

Notes

GEORGE HENRY LEWES'S ANNOTATIONS OF THE COMEDIES IN CHARLES KNIGHT'S SHAKSPERE, (2ND EDITION, 1842–1844)

George Henry Lewes's (1817–1878) extensively annotated copy of the twelve-volume *The Comedies, Histories, Tragedies, and Poems of William Shakspeare*, edited by Charles Knight (2nd edition, 1842–1844) and published by Knight, is now at the Folger Library, Washington, DC.¹ What follows is a record of selective Lewes annotations on four of the comedies contained in the first three volumes of his copy, with a brief discussion of patterns in his Shakespearian marginalia for this group of plays.² Lewes's innumerable marginal linings and underscoring, however, are too numerous to include in their totality in this account. Lewes's annotations constitute unpublished primary material, are a resource for the study of reading Shakespeare in the 1840's, the Shakespeare/Knight edition and provide insight into an early Victorian responding to selected Shakespearian Comedies. Unfortunately, space considerations do not allow for description of Lewes's spacing on Knight's page, or his ink usage.

The Two Gentlemen of Verona (Knight, Vol 1)

In Knight's first volume, the text of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, has, at the conclusion of the seventh scene of the second act, one of the few

¹ Some of the marginalia are dated, and it is likely that they were made between February 1842 and late summer 1843: see William Baker, 'George Henry Lewes's Reading of *Hamlet*', *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies*, lxxix (2017), 54 and for the history of Lewes's copy of Knight's volumes see p. 66 n 1. We wish to thank for their co-operation with work on the publication of hitherto unpublished materials, Jonathan G. Ouvry, the great-grandson of George Henry Lewes, the staff of the Folger Library and Dr. Maxwell Hoover.

² The annotations are presented in the order in which the plays appear in Knight who excludes lines numbers so our references are, unless otherwise stated, to Blakemore Evans (ed.), *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edn (Boston, New York, 1997). Material between parentheses represents approximate readings of sometimes difficult handwriting. '|' represent line division. Lewes's underscoring or underlining is indicated where appropriate.

examples in Lewes's marginalia of ecstatic praise of a passage or a scene:

This scene so full of tenderest love, and faith in love comes in beautiful and artistic succession to its precedent, so disagreeable & unnatural; and the two human hearts thus oppositely beating are finely contrasted. Who would talk of Unities after this? Who would rebel against the power of imagination which annihilates all Time & Space making the Past & Future Present - the Distant near! Feby 1842. (Knight, 59).

Another annotation of interest occurs in Act III, scene ii, in the conversation between the Duke and Proteus. The Duke has asked Proteus 'What might we do, to make the girl forget | The love of Valentine, and love sir Thurio?' and Proteus responds 'The best way is, to slander Valentine | With falsehood, cowardice, and poor dissent; Three things that women highly hold in hate' (II.29–33). Lewes, in acute remarks that make it a regret that he did not apply his critical acumen to a full-length study of Shakespeare, observes:

The aesthetical feeling of this character I think faulty, & is not even to be explained by the state of Romantic Literature at the time. I have before noticed the incongruity in Proteus, but this conduct in one previously described as an honourable gentlemen is purely revolting, & too despicable for Comedy. The only excuse is that Proteus is weak but such weakness is frightful and as a moral weakness is a moral crime, so when carried beyond a certain pitch it gets beyond the region of Comedy. Feby 42. (Knight, 75).

The Merchant of Venice [Knight, Vol 2]

Lewes's annotations in Knight's text of *The Merchant of Venice* provide insight into the psychology of Shylock, illuminate the relationship between social duty and blame, and explore details of the law of Venice that will eventually lead to Shylock's defeat. Shylock's 'This is the fool that lends out money gratis' (Knight, p.311: III.iii.2), elicits Lewes's observation:

The probity of Antonio was doubtless a great source of Shylock's hatred. It was a cutting

reflection on himself - far more offensive than spitting on his gaberdine. Men always hate and despise those whose motives differing from their own they cannot fathom; precisely because Shylock could not understand *why* Antonio took no interest, did he hate him the more.

The majority of Lewes's annotations are found in the trial scene (Act IV, scene i). There is a lengthy annotation by Shylock's speech responding to the Duke's opening invitation to Shylock to explain himself: 'I have possess'd your grace of what I purpose' and concluding 'A losing suit against him. Are you answer'd?' (Knight, 322–23: IV.i.34–61). For Lewes

This fine piece of pleading has a sophism unsolved in it which has been dimly felt by all, though the precise import may not have been seen. It is this: we do not much blame any humour idiosyncrasy or antipathy in another so long as it does not affect his social duties; if in the gratification of his whims he wounds or murders or otherwise violates his social duties, then his idiosyncrasy becomes a crime.

Lewes responds to Shylock's 'I cannot find it; 'tis not in the bond' (l.258). He draws an elaborate 'X' symbol in the right-hand margin of his copy. Lewes then writes 'There is a secondary purpose in making Shylock thus demand the *strict letter of the bond*, uninfluenced by any feelings of humanity & asking only justice, for by the very *letter of the bond* is he to be subsequently defeated.' Portia's eight line 'Tarry a little; -there is something else.-' and concluding 'Unto the state of Venice' (IV.i.295–308), elicits Lewes's comment: 'In the old Roman law of the Twelve Tables a creditor had the right of cutting off portions of the debtor's flesh who was unable to pay.' Lewes then quotes from the French historian Jules Michael Michelet's opening volume of his *Histoire Romaine République*, which he was reading in September 1841: 'S'il coups plus ou moins qu'il ne soit pas responsable,' and gives his source as 'Michelet. Hist. Rom l p.174.' (Knight, 330).³

³ Hazlitt's English translation of Michelet (1847) reads: 'should they cut more or less they are not responsible' (London, 1847), 90. Lewes wrote on Michelet's works in his 'Michelet on Auricular Confession and Direction', *Foreign Quarterly Review*, xxxv (1845), 188–98. His extensively annotated copy of Michelet's *Histoire Romaine République*, 3 vols., Bruxelles, 1840

Other passages that interest Lewes are from the same scene. Shylock's 'Is that the law?' is underscored (l.309) as is, on the same page, his 'Give me my principal, and let me go' (l.332). Lewes comments 'A less than Shakspeare would infallibly have made Shylock here describe his agony & rage "in good set terms"'. But how much truer the above! The Jew is here alone & friendless & will not give his enemies the triumph of seeing him moved' (Knight, 331).

Much Ado About Nothing [Knight, Vol. 2]

In *Much Ado About Nothing* Lewes's attention is drawn to the apparent expression of false or exaggerated feelings in some of the characters (Benedick, Hero, and Claudio) and to the means by which the comedy is created in scenes involving Dogberry and the constables.

Lewes underscores and places vertical marginal lines in the scene between Dogberry and Verges, with the Watch (III. iii.22–60), and observes:

The ground of the comic here, as of Dogberry's character, is a curious irrelevancy of logic - a mis-application of good sense maxims whereby they become outrageous nonsense. He is full of a sort of traditional common sense, which he is unable to use. To thank God you are rid of a knave is proper in every one *but* a Watch-man: the same with a reluctance to meddle with untrue men: the same with the 'peaceable way': the same with 'sleeping not offending' He is the *Polonius* of Watchmen' (Knight, 417).

At the opening scene of the final Act, just before Benedick exits, Claudio comments in response to Don Pedro: 'Yea, and text underneath "Here dwells Benedick the married man?"' (V.i.174–75). This elicits Lewes's response: 'I must confess my suspicion that Shakspeare has here forgotten himself and the state of mind in which Claudio must be in. After all that has transpired banter is not the mood for Claudio: especially that which turns on *marriage*; unless indeed the banter with which the mind would cheat despair [sic]: and this is not Claudio's. His conduct is mean and

is at Dr Williams's Library, London. On the title page of the first volume, Lewes wrote 'Read Sept, 1841' (see William Baker, *The George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Library* [New York and London, 1977], item 1454, p. 136).

heartless enough, and this scene confirms it' (Knight, 446).

Twelfth Night [Knight, Vol. 3]

There are extensive linings throughout *Twelfth Night*, though only a very few with accompanying marginalia. Lewes's concerns in these annotations are with textual variants, and with speculation on Shakespeare's own experience of married life through the words of a character.

In Act I, scene i, the Duke's opening speech Knight has a lengthy commentary on this opening passage of the play. Following a discussion of imagery in Shakespeare and Milton, Knight's concern is the word 'sound' in line 5—'like the sweet sound'—changed by Pope to 'south'.⁴ For Knight 'Upon the whole, we should feel inclined not to disturb the usual reading of *south*, were it not for the circumstance that Shakspeare has nowhere else made the *south* an odour-breathing wind; his other representations are directly contrary' (Knight, 146). Lewes comments: 'The sound may breathe—but it does not steal nor give odour to violets, hence South is the word Shakspeare does not compare the sound of music to the sound of a breeze; but the affect of music to the effect of the breeze.'

In Act II, scene iv, the Duke tells Viola who is disguised as Cesario: 'Our fancies are more giddy and unfirm, | More longing, wavering sooner lost and worn, | Than women's are' and 'Then let thy love be younger than thyself' (II.32–34; 36). Lewes comments:

Does not this passage refer in sadness to his own marriage? However much he may have abstained from speaking of himself, he could not as a poet abstain from speaking out his own immense experience of life. Besides no man happy in a marriage with a woman older than himself could have penned these lines (179).

Conclusion

Lewes's marginalia reveals his exploration of the psychology and aesthetic feeling of character (Proteus, Shylock), in several of the comedies, analyses the way Shakespeare achieves comic effects (*Much Ado*), textual changes and the sound impact of the words (*Twelfth Night*). Lewes is also interested in intertextuality comparing Shakespeare's texts with passages from later European literature. Further annotations attempt to come close to Shakespeare himself, through speculation on possible biographical elements hidden in his texts such as marriage, and strive to provide insight into the mind of the great artist at work.

WILLIAM BAKER

Hangzhou Normal University, China

ANDREW THOMPSON

Roehampton University, UK

doi: 10.1093/notesj/gjab106

© The Author(s) (2021). Published by Oxford University Press.
All rights reserved. For permissions, please email:
journals.permissions@oup.com

⁴ For recent commentary on the textual change, 'south' or 'sound', see G. Taylor, J. Jowett, T. Bourus, and G. Egan (ed.), *The New Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works Critical Reference Edition*, G. Taylor, J. Jowett, T. Bourus, and G. Egan, 2 vols (Oxford, 2017), II, 2165.