CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

INTRODUCTION

The Quarto of *Merry Wives of Windsor* is one of several early publications of Shakespeare plays that print a text differing markedly from the later quartos or the Folio of 1623. In a hugely influential study, published in 1917, *Shakespeare's Fight with the Pirates and the Problems of the Transmission of his Text*, Alfred W. Pollard branded as 'bad' quartos five such texts, arguing that they were purloined in one way or another by unscrupulous printers.[1] Of these five, the First Quarto of *Merry Wives of Windsor*, issued in 1602 and reprinted with very few alterations in 1619, has had a particularly bad press.[2] In 1888, P. A. Daniel forthrightly declared that 'the text of the Q is self-condemned: in it prose and verse are utterly confounded; the parts are frequently wrongly distributed; the dialogue, often incoherent, is sometimes quite unintelligible'.[3] H. C. Hart, the first Arden editor of *Merry Wives*, noted, a few years later: 'one feels sorry for this poor little debased Quarto. It gets nothing but abuse, or else the most austere criticism.'[4] Negative opinion has persisted to the present.

The dismissive view of this and the other so-called 'bad' quartos aligned them with the 'divers stolen and surreptitious copies, maimed and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors', of which Heminges and Condell claimed that their Folio of 1623 offered 'cured and perfect' versions. More recently, however, opinion on the so-called 'bad' quartos has shifted markedly, and in this general revaluation, Q1 of *Merry Wives* has been defended. Helen Ostovich, for example asserts that: 'Q is not the grossly corrupt, "illegitimate", "filched", "wretched", "mere patchwork"'of a good play that Shakespeare wrote. It is a successful experiment in citizen comedy.'[5]

Nonetheless, disputes about the nature and origin of the Quarto continue. Jeanne Addison Roberts wrote optimistically in 1975 that: 'There is a special "scientific" satisfaction in studies which seem to show progress towards the discovery of facts . . . Such progress can, I believe, be discerned if one traces the history of critical theories about the relationship of the Q and F versions of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.'[6] Suffice it for the moment to say that her confidence has proved unfounded, and her trust in the quasi-scientific certainty of bibliographic study has itself been undermined. Recognition of the ways in which imagination, supposition and narrative ingenuity, rather than scientific method, underpin so much of the writing about this Quarto makes the history of its reception a fascinating object of study in its own right.

---

[1] He was not the first to discuss the problems of the quartos; see Bracy and Roberts for a history of commentary on the Quarto text of *Merry Wives*.

[2] Since the second Quarto has no independent authority, it is unnecessary to distinguish in this Introduction between Q1 and Q2; reference will therefore generally be made in future simply to 'Q'.

[3] Daniel, vi.

[4] Hart, xx.

[5] Ostovich^3, 96. See also Craig, 66–7: 'In reality, the quarto text . . . is not a bad quarto at all, and no one seeing certain merits in the 1602 quarto need feel disgraced by defending a document about which so many disagreeable things have been said.'

[6] Jeanne Addison Roberts, '*The Merry Wives* Q and F: the Vagaries of Progress', *S.St.*, 8 (1975), 143.

Throughout its history, almost all verdicts on the Quarto text have been offered in and through comparison with the longer version of the play contained in the 1623 Folio. While the relationship of Q1 to the Folio must be a central issue in any attempt to determine what, exactly, the 1602 text itself represents, it is worth trying to keep that comparison at bay for a short while, and to begin by considering the text of Q1 on its own terms, as it might have appeared to a purchaser in 1602. As Laurie Maguire observes:

> placing a Shakespeare F or Q2 text alongside a Q1 version may narrow the interpretive options instead of increasing them, for it introduces inevitable biases about the direction of dependence: one can rarely have *a priori* confidence in the direction of influence between two texts.[1]

Recently, the theatrical viability of the Quarto text has been tested in two very different contexts – the first an unrehearsed, book-in-hand, reading in the School of English at the University of Leeds, where staff and students, many of whom had never read or seen the play in its Folio form, did their best to get an early version of this edited text 'on its feet'; the second a much more ambitious, fully staged production by the student company Lord Denney's Players at Ohio State University, under the direction of Sarah Neville (editor of the Folio text for *The New Oxford Shakespeare*). The results in both performances were in some respects illuminatingly similar. Both of them emphatically undermined Richard Dutton's assertion that Q is 'unperformable'.[2] The main plot of Falstaff and the Wives emerged positively; swift but funny, it posed few problems of staging or of comprehension for its audiences. The same, however, could not be said of the various sub-plots. The horse-stealing incident came out of nowhere and vanished equally quickly and incomprehensibly. While comic business was certainly made of the 'fight' between Caius and Evans, its cause was entirely opaque. Actually staging the text also highlighted how misleading was the long title of the Quarto, which promised 'pleasing humours of Sir Hugh the Welsh knight, Justice Shallow and his wise cousin Master Slender. With the swaggering vein of Ancient Pistol and Corporal Nim'. The 'swaggering vein' of Pistol and Nim is actually only very briefly in evidence, and Shallow's role is very limited. One doubts whether the purchaser of this volume in 1602 would have been satisfied that the play he or she read lived up to the expectations the title-page engendered.

But what, exactly, such a purchaser thought they were buying is a very significant question. Whatever one might think of the nature, origin or quality of the Quarto text we now have, what mattered in 1602 to the bookseller, Johnson, was the saleability of his book. The title-page not only names an author and a theatrical company, but promises that the volume will give its reader access to the play as performed before the Queen. This is clearly a significant part of the advertising for the book of the play, as it

---

[1] Maguire, 228.

[2] Richard Dutton, 'A Jacobean *Merry Wives*?' *The Ben Jonson Journal*, 18 (2011), 16. A revised version of the article is in Dutton, 245–58.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

was for many of the dramatic texts printed in the Early Modern period.[1] Exactly what its purchasers expected the relationship to be between the text they held in their hands and that royal performance, however, is an open question. It is, of course, possible that they did anticipate that they were buying a full record. Assertions of accuracy and completeness could on occasion form part of the sales pitch for a play's publication, particularly when it was replacing an earlier and 'imperfect copy'. This is the claim that Q2 *Hamlet* makes, for example, when the title-page declares that it is 'Newly printed and enlarged to almost as much againe as it was, according to the true and perfect Coppie'.[2] It is obvious that a potential purchaser is expected to respond positively to the promise of a more complete version than the First Quarto, printed the previous year, had offered. It is worth noting, however, that though Q1 advertises that the play has been acted in London, Oxford and Cambridge, Q2's title-page makes no mention of performance. The completeness of a text may not necessarily be the same thing as an accurate record of what was actually performed.

Alan Farmer has argued that Shakespeare was advertised by booksellers as having revised published texts more frequently than any other playwright – in which case it is perhaps even more surprising that there was no 'augmented and corrected' edition of *Merry Wives*.[3] Yet the very existence of the 'short' quartos suggests that it may have been, on occasion, more important for a bookseller to have *some* record of the latest theatrical 'hit' for sale than that it should be textually entirely – or perhaps even approximately – accurate or complete. Furthermore, if Tiffany Stern is right to suggest that the title-pages of printed plays might actually be reprints of, or at least be derived from, the playbills posted round the city to advertise performances, then this would strengthen the sense of identity between performance and publication in the minds of potential purchasers.[4]

There has been much discussion of the question of the profitability of published plays, with Peter Blayney's argument that they were not very significant earners challenged by Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser.[5] But it cannot be doubted that the decision to publish a version of *Merry Wives* must have implied at the very least that Arthur Johnson believed there was likely to have been a potential readership for it, even if the absence of a second printing before 1619 suggests that it was not a best-seller. Holger Schott Syme argues that 'the fact that a stationer was willing to buy a

---

[1] On title-pages, see Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'Vile Arts: the Marketing of English Printed Drama, 1512–1660', *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, 39 (2000), 77–165; Gabriel Egan, '"As It Was, Is, or Will Be Played": Title Pages and the Theatre Industry to 1610', in Holland and Orgel, 92–112.

[2] Thomas Creede, the printer of *Merry Wives* Q1, had himself printed the second Quarto of *Romeo and Juliet* as 'newly corrected, augmented, and amended' three years earlier, in 1599.

[3] Alan B. Farmer, 'Shakespeare as Leading Playwright in Print, 1598–1608/9', in Kidnie and Massai, 87–104.

[4] See Tiffany Stern, '"On Each Wall and Corner Poast": Playbills, Title-pages, and Advertising in Early Modern London', *ELR*, 36 (2006), 57–89. A revised version is in Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), Ch. 2.

[5] Peter W. M. Blayney, 'The Publication of Playbooks', in John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan, eds., *A New History of Early English Drama* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 383–422; Alan B. Farmer and Zachary Lesser, 'The Popularity of Playbooks Revisited', *SQ*, 56.1 (2005), 1–32; Peter Blayney, 'The Alleged Popularity of Playbooks', *SQ*, 56.1 (2005), 33–50.

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

play and pay for its registration at all ought to be considered prima facie evidence for its marketability', and asserts that 'the challenge was not how to give theatrically faded plays a new life as books but how to choose those plays whose stage popularity could be translated into print popularity'.[1]

Throughout their history, for good and ill, claims for the *theatrical* origins of the so-called 'bad' quarto texts have been emphasised. Yet noting the presence of 'commonplace markers' in *Hamlet* Q1 – a text with some similarities to Q1 of *Merry Wives* – Lesser and Stallybrass suggest that: 'if we want to historicize this playbook in its own moment, we need to see it not simply as a theatrical abridgment but rather as a *literary text for reading*'.[2] There are no such explicitly 'readerly' markers evident in the Quarto of *Merry Wives*, but, approaching another so-called 'bad' quarto, that of *Henry V*, Cyrus Mulready notes that 'criticism . . . has tended to disregard the actual publication of the texts themselves, their status as books (and therefore commodities), and their appeal to early readers'.[3] David Scott Kastan conjectures more generally that 'play quartos do seem largely to have depended on playgoers for their sales, the six-penny pamphlets a relatively cheap way of happily recalling a performance or catching up with one that had unhappily been missed'.[4] The relationship of the First Quarto of *Merry Wives* to actual stage performance is, therefore, a significant question, and one which will recur frequently, but first the long-debated puzzles about the relationship of Quarto and Folio texts of *Merry Wives* must be approached. The date of the play's composition is the first issue to consider.

Dating and the Sequencing of Quarto and Folio

When was the play first written, and which of the two surviving texts is closer to that 'original' script? In the eighteenth century, the earlier publication date of the Quarto was sufficient to suggest its priority. Alexander Pope believed that Q1 as it stood was the 'first imperfect sketch' Shakespeare himself made, and he explained its problematic nature by invoking the apocryphal tale of the play's composition in two weeks at Queen Elizabeth's command. Though accepted by other early editors, including Johnson and Steevens, it is a view which was for many years discarded. More recently, however, it has been resurrected. Peter Grav, for example, suggests 'that the story that Elizabeth commissioned the play . . . may be founded in truth', and others have sought to revive the 'first draft' theory for this and other quartos.[5]

---

[1] Schott Syme, 31.

[2] Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, 'The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays', *SQ*, 59 (2008), 371–420.

[3] Cyrus Mulready, 'Making History in Q *Henry V*', *ELR*, 43 (2013), 483.

[4] David Scott Kastan, 'Plays into Print: Shakespeare to His Earliest Readers', in Jennifer Lotte Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, eds., *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 33. A part – albeit a small part – of the potential audience was made up of players intending to mount provincial performances. See Julie Stone Peters, *Theatre of the Book 1480–1880* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 7.

[5] Grav, 236. See also Craig, and Y. S. Bains, *Making Sense of the First Quartos of Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, Henry V, The Merry Wives of Windsor and Hamlet* (Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Rashtrapati Nivas, Shimla, 1995). Bourus has vigorously advanced the 'first draft' theory in relation to Q1 of *Hamlet*.

CAMBRIDGE
Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

Subsequent attempts to date the first performance of the play, and to suggest which version has chronological priority, have turned on two distinct questions – first, the relationship of this Falstaff story to the *Henry IV* and *Henry V* plays in which he and other characters also appear; and, second, the implications of what are taken to be topical allusions in each of the surviving texts. As is entirely typical for this play, diametrically opposed views have been offered.

The connection between *Merry Wives* and the *Henry IV* and *Henry V* plays is at one level obvious – as are the fundamental differences of genre and the lack of characterological continuity between them – but the question is whether the comedy was written before, during or after the composition of the Henriad. One argument has been that Shakespeare would not have written a new play about Falstaff after dramatising his rejection at the end of *2 Henry IV* and narrating his death and the death of his companions in *Henry V*.[1] Giorgio Melchiori answers this oft-held view with the suggestion that, on the contrary, the play 'was written to compensate for that death, which betrayed the promise made in the Epilogue of the Second Part of *Henry IV* to "continue the story with Sir John in it"'.[2] Melchiori himself follows much older precedent in taking the view that the play was written after *Henry V*, which can be dated to 1599. He agrees with G. R. Hibbard in adducing as evidence the fact that 'the swaggering vein' of Corporal Nim is advertised on Q1's title-page. Nim first appeared in *Henry V*, and so, the argument goes, could not have been sufficiently known to Q1's potential readership for this to have had any value as publicity until after that play had been performed.[3] Martin Wiggins, however, disagrees, arguing instead that Shakespeare may have had the whole plan for the Henriad in his mind from the beginning, which 'means that some of the material for the project would have been developed ahead of time and "banked" for future use; some of the characters in *The Merry Wives*, . . . must have proven themselves on stage, but the same need not follow for them all'.[4] There is no way of resolving these contrary positions. *Merry Wives* is neither sequel nor prequel, and its composition was not predicated on the kinds of narrative consistency and continuity that have come to be our conventional expectations in novelistic or filmic series. The comedy stands generically apart from the history plays, and though it is entirely plausible to date its origin to roughly the same time, any attempt to place it more precisely in a historical sequence on grounds of narrative consistency is bound to fail.

Much more significant for the dating and sequencing of the surviving texts have been the efforts to identify topical references in the play. The most frequently invoked of such apparent references is the Folio's speech in praise of the Order of the Garter (5.5.47–67). The most widely favoured suggestion in the twentieth century was that the play was written for the Garter Feast of 1597, held in London at Whitehall ahead of the institution of the new Knights at Windsor. Leslie Hotson advanced the theory briefly in 1931, and it was endorsed and amplified in book-length studies by, among others, William Bracy, William Green and Jeanne Addison Roberts.[1] They all agreed that, since Lord Hunsdon, patron of Shakespeare's acting company, was elected to the Order on that occasion, he therefore commissioned 'his' playwright to compose a Garter play in celebration. The linking of the play to that occasion was further supported by the fact that the Duke of Württemberg, formerly known as Count Mompelgard, was admitted to the Garter at the same ceremony. He may (or may not) be identified with the 'cousin garmombles' of the Quarto (see 16.46n.), and more generally with the 'German' sub-plot of the stolen horses, a narrative which is problematically skimpy in both Q and F.

---

[1] See, e.g., Roberts, 42.

[2] Melchiori, 20. Daniel, xiv, made the same argument as long ago as 1888.

[3] This suggestion also persuaded the *New Oxford Shakespeare* editors to move from the date of 1598 in their first edition to 1600 in the second.

[4] Martin Wiggins, with Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, Vol. III, *1590–1597* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 396.

While T. W. Craik, the editor of the Oxford, and David Crane, editor of the New Cambridge volumes, both accepted the 1597 date, Melchiori, as we have seen, did not. He still, however, wanted to preserve the Garter references as part of the first version of the play, and so constructed a complicated narrative in which Shakespeare first produced a brief pageant or masque-like entertainment for the Garter Feast in 1597 which he then expanded into the text of which the Folio preserves a record.[2]

This early date has come under serious interrogation by Elizabeth Schafer and Barbara Freedman,[3] each pointing out that there is absolutely no evidence that the play was performed on that particular occasion in 1597, or, more significantly, that any Garter Feast at any time conventionally included dramatic entertainment. Neither of them, however, explicitly questioned the assumption that it was the Folio, with its Garter passage, which reflected the first version of the play.

More recently, Richard Dutton rejected any connection between *Merry Wives* and the 1597 Garter Feast, asserting, indeed, that:

> *Merry Wives* is an intensely *inappropriate* play to celebrate the election of someone to the Order of the Garter. It is not heroic, it is not festive; it is satiric and charivaric, and invests much of the energy of its climax in the ritual humiliation . . . of its central character, Falstaff. Falstaff was actually a degraded Garter knight, the antithesis of what a new member of the Order should strive to be.[4]

He argues that it is the Quarto text which derives from the earliest version of the play, and that additional 'courtly' material in the Folio text was added later, possibly for the court performance of *Merry Wives* which is known to have taken place in 1604.[5] John H. Long had, more than half a century earlier, anticipated this view, on the basis that

---

[1] Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1931); Bracy; William Green, *Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Princeton University Press, 1962); Roberts.

[2] This hypothesis was first advanced in Giorgio Melchiori, *Shakespeare's Garter Plays* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), 77–122, and summarised in his edition, 18–30.

[3] Elizabeth Schafer, 'The Date of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Notes and Queries*, 38 (1991), 57–60; Barbara Freedman, 'Shakespearean Chronology, Ideological Complicity, and Floating Texts: Something is Rotten in Windsor', *SQ*, 45 (1994), 190–210.

[4] Dutton, 249.

[5] Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich, 'Pageantry, Queens and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *SQ*, 63.3 (2012), 328–54, accepts a Jacobean date for the Folio text, but argues that it is actually more critical of the court than is the Quarto.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

Q's final scene is simply more appropriate and more theatrically effective than that in F.[1] This is a notion borne out by theatre history. The Garter speech was generally cut in the eighteenth century, and has frequently been much abbreviated in more recent performances. The BBC TV production, for example, omitted the Garter speech completely, and substituted a few lines from Q.[2]

This is not the only difference between the two texts that has been adduced as dating evidence. In Q, Ford adopts the pseudonym 'Brook' in his encounters with Falstaff. In the Folio, this becomes 'Broom' – a reading which makes nonsense of the joke at F 2.2.122 where Falstaff exclaims 'Such brooks are welcome to me, that o'erflows such liquor'. It is generally assumed that the alteration was in response to a protest by Henry, Lord Cobham, whose family name was Brook, and to whom the slur would have been all the more potent in that Shakespeare had already been required to change the name 'Oldcastle' to 'Falstaff' in response to pressure, probably from Cobham's father, at the time of the composition of *1 Henry IV*. Dutton persuasively suggests that 'if the change [of Brook to Broom] had actually happened in 1597 or thereabouts, we would expect it also to be respected in 1602. This is one of the clearest indications that Q1 is in fact . . . antecedent to F.'[3]

Two other significant variations between the two texts have no obvious implication for dating. First, the Latin lesson of F 4.1. is completely detachable; it has frequently been cut throughout the play's stage history without causing notable disruption. It could, therefore, have been part of an original text, or, equally, have been added later for court performance.[4] Second, the absence, or toning-down, of oaths in the Folio text reflects the purgation of such material in response to the 1606 Act to Restrain Abuses, and could have been carried out at any time until Ralph Crane prepared the manuscript for the Folio printers.

In the end, it seems to me that the most likely date for the composition of the first version of *Merry Wives* is *circa* 1600, and I am persuaded – not least by the clumsiness of the introduction of the Garter passage in F and its questionable appropriateness to the central theatrical business of Falstaff's humiliation – to accept that the Folio's version of the final scene was probably part of a later revision of the play, possibly prepared for court performance. How thorough a revision that might have been of the play as a whole is a matter for conjecture. I also have to acknowledge that this is a position incapable of incontrovertible proof.

Yet the stance one takes on this issue has significant implications for the way in which one then approaches Q. A single example might illustrate the problem. At Folio TLN 177–82 we have this exchange:

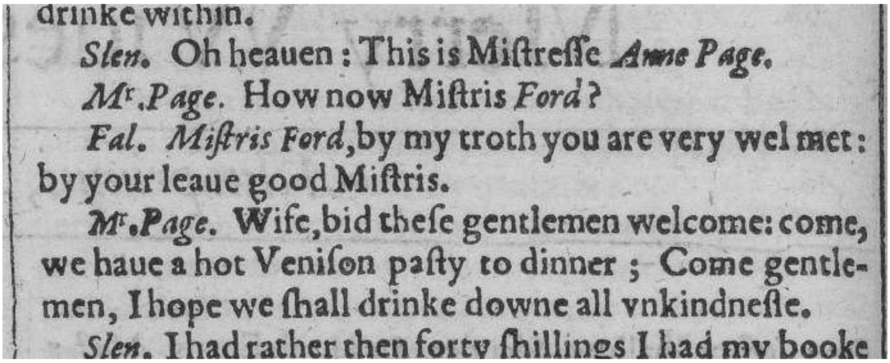
---

[1] John H. Long, 'Another Masque for *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *SQ*, 3 (1952), 39–43.

[2] Irace, 40–1.

[3] Dutton, 252. See also B. J. Sokol, 'A Warwickshire Scandal: Sir Thomas Lucy and the Date of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Shakespeare*, 5 (2009), 355–71.

[4] See below, pp. 17–18.

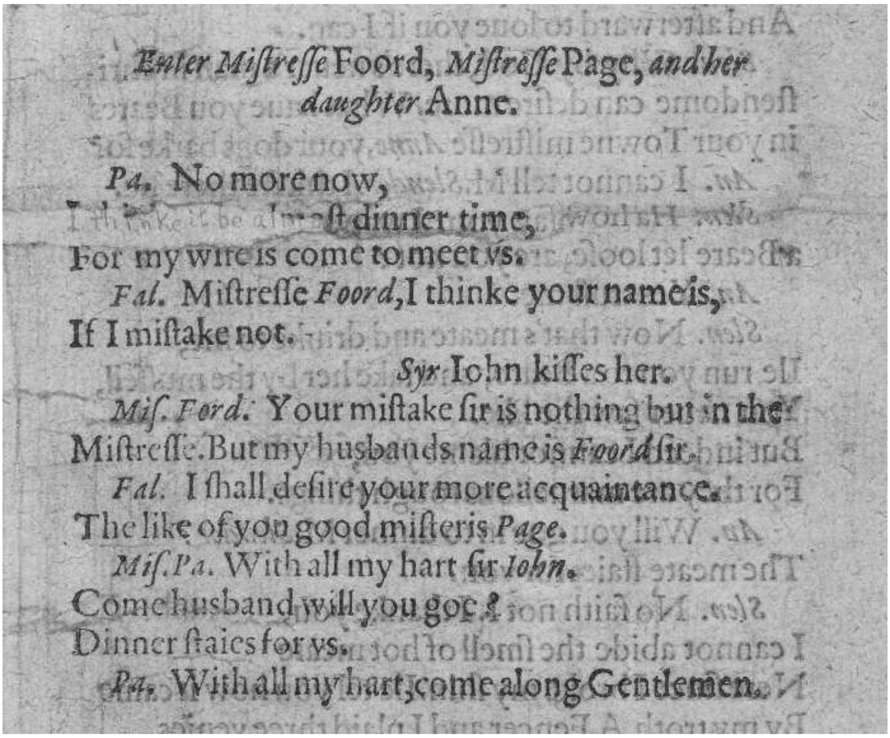


drinke within.
Slen. Oh heauen: This is Miſtreſſe *Anne Page.*
Mr.Page. How now Miſtris *Ford*?
Fal. *Miſtris Ford*, by my troth you are very wel met: by your leaue good Miſtris.
Mr.Page. Wife, bid theſe gentlemen welcome: come, we haue a hot Veniſon paſty to dinner; Come gentlemen, I hope we ſhall drinke downe all vnkindneſſe.
Slen. I had rather then forty ſhillings I had my booke

Extract from F1 A4r by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library

The Folio adopts a system of indicating massed entries at the beginning of a scene, so here later editors add the stage direction '*Enter* MISTRESS FORD *and* MISTRESS PAGE' after the first line (1.1.151). Falstaff's greeting of Mistress Ford then follows simply on the cue offered to him by Page's acknowledgement of her presence.

In Q, however, this exchange looks significantly different:



Enter Miſtreſſe Foord, *Miſtreſſe* Page, *and her daughter* Anne.

Pa. No more now,
I thinke it be almoſt dinner time,
For my wife is come to meet vs.
Fal. Miſtreſſe *Foord*, I thinke your name is,
If I miſtake not.
Syr Iohn kiſſes her.
Miſ. Ford. Your miſtake ſir is nothing but in the Miſtreſſe. But my husbands name is *Foord* ſir.
Fal. I ſhall deſire your more acquaintance.
The like of you good miſteris *Page*.
Miſ.Pa. With all my hart ſir *Iohn*.
Come husband will you goe?
Dinner ſtaies for vs.
Pa. With all my hart, come along Gentlemen.

Extract from Q1 D2v by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-04409-8 — The First Quarto of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor'
Edited by David Lindley
Excerpt
More Information

Page does not mention Mistress Ford before Falstaff greets her by name and kisses her. Her reply, which is not in F, is then somewhat confusing – why should she object to the title 'mistress', as she seems to do? Furthermore, why should Falstaff even think her to be Mistress Ford at all, since it is Page who says that *his* wife is come to fetch them in? Wouldn't it seem more likely that Falstaff would first greet Mistress Page? If one believes that Q1 derives from – and corrupts – something like the Folio text, then this variation might be written off as confused elaboration of an imperfectly remembered moment in which Page's key mention of Mistress Ford was omitted. But Greg thought that these lines 'have a genuine appearance, and were almost certainly in the acting version'. The problem then becomes not only to give an explanation of Falstaff's choosing to greet Mistress Ford, rather than Mistress Page, but also to understand quite what Mistress Ford herself is saying in rebutting Falstaff's approach. Greg thought she was 'disclaiming any pretence to gentility', a problematic reading, since the appellation causes no difficulty anywhere else in the text. If, however, one believes that Q1 does indeed represent an earlier form of the text, then this moment might be explained – as Helen Ostovich claims – by suggesting that Falstaff *mistakenly* greets Mistress Page as Mistress Ford, and kisses her. Mistress Ford then corrects him, identifying herself to him (and to us). There are still problems, however, since neither Falstaff nor the audience has met either woman before, and therefore the confusion is likely to be shared by both. The omission of what might seem to be essential narrative cues and clues, as will become apparent, is one of the problematic features of Q, and thus not untypical here. Nonetheless, even if, as it stands, it is imperfectly rendered or abbreviated in the Quarto text, to treat Falstaff's greeting as a mistaken identification makes a mildly amusing theatrical gag, as the Ohio performance demonstrated, which it might seem odd that the Folio chooses to smooth out. Again, the argument could go either way – the Folio represents the first version and the Quarto records a slice of later improvised business, or else the Folio is tidying up the Quarto's confusion. It would seem that neither text is entirely to be trusted at this point. But, crucially, the stance one takes towards it will be materially influenced by the hypothesis one entertains of the sequence, and therefore the status, of the two texts.

The Copy for the Quarto

The question is, on the surface, straightforward: what manuscript copy of *Merry Wives* did Thomas Creede put before his compositors?[1] To find an answer, however, is anything but simple, since it involves confronting fundamental and controversial questions about the nature of Early Modern dramatic printed texts and the manuscripts that lie behind them. The three interlocked central issues are:

1. the relationship of each of the surviving printed texts either to an authorial manuscript or else to a theatrical performance;
2. the brevity of Q1 compared to F;
3. the very uneven verbal correspondence between the two versions.

---

[1] On Thomas Creede, see Akihiro Yamada, *Thomas Creede Printer to Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Tokyo: Meisei University Press, 1994); Schott Syme, 28–46.

The position taken on any one of these issues impacts upon the others, and frequently reveals unspoken and often unprovable assumptions buried beneath a weight of earnest scholarly conjecture.

For almost the whole history of Shakespearean textual scholarship, speculation on the potential difference between what the author wrote and what actors actually performed and booksellers printed has been a powerful constitutive force in editorial thinking, and the effort to identify the traces each might leave in the printed text has been a continuous preoccupation. Until relatively recently, the dominant assumption has been that Shakespeare's intentions were embodied in his original draft, but were extremely likely to be 'corrupted' in performance by actors, and misrepresented by compositors in the printing house. The editorial effort, therefore, was to cleanse a text of theatrical depredations, and to see through the 'veil of print', in Fredson Bowers's oft-quoted formulation, to get back as nearly as possible to that original, authorial text. In New Bibliographical thinking, that task began with an attempt to identify the nature of the printer's copy that lay behind the surviving text. Walter Greg's hugely influential binary categories of (authorial) 'foul papers' and (theatrical) 'promptbook' as the two kinds of manuscript that a printer might find before him turned that task into a choice between alternatives which he believed could be securely identified through the characteristics of the printed text. In this context, the designation of the 'bad' quartos as 'stolen' by unscrupulous actors reflected a view of theatrical degeneration from the pristine authorial manuscript, and for many years the two texts of *Merry Wives* were slotted neatly into this binary – the Folio text was thought to derive from 'foul papers', where the Quarto was a theatrical 'piracy'.

In more recent years, that theatrical/authorial binary distinction has been given a different spin. Lukas Erne, arguing against the long-held belief that Shakespeare was indifferent to publication, proposed that Shakespeare wrote with an eye on the creation of a publishable, readerly text, one which, if performed as it stood, would have taken noticeably longer than the two to three hours which plays are generally supposed to have lasted, and which Shakespeare therefore expected his theatrical company to cut.[1] Andrew Gurr develops a similar thesis, suggesting that the longer, authorial version was the one sent to the Master of the Revels for licensing. This, he argues, represented a 'maximal' text, from which the company then created a shorter performance text, one which might evolve over time, and be revised with or without the presence or agreement of the original playwright.[2]

At the same time, theoretical attacks on the centrality of the very concept of the 'author' as the validator of the meaning of a text underpinned a refocussing of editorial effort towards the attempted recovery of the collaborative work involved in theatrical performance and away from a retrieval of the purity of an authorial original.[3] It was the

---

[1] Lukas Erne, *Shakespeare as Literary Dramatist* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), and *Shakespeare and the Book Trade* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).

[2] Andrew Gurr, 'Maximal and Minimal Texts: Shakespeare v. The Globe', *S.Sur.*, 52 (1999), 68–87.

[3] See Heather Hirschfeld, 'Playwriting in Shakespeare's Time: Authorship, Collaboration, and Attribution', in Kidnie and Massai, 13–26.