printed between 1 January and 17 March 1596/7 while Cobham was still Lord Chamberlain. Or, to be strictly accurate, the statement means that sheet A, of which the title-page was an integral part, was being set up during this time.

It seems a valid inference that the printer of the quarto would describe the players by their current designation of Hunsdon’s men. If printing began after the second Lord Hunsdon, patron of the company, was appointed Chamberlain, his retainers would doubtless have been given the title bearing the greater distinction, that of the Lord Chamberlain’s men. Any change in name of this, one of the most important acting companies, must quickly have been known to the play-going and play-reading public. There would be no point in giving them their older designation of Lord Hunsdon’s retainers. Consequently, if the company was referred to as Hunsdon’s servants, it was probably because at that time they were known by this name. The printer could hardly have had the prescience that Cobham would die shortly and Hunsdon succeed him in office. Cobham had been Chamberlain, and Shakespeare’s company had been known as Hunsdon’s men since July 1596; and there was no particular reason to expect them to be known by any other title. Moreover, the fact that separate title-pages were frequently posted as advertisements for their respective books lends support to this reasoning. Timeliness in designating the acting company by its current title would surely be important if some copies of the title-page of Romeo and Juliet were destined for this purpose. It is reasonably safe, therefore, to infer that the book was published by 17 March, or at least within so short a time after, that the old designation of Hunsdon’s servants was fresh in the public’s memory. It seems probable that if Shakespeare’s company had changed its name to Chamberlain’s men before publication of the quarto, the printer would have brought his book up to date by simply

1 Fleay, Chronicle Hist. of W. Sh., 1886, p. 191.
inserting a cancel title-page. This supposition is especially likely in view of the fact that the edition was evidently printed in haste, in order to take advantage of the current popularity of the tragedy on the London stage.

There is further evidence to be considered which concerns John Danter, the printer of the quarto, and has a bearing on the printing-date. On 10 April 1597 it was recorded in Register B of the Stationers’ Company that there were latelie in lent last found in the house of John Danter Twoo printinge presses and certen letters pica, and pica Roman, and other sortes of letters in fourmes and cases, wch were employed in printinge of a booke called Jesus psalter, and other things without auctoritie, which presses and letters were . . . defaced and made unserviceable for pryntinge . . . 2 In 1596/7 Lent began on 9 February and Easter came on 27 March. Some time in this period two of Danter’s presses, and some of his printing materials were confiscated and destroyed. Danter had always led a precarious existence as a printer, and his output was very small. Several months before this episode of the Jesus Psalter, a press and type of his had been seized. 3 Hence it is plausible to suppose that the loss of these two presses during Lent seriously affected his output or, even more likely, stopped it altogether, at least until he could make replacements.

1 It may not be without significance that the title-pages of two other Sh. quartos printed in the same year, R. II (ent. 29 Aug.) and R. III (ent. 20 Oct.), assert that the respective plays were acted by the Lord Chamberlain’s men. The earlier entry shows that five or six months after Hunsdon’s appointment the printer was not using the old title of Hunsdon’s servants.

2 W. W. Greg and E. Boswell, Records of the Court of the Stationers’ Company, 1930, p. 56. From this entry it appears that only the type actually used in printing the Psalter was seized, not all the type in Danter’s office.

3 Arber, Stationers’ Register, i. 580–1. The effect of these seizures is possibly reflected in the declining number of Danter’s entries in the Register during the last three years: in 1594, 34 titles; in 1595, 10 titles; in 1596, 7 titles; and in 1597, 1 title.
We now have two overlapping periods of time to consider: first, the interval between 1 January and 17 March, when Shakespeare’s comrades were known as Hunsdon’s men; second, the interval between 9 February and 27 March, during which Danter’s printing-house was raided. These two periods have a common period between 9 February, the beginning of Lent, and 17 March, when the second Lord Hunsdon assumed the post of Chamberlain. Is there any evidence which suggests that the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* was printed in this period?

The first quarto divides itself typographically into two parts. Signatures A–D are printed in a rather large type measuring about 95 mm. in a twenty-line count and, exclusive of running-title and catchword, containing 32 lines to a page; sigs. E–K are in a smaller type, measuring 82 mm., and containing 36 lines to a page. The change of type after the printing of A–D indicates that the completion of the printing of the quarto as a continuous unit was in some way interrupted; and other evidence connected with this change suggests that the type for the second part was composed and the printing probably executed in a different printing-house. It is perhaps well in this place to emphasize that the nature of this typographical division points to the fact that the type of the second part, sigs. E–K, was composed after the composition of sig. D was completed and not simultaneously with sigs. A–D. It was, of course, by no means unusual for the manuscript of a book to be distributed among different compositors, or even different printers, who would all compose the type at the same time.¹ This procedure, however, is generally revealed by certain definite signs:

The usual indication of such division of a book between different workmen is that the parts do not follow one another in the normal manner. In some cases the book is found to be made up of two or more incomplete series of signatures. In others, while the series may in general be regular, we find certain signatures omitted,

though the text follows on without a break, or extra signatures are inserted, or certain gatherings have a greater or smaller number of leaves than is normal for the book, or we find a page or two of matter which has evidently been inserted as padding to fill up a blank. Such irregularities are of course due to the fact that the amount of matter supplied to the various compositors has not filled exactly the space which was allowed for it.

These conditions have not been fulfilled in the *Romeo and Juliet* quarto. The type of sigs. A–D ends quite neatly at the bottom of the last page of D, without apparent crowding or spacing of the type to make it end exactly at this point. If different printers or compositors had set up the parts simultaneously from manuscript copy, the chances of such perfect division between them are indeed slight.

To return to the evidence for the probable composition of sigs. E–K in a different printing-house: it is important, in the first place, to observe that a different running-title was used in the second part, sigs. A–D having *The most excellent Tragedie, of Romeo and Juliet*, sigs. E–K having *The excellent Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet*. As long as the wording of the running-title remained unchanged, an Elizabethan compositor usually saved time and effort by leaving the type for the running-title in the forms and not setting up a new running-title for each page of text. The unusual change in the running-title of the second part of the *Romeo and Juliet* quarto argues for its having been set up by a printer who was not aware of the wording that had been established for sigs. A–D, a change readily accounted for if the completion of the book had been entrusted to another printing-house.

Second, sigs. E–K show a noticeable decrease in printer’s errors. Third, and most significant of all, the type

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1 Ibid., p. 129.

2 The same settings of type were used for all the running-titles in sigs. E–K, as is evidenced by certain peculiarities in individual letters. This was doubtless done in sigs. A–D, though I can discern no typographical peculiarities to establish it as a certainty.

3 A minor point is the fact that Capulet’s name, with one exception (on A4v),
of E–K was spread out by inserting spaces between stage-directions and text, by leaving spaces at the top or bottom of many pages, and (beginning on G2*) by inserting rows of printers’ ornaments across the page. According to my calculations the spaces thus created total 177 lines. It has already been noted that the second part normally had 36 lines of type on each page, as compared with 32 lines in the first part. With this gain of four lines a page, the 47 pages of the second part, if printed without spacing, would contain 188 more lines than the same number of pages in the type of the first part. This figure is remarkably close to the 177 lines of spaces in the second part. The numerous prose passages, in which the smaller type yields more words to a line, would easily account for the difference of eleven lines (188 minus 177). Thus it is fairly evident that the type of sigs. E–K was spread out in order to make it fill as many sheets as it otherwise would have occupied if the larger type of sigs. A–D had been used.¹

Such uneconomical expansion of the type would be hard to explain if the same printer produced the entire quarto. By using the smaller type, he could have saved five of the seven pages of sig. K (5 × 36 equals 180, virtually 177 lines), and by compressing here and there he could easily have ended the book on sig. I, thereby saving the cost of paper and machining for an entire sheet. (Certainly not much space was wasted in

is uniformly spelled ‘Capulet’ in A–D but ‘Capolet’ in E–K. Miss G. Hjort explains this variation as ‘the difference between the spelling of two Elizabethan compositors’. M.L.R., 1926, xxi. 142.

¹ Apparently this was first pointed out by R. B. McKerrow in his British Academy Shakespeare lecture, ‘The Treatment of Shakespeare’s Text by his Earlier Editors, 1709–1768,’ 1933, p. 33, though it was partly anticipated by F. G. Hubbard, The First Quarto Edition of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet (U. of Wisconsin Studies in Lang. and Lit.), 1924, pp. 20–1, who suggested as a possibility ‘that the borders [i.e. rows of printers’ ornaments] were inserted when the signatures G–K were made up, in order to get a satisfactory paging for the last signature’.
printing sigs. A–D: in three places, A4, A4', C4', a blank line was left between stage-direction and text; elsewhere every line of type-area was used.)

On the other hand, if we imagine Danter, through confiscation of his presses and material, having to arrange with a second printer for the completion of the book, the spacing out of the type is quite explicable. From a typographical point of view the sheet is the unit of printing; and it is in terms of the printed sheet that a printer computes his costs—or his charges, if he is printing for another. Basing his calculations on the size of type used in sheets A–D, Danter would estimate that he required six more sheets to finish the quarto, and would arrange accordingly with some trade printer. But the second printer, using smaller type, would discover very early that by printing normally he would not be able to fill the specified number of sheets; so, in order to assure receiving payment on the contracted number of sheets, he began at the outset to space out the type. Danter, if he had been forced to print the remainder of the book himself with smaller type, would have had no reason to be so wasteful of paper and time; whereas a jobbing printer would have had a very good motive: to assure his being paid for the maximum number of sheets.

Thus the typographical evidence suggests most strongly that Danter turned the printing of *Romeo and Juliet* over to someone else, when the book was less than half completed. It is natural to suppose that the occasion for this change was the raid on Danter’s printing-house in Lent of 1596/7, and the reference on the title-page to Lord Hunsdon’s men implies that the book was in the press during that portion of Lent between 9 February and 17 March 1596/7. In the absence of final evidence this conclusion is necessarily conjectural, for the possible forces and circumstances that might have been at

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1 This does not, of course, mean that every line was *filled* with type; sometimes a line has only one or two words, a stage-direction or exit perhaps, the rest being occupied by quads.
work in Danter's printing-house are beyond calculation; but the conclusion does fit the known facts without straining them.

As a kind of postscript, one other matter perhaps merits discussion here. Inasmuch as Danter evidently ceased printing in this same year, 1597, it is tempting to presume that the affair of the *Jesus Psalter* marked the close of his printing career. But we have evidence that at least one book was published by him after that time. On 22 August 1597 Danter made his last entry in the *Stationers’ Register*; and the book was published in that year, being, according to the title-page, printed by John Danter and sold by William Jones, under the title, *Mihil Mumchance, his Discoverie of the Art of Cheating in false Dyce play* (S.T.C. 17916). Being a small book, a quarto of fifteen leaves (A² B–D⁴, E¹), it could not have taken long to print, and therefore was probably printed and published about or not long after 22 August 1597, several months later than the episode of the *Jesus Psalter*. It may have been only published by Danter, and not printed by him; nevertheless its appearance shows that he was, and regarded himself as being, still in active business.

The typographical evidence of the book itself, though not absolutely conclusive, points to its being Danter’s own work. The type on A² of *Mihil Mumchance* is identical with that used on sheets A–D of *Romeo and Juliet*, a fact which suggests that the change of type in the Shakespeare quarto was due to lack of presses, not of type. The ornaments used on A², B¹, and E¹ are all to be found in previous books by Danter, the one on A² being the same as that used on the title-page of the *Romeo and Juliet* quarto. However, the ornamental initials

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1 Arber, S.R. iii. 89.
2 The book examined was the Bodleian copy (Malone 575).
3 The ornament on this page is found, for example, on the title-page of *Strange Signes scene in the aire . . . in, and aboute the Citie of Rosenberge*, 1594, J. Danter, sold by W. Barley.
4 Also found on title-page of T. Nashe, *Hawe with you to Saffron Walden*, 1596.
used on A2, A2', and B1 are not designs observable in Danter's earlier books. The two most likely suppositions to explain these phenomena are: (1) that Danter printed the book himself, the ornamental initials representing what he had purchased (or borrowed) to replace his confiscated stock, or (2) that someone else printed the book, Danter providing some of his own type and ornaments, perhaps under some kind of partnership arrangement. I am inclined to regard the first hypothesis as somewhat more probable. The presence of the type and the ornaments seems to indicate that Danter had an active share in the printing of the book, and that he had probably acquired new printing machinery by August of this year.

Danter died some time between the entry of this book (22 August 1597) and 24 December 1599, when his widow assigned some books to William White. Until better evidence turns up, we must take with several grains of salt H. R. Plomer's statement that Danter 'disappears in a whirlwind of official indignation and Star Chamber shrieks'. His difficulties with the Star Chamber came several years earlier. Chronic illness, inability to make a living by printing, or some other cause may have been the occasion of his ceasing business after 1597. At any rate, the episode of the *Jesus Psalter* does not necessarily coincide with the termination of Danter's publishing career. However, the evidence connected with the printing of *Mibil Munchance* in no way runs counter to the principal thesis of this article, namely, that the first quarto of *Romeo and Juliet*, begun by Danter but completed by another printer, was probably printed between 9 February and 17 March 1596/7.

J. Danter; and on A2 and C1 of Henry Perry, *Egluryn Phraethineh*, 1595, J. Danter.

1 They struck me as resembling some of Richard Field's; but my brief visit of one afternoon to the Bodleian did not allow time to verify the point by comparing them with books printed by Field.

2 *Arber, S.R. iii. 153.*

3 *The Library, 2nd series, vii. 153.*
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