

THE WORKS
OF
SHAKESPEARE

THE MERRY WIVES
OF WINDSOR

EDITED BY

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INTRODUCTION

THE *Merry Wives of Windsor* is invested with certain extraneous points of interest, more perhaps than attach themselves to any of Shakespeare's plays, as considered apart from their inherent merits. These peculiarities resolve themselves into two groups, which the present Introduction will deal with later on. They are, first, the traditional matter which has come down to us, as we believe, regarding not only the production of the play but also the actual personality of one of the characters; and, secondly, the picture the play gives us of country life, sports, and manners in England, which we have not elsewhere drawn for us with the same fulness by Shakespeare. The first group of these characteristics is mainly debatable and uncertain ground, unfortunately so, for the subject is of the utmost interest with regard to the author. For the second, those who run may read in the play itself.

Before going into these matters, let us study the sources of our text, and the date of the play's appearance. The text of the *Merry Wives* is that of the 1623 Folio. The three later Folios, reproductions of the first, require no further mention here. But we have another text, the Quarto edition of 1602, which was reprinted (Q 2) in

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1619. There was also a quarto edition in 1630, Q 3 of the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare, which was a slightly modernised reprint from the Folio text of 1623.

The text of the 1602 Quarto has been reprinted by Griggs in facsimile with an admirable introduction by Mr. Daniel. It was previously reprinted with notes and introduction by Halliwell in 1842 for the Shakespeare Society, which edition is reproduced in Hazlitt's Shakespeare's Library, 1875 (volume the sixth).

The 1602 Quarto has also been reprinted by the Cambridge editors from Capell's copy, which differs in one or two places from Halliwell's reprint.

The title of this Quarto is as follows:—

"A Most pleasaunt and excellent conceited Comedie, of Syr *John Falstaffe*, and the Merrie Wiues of *Windsor*. Entermixed with sundrie variable and pleasing humors, of Syr *Hugh* the Welch knight, Iustice *Shallow*, and his wise Cousin M. Slender. With the swaggering vaine of Auncient *Pistoll* and Corporall Nym. By *William Shakespeare*. As it hath been diuers times Acted by the right Honorable my Lord Chamberlaines seruants. Both before her Maiestie and elsewhere. LONDON Printed by T. C. for Arthur Iohnson, and are to be sold at his shop in Powles Church Yard, at the Signe of the Flower de Leuse and the Crowne: 1602." Dr. Farmer remarked that the error at "*Syr Hugh* the Welch knight" was "a proof that Shakespeare never superintended the publication of this play," which is very obviously true from other considerations.

As a preliminary to a notice of this text, the words of the editors of the Folio of 1623 must be insisted upon. They claim there to have collected and published the

works of their "friend and fellow" as he wrote them, with the "height of their care." They give their chief reason: "To the Great Variety of Readers . . . you were abused with diverse stolne and surreptitious copies, maim'd and deformed by the frauds and stealthes of injurious imposters, that expos'd them: euen those are now offered to your view cur'd and perfect of their limbes; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them."

We may be certain that the 1602 Quarto of *Merry Wives* was largely in their minds when John Heminge and Henry Condell wrote those words. It is so "maimed and deformed" that the Cambridge editors state truly that collation cannot be attempted between its text and that of the Folio. Halliwell called it a "First Sketch," but he subsequently, in his *Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare*, altered that view and pronounced it to be a "very defective copy, one made up by some poetaster, with the aid of shorthand notes." Daniel says his "conviction is in favour of one common original for both versions" (Folio and Quarto). I believe the Folio may be accepted as the text of the play in its entirety, with the usual amount of press errors assumed and allowed for; and with also the painful possibility, the almost certainty, of corruptions due to actors' innovations or alterations. But the Quarto has been so tinkered and battered that it can mainly be made use of as a check to the text in doubtful passages, and even then, as a clue, not as an authority. If we consider the Folio as derived from another "original," it is not derived from it in the same unscrupulous fashion as the Quarto is, but is assuredly in the main identical with that original.

The earliest notice we have of *Merry Wives* is in the Stationers' Registers: "18 Jan. 1601-2, John Busby] An excellent and pleasant conceited commedie of Sir John Faulstof and the Merry Wyves of Windsor." And "Arth. Johnson] By assignment from John Busbye a book, An excellent and pleasant conceited comedie," etc. (as before). This John Busbye was concerned, as Collier pointed out, two years before, in the publication of the undoubtedly surreptitious and corrupt *Henry V.*

The date of the first appearance of the play is, for a series of reasons, placed at 1598. There is an entry, Anno 1605, in Cunningham's *Revells Booke* (p. 203, Shaks. Soc.): "By his Matis plaiers. The Sunday followinge (Hallowas Day) A Play of the Merry Wiues of Winsor." But it is open to grave suspicion. See my Introduction to *Othello*.

Obviously the Quarto must be carefully studied, although it be corrupt. The question is, What value are we to attach to it as a text for the play? That can only be answered by such study, for there is no doubt, from the most cursory perusal, it is a spurious production. The fact that it is twenty years senior to the Folio must be remembered, and also that it appeared when *Merry Wives* was in the greatest popularity as a nearly new play. But how did such a variant from the true text arise? and how was it possible for even the most dishonest publisher to be successful in offering to the public for sale a text of a favourite play, which is cut down to about half or two-thirds of its correct dimensions? My reply to this is somewhat similar to what Mr. Daniel gives as to the origin of the Quarto; it is, in fact, almost identical, but I arrive at it

in a somewhat different manner. Wright has nearly the same view of the *Henry V.* quarto.

I believe there was a recognised and authorised shortened representation of the play in use, reduced from our Folio version, for special purposes, whether to convenience a smaller company, or for private representation, as, for example, for compression into reduced time after court revels or banquets. In order to effect this, certain blocks of the play would be omitted, but lines or pieces of these blocks would be retained in order to preserve the continuity of narrative and action. Possibly the shortened play was the one the public were more familiar with, which rendered the task of the surreptitious note-taker and purloiner the easier, and removed the stumbling-block of a deficiency in size. When the full play was to be acted, with a full company's strength, these temporarily excerpted portions would be reinserted in their proper place in the actors' copies; who would not, however, be always careful to expunge those passages which were already retained to sustain the thread of the play in its continuity. In this way I imagine certain confusions arose, and it was the endeavour to explain these confusions in the Folio that suggested, after much pondering, this view to me.

The most obvious confusions are those concerning the hours of the morning, or of the afternoon, mentioned in connection with Falstaff's meetings with Mrs. Ford in the last Scene of the Third Act. These can only be set right by the alteration of words in the text. This is not, happily, the province of an editor, for it is a complicated and unpleasant investigation. Mr. Daniel, in his paper "On the Durations of the Action of Shakespeare's Plays"

(*New Shaks. Soc. Trans.*, 1877-79), says it is impossible as the play now stands to arrange the times consistently. In the *Irving Shakespeare* the matter is thoroughly sifted also. For a stage representation, it is of imperative importance.

Since there has been undoubted garbling of our Folio text in these time-details, we are constrained to admit it may be possible elsewhere in it; but it is not to be supposed from this that the Folio text is in any degree open to suspicion; except in a very few cases and kinds of cases that may be insisted upon. Such are: (1) details of scenic representation, tantamount to stage-directions in some cases; (2) trifling alterations, or possibly serious ones, due to personal matters; and (3) ordinary typographical or publishers' mistakes, through their own errors or from faulty MSS., and the changes made to satisfy the Act against profanity in players.

I imagine we can sort our difficulties in the Folio text under the above headings, none of which invalidate its authority. There is, indeed, one kind of apparent corruption which could not be so dealt with, *i.e.* where we conceive certain lines to be wholly unworthy of Shakespeare. That is, of course, very often a matter of opinion; and it is a sort of criticism that it is dangerous to handle even with the longest possible pole. I have noticed, especially in the Fifth Act, certain lines that are so wretched here and there, that they may be assumed to have been foisted in by one or other of the actors from time to time, and got mixed up with the text. They are mere trifles, and we may thank the Folio editors and congratulate ourselves they are not much more serious. When Middleton wrote *The Mayor of Quinborough*, he spoke in very

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violent language of "your new additions, they spoil all the plays that ever they come in." Heywood has a tirade against such malpractices, and more serious ones, in his *Rape of Lucrece*—"Address to Reader."

In the Fourth and Fifth Acts I think we can find evidences of the unexpunged bits of the shortened version. They amount to repetitions. It will be necessary here to refer occasionally to the Quarto text, but I am dealing entirely with that of the present edition, the Folio, which gave rise to these views quite independently.

In the last Scene of the Fourth Act, some thirty lines are devoted to prosaic details of the public shame to be inflicted upon Falstaff. This is Fenton's account to the Host, an official account, for he is at the bottom of the plot, and what he tells us is very nearly sufficient to enable us to understand all that takes place, including the mystification of Caius and Slender, by the colour device.

Previously to this, in the fourth Scene, about eighty lines (nearly the whole Scene) have been devoted, in proper dramatic and poetic fashion, to setting forth this plot, as it was first compounded, by the wives and their husbands, with an even more explicit account of the colour device. Here there is much repetition. A very few words would have sufficed to let audience or reader know, in the last Scene of this Act, that Fenton knew the plot, had taken the Host into his confidence, and was at the bottom of all the manipulation.

With these two movements the Quarto agrees, though the primary evolution of the plot takes up less than half the Folio's space; a grievous loss, and one of the many objectionable elisions in that text.

Here, I imagine, Fenton's account is possibly spurious, and was a substitution in the supposed shorter edition for subsequent matter; that it got into the Quarto through the pirate's lack of discrimination; and that on the publishing of the full text it was allowed to remain in its present needlessly expansive and unpoetical garb.

In the second and third Scenes of the Fifth Act we are told again the machinery by which Slender and Caius are to be deceived. These are brief passages, and the second is necessary as opening the final denouement. The Quarto dispenses entirely with these two Scenes, and certainly one does not miss them. It is true we lose the "mumbudget" episode. It is probable these formed no part of the shortened play, though undoubtedly they belong to the text. They elaborate the characterisation, and draw on the coming events. But we do not need to be told again about the sawpit.

Finally, we have all these minutiae repeated not only in the stage-directions before and after the pinching dance, but also in the text itself of the fifth Scene, from line 200 to 220, colours and all, in detail, until even an ordinary reader must be surprised at his assumed denseness, while a student finds himself reverting backwards, over and over again, to look for the reasons thereof. And he only finds that he had already been fully informed.

The Quarto gives evidence here again of faulty condensation. Any one about to compress the Fifth Act would infallibly omit "mum" and "mumbudget." This the Quarto has done, but has let the words appear abruptly and unexpectedly at the close, the previous key (in v. ii.) being left out.

There is repetition again in the Folio in the wording at Falstaff's two escapes; the language used to Ford and that Ford uses on these two occasions (III. iii. 211-237 and IV. ii. 127-165) having several almost identical expressions; they are more than mere parallels, and act as comments upon one another. See my notes at IV. ii. 162 and 163. These dialogues are sufficiently distinct in the Quarto version. The two passages so nearly repeated in the Folio occur upon the first occasion in the Quarto but not upon the second. Probably the "acting" shorter version saw that they could be dispensed with, and in this case the pirate may have followed his original.

It is difficult sometimes to piece the two texts into any harmony side by side. It is difficult to grasp the events in one version, and then to turn to the other and unwind them there. Owing to the faultiness of the Quarto, it is in that case sometimes well-nigh impossible, but only in minor matters, however. How much more difficult is it to lay these discrepancies in any intelligible form before the reader who has only one text before him! In such a case the only proper method would be the cumbrous one of printing both texts side by side, passage for passage, and not separately, as is done by the Cambridge edition. I have endeavoured to meet this difficulty by placing in my notes the more important passages that are peculiar to the Quarto, or are very distinct therein, in juxtaposition with the corresponding words in the text. For it is absolutely necessary to study certain portions of the smaller text (and therefore the whole of it), on account of some vital differences it contains. The most important of these occur in two connected places dealing

with the horse-stealing episode, in IV. iii. and IV. v. 64-95. The Quarto throws a different light on this episode, which must be dealt with more fully by itself. The alteration of the word "garmombles" (a thin disguise for "Mumpellgart") to "cozen-germans" in the Folio was perhaps intentionally made to remove a personal allusion, either because it had lost its pith or because it was objected to. I am quite aware that some commentators will not admit this allusion though wholly unable to explain it away. Of that more presently; I believe in it.

A few more prominent peculiarities in the Quarto version must be referred to. It may give a general idea of its impossibility for purposes *of detailed collation to refer again to the Fifth Act. The Quarto, at the beginning of that Act, reaches "Scene xviii," which commences "This is the third time" (v. i. 2). In sixteen lines from that point the Quarto has arrived at "Do I speake like Horne the hunter, ha?" (v. v. 31). And from that point, at "Enter Sir Hugh," what the Folio takes about two hundred and fifty lines to develop, practically the last Scene, the Quarto disposes of in two-thirds of the number. The omission from the Quarto of the whole of the topical speech dealing with Windsor Castle and the Order of the Garter I believe to be significant, as though the complete play was adapted expressly for Windsor, and the shortened one for representation elsewhere. It is hard to avoid the feeling, though it is perhaps not capable of proof, that this play was written for and acted at Windsor itself. This presumption is somewhat heightened by the presence in the Quarto of half a dozen very inferior lines which replace the Windsor Castle speech,

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and sound pure London. They would come in after Evans's speech about the housemaids (v. v. 58), and are an interrupted continuation of that speech in the Quarto—

Hu. Where is Pead? go you and see where Brokers sleep,
And Fox-eyed seriants with their mase,
Go laie the Proctors in the street
And pinch the lowsie seriants face:
Spare none of these when they are a-bed,
But such whose nose lookes blew and red.

These poor lines bring one back to the Poultry and the Counter-Gate. Not that the Windsor Castle speech is of any poetical merit. It is prose in verse, but in strict appropriateness.

At the very beginning of the play the Quarto omissions are equally, if not more, important. The second line there is the thirty-fourth in our text, so that not only Slender is here again compelled to hide his diminished head, but all the "Lucy" passages are lost; a very serious deficit in our interest in the play, but quite possibly a purposed omission in the supposed shorter version. It is probably personal, and certainly not necessary to the matter in hand. Here the abbreviation is made with some skill, showing a contrast to the supreme carelessness later on, as though the condensed version was more carefully obtained and followed. The motive here seems to be to cut Slender short. His "Cotsall" remarks are omitted. The deer-stealing remarks are retained, as are also the incidents connected with the robbery of Slender's purse, which form part of the events of the play. With regard to Slender, the whirligig of time brings in its revenges, and modern criticism regards "this very potent plect of imbecility" as the best character in the play.

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On the other hand, the Host in the Quarto receives his full allowance of space. He is but slightly curtailed in any place from his proper position in the Folio, so that he is even more in evidence, comparatively, in the Quarto. He was undoubtedly a most popular character. Caius and Evans receive their due attention in the Quarto, but Quickly is greatly cut down, not merely by omitted speeches, but by mutilated speeches which are more significant.

The Wives are treated with scant respect in the Quarto, and are shortened beyond their proportions. Fenton is so unceremoniously dealt with that he comes in once out of his proper order in the play (I. iv.), and in the Fifth Act he is made of even less interest than in the Folio, where, for Anne's sake, we would like to know him better. Falstaff's speeches are all more or less cut up, but he has his full proportionate share.

One result of this treatment is that we have in the Quarto the unusually numerous gallery of actors that the full play presents, but in a much reduced space. This reduction of limits confuses and crowds the characters, and makes the play seem there much more involved than it really is. Had we no Folio text, the Quarto would be indeed a heart-breaking study.

One feels sorry for this poor little debased Quarto. It gets nothing but abuse, or else the most austere criticism. Nevertheless the bulk of it is surely Shakespeare's. The Folio "passes it strangely by and scarcely greets it." But the Quarto may "ensconce itself within the knowledge of its own deserts," for it is of very material interest and assistance in several passages and word-difficulties which are dealt with in my notes. Before dismissing it, I will

call attention to some of these, premising that, wherever a passage has received assistance in my text (that of the Folio) from the Quarto, the words so introduced have been marked off with brackets, as is done by the Cambridge editors. This has been done in three cases: at the words "for missing your meetings and appointments" (III. i. 91), at "Give me thy hand, terrestrial; so" (III. i. 107), and at "to say my prayers" (IV. v. 106). In these particular instances we are to suppose these words have accidentally dropped out of the Folio text, and we supply them from the Quarto. The Cambridge editors regard them as absolutely essential. The middle one of these three is, in my opinion, the only one that is "absolutely essential," but the others are a very helpful improvement; which might be said of several passages inserted by former editors from the Quarto, not, however, by any means so emphatically. In most of those other cases the insertion is merely the personal option of one or other editor, which is a depreciation of the value of the Folio, and a licence to be steadily opposed. A few of these desirable passages may be set down here, for the others I must refer to my notes, as also for remarks upon those quoted here.

After line 129 (I. i.) the Quarto has, "They carried mee to the Tauerne and made mee drunke, and afterward picked my pocket." This may be regarded as an omission.

At I. i. 294, the Quarto would read, "I cannot abide the smell of hot meate Nere since I broke my shin. Ile tell you how it came By my troth. A Fencer and I plaied three venies For a dish of stewed prunes, and I with my ward Defending my head, he hot my shin." This is a more intelligible fencing metaphor, but the Folio makes

Slender appear, as is intended, a greater fool. Moreover, it is in proper harmony with the *passado* and *stockado* fencing terms that the correct version jeers at. Decidedly corrupted for simplicity and brevity's sake.

At I. ii. 11, after "pray you," Sir Hugh says in the Quarto, "I must not be absent at the grace. I will go make an end," etc. This perhaps belongs correctly to the text.

At I. iii. 25, after "wield," Nym's speech is, "His minde is not heroick: is not the humour conceited?" This remark supplements and explains that in the Folio.

At I. iii. 98, Nym says, "operations in my head" in the Quarto. Pope considered the words "in my head" had been erroneously omitted.

At II. i. 71, Mrs. Page says in the Quarto, "O most notorious villaine! Why what a bladder of iniquitie is this." Falstaff elsewhere compares himself to a bladder in *1 Henry IV.*

At II. i. 112, after "wife," the Quarto has, "When Pistoll lies do this," a continuation of Pistol's speech. Pistol makes this remark in *2 Henry IV.* This, as well as the last, may be actors' insertions familiar with the dialogues of the earlier plays in the series.

At II. i. 181, Page says in the Quarto, "And for the knight, perhaps He hath spoke merrily, as the fashion of fat men Are." This remark is quite characteristic of Page's agreeable character, and is itself worthy of a place.

At II. ii. 2 in the Quarto, Pistol's words are, "I will retort the sum in equiPAGE." Though not in the Folio text, these words are not merely of archaic interest. They are, I think, undoubtedly part of Pistol's speech as Shakespeare wrote it; whether altered or omitted, and where, it is impossible to speculate. For some remarkable dis-

crepancies between Pistol's final disappearance from the play in the Quarto and Folio texts, see notes at II. ii. 32 and 144. And see below, where Pistol's position is considered with regard to Mrs. Quickly.

From about this point the Quarto seems to become more hastily compressed, and the difficulties are very often those of the inextricable tangle of times of the meetings. The divergence between the two texts increases, the omissions in the Quarto are more serious, and the replacements more widespread and deleterious. In general terms I have noticed the larger anomalies already; the details cannot be dealt with seriatim without parallel texts. The above quotations are sufficient to show that the Quarto text needs careful study. An exact comparative analysis would take up a deal of space, but it is most interesting. There is, indeed, need of self-restraint to resist the insertion of some of the above passages, in addition to those necessary ones already included. Nothing but an unswerving reverence for the Folio text enables one to withstand the temptation—a reverence that did not belong to the early commentators.

For further variations of interest, I must refer to my notes. See especially IV. v. 82, where I claim to have discovered the only Welsh passage yet found in Shakespeare! Two verbal differences must be referred to, however, of a different nature.

In I. i. 113, where the Folio reads "king," the Quarto has "council." This apparent reference to James is explained by Mr. Daniel as being neutralised by the "time of the play being laid in the reign of Henry IV.," which has, I think, a very distant bearing on the point. But he also