[Review of:] The First Quarto of King Henry V (Cambridge, 2000) / Andrew Gurr (ed.)

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Reference


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the similarly mutable Archimago from Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, to illuminate Milton’s attack on hypocrisy and the necessity to distinguish between religious truth and falsity. In ‘Laughter in Heaven’ (chapter 6), King offers a ‘previously unrecorded, historicized explanation of laughter in heaven’, and does so very successfully by immediately taking issue with Empson’s ‘ahistorical’ reading of the role of God in Milton’s epic (pp. 112-113). Through the figure of the Eye of Providence King demonstrates the extent to which Milton participates in ‘the satirical practices of contemporary Protestant propaganda’ (p. 116). Bakhtin is again drawn upon to illuminate Milton’s use of carnivalesque language in Book 6 of *Paradise Lost* where the ‘the anal and oral aggression of the fallen angels represents a return to grotesque alimentary imagery’ (p. 124).

The issue of religious division in early modern period England is complex. The seemingly straightforward opposition between Catholic and Protestant is almost immediately complicated in the reign of Elizabeth by the rise of Puritanism, and then further complicated in the seventeenth century by the growing cracks apparent within Protestantism in the Jacobean and Caroline periods. Recent work on the Jacobean church in particular has complicated to a significant extent our understanding of Arminianism generally and the Laudian episcopacy specifically. Nor is it now considered entirely wise to suggest in unqualified terms that the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation with its emphasis on ‘Bible reading in the vernacular and pulpit preaching’, ‘bridged the gulf between clergy and laity that yawned by the end of the Middle ages’ (p. 4). This is a view of the Reformation that has been hotly contested in recent years, and it is fair to say that this is a minefield that one might prudently avoid. However, for a book that relies heavily upon the various religious and political contexts of Milton’s writings, the absence of engagement with these historiographical debates is conspicuous.

All in all, however, King’s book is excellent. The connections he makes between Milton’s oeuvre and contemporary events are always highly suggestive. Similarly, the range of texts concerned with Protestant satire drawn upon by King to place Milton’s poetry and prose within the literary context of nonconformist satire is impressive.

David Walker


In comparison with the authoritative Arden and the innovative Oxford Shakespeare, the New Cambridge Shakespeare may seem to many like a relative lightweight among the series that strive for academic excellence on an increasingly crowded market. With the advantage of hindsight, future generations might well disagree with their judgement. In more than one way, the NCS under
the general editorship of Brian Gibbons has set new standards with which their rivals have had, or still have, to catch up. Its detailed and richly illustrated stage histories do full justice to what is perhaps the most far-reaching critical shift in the twentieth century from text-centred to performance criticism. Its inclusion of *Edward III* (1998, ed. Giorgio Melchiori) constitutes the play's over-due canonisation from which the Oxford Shakespeare shrank away. And its subseries of 'Early Quartos' includes a group of texts whose designation as 'bad quartos' has often been lamented and its importance increasingly recognized, but that has been denied the full editorial attention it deserves.

Following four years after Peter Davison's *First Quarto of King Richard III* and just two years after Stephen Roy Miller's *Taming of a Shrew* and Kathleen Irace's *First Quarto of Hamlet*, Andrew Gurr's *First Quarto of Henry V* provides us with an edition of the short and less familiar text of *Henry V*. Being among the group of texts which Alfred Pollard first labelled 'bad quartos', it differs substantially from the more familiar Folio text. Most notably, the chorus, three scenes (I.1, III.1, and IV.2) and many passages of varying length are missing, the number of characters has been substantially reduced and several speeches have been reassigned. Gurr's edition may well prove to be of lasting importance. The argument its introduction puts forward radically calls into question the foundations upon which Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor built their Oxford *Complete Works of Shakespeare* (1986). While earlier editors in a tradition reaching back to the eighteenth century had attempted to recover as accurately as possible what Shakespeare originally wrote, Wells and Taylor's professed quest was the 'socialised text': a theatrical rather than a literary document reflecting communal rather than authorial production. On these grounds, a number of controversial decisions were taken such as the preference of the Folio over the longer second quarto text of *Hamlet*.

Gurr now suggests that Wells and Taylor may have built their project on sand. Reviewing the Wells and Taylor *Complete Works* and *Textual Companion* in *The Review of English Studies*, Brian Vickers warned as early as 1989 that a 3,535-line Folio *Hamlet* was substantially too long to be a 'performance text' in any meaningful sense. Gurr's introduction to *The First Quarto of Henry V* pursues Vickers' attack by arguing that 'there is little hope of retrieving from the written text much of the original performance, and that a concept of a fixed "performance text" is a misconception' (p. 2). He goes on to argue that Q1 *Henry V* 'deserves attention as the closest we are ever likely to get to the editorial ideal (or will o’the wisp) of the Oxford edition, Shakespeare in performance at the Globe in 1599' (p. 2), and that 'the copy that formed the basis for the quarto text is almost certainly the ideal that was announced for the Oxford Shakespeare but not presented there' (p. 10).

Not the slightest of the obstacles Gurr's stimulating argument will have to overcome is that the first quarto of *Henry V* is simply a less complex, or, in the jargon of the day, a less 'potentially subversive' play. It may take some time for Shakespeareans to get around to the idea that Burbage's *Henry V* seems to have
been much closer to the jingoistic figure of Q1 than to the highly ambivalent character in the long text. On the other hand, the implication of Gurr’s edition that the Lord Chamberlain’s Men reduced Shakespeare’s contradictory figure to a conventional soldier king raises all kinds of fascinating questions about the political dynamics governing the performance practices of Shakespeare’s company.

It may seem particularly fortunate that the same scholar, in an edition that appeared eight years earlier, edited the NCS HENRY V, based on the Folio text. Gurr points out that the edition of Q1 ‘is meant to be complementary to the New Cambridge Shakespeare edition of the Folio text’ (p. ix). The paired editions do allow for sensible economy: as introductory matters, including the play’s reception and stage history, had been dealt with in 1992, the introduction to the present edition can concentrate on the text of Q1. Similarly, the new edition confines itself to textual notes (printed in the back), an understandable decision considering the earlier edition provided full and good annotation. Gurr’s textual notes are generally good and to the point, though they leave some questions unanswered. For example, the names of two of the three traitors who try to sell Henry to the French are identical in Q and F, but where the more familiar Folio text has ‘Thomas Lord of Scroope of Marsham’, the quarto has ‘Henry, Lord of Masham’, omitting all reference to ‘Scroop’. Since the Dictionary of National Biography informs us that a Thomas le Scrope, 10th Baron of Scrope of Bolton, was alive and well when Q1 Henry V was published, one might have hoped for informed guesswork about what motivated this change.

Working successively on two ‘complementary’ editions of Henry V must have been a mixed blessing, however. In fact, having had to deal with the textual problem of Henry V from two different angles within less than a decade, Gurr has been led into some serious problems of consistency that somewhat undermine the volumes’ professed complementarity. While he argued in the earlier edition that Q1’s value ‘as an authoritative source for the original staging of the play must . . . be called in question’ (p. 220), Gurr now believes that the quarto text ‘offers the best evidence we have of what routinely happened to the scripts that the Shakespeare company bought from their resident playwright’ (p. ix). Arguing in 1992 that ‘Q copy was prepared for reading, not for acting’ (p. 220), he now thinks that the quarto text ‘was clearly made for performance on the stages that Shakespeare wrote for’ (ix). Perhaps most importantly, Gurr argued in 1992 that ‘the copy of Henry V is not likely to have been an “authorised” text’ (p. 220) while, eight years later, he argues it is ‘likely that the whole text was printed from a transcription which was fully authorised’ (p. 13). There is nothing wrong, of course, with a scholar changing his mind, especially if the change of mind seems supported by good evidence and opens the door to exciting new perspectives, as Gurr’s new edition does. The extent of disagreement between two editions that purport to be complementary would surely have deserved to be pointed out, however. In particular, having just argued that past critics have been wrong on the question of the ‘reporters’ and having singled out more than one of these critics
by name (p. 12), one might have expected an acknowledgement of Gurr’s own change of mind on the same point.

Considering that the scope of Gurr’s introduction is more or less limited to the play’s text, it is surprising that much of the work that has been done in this area is not referred to. Even though its argument that Q1’s origins are related to the fortunes of the Earl of Essex is probably wrong, Annabel Patterson’s ‘Back By Popular Demand: The Two Versions of *Henry V*’ would have deserved a mention, if only because her essay is a rare and laudable attempt to combine textually and politically informed criticism. Nor does Gurr mention Graham Holderness and Bryan Loughrey’s edition of Q1 *Henry V* in the ‘Shakespearean Originals: First Editions’ series of 1993, though its often careless scholarship may explain this omission. More serious seems Gurr’s treatment of Gary Taylor’s *Three Studies in the Text of ‘Henry V’* (Oxford, 1979), a painstaking study that mostly deals with Q1, but is not referred to in Gurr’s introduction and absent from the bibliography. Gurr makes a good case for a scenario (Q reflects London performance which would have been an abridged version of the text behind F) that overrules Taylor’s (Q is an abridgment for the provinces of the full text performed in London). His argument would have gained in credibility, however, if he had addressed Taylor’s directly and shown where he believes it went wrong.

There is one important question which Gurr’s edition raises but does not answer: if the text of Q1 *Henry V* is the closest we will ever get to the play ‘in performance at the Globe in 1599’, just how close is that likely to be? The likelihood is that it is not so close after all. If the Folio text of *Henry V*, with roughly 3,200 lines, is very long, the Quarto text, with about 1,600, is very short. We know that Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (ca. 3,000 lines), performed at the Globe by the King’s Men, was ‘with diverse things Printed, that the length of the play would not beare in the Presentment’ (title-page). We also know, however, that Marston’s *Malcontent* (Q1, 1,845 lines) was too short when Shakespeare’s company appropriated the play from a children’s company and that another 594 were written to raise it to performance length at the Globe. With 2439 lines (Q3), the Globe *Malcontent* is more than 800 lines longer than the first quarto of *Henry V*. Gurr might have done more to acknowledge that while F *Henry V* is not the play Shakespeare’s company performed at the Globe, Q1 isn’t quite the real McCoy either. Yet whatever minor flaws this edition may have, it is a significant step forward in the current reappraisal of Shakespeare’s ‘bad’ (or better: ‘short’) quartos and advances an argument of far-reaching importance which any serious student of *Henry V* will have to address.

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