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Putting London Centre-Stage

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thoroughly researched criticism on the given Shakespearean text'. This reader would have enjoyed a more substantial range of critical approaches and, crucially, would have liked to see some of the volume's provocations acknowledged and discussed. In refusing to reflect upon its own position within the critical field, the book, like the queen and the general enshrined in its title, comes to feel oddly nostalgic and sometimes rather backward-looking. Like Cleopatra, it refuses the Soothsayer's invitation to describe the future, and while the volume may be clearer-sighted than Antony and Cleopatra in its analysis of the past, and its examination of the conjunctions between criticism and ideology, it is less bold than the two lovers in struggling with the questions of its own place in that history, with who and what it is, and how it will be remembered.

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The First and Second Parts of King Edward IV by Thomas Heywood, edited by Richard Rowland. Manchester University Press, 2005. £47.50. ISBN 0 7190 1566 9

RICHARD ROWLAND'S EDITION of Thomas Heywood's two-part play of 1599 is a substantial achievement of scholarship. Not only does it make this important exemplar of the late sixteenth-century history play available to a wider readership than has hitherto been possible (this is the first edition of the play since 1874), but it does so with considerable authority.

With the uncertainty about the succession, not to mention the *fin-de-siècle* anxieties brought about by the prospect of the end of the sixteenth century itself, the ten years or so preceding the end of the long reign of Elizabeth I produced a large number of plays on historical subjects. Indeed, history was such a preoccupation at this juncture that the Elizabethan authorities tried to clamp down on historical and satirical works in the year in which this play was first produced. Heywood's *Edward IV* therefore sits within an established cultural trend. But, unlike some other perhaps better-known plays of the period, this text represents a civic as much as a national history.

Indeed, one can argue that it was the play's more apparently parochial aspects that did much to generate its popularity both on the stage and in print in its own day, for it was performed in at least three different theatres and printed in six separate editions over a twenty-five-year period. This comprehensive edition strives to foreground those local but significant concerns. Rowland asserts that '*Edward IV* takes the people and spaces which the chronicles often overlooked and places them centre-stage.' Furthermore, it does so with a latent radicalism which contrasts with the usual approach of Shakespeare's history plays. Rowland writes, for example, that 'the rich evocation of the spectators' quotidian existence ... contextualises, critiques and sometimes effaces the antics of not one but two kings' (p. 56). From its first printed incarnation, the play's very title highlights the popular appeal of its depiction of the semi-legendary Tanner of Tamworth and the (in)famous Mistress Shore; King Edward IV himself, as this play has it, is chiefly of interest owing to his involvement with these plebeian figures.

Much of the value of this edition lies in the way in which the play-text is situated within a meticulously researched series of theatrical, historical and topographical contexts. It therefore exemplifies the benefits of that juxtaposition of material and cultural histories which has been such a notable feature of recent early modern scholarship. In particular, and like the first part of the play which is its subject, Rowland's account is compellingly grounded in the specificity of early modern London. Indeed, it is Rowland's case that until now 'neither the suddenness with which that topographical specificity achieved such prominence nor the agency of *Edward IV* in that emergence has been adequately acknowledged' (p. 15). A fresh perspective on the play becomes available when local detail is taken into account: for instance, the play's usage of the ballad versions of the story of the Tanner of Tamworth takes on an added significance when this is (literally) situated in the context of the locations of two playhouses where *Edward IV* had been performed, the Boar's Head in Whitechapel and the Rose in Southwark, both of which had close associations with the leather trade.

As Rowland stresses, the last decade of the sixteenth century was a momentous time for London, characterised by plague and dearth brought about by repeated crop failures, as well as outbreaks of urban unrest against both 'aliens' (i.e. foreigners) in the city and those whom Londoners believed were depriving them of essential foodstuffs. Arguably it took a London writer like Heywood, along with other contemporaries such as Thomas Dekker and Anthony Munday, to depict the city's tensions in such a detailed and empathetic manner. Indeed, Heywood's identity as a civic writer was such that, like Dekker and Munday, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton, he was later to become involved in the writing of that most London-centric of texts, the

annual lord mayor's show. Rowland argues compellingly that the critical concentration on Shakespeare's history plays alone gives a misleading picture of the key characteristics of this genre: 'Shakespeare's London', he asserts, 'does *not* emerge as a conglomeration of sharply differentiated parochial zones, but as an indivisible unit: a monolith' (p. 16). Equally, Rowland is attuned to the ways in which 1590s London makes its presence felt in the text despite the play's official setting in the mid-fifteenth century. Illuminating comparisons are drawn in the introduction to another 1590s play which depicts London with an unusual level of detail and which also deals implicitly with the crises of its own moment, *The Booke of Sir Thomas More* (a play much, if belatedly, in the public eye at present), indicating the presence of a sub-genre of London drama in this period which might demand further exploration.

As my discussion has suggested, the introduction to the play goes beyond the survey of sources and antecedents which one would expect to find in a modern edition to produce a lengthier, more discursive account full of interest and argument. Thus, for example, the play's indebtedness to chronicle histories by Holinshed, Fabyan and Stow, as well as to less 'respectable' texts such as ballads, is not simply noted but is explored in some depth. For this reason alone, Rowland's account should prove to be an abidingly important interpretation of Heywood's play. Along with his expertise in the history and culture of London, the editor is well informed about recent work on non-Shakespearian drama, although one area to which relatively little attention is given – perhaps for pragmatic reasons of space – is feminist critics' discussions of the role of Jane Shore.¹

However, this edition is not solely a valuable contribution to scholarship. Its cost aside, as part of the impressive series of Revels Plays it is designed for use in the seminar room as much as the library. The body of the text itself is scrupulously edited. Its copious notes elucidate the play's complex use of historical chronicles and trace its connections to other literary works of the period. On a number of occasions Rowland is even able to locate a usage of certain words which pre-dates that listed in the generally authoritative *Oxford English Dictionary*, or indeed to highlight words which are not to be found there at all, which in itself demonstrates the benefits of exploring texts outside a narrowly defined canon of works. Almost in passing, then, this edition also brings to the foreground a wide range of hitherto obscure works, giving future students and scholars some suggestive sources to investigate. Primarily, however, for a non-specialist reader the main achievement of this definitive edition is to reveal to a greater extent than ever before what a rich text *Edward IV* is, and how enlightening it would be to

¹ See, for example, Kathleen McLuskie, *Dekker and Heywood* (Basingstoke 1994), *passim*.

place it alongside better-known works on a university or school syllabus. This is not a banal example of a sub-Shakespearian history play by a minor writer, as might have been presumed: by representing a strikingly diverse range of dramatic genres, geographical locations, social classes and linguistic idioms, *Edward IV* exemplifies the dynamism and complexity of early modern popular culture. After the sustained work Rowland has done on Heywood's play its relative neglect by critics and editors will seem all the more inexplicable and, one would hope, will no longer be the case.

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Byron's Ifs and Buts

Matthew Bevis

The Cambridge Companion to Byron edited by Drummond Bone. Cambridge University Press, 2004. £15.99 ISBN 0521786762 (pbk); £45 ISBN 0521781469 (hbk)

'I AM NOT FAMOUS for decision', Byron once noted in a demure parenthesis to the earl of Blessington.¹ The confession winningly highlights Byron's changeability, and yet – given the poet's awareness of how public infamy may not always tally with private inclinations – the comment might also imply hidden depths: 'not *famous* for decision, granted ... but there are other sides to me, you know'. In conversation with Lady Blessington, the poet quipped, 'Now, if I know myself, I should say, that I have no character at all', before quickly thinking through the importance of that 'if' and following it with a 'but': 'But, joking apart, what I think of myself is, that I am so changeable, being every thing by turns and nothing long – I am such a strange *mélange* of good and evil, that it would be difficult to describe me. There are but two sentiments to which I am constant – a strong love of liberty, and a detestation of cant.'² It is characteristic of Byron's self-witnessing

¹ *Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 11 vols. (London 1973–81) x. 157.

² *Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell (Princeton 1969) p. 220.