Book Reviews

Edited by Heather Allen

Lesser, Zachary, *'Hamlet' After Q1: An Uncanny History of the Shakespearean Text*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015. ISBN 978-0-8122-4661-2. Pp. 304. Hardbackback $59.95.

In the field of Shakespeare studies an extraordinary amount of ink has been expended on the topic of the "bad quartos": those short versions of a handful of plays, which vary — sometimes significantly — from their longer counterparts. Theories as to their origins have proliferated for more than two centuries. Are they stenographically transcribed texts, imperfectly copied down during performance? Have they been "memorially reconstructed" by bit part actors? Are they texts that have been cut down for performance? First drafts? Simplified versions created for specific audiences? No theory quite fits all the evidence — and certainly no theory commands universal agreement among scholars.

Enter, then, to the fray, Zachary Lesser. Lesser has established a very considerable reputation as a textual scholar in recent years, not least with his masterful study *Renaissance Drama and the Politics of Publication: Readings in the English Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). In his latest book, Lesser offers an analysis of one of the most famous of the "bad quartos" — the short text of *Hamlet* published in 1603. Its most notable variations from the received text are well known: the compressed nature of this first published quarto (known as Q1) has the effect of "speeding up" the play, drawing it generically closer to a conventional revenge tragedy; the queen acknowledges Claudius's guilt and agrees to assist in his unmasking; a number of characters bear different names (Polonius becoming Corambis, for instance); and, most famously, perhaps, "To be, or not to be, that is the question" becomes "To be, or not to be, I there's the point".

Lesser adopts an approach to Q1 which is wholly different from that of all previous scholars. Where his predecessors have endlessly speculated as to the provenance of the short quarto, Lesser attends to its greater history — and to the significance of that history for our engagement with the text of *Hamlet* (however constituted). Lesser's starting point is a very

simple—but often overlooked—fact: Q1 was not actually discovered until 1823. Its existence had been suspected, since the edition of *Hamlet* published in 1604/5 announced on its title page that it had been "Newly imprinted and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie", but, before 1823, no copy of Q1 had ever come to light. By focussing on Q1's moment of discovery, rather than its moment of origin, Lesser brings a new perspective to the text. In his view, "the seemingly endless quest for the origins of Q1 has been part of why we have failed to grasp the significance of its history" (22–3). His analysis works forwards, investigating the impact that the discovery of Q1 had on Shakespearean textual studies in the nineteenth century and beyond, but it also works backwards, shedding new light on the relationship among the various texts of the play in their own time.

At the heart of Lesser's book is a set of intelligent close analyses of a series of much debated moments in the text of *Hamlet*: the meaning of the phrase 'country matters' in Hamlet's exchange with Ophelia just prior to the performance of *The Mousetrap*; the question of whether Gertrude's "closet" is a bedroom or an antechamber; the meaning of the word "conscience" in the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy. In each case, Lesser demonstrates—fascinatingly—that these issues largely became editorial and analytical cruces after the appearance of Q1 early in the nineteenth century. So these aspects of the text can be seen as something like retrospective creations from the appearance of the early text in a late period. Lesser's exploration of these textual moments is shrewd, compelling and provocative. To take one instance: the presence of Gertrude's bed in the closet scene in theatre and film productions of *Hamlet* is conventionally linked to the Oedipal reading of the play advanced by Freud's biographer Ernest Jones early in the twentieth century. Lesser demonstrates, however, that reading the closet as a bed chamber has a much longer history—and that anxiety over this issue can in fact be traced back to the appearance of the stage direction "Enter the ghost in his night gowne" in Q1. Lesser offers intriguing suggestions as to why Q1 should specify a nightgown here, when the other texts do not.

The conclusion to Lesser's book opens up his analysis to encompass a more general discussion of Shakespeare editing in the wake of the "New Textualist" movement of the 1990s. Lesser closely examines the Arden 3 edition of *Hamlet* (2006), edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor, in some detail. The edition included a fully-edited text of Q1, offering it as an independent entity and, effectively, declining to present a definite theory as to the relationships among Q1, Q2 and the text of the First Folio. In this way, Thompson and Taylor broke with traditional editorial practice,

though Lesser feels that simply opting out of making editorial choices is not wholly the answer to the problem either. Thus, he calls for a significant rethinking of the way in which we conduct textual history and editorial practice. His own book points the way toward a productive new approach in these matters. *'Hamlet' After Q1* is an intellectual tour de force — lively, engaging and very convincing. It should be required reading for all Shakespeareans.

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Livingston, Michael and John K. Bollard, eds. *Owain Glyndŵr: A Casebook*. Exeter Medieval Texts and Studies. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013. ISBN 978-0-85989-883-6. Pp. xvi + 619. Hardback £95.00; Paperback £25.00.

It would be impossible to do justice to what Michael Livingston and John K. Bollard have achieved with their *Owain Glyndŵr: A Casebook* in a review of any length. This book is an unprecedented and invaluable record — as comprehensive as could be contained within a single volume — of the rebellion of the Welsh leader Owain Glyndŵr (?1357–9 to 1415) against Henry IV from 1400–1415 and its historical, literary, and popular legacy. This collection will be indispensable to those in a broad range of fields, from the expected (Celtic studies, fifteenth-century history and politics, Shakespearean studies, Anglo-Welsh relations) to the surprising (folklore, military history, the history of the English language). We are indebted to the editors and contributors of this volume for its comprehensiveness and accessibility, and this *Casebook* will undoubtedly remain the definitive collection of documents pertaining to Owain Glyndŵr for generations to come.

The *Casebook* contains 101 primary documents related to the life and rebellion of Owain Glyndŵr in the original languages with facing-page translations (6–255), textual notes (257–422), eleven critical essays on the rebellion and its textual afterlives (423–584), a chronology (1–4), and comprehensive bibliography (585–99). The sources themselves span three centuries (1370–1597), six languages (Middle English, Welsh, Anglo-Norman, Latin, French, and Early Modern English; with both poetry and prose represented in most), and a broader range of genres than this reviewer could tally: prophecies, praise poems, legal documents, land grants, royal proclamations, letters, rolls of parliament, chronicles, eyewitness accounts of battles, and genealogies, to name a representative sample. The accompany-