

Kolkovich, Elizabeth Zeman. "Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63.3 (2012): 328-54.

## Pageantry, Queens, and Housewives in the Two Texts of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

ELIZABETH ZEMAN KOLKOVICH

THE PAGEANT THAT ENDS *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR* is an anomaly within the Shakespeare canon. Although other comic plays within plays feature lower-ranking men performing for their betters, the *Merry Wives* pageant is devised by and for the middling sort, and its devisers and some of its performers are female characters. These oddities seem less strange when we consider the fictional pageant's intertextuality with actual late Elizabethan pageantry and its multiple devisers and audiences. During the last decade of Elizabeth's reign when *Merry Wives* was composed and first published, progress entertainments performed on provincial estates comprised an especially popular form of court pageantry.<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth often stopped at country manors during her royal progresses, and to celebrate her visit, several of her elite hosts collaborated with writers and performers to present a series of outdoor skits comprised of songs, speeches, and dialogues in verse and prose. This interactive genre often allowed those on the margins access to social and political power. Lower-ranking members of the community sometimes had the opportunity to promote their interests through performance; unlike most other dramatic forms in Elizabe-

---

I thank Richard Dutton, Tara Lyons, Carol Neely, and two anonymous readers at *Shakespeare Quarterly* for their comments on earlier drafts of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> Although there were several forms of court pageantry during Elizabeth's reign (including the royal entry, court masque, and tilt), the relatively large number of extant country-house entertainment texts between 1591 and 1602 attests to the frequency of these performances in the last decade of the reign and to the public's desire to record and preserve them. Scholars used to date *Merry Wives* to 1600–1602 until Leslie Hotson suggested that Lord Hunsdon commissioned it for performance at the 1597 Garter ceremony; see *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (London: Nonesuch Press, 1931), 111–22. William Green later developed the theory in *Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1962). Although many editors still accept this occasionalist dating, some recent scholars have pushed for a slightly later date. Barbara Freedman contends that the play “recycled rather than anticipated” the 1597 occasion in “Shakespearean Chronology, Ideological Complicity, and Floating Texts: Something Is Rotten in Windsor,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45 (1994): 190–210, esp. 207. In the Arden edition of the play, Giorgio Melchiori argues that it was written in late 1599 or 1600; see *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 18–30. Richard Dutton favors a similar date in “A Jacobean *Merry Wives*?” in *The Ben Jonson Journal* (Edinburgh) 18 (2011): 1–26.

than England, several country-house entertainments enabled women to enter into political negotiations with the Queen as they lobbied for increased favor and power. Far from simple affirmations of Elizabeth's authority, these entertainments both honor and critique the royal agenda as they celebrate local talents, leaders, and customs. The *Merry Wives* pageant does the same as it alludes to aspects of late Elizabethan royal entertainment in its form and themes. This intertextuality especially highlights the play's representations of Englishness and gender. The fictional pageant interprets provincial pageantry as a space in which to negotiate communal identities and offers an opportunity for women and the nonelite to intervene socially and politically. As it does so, it reveals friction between regional pride and emerging nationalism, and it suggests that Elizabeth served as a model of female authority for women of the middling sort.

Attention to the *Merry Wives* pageant sheds new light not only on the play's messages about nation and gender, but also on its performance and publication history. The *Merry Wives* pageant exists in two distinct texts in the 1602 "bad quarto" and the 1623 Folio. Both versions echo certain aspects of folk customs and progress pageantry as the title characters punish Falstaff for his lusty advances, and both allude to Queen Elizabeth and the ideologies surrounding her rule. The quarto's title page claims it was performed "Both before her Maies-  
tie, and else-where,"<sup>2</sup> but the Folio pageant's loftier language and more explicit references to the Elizabethan court have led scholars to assume that the Folio must offer the version presented to the Queen. Today, the most widely accepted theories posit that the quarto represents either a memorial reconstruction or an abridged version of the play Elizabeth saw.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, my approach encour-

<sup>2</sup> *A most pleasaunt and excellent conceited comedie, of Syr Iohn Falstaffe, and the merrie wiues of Windsor* (London, 1602), sig. A2r.

<sup>3</sup> For an excellent overview of scholarly and editorial treatment of the quarto, see Leah S. Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton* (London: Routledge, 1996), 68–79. W. W. Greg first proposed the theory of memorial reconstruction in *Shakespeare's Merry Wives of Windsor 1602* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), vii–lvi, and more recently, Laurie Maguire finds a strong case for memorial reconstruction in the *Merry Wives* quarto in *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The "Bad" Quartos and their Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996), 298–6, 324. However, this theory does not account for all variants. In two articles, Paul Werstine determines that memorial reconstruction is not demonstrable, and even Greg suggests that the theory cannot explain the two texts' strikingly different endings. See Paul Werstine, "Narratives about Printed Shakespeare Texts: 'Foul Papers' and 'Bad' Quartos," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 41 (1990): 65–86, and "A Century of 'Bad' Shakespeare Quartos," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 50 (1999): 310–33. For the argument that the quarto is abridged for provincial performance, see Green, 82–88; and A. W. Pollard and J. Dover Wilson, "The 'Stolne and Surreptitious' Shakespearian Texts," *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 January 1919, 18. Gerald Johnson persuasively argues against the provincial hypothesis and proposes that the quarto represents an acting version of a longer play in "The *Merry Wives of Windsor*, Q1: Provincial Touring and Adapted Texts," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38 (1987): 154–65. Fewer recent scholars have argued that the

ages us to take seriously the claim on the quarto's title page that it was performed for a wide spectrum of Elizabethan society, including the Queen. My analysis of the two texts diverges from Leah Marcus's characterization of the quarto as urban and anticourt and the Folio as a text that treats courtly figures kindly.<sup>4</sup> The quarto's rustic language is not at odds with royal entertainment, nor are its central themes inconsistent with Elizabeth's image at the end of her reign. As the quarto's concluding pageant celebrates the governing capacities of housewives on the local level, it endorses Elizabeth's image and authority. The Folio pageant's additional references to Elizabeth, her court, and its rituals develop and complicate what is already present in the quarto. The Folio's additional allusions to the court make it not more celebratory but more ambivalent as it emulates and parodies court festival. While the quarto presents itself in print as a performance fit for Elizabeth, the Folio more boldly reflects on her influence and the possibilities of appropriation and manipulation of her image. This textual and intertextual evidence lends support to the possibility that the quarto indeed represents the version performed for Elizabeth and that the Folio is a later, revised text.

## I

Several scholars have examined how the final scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* resembles the popular shaming rituals of charivari and skimmington, in which a community united to mock and punish a domestic offender whose behavior has threatened the social order.<sup>5</sup> At the end of the play, Mistresses Page and Ford join forces with Mistress Quickly, their husbands, and other townspeople to invent and execute a theatrical production designed to humiliate Falstaff as punishment for his untoward conduct. Falstaff enters expecting a romantic rendezvous but is instead accosted by a legion of fairies played by

---

differences between the two texts result from revision, authorial or otherwise. Dutton makes a strong case for the Folio as a revised text (18–21); see also Peter Grav, "Money Changes Everything: Quarto and Folio *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and the Case for Revision," *Comparative Drama* 40 (2006): 217–40.

<sup>4</sup> Marcus, *Unediting the Renaissance*, 68–100, and "Levelling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 168–78.

<sup>5</sup> Anne Parten makes a persuasive case for the final scene as "a modified skimmington" in "Falstaff's Horns: Masculine Inadequacy and Feminine Mirth in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Studies in Philology* 82 (1985): 184–99; Edward Berry analyzes at length how the Folio adapts the charivari for comic ends in *Shakespeare and the Hunt: A Cultural and Social Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001), 147–56). See also Carol Thomas Neely, *Distracted Subjects: Madness and Gender in Shakespeare and Early Modern Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2004), 148–49; and Mary Ellen Lamb, *The Popular Culture of Shakespeare, Spenser, and Jonson* (Milton Park, UK: Routledge, 2006), 147–48. Many critics have pointed out that the charivari and skimmington typically disciplined shrewish women, but *Merry Wives* reverses gender roles; Neely and Lamb both identify the pageant as a fusion of charivari and masque components.

local men, women, and children. Like a skimmington, this scene combines punishment and festivity to discipline a symbolic cuckold within the community and outside official justice, and when Page earlier refers to Falstaff's impending humiliation as "publike sport" (through-line number [TLN] 2136), he employs language often used to describe charivari.<sup>6</sup> Other critics have highlighted the fictional pageant's evocation of elements of courtly masques or Garter rituals, especially the Folio text's references to Windsor Castle, the Order of the Garter, and Queen Elizabeth.<sup>7</sup> The *Merry Wives* pageant incorporates elements of both popular shaming rituals and elite ceremony, and both comparisons reveal ways in which the fictional pageant comments on gender and social rank. However, I offer a new context that enables us to understand better the fictional pageant's social commentary: its intertextuality with royal entertainment on progress.

Both versions of the *Merry Wives* pageant allude to elements of Elizabethan country-house entertainments and reveal cultural perceptions of their value. Performed outdoors in the parks, meadows, gardens, and courtyards of country manors, these provincial pageants employed the pastoral mode as they used the landscape as stage and theme.<sup>8</sup> Each performance included a sequence of episodic pageants and demanded interaction between the actors and specta-

<sup>6</sup> The First Folio is cited from *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968), by through-line number (TLN). "Sport" was a common label for charivari (Berry, 149–50).

<sup>7</sup> See especially Peter Erickson, "The Order of the Garter, the Cult of Elizabeth, and Class-Gender Tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (London: Methuen, 1987), 116–40; and Natasha Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2002), 102–7.

<sup>8</sup> For discussions of the genre's use of landscape, see Michael Leslie, "Something Nasty in the Wilderness': Entertaining Queen Elizabeth on Her Progresses," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 10 (1998): 47–72; and Bruce R. Smith, "Landscape with Figures: The Three Realms of Queen Elizabeth's Country-House Revels," *Renaissance Drama* n.s. 8 (1978): 52–115. My own descriptions of the genre are based on my analysis of the surviving manuscript and print texts of entertainments at Kenilworth (1575), Woodstock (1575), Wanstead (1578), Theobalds (1591), Elvetham (1591), Cowdray (1591), Bisham (1592), Sudeley (1592), Ditchley (1592), Rycote (1592), Theobalds (1594), Mitcham (1598), Wimbledon (1599), Wilton (1599), Chiswick (1602), and Harefield (1602). John Nichols transcribes many of these texts in *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth* (London, 1823), as does Jean Wilson in *Entertainments for Elizabeth I* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1980). For analysis of certain of these entertainments, see Gabriel Heaton, *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments: From George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2010), 1–116; *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Elisabeth Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007), 163–244; Curt Breight, "Realpolitik and Elizabethan Ceremony: The Earl of Hertford's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Elvetham, 1591," *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992): 20–48; and David Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry 1558–1642*, rev. ed. (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003), 15–66.

tors, who walked the estate grounds together as they performed and viewed the shows. When Elizabeth arrived at an estate, homegrown characters such as shepherds, domestic servants, and figures from English lore appeared in her path. As these pageants praised and entertained Elizabeth, they promoted the agendas of the patrons, writers, and performers who collaborated to produce them. Entertainment devisers often strengthened alliances with Elizabeth and her top advisors, earned new positions at court, or influenced policy-making through performance.<sup>9</sup>

Within the fictional world of the play, the *Merry Wives* pageant recalls many features of these regional shows. In both versions, Mistresses Page and Ford call their performance a “deuice,” a word commonly used for royal pageantry (sig. F3r; “deuise,” TLN 2164). Their pageant is not set in an indoor space at court like a masque; instead, like a country-house entertainment, it is collaboratively devised, pastoral, and staged outdoors in a park adjacent to the local castle. In progress pageants, female characters were played by a combination of cross-dressed boys and local women, and the fictional entertainment follows this precedent.<sup>10</sup> Mistress Quickly and Anne Page take parts, and the quarto’s stage directions inform us that local boys play other fairies of unspecified gender. The fictional pageant shares its central focus—that of sexual virtue—with several late Elizabethan entertainments. In the 1590s, country-house shows frequently drew on Elizabeth’s image as the Virgin Queen to praise chastity and satirize lust. For Elizabeth’s visit to Bisham Abbey in 1592, Elizabeth Russell devised an entertainment in which her teenaged daughters played the speaking roles of two shepherdesses who resist Pan’s sexual advances and laugh at him when he threatens to rob them of their chastity. One says that “weomens tongues are made of the same flesh that their harts are, and speake as they thinke: Mens harts of the flesh that their tongues, and both dissemble.”<sup>11</sup> When the shepherdesses claim that men cannot be trusted, they imply that men cannot serve Elizabeth as well as women can. Through this performance, the Russell women represented themselves as the Virgin Queen’s chaste protégées in successful auditions for

<sup>9</sup> For examples of entertainments’ personal and political functions, see Heaton, 1–116; Bright, 20–48; and Elizabeth Heale, “Contesting Terms: Loyal Catholicism and Lord Montague’s Entertainment at Cowdray, 1591,” *Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments*, 189–206.

<sup>10</sup> The evidence on players in progress performances is scarce, but some entertainment texts reveal who played which parts. See, for example, George Gascoigne, “The Princely Pleasures at Kenilworth,” in *The Complete Works of George Gascoigne*, ed. John W. Cunliffe (New York: Greenwood, 1969), 2:91–131. In the entertainment at Bisham, two shepherdesses reveal they are played by the daughters of hostess Elizabeth Russell when they refer to their mother. See *Speeches Delivered to Her Maiestie This Last Progresse* (Oxford, 1592), sig. A3v (in quotations from this text, abbreviations are silently expanded).

<sup>11</sup> *Speeches Delivered*, sig. A3r.

positions at court, yet they sought these positions to secure financially and socially advantageous marriages.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the *Merry Wives* pageant idealizes virginity but reveals marriage as one of the purposes of the performance. Anne Page's parents try to marry her secretly to their preferred suitors under the guise of the entertainment, and Anne exploits the liberty within pageant devising to elope with her chosen mate.

Although the fictional pageant alludes to country-house entertainment in its setting, structure, and themes, it diverges from the genre in meaningful ways as well. Country-house entertainments were hosted by aristocratic householders, and although those of the lower ranks often performed in the pageantry, they did not devise and supervise the event as the play's wives do. The wives do not seek royal favor or an increase in status and wealth, as country-house owners did; instead, they use their performance to defend their reputations and to pursue a more orderly community. When the play adapts elements of royal entertainment to empower citizen wives to manage their neighbors, it implies that such performances can bring about social and political change in addition to personal reward. As country-house entertainments celebrated the Queen's arrival and authority, they typically promoted the idea that elite country estates were centers of local order, but the *Merry Wives* pageant instead implies, as Wendy Wall has argued, that households of the middling sort are the foundation of England's governance and social stability.<sup>13</sup>

The play's emphasis on the vital roles of citizen housewives begins much earlier in both texts. Natasha Korda proposes that the Folio teaches husbands not to meddle in their wives' affairs and eases male anxiety about the housewife's supervisory role by depicting the wives as competent and self-disciplined.<sup>14</sup> The quarto shares this message. The play in both versions represents its title characters as outspoken, self-governing women who make shrewd decisions. Like the young women at Bisham, the wives are highly capable of combating unwanted male advances, and they defend their ability to do so independently. When the wives in both texts insist, "Wiues may be merry, and yet honest too" (TLN 1994), they give license to female authority at home and elsewhere by illustrating that women need not be silent to be chaste.<sup>15</sup> In the quarto, Mistress Quickly says of Mistress Page, "her husband giues her leaue to do all," which

<sup>12</sup> I analyze the Bisham entertainment and the political negotiations it enacts in greater detail in "Lady Russell, Elizabeth I, and Female Political Alliances through Performance," *English Literary Renaissance* 39 (2009): 290–314.

<sup>13</sup> Wendy Wall, *Staging Domesticity: Household Work and English Identity in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), 112–26.

<sup>14</sup> Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*, 76–95.

<sup>15</sup> In the quarto, the line reads: "What wiues may be merry, and yet honest too" (sig. E1v).

emphasizes her freedom while acknowledging her husband's role in authorizing her independence (sig. C3v). Her friend and confidant, Mistress Ford, rules herself and her household well despite a jealous, meddling husband. The wives are even more outspoken and independent in the Folio, which offers a more detailed view of Mistress Page's self-governance: "neuer a wife in *Windsor* leades a better life then she do's: doe what shee will, say what she will, take all, pay all, goe to bed when she list, rise when she list, all is as she will" (TLN 880–83). This catalog of responsibilities emphasizes her management of domestic finances and order. Mistress Page's freedom does not necessarily represent the experience of all housewives—she lives "better" than the rest—but the play celebrates her as ideal. As the play in both versions presents Mistresses Page and Ford as successful authority figures within their households, it holds up for scrutiny the idle characters who represent Windsor's lower gentry, especially Justice Shallow, the play's legal authority, and Master Slender, who occupies a relatively high social rank in Windsor because of his money. Both texts characterize Shallow as pompous, Slender as foolish, and both as ineffectual. By contrast, Mistresses Page and Ford actively pursue alternative ways to keep order. When they orchestrate the public shaming of Falstaff in a theatrical production and then unite the community at the play's end, the play shows how their skills as good household managers make them effective disciplinarians within the community.

This focus on the local governing abilities of those of the lower ranks might seem to reveal an anti-Crown sentiment in the pageant, but the play's intertextuality with Elizabethan entertainment reveals that its local emphasis does not necessarily lead to that conclusion. Even as country-house pageants honored Elizabeth and asked for her favor, they flaunted local authorities and specialties, and we see a similar emphasis on regional pride in the *Merry Wives* device. An entertainment at Sudeley Castle in 1592 exemplifies how royal pageantry can construct a regional identity. In its opening speech, a shepherd welcomes Elizabeth at the castle's entrance and explains, "Your highnes is come into Cotshold, an vneuen country, but a people, that carry their thoughtes leuell with their fortunes, lowe spirites, but true harts, vsing plaine dealinge, once counted a iewell nowe beggery."<sup>16</sup> Through standard pastoral claims and conventional expressions of humility before the Queen, this speech celebrates the integrity of the local inhabitants in contrast to a growing lack of honesty elsewhere. Forthrightness, or "plaine dealinge," has great merit here, even though it has lost its value elsewhere. One of the many reasons Elizabeth went on progress was to escape the plague, and unlike plague-ridden London or the disingenuous court environment, pastoral Gloucestershire is "healthy, and harmeles, a fresh aier,

<sup>16</sup> *Speeches Delivered*, sig. B1r.



where there are noe dampes, and where a black sheepe is a perilous beast.”<sup>17</sup> When the shepherd emphasizes the county’s serenity and upright citizens, he implicitly honors the local leadership of Elizabeth’s host, Giles Brydges, Lord Chandos, and his role in keeping peace in this province.<sup>18</sup>

Curiously, the Sudeley shepherd spends more lines defining the Cotswold region as a self-sufficient “country” than praising the Queen, and his speech exposes friction between royal authority and Brydges’ local power. When he celebrates the novelty of the Queen’s visit (which fills “eies with wonder”), the shepherd underscores that Elizabeth is not normally the center of Gloucestershire life.<sup>19</sup> The Sudeley pageantry is not exceptional in this regard. Because country-house entertainments were performed at estates managed by aristocrats but officially owned by the Crown, they frequently demonstrated a struggle for jurisdiction between the Queen and her hosts. When a character in the entertainment at Kenilworth Castle (1575) introduced herself as “the Lady of this pleasant Lake” and told Elizabeth that “the Lake, the Lodge, the Lord, are yours for to commande,” Elizabeth reportedly responded: “We had thought indeed the Lake had been oours, and doo you call it yourz now?”<sup>20</sup> Her comment reveals that she interpreted other claims to ownership as a challenge to her power. Although several scholars have identified the emergence of a national rhetoric in Tudor literature, the Sudeley and Kenilworth entertainments reveal that we have understated the importance of regional identities in the period.<sup>21</sup> When we analyze the *Merry Wives* pageant in this context, we gain a nuanced understanding of its treatment of the relationship between Windsor and the court. The play in both texts helps demonstrate that emerging ideas about national identity existed in tension with regional loyalties in Elizabethan England.

<sup>17</sup> *Speeches Delivered*, sig. B1r.

<sup>18</sup> Brydges had been active in local government since 1572; as Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire in 1587–88, he secured and maintained a trained militia to protect the region from Spanish invasion. The several letters Brydges exchanged with Elizabeth and her top advisors between March 1587 and July 1588 reveal his responsibilities as Lord Lieutenant. See National Archives (formerly Public Record Office) SP 12/199, no. 11, fol. 23; SP 12/199, no. 53, fols. 97–97v; SP 12/209, no. 60, fol. 95; SP 12/212, no. 74, fols. 125–125v; and SP 12/212, no. 75, fol. 127.

<sup>19</sup> *Speeches Delivered*, sig. B1r.

<sup>20</sup> Gascoigne, 2:93–4; and Robert Laneham, *A Letter*, ed. R. J. P. Kvin (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 10–11.

<sup>21</sup> See Richard Helgerson, *Forms of Nationhood: The Elizabethan Writing of England* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992); Andrew Hadfield, *Literature, Politics, and National Identity: Reformation to Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994); Claire McEachern, *The Poetics of English Nationhood, 1590–1612* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996); and Philip Schwyzer, *Literature, Nationalism, and Memory in Early Modern England and Wales* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004). For an excellent discussion of regional literature and culture in medieval and Renaissance Chester, see Robert W. Barrett, Jr., *Against All England: Regional Identity and Cheshire Writing, 1195–1656* (Notre Dame: U of Notre Dame P, 2009).

At first glance, the most important component of a country-house entertainment—the visiting monarch whose presence inspires all festivities—appears to be missing from the fictional pageant. Its primary function is to punish rather than to praise, and the impetus for its performance is Falstaff's offense rather than the arrival of a traveling queen. However, Elizabeth is present symbolically in both *Merry Wives* texts. Both allude to her pervasive influence, especially when a Fairy Queen supervises and participates in the pageant.<sup>22</sup> Fairy queens were popular characters in Elizabethan entertainments and tournaments, and as Matthew Woodcock demonstrates, they often reflected aspects of the reigning monarch's image.<sup>23</sup> Especially after Spenser identifies his Fairy Queen as a representation of "the most excellent and glorious person of our soueraine the Queene," late Elizabethan literature frequently casts Elizabeth as a fairy queen.<sup>24</sup> *Merry Wives* follows these precedents, and the appearance of its Fairy Queen leading a singing circle of fairies especially recalls the entertainment at Elvetham (1591), in which fairies gather "in rings of painted flowers" to praise Elizabeth as a paragon of virtue.<sup>25</sup> Woodcock maintains that fairy queens often function as mirror images of Elizabeth that celebrate her merits or as idealized rivals that indicate her shortcomings, and the Fairy Queen at Elvetham embodies both possibilities.<sup>26</sup> She declares herself ready to do her "duety to your Maiestie" and "humbly to salute you," and she presents herself as Elizabeth's protector when she vows to "cut them short that enuy at thy praise."<sup>27</sup> At the same time, the Fairy Queen's emphasis on her own authority and popularity threatens to undermine the entertainment's insistence on Elizabeth's unmatched power. She identifies herself as "Aureola, belou'd in heauen, / (For amorous starres fall nightly in my lap)."<sup>28</sup> Her fairies help dispel any potential threat when they gather round Elizabeth to sing her praises as the source of England's peace and prosperity:

Elisa is the fairest Queene,  
That euer trod vpon this greene.  
Elisaes eyes are blessed starres,  
Inducing peace, subduing warres.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Erickson and Korda highlight the play's allusions to Elizabeth through the Fairy Queen in their analyses of the Folio pageant. See Erickson, 118–19; and Korda, *Shakespeare's Domestic Economies*, 102–7.

<sup>23</sup> Matthew Woodcock, *Fairy in the Faerie Queene: Renaissance Elf-Fashioning and Elizabethan Myth-Making* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 30–50.

<sup>24</sup> Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* (London, 1590), sig. Pp2r.

<sup>25</sup> *The Honorable Entertainment giuen to the Queenes Maiestie in Progresse, at Eluetham in Hampshire, by the right Honorable the Earle of Hertford. 1591* (London, 1591), sig. E1r.

<sup>26</sup> Woodcock, 38.

<sup>27</sup> *Honorable Entertainment*, sig. E1r.

<sup>28</sup> *Honorable Entertainment*, sig. E1r.

<sup>29</sup> *Honorable Entertainment*, sig. E1v.

Although the *Merry Wives* fairies speak of Falstaff's lust rather than Elizabeth's chastity, they still insist on sexual virtue, and the play's Fairy Queen alludes to the actual reigning monarch when she presides over a provincial show, keeps order, and enforces chastity. Whereas the quarto identifies Elizabeth as its audience on the title page, the Folio pageant adds more direct references to her castle and her court.

As the two *Merry Wives* texts adapt elements of Elizabethan country-house entertainment, both reveal the potential to honor and to undermine Elizabeth's influence over the local community. The fictional pageant hints at royal control over the region when a Fairy Queen supervises the provincial festival, yet it also celebrates the ability of Windsor citizens to keep order locally as it incorporates aspects of popular shaming rituals to discipline Falstaff. Furthermore, both versions of the play specify that the pageant is staged in Windsor Forest, a space that calls attention to overlapping royal and regional authorities. Although the local park shares its name with the town of Windsor, it is adjacent to the royal residence at Windsor Castle and alludes to the current reigning monarch who insisted that all of England's manors and forests belonged to her.<sup>30</sup> A performance in this space, both royal and local, signals increased opportunities for shared or contested authority between the Queen and Windsor's citizens. The Windsor community in *Merry Wives* does not claim that it owns the castle or forest, but it does profess ownership of the town's governance. This assertion does not necessarily make the play resentful of the court, and the quarto and Folio texts reach different conclusions about Elizabeth's authority over towns such as Windsor.

## II

Although both versions of the play share several features, we find substantial difference in the pageant's language and the play's ending. The quarto employs a slightly more "rural" tone, while the Folio uses more "elevated" language. The opening lines in the quarto pageant have the Fairy Queen deliver simple orders to her fairies, such as "Looke round about the wood" and "pinch him blacke and blew" (sig. G2r). In the Folio, however, she addresses the fairies using such lines as "You Orphan heires of fixed destiny, / Attend your office, and your quality" (TLN 2521–22). Throughout the pageant, the quarto places more emphasis

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth exemplifies her view of estate ownership in a 1570 letter she wrote at the Russell family's estate, in which she dates herself from "our manor of Cheneyes." This letter is quoted in E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), 1:118. Berry has shown that all forests in Elizabethan England were considered royal space for hunting and pleasure (6–9).

on the community's ability to govern itself, while the Folio's additional references to the English court more explicitly explore the relationship between court and country. These differences have led several critics to conclude that the Folio is more courtly than the quarto is, but the play's allusions to Elizabethan entertainment challenge this assumption.<sup>31</sup> The quarto's rustic language and emphasis on the local do not make it an unlikely choice for court performance. Elevated language was no prerequisite for playing before the Queen, and provincial rituals were an integral part of country-house entertainments, most of which featured pastoral characters or country folk who favor simple speech. These pageants regularly adapted aspects of provincial festival, such as the selection of a young May Queen or a festival King from among commoners, and they presented country dances and folk pageantry alongside courtly dialogues.<sup>32</sup> The Kenilworth entertainment included pageants written and performed by aspiring poets and courtiers, along with a Hock Tuesday play performed by local men and women. Especially before a 1601 proclamation prohibited masterless men of the lower ranks from attending progresses, a wide spectrum of society was present, and the texts detailing these performances reached an even broader audience when they circulated in manuscript and print.<sup>33</sup> Because country-house entertainments were both popular and elite, they demonstrate that the same performance could appeal to courtly and common audiences. The quarto pageant's language and incorporation of folk rituals reveals the influence of country-house pageants, and this intertextuality urges us to reconsider what makes a performance suitable for Elizabeth. When the quarto's title page claims that its version of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* was performed for audiences both elite and commercial, we have no reason to doubt it.

The two texts resolve the play in slightly different ways as well. Both versions end rather happily. Falstaff admits he has learned his lesson, the Pages somewhat begrudgingly accept their daughter's elopement, and the final lines call for reconciliation and communal festivity. However, subtle differences in language make the community solidified at the end of the quarto appear more inclusive than that of the Folio. In the quarto Falstaff worries about how "the fine wits of

<sup>31</sup> See Jeanne Addison Roberts, *Shakespeare's English Comedy: The Merry Wives of Windsor in Context* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1979), 1–140; Marcus, *Unediting*, 68–79; and Melchiori, ed., *Merry Wives*, 31–42.

<sup>32</sup> An example is Philip Sidney's "The Lady of May," performed at Wanstead in 1578 and printed in the folio of *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia* (London, 1598), 570–76. The entertainment's central character is a young woman who has been chosen as May Queen during local festivities.

<sup>33</sup> Mary Hill Cole, *The Portable Queen: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Ceremony* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1999), 163–71; William Leahy, *Elizabethan Triumphal Processions* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), esp. 81–91.

the Court” will mock him (sig. G3v), and Ford acknowledges that the community will bond over laughing at Caius and Slender, but the text emphasizes that Windsor accepts these outsiders. Ford announces that “all’s forgiuen,” the Welsh Sir Hugh prepares to dance and feast with others at Anne’s wedding, the final speeches are filled with phrases such as “wel pleased” and “well eased,” and Ford concludes the play by declaring, “All parties pleased, now let vs in to feast” (sigs. G3v–G4v). The quarto imagines a group of people coming together because of shared location despite rank or origin. By virtue of Elizabeth’s presence on the title page and its allusions to her through the Fairy Queen, the quarto implicitly acknowledges her role as a silent, but powerful, supervisor of this celebration of the local community. The quarto’s ending does not mock the court, and it showcases Windsor culture in a way that could appeal to audiences both low and high.

The Folio qualifies its happy ending. Like the quarto, it ends with an invitation to communal gathering when Mistress Page says, “Good husband, let vs euery one go home, / And laugh this sport ore by a Countrie fire, / Sir *Iohn* and all” (TLN 2724–26). But the Folio’s ending features more squabbling and lingering judgments than that of the quarto. In lines unique to the Folio, Falstaff mocks Sir Hugh as “one that makes Fritters of English” (TLN 2628), and Hugh, Ford, Page, and the wives jab at Falstaff with a series of insults until he admits complete defeat. Additionally, not all parties are pleased at the end. Mistress Page’s lines follow those by Page and Ford that accept the outcome only because they cannot change it. Ford says of Anne’s marriage to Fenton, “here is no remedie” (TLN 2713). Page echoes, “Well, what remedy? *Fenton*, heauen giue thee ioy, what cannot be eschew’d, must be embrac’d” (TLN 2718–19). When Mistress Page encourages communal laughter after these lines, her invitation appears as a way to manage her husband’s displeasure. Steven Urkowitz has noted that this ending, compared to that of the quarto, offers “measured rather than unconditional reconciliation” and that neither of Anne’s parents explicitly forgive her (or indeed speak to her directly), whereas Page gives her his blessing in the quarto “since your choise is made of one you loue” (sig. G4v).<sup>34</sup> Although subtle, these variants make the Pages seem more defeated than contented in the Folio. This more ambivalent ending stems in part from the Folio’s critique of the Elizabethan court environment, especially the untrustworthiness of courtiers.

Fenton, for example, is a slightly different character in the Folio than he is in the quarto. Although the Host implies that Fenton comes from a privileged

<sup>34</sup> Steven Urkowitz, “Two Versions of *Romeo and Juliet* 2.6 and *Merry Wives of Windsor* 5.5.215–45: An Invitation to the Pleasure of Textual/Sexual Di(Per)versity,” in *Elizabethan Theater: Essays in Honor of S. Schoenbaum*, ed. R. B. Parker and S. P. Zitner (Newark: U of Delaware P, 1996), 222–38, esp. 235.

background, the quarto never specifies his social standing. The Host says, "He capers, he daunces, he writes verses, he smelles / All April and May," and Page protests Anne's love for him because "the gentleman is / Wilde, he knowes too much" (sig. D4r). Fenton's experience with women and carelessness with money make him an undesirable suitor from Page's perspective.<sup>35</sup> The Folio turns Fenton into a courtier, and Page offers these more precise reasons for his disapproval: "The Gentleman is of no hauing, hee kept companie with the wilde Prince, and *Pointz*: he is of too high a Region, he knows too much" (TLN 1331–34). By identifying Fenton as a former companion of Prince Hal, the Folio explicitly connects him with the court and ties his "too much" knowledge to his experience as a courtier rather than to his general wildness. It also allows for a more cynical interpretation of his motivations for pursuing Anne. Fenton begins a private conversation with Anne in the quarto by declaring his love for her, and she responds by assuring him, "My hart is setled vpon none but you, / Tis as my father and mother please: / Get their consent, you quickly shall haue mine" (sig. E4r). Fenton then says:

Thy father thinks I loue thee for his wealth,  
 Tho I must needs confesse at first that drew me,  
 But since thy vertues wiped that trash away,  
 I loue thee *Nan*, and so deare is it set,  
 That whilst I liue, I nere shall thee forget.  
(sig. E4r)

The emotion expressed in these lines appears genuine because it is simply stated ("I loue thee") and because Fenton demonstrates his change by calling his former focus on wealth "trash." He explains that the power of Anne's "vertues" has reformed him. When their secret marriage is revealed at the end of the quarto, the Fords and Pages all emphasize, as Fenton and Anne do here, that this match is based on love. Mistress Ford says, for example, "Tis pitie to part loue that is so true" (sig. G4v).

The basic plot unfolds no differently in the Folio, but Fenton's altered explanations, Anne's increased silence, and her parents' reactions together allow for alternative interpretations of the motivations behind this match. Fenton initiates his conversation with Anne in the Folio by rehearsing the reasons her father disapproves: Fenton is "too great of birth," has a wild past, wants to marry Anne only because her father's money will "heale" his debts, and can love Anne only "as a property" (TLN 1573, 1579). Anne responds simply, "May be he tels you true" (TLN 1580). Then, in place of the lines quoted above, the Folio substitutes the following:

<sup>35</sup> For Lamb, Fenton initially confirms stereotypes of aristocrats with bad credit (136).

[FENTON] No, heauen so speed me in my time to come,  
 Albeit I will confesse, thy Fathers wealth  
 Was the first motiue that I woo'd thee (*Anne*):  
 Yet wooing thee, I found thee of more valew  
 Then stamper in Gold, or summes in sealed bagges:  
 And 'tis the very riches of thy selfe,  
 That now I ayme at.

ANNE Gentle M. *Fenton*,  
 Yet seeke my Fathers loue, still seeke it sir,  
 If opportunity and humblest suite  
 Cannot attaine it, why then harke you hither.  
 (TLN 1581–91)

Although Fenton in both versions presents himself as reformed and in love with Anne, this passage implies a more financially motivated character who continues to speak of marriage and love in economic terms and who seeks a wife of certain value. Even as he declares his love, his emphasis on Anne's "valew" and "riches" illustrates a rational evaluation of her qualities' worth, as if he has chosen Anne because he finds personal benefit in her merits. This practical approach to marriage is not inherently negative, nor is Fenton's use of monetary metaphors to describe his desire. However, his financial language carries somewhat negative connotations within the context of their discussion—a discussion in which Fenton tries to argue against the accusation that he can love Anne only "as a property."

Anne's reactions in this passage are especially interesting when compared to the quarto; here she expresses skepticism and guarded answers rather than the clear declarations of love and unmeasured encouragement she offers in the quarto. Fenton later states his love more directly when he tells Mistress Page, "I loue your daughter / In such a righteous fashion," and he speaks to the Host about "the deare loue I beare to faire *Anne Page*, / Who, mutually, hath answer'd my affection" (TLN 1646–47, 2353–54). We are led to assume that Anne genuinely loves him and helped devise the elopement scheme, but unlike the quarto, the Folio never has Anne state her feelings directly.<sup>36</sup> She is silent in the last scene, and when Fenton asks for her mother's blessing, Anne begs only for her mother not to marry her to Slender or Caius (TLN 1651–56). Fenton is clearly her best choice in both texts, but while the quarto provides persuasive evidence that Anne and Fenton love each other dearly, the Folio encourages us to question whether Fenton might indeed view her as a possession and whether

<sup>36</sup> In the Folio, Fenton reveals the elopement plan to the Host by offering a letter written by Anne that outlines how they will deceive her parents (TLN 2356). This moment implies that the elopement was Anne's idea; at least, she supports it in writing.

Mistress Quickly might actually get it right when she claims of Fenton in that text, “*Anne loues hiim not*” (TLN 548).

The Folio’s version of Fenton bears subtle resemblance to the ridiculed knight at the play’s center.<sup>37</sup> The Folio Fenton shares Falstaff’s raucous past at court and continued focus on money, although Falstaff takes the latter to an extreme because his wooing is driven entirely by his desire for wealth in both texts. He seeks affairs with Mistress Ford because “she hath all the rule / Of her husbands purse. She hath legians of angels” and Mistress Page because “shee beares the purse too” (sigs. B2r–v).<sup>38</sup> Falstaff identifies both women as managers of substantial household wealth and expects, like an Elizabethan courtier wooing the Queen, that he can win their favor and increased wealth through flattery and pronouncements of love. The wives never take Falstaff seriously as a suitor, and neither can we. His attempts at love poetry chime with simplistic end rhyme (“By me, thine owne true Knight, by day or night: / Or any kinde of light, with all his might, / For thee to fight”) and invite ridicule (TLN 565–67). Just as the shepherdesses at Bisham laugh away Pan’s advances, the wives immediately mock Falstaff’s failed attempts to play the wooer’s part. Falstaff repeatedly underestimates the women’s wit and chastity and gets punished for this offense. His punishments are physically painful, humiliating, and emasculating. He is carried out of Mistress Ford’s house in a basket of dirty laundry and then dumped into the river, beaten while dressed as an old woman, and pinched and publicly shamed in Windsor Forest. Although Falstaff is a consistent character in both *Merry Wives* texts, the context within which we analyze him changes. In the quarto, Falstaff’s selfish insincerity is a negative character trait unique to him. The quarto does not imply that his foolishness results from his association with the court. In the Folio, however, Falstaff becomes part of an overall depiction of courtiers as self-serving and distrustful.

Two passages unique to the Folio reveal this representation. When Mistress Quickly offers proof of Mistress Ford’s marital chastity, she characterizes courtiers as lascivious:

the best Courtier of them all (when the Court lay at *Windsor*) could neuer haue brought her to such a Canarie: yet there has beene Knights, and Lords, and Gentlemen, with their Coaches; I warrant you Coach after Coach, letter after letter, gift after gift, smelling so sweetly; all Muske, and so rushling, I warrant you, in silke and golde, and in such alligant termes, and in such wine and

<sup>37</sup> Analyzing the standard text, Richard Helgerson notes that Fenton and Falstaff are types of one another; see *Adulterous Alliances: Home, Stage, and History in Early Modern European Drama and Painting* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), 62–63.

<sup>38</sup> I cite the quarto here. These lines are nearly identical in the Folio, except that “She hath legians of angels” is changed to “he hath a legend of Angels” (TLN 346).



suger of the best, and the fairest, that would haue wonne any womans heart:  
and I warrant you, they could neuer get an eye-winke of her.

(TLN 831–40)

According to Mistress Quickly, male courtiers envision royal progresses to Windsor as opportunities to seduce local women. It is precisely their courtliness—their expensive material possessions, implicit power, and skills at wooing with letters and gifts—that Quickly identifies as seductive to all women but the most chaste. Mistress Page more succinctly summarizes the Folio’s view of courtiership when she says to Robin, “O you are a flattering boy, now I see you’ll be a Courtier” (TLN 1276–77). According to the Folio, courtiers flatter and seduce to serve their own interests without attention to the consequences, and Falstaff fits this description well. The quarto Falstaff appears uniquely greedy and laughable, but the Folio enables him to stand in for courtiers more generally. In this context, the Folio’s recasting of Fenton as a courtier helps to explain his cold reception by Anne’s parents. Its critical view of courtiers reveals an anti-court sentiment that is not apparent in the quarto.

### III

The allusions to Elizabeth in the two versions of the *Merry Wives* pageant carry divergent implications as well. The quarto pageant depicts Windsor as a self-sufficient community that serves royal interests without sacrificing its own. In two passages, a satyr played by Sir Hugh emphasizes the importance of maintaining order locally when he instructs the fairies to discipline disorderly members of the community. Sir Hugh tells the fairies to

go to the countrie houses,  
And when you finde a slut that lies a sleepe,  
And all her dishes foule, and roome vnswept,  
With your long nailes pinch her till she crie,  
And sweare to mend her sluttish huswiferie.  
(sigs. G2r–v)

The fairies enforce good housekeeping by punishing women who are “sluttish,” a term that describes a lack of domestic cleanliness and connotes sexual impropriety. Because the list of tasks begins here, the passage implies that stability in Windsor starts with tidiness in individual homes. The community depends upon the moral and domestic virtues of those who manage these households, and Mistresses Ford and Page, whose pageant enforces a high standard of cleanliness for all country housewives, serve as exemplary models.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Wendy Wall’s argument about the Folio’s “decidedly domestic basis for community-formation and sexual stability” (90) applies to this quarto passage as well.

Sir Hugh's second passage moves from women's responsibilities to male authority figures. He gives these instructions:

go you & see where Brokers sleep,  
And Foxe-eyed Seriants with their mase,  
Goe 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 plew and red.  
(sig. G2v)

The quarto pageant celebrates the upheaval of local authority: retailers, sergeants, and proctors who might be church, legal, or university officials. This disruption is not a permanent dismantling of power, but a temporary punishment of contemptible local officials, who wield oppressive weapons and who sometimes sport the red nose of drunkenness. It is unclear from this passage how many of the "Brokers," "Seriants," and "Proctors" deserve punishment and to what extent the fairies simply revel in mischief, but the Fairy Queen insists that these tasks are necessary when she orders the fairies to "fulfill" them right away and to keep busy: "And looke that none of you stand still. / Some do that thing, some do this, / All do something, none amis" (sig. G2v). Her lines characterize the fairies as didactic, and so does the pageant's connection to the larger play. Its snapshot of drunken, foolish, and inept community leaders reminds us of the play's own lower gentry. At the end of this pageant, Mistress Page tells Falstaff that his

dishonest meanes  
To call our credits into question,  
Did make vs vndertake to our best,  
To turne your leaud lust to a merry Iest.  
(sig. G3v)

When the community unites as a result of the "Iest" these women have carefully orchestrated, the quarto implies that the title characters have provided more orderly authority than the flawed local gentry have.

As the quarto pageant celebrates citizen wives as the foundation of order in the provinces outside of London, it insinuates through its Fairy Queen that a more powerful female authority oversees the community. The connection between the Fairy Queen and the actual reigning monarch is subtle in the quarto. Mistress Quickly enters "*like the Queene of Fayries*," according to its stage directions, but the pageant's dialogue never uses the word "queen" or refers directly to Elizabeth or her court (sig. G2). The quarto inserts Elizabeth into the play when it identifies her as its audience, and her appearance on its

title page transforms the text into an occasional piece over which she presides. Elizabeth's presence as a silent supervisor shapes our interpretation of the text, just as printed entertainments highlight their political import by using titles such as *The Honorable Entertainment giewen to the Queenes Maiestie in Progresse, at Eluetham in Hampshire* (1591) or *Speeches Delivered to Her Maiestie this Last Progresse* (1592). Although the quarto pageant focuses on the local, the presence of a Fairy Queen who supervises the work of enforcing order underscores that the community acknowledges—even embraces—royal authority. The quarto pageant indirectly praises Elizabeth, its most powerful spectator, by valuing elements of her image: chastity, effective female rule, and good household governance. One of Elizabeth's French prayers during the early part of her reign quotes Psalm 101 by the French poet Clement Marot: "I'll rule my house with heart all pure, / With reason sure."<sup>40</sup> These lines imply a view of the English household as a microcosm for the English kingdom, not unlike Robert Cleaver's line in *A godlie forme of householde government* (1598): "A Householde is as it were a little common wealth."<sup>41</sup> The quarto pageant adapts this analogy to identify the social and political value of women's domestic labor on the local level, and it implies that Elizabeth can depend upon citizen wives to rule their households and communities effectively while she oversees them.

The choice of bawdy, low-ranking Mistress Quickly to play the Fairy Queen can be puzzling. Defending the directorial decision to have Anne Page play the part, Peter Evans notes, "The transformation of Quickly from meddling housekeeper to Fairy Queen would have been too much for audiences to accept, even in a supernatural atmosphere."<sup>42</sup> Barbara Freedman asks, "Why would anyone composing a personal compliment to Elizabeth represent her in the person of Mistress Quickly?"<sup>43</sup> The pageant in both texts recalls seasonal festivals such as the Hock Tuesday, May Day, and Midsummer revels because it enables participants to assume new social roles temporarily and to forge a communal identity in the process, but the quarto especially presents its pageant as an example of rural carnival.<sup>44</sup> At its end, Falstaff highlights the large-scale community involvement when he asks, "How now who haue we here, what is all *Windsor*

<sup>40</sup> *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000), 147.

<sup>41</sup> *A godlie forme of householde government for the ordering of private families, according to the direction of Gods word* (London, 1598), sig. B1r.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Evans, "'To the oak, to the oak!' The Finale of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*." *Theatre Notebook* 40 (1986): 106–14.

<sup>43</sup> Freedman, 191. Similarly, Helgeson identifies Mistress Quickly's role as incongruous in *Adulterous Alliances*, 72.

<sup>44</sup> For a succinct explanation of the carnival in Elizabethan England, see Michael D. Bristol, "Carnival and the Institutions of Theater in Elizabethan England," *ELH* 50 (1983): 637–54.

stirring?" and draws attention to parallels with maying festivities when he says, "I, tis well I am your May-pole" (sigs. G3r-v). The pageant is as didactic as it is festive, and Falstaff's physical punishments—especially the burning of his "fingers endes" with a taper—do not sound cheerful (sig. G2v). However, the wives justify this tactic as the best way to keep order when they explain that Falstaff's actions "Did make vs" respond punitively, and the characters highlight mischief and revelry to underscore that the pageant is all in good fun. In the context of festivals of misrule, Mistress Quickly's performance of a fictional queen makes sense because a carnivalesque pageant enables an uneducated servant to borrow an identity far beyond her station.

The bawdiness that reveals Quickly's lack of education is relatively understated in the quarto. When we first meet her in this text, she says of Caius, "he puts all his priuities in me," and in both texts, she swears she is a maid "as my mother was / The first houre I was borne" (sigs. B3r, C3r). Yet many of the double entendres and malapropisms we associate with Mistress Quickly do not appear in the quarto. Throughout much of the play, she serves simply as a housekeeper for Caius and a messenger for the wives, who eagerly "set her a worke in this businesse" of entrapping Falstaff (sig. C1v). Her lines are brief rather than rambling, and other characters do not say disparaging things about her, as they do in the Folio. Viewers may have associated this Quickly with her rough-edged, sexually experienced counterpart in the *Henriad*, even though she is not exactly that character in the quarto. She is still often vulgar and naïve, and her performance of a Fairy Queen who outlaws sluttishness infuses the pageant with humor and irony that suit the quarto's relatively festive atmosphere. In fact, Quickly's lack of refinement does not make her such an odd choice in the context of Elizabethan country-house entertainment. In these shows, Elizabeth's mere presence often rescues virginal women from ruin or transforms unchaste characters into chaste ones. In a 1592 entertainment at Ditchley, she teaches inconstant lovers to value chastity, and a central character thanks her for having "restorid us to right" and especially for teaching "light harted" and morally lax women about constancy.<sup>45</sup> If we accept that the quarto was performed before the Queen, Quickly's transformation might likewise indicate Elizabeth's powerful influence. Additionally, Mistress Quickly's role suggests her readiness to serve the true monarch, just as fairy queens in country-house entertainments defer to Elizabeth's greater authority even if they originally present themselves as rivals. The fairy queens at Elvetham and in other pageants are not stand-ins for Eliza-

<sup>45</sup> The Ditchley entertainment exists in manuscript (British Library Add. MS 41499A). I quote from the transcription in E. K. Chambers, *Sir Henry Lee: An Elizabethan Portrait* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), 289–90.

beth, but shadows of her that she calls forth and commands.<sup>46</sup> They might share her values, but they are separate from her. Similarly, the quarto pageant never suggests that Mistress Quickly stands in for Queen Elizabeth, and it does not draw a direct analogy between the two. Instead, within a text that emphasizes inclusiveness rather than class division, Mistress Quickly's performance of the Fairy Queen honors Elizabeth's influence.

The Folio makes more explicit its allusions to Elizabeth and adaptation of her image. The Folio's Fairy Queen continues to enforce effective housekeeping and sexual virtue, but she and her servants become especially obsessed with female chastity. The Folio substitutes a second passage condemning women's sins in place of the quarto's lines about punishing deficient male authority figures:

Go you, and where you find a maid  
That ere she sleepe has thrice her prayers said,  
Raise vp the Organs of her fantasie,  
Sleepe she as sound as carelesse infancie,  
But those as sleepe, and thinke not on their sins,  
Pinch them armes, legs, backes, shoulders, sides, & shins.  
(TLN 2531–36)

This passage reveals a fixation on female chastity without equal concern for unruly men, although the Folio pageant elsewhere heightens its condemnation of male lust. The fairies discipline Falstaff in both versions—for being “full of lecheries and iniquitie” in the quarto (sig. G3r) and for his “vnchaste desire” in the Folio (TLN 2579)—but the Folio fairies put his chastity to “triall” and sing more extensively about his sins (TLN 2571). The Folio's emphasis on punishment creates an environment that appears less tolerant and festive than that of the quarto, and its obsessive regulation of women's sexual thoughts somewhat undercuts the title characters' autonomy. This version transforms the Fairy Queen from a supervisor of local order and fairy mischief to a strict disciplinarian who dictates chastity, and its increased emphasis on the suppression of desire strengthens its connection to the ideology surrounding Queen Elizabeth at the end of her reign.

The Folio pageant's references to the Elizabethan court make this connection explicit. Its fairies, who now monitor Windsor rather than country households, receive this command: “Where fires thou find'st vnrakd, and hearths vnswept, / There pinch the Maids as blew as Bill-berry, / Our radiant Queene, hates Sluts, and Sluttery” (TLN 2526–28). The phrase “Our radiant Queene” draws a parallel between its Fairy Queen, who demands chastity from her subjects, and

<sup>46</sup> Fairy queens appear in the progress pageants at Woodstock (1575) and Ditchley (1592). See Woodcock, 39–49.

the Virgin Queen. This "Queene" focuses her energy not on all women, but specifically on unmarried and virginal "Maids." The word "Maids" might even recall Elizabeth's Maids of Honor, whom she expected to be good housekeepers and to shun male advances in favor of her service. These lines continue the pageant's earlier representation of the Fairy Queen as a stern enforcer of female chastity, and they signal an allusion to Elizabeth that the Fairy Queen's monologue strengthens. She instructs her fairies to clean Windsor, especially the "Chaires of Order" and "Each faire Instalment, Coate, and seu'rall Crest," while singing "Like to the Garters-Compass, in a ring" (TLN 2543–48). The Order of the Garter was the most exclusive chivalric honor in England, and when Elizabeth became head of this male order, she established herself as a Petrarchan mistress to whom the Garter knights had to pledge their loyalty.<sup>47</sup> The Folio's Fairy Queen calls attention to Elizabeth's effective use of Petrarchism to manage suitors and servants when she describes the Garter knights in a submissive position, displaying the richly decorated garters worn "below faire Knight-hoods bending knee" (TLN 2554). She orders her elves to keep Windsor Castle tidy so "That it may stand till the perpetuall doome, / In state as wholesome, as in state 'tis fit / Worthy the Owner, and the Owner it" (TLN 2540–42). Just as late Elizabethan country-house entertainments often wish for the Queen's eternal life and fame, this passage envisions the castle as a lasting monument to Elizabeth's reign. The castle and its owner, which reflect one another, should be "wholsome" and "fit," terms that connote sexual propriety along with physical, mental, and moral well-being. Whereas the quarto presents its Fairy Queen as a servant who pays tribute to Elizabeth, the Folio has Quickly stand in for her when it downplays its function as rural carnival and strengthens allusions to her court. This Fairy Queen no longer simply enforces local order under the supervision of a royal audience; instead, she steps into Elizabeth's role and rules Windsor Castle.

In this altered context, Mistress Quickly's performance of the Fairy Queen takes on a different significance. The Folio lacks stage direction to indicate which

<sup>47</sup> The Order of the Garter began in the fourteenth century as a Catholic military organization. When the Tudors revived and reformed it, a popular myth associated its origins with the elevation of a feminine trifle and the celebration of male gallantry. According to legend in the Elizabethan period, Edward III founded the Order after he stooped to pick up a lady's fallen garter at a ball. When male bystanders snickered, he responded with the French phrase that became the Order's motto: "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*," or "Evil be to him who evil thinks," and he added that the men would soon want to wear garters themselves. There are a few variants to the origins story. Sometimes the lady with the fallen garter is the Queen, the Countess of Salisbury, or an anonymous maid of honor. See Raymond B. Waddington, "Elizabeth I and the Order of the Garter," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 24 (1993): 97–113; and Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1977), 164–85.

character plays the role, but its use of the prefix “Qui” for some of the Fairy Queen’s lines suggests that Quickly still takes the part (TLN 2519, 2574).<sup>48</sup> The analogy of housewifery and queenship in Elizabeth’s final country-house entertainment at Harefield (1602) illuminates possible implications of her performance in the Folio. It depicts hostess Alice Egerton, Countess of Derby, as a proficient housewife, and it represents Elizabeth similarly to establish an alliance between them.<sup>49</sup> The entertainment’s opening pageant features a comic debate between a Bailiff and a Dairymaid, who explain that Egerton has instructed them to be hospitable as they argue about where to lead the visitors. The Dairymaid insists that the dairy house will offer better accommodations than will the main house, and when the Bailiff belittles her plan by saying, “If my Mrs. should heare of this, I faith shee would give you little thanks I can tell you,” he depicts Alice Egerton as a firm supervisor who values hospitality.<sup>50</sup> By drawing attention to Egerton’s administrative duties as the mistress of a large manor, the entertainment underscores that her domestic labor becomes politically valuable during the Queen’s visit. In fact, household records show that Egerton supervised the plans and financing for this entertainment.<sup>51</sup>

The Harefield entertainment also claims that Egerton resembles Elizabeth as the manager of a huge household. The Bailiff assigns Elizabeth the same title as he does Egerton when he calls her “the Mrs. of this faire company.”<sup>52</sup> No other country-house entertainment names Elizabeth “Mrs.” or “mistress.” Some call her “Lady” or “Madame,” and most refer to her as “Majesty,” “Sovereign,” “Highness,” and “Queen.” Because the word “mistress” can signify a female governor, as well as a housewife, it begins to establish an analogy between managing a household and ruling a state that is solidified when the Dairymaid and Bailiff both call the Queen “the best Huswife in all this company.”<sup>53</sup> By labeling Eliza-

<sup>48</sup> Dutton (19–20) argues that the Folio remains ambiguous about whether Quickly or Anne takes the role of the Fairy Queen.

<sup>49</sup> Two earlier essays suggest that Alice Egerton played a central role in the Harefield festivities: Jean Wilson, “The Harefield Entertainment and the Cult of Elizabeth I,” *Antiquaries Journal* 66 (1986): 315–29; and Sara Mueller, “Domestic Work in Progress Entertainments,” in *Working Subjects in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Michelle M. Dowd and Natasha Korda (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 145–59.

<sup>50</sup> Nichols, *Progresses*, 3:587–8.

<sup>51</sup> Alice’s husband Thomas later wrote that the Queen’s entertainment “cost me more then I will remember,” and he blames this incredible cost on his wife’s misspending. This discussion of the Harefield entertainment appears in his 1603 petition to King James (MS Ellesmere 163), which is now held at the Huntington Library, and his manuscript entitled, “An Unpleasant Declaracion of Thinges Passed Betwene Countesse of Derby and Me since our mariage” (Huntington Library MS Ellesmere 213).

<sup>52</sup> Nichols, ed., *Progresses*, 3:586–87.

<sup>53</sup> Nichols, ed., *Progresses*, 3:588.

both a model housewife, the entertainment alludes to the daily labor all aristocratic housewives perform in order to run households effectively, and it presents female domestic labor as integral to the governing of late Elizabethan England. It uses the analogy of the Queen as a good housewife to imply that aristocratic women's effectiveness at managing large estates can validate their political power outside of the home. This entertainment and the one at Bisham reveal that aristocratic women appropriated elements of the Queen's image in their own representations, and their entertainments insist that Elizabeth's example can inspire other women to claim increased authority.

We see a similar analogy at work in the Folio pageant. Mistress Quickly has earlier presented herself as a model housekeeper, even though the household she manages is not her own. She says of her job in Caius' household, "I keepe his house; and I wash, ring, brew, bake, scowre, dresse meat and drinke, make the beds, and doe all my selfe" (TLN 485–87). Both versions of the play include boastful lines about Quickly's strong domestic skills, and both could imply that her temporary rise to queenly status models the way that women of all ranks can use housewifery to demand respect.<sup>54</sup> But the Folio makes a bolder statement when it aligns the Fairy Queen more clearly with Elizabeth. It makes explicit what the quarto only implies: Elizabeth, like this Fairy Queen, leads the enforcement of chastity and good housewifery among the masses. When it calls Mistress Quickly "Our radiant Queene" and introduces references to Windsor Castle and the Elizabethan court, it compares lower-ranking housekeepers' control of domestic spaces to Elizabeth's rule of the state. Although the Folio pageant never directly refers to Elizabeth as England's "best huswife," it implies the same through an unmarried housekeeper's performance of a Fairy Queen who enforces domestic and moral cleanliness. Even a lowly housekeeper can exert authority based on the model of female governance that Elizabeth provides.

Although this parallel empowers lower-ranking women, the Folio text might not be a personal compliment to Elizabeth after all. When the entertainments at Harefield and Bisham imply that Elizabeth's rule can serve as a model for other women, they align her only with women from noble families. The Folio pageant aligns her with a low-ranking laborer, and in doing so, it undermines her own insistence that she is an exceptional woman, very different from "a milkmaid with a pail on mine arm."<sup>55</sup> The Folio's strengthened connections between the Fairy Queen and the Virgin Queen therefore become problematic, especially

<sup>54</sup> In the quarto, Quickly says, "Washing, brewing, baking, all goes through my hands, / Or else it would be but a woe house" and "Take all, and paie all, all goe through my hands" (sig. B3r–v).

<sup>55</sup> Elizabeth I, "The Queen's Speech at the Close of the Parliamentary Session, March 15, 1576," in *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, 170.



when Quickly's heightened bawdiness and folly make the analogy even less flattering to Elizabeth. Compared to the quarto's version of Mistress Quickly, the Folio character jokes more extensively about sexual impropriety. A scene unique to the Folio (4.1) has Quickly misinterpret young William's entire Latin lesson as a string of lewd words. When Sir Hugh questions William about the "*Genitiue case*," Quickly exclaims, "Vengeance of Ginyes case; fie on her; neuer name her (childe) if she be a whore" (TLN 1873, 1877–78). Quickly is more verbose and therefore more irritating to others in the Folio. Other characters express great frustration at her malapropisms and tedious speeches, and they often try to silence her or urge her to get to the point. In 4.1, Sir Hugh and Mistress Page repeatedly ask Quickly to "hold thy peace" and "Leaue your prables" (TLN 1844, 1866). Finally Sir Hugh asks, "O'man, art thou Lunaties? Hast thou no vnderstandings for thy Cases, & the numbers of the Genders? Thou art as foolish Christian creatures, as I would desires" (TLN 1883–86). Mistress Ford elsewhere calls Quickly a "foolishion Carion" (TLN 1522–23). The Folio sexualizes and ridicules Quickly more than the quarto does. At the same time, it makes the Fairy Queen she plays more courtly and more insistent on chastity. This combination heightens the irony present more subtly in the quarto and satirizes more than promotes Elizabeth's image.

The Folio pageant retains elements of the rustic, carnivalesque quarto pageant and enables some of the same interpretive possibilities, but its increased references to Elizabeth and Windsor Castle complicate the quarto's representation of a self-governing community that serves the Crown. The quarto implies that its Fairy Queen attends the reigning monarch silently supervising the action, but the Folio introduces more ambivalence. It parodies Elizabeth's popular representation as the Virgin Queen by presenting a Fairy Queen played by an even bawdier, foolish servant who fixates on and strictly manages her subjects' sexual desires. Especially when we analyze the two versions in context with actual entertainments designed to praise the Queen, the Folio appears not so much *for* Elizabeth as *about* her. The Folio's additional allusions to the Elizabethan court do not subordinate the local community to the crown. Instead, they contribute to its fervent celebration of citizens as its pageant appropriates Elizabeth's example as a long-reigning woman to represent domestic laborers of the middling sort as successful leaders.

The rest of the Folio text extends the queen-housewife analogy to Mistresses Page and Ford. In lines unique to the Folio, the wives have apparently learned their behavior from the Queen's example. Mistress Page envisions female governance that politically and sexually controls men: "why Ile Exhibit a Bill in the Parliament for the putting downe of men" (TLN 575–77). Like Queen Elizabeth, the wives empower themselves with "political Petrarchism,"

the Elizabethan use of the rhetoric of love as a mode of political control over men.<sup>56</sup> Mistress Ford toys with Falstaff by permitting him to woo her in terms of Petrarchan convention and by responding with playful, non-committal, and often ironic uses of similar tropes. She says, for example, "Well, heauen knowes how I loue you, / And you shall one day finde it" (TLN 1422–23). Although Falstaff interprets this line as a declaration of her love, he eventually learns that "how" she loves him is not at all. The wives control Falstaff by exploiting his sexual desire; as Mistress Page says in the Folio, they "entertaine him with hope, till the wicked fire of lust haue melted him in his owne greace" (TLN 611–12). Several of Queen Elizabeth's favorites claim in their Petrarchan verse that she played a similar role in sustaining and frustrating her male courtiers' desires. During the Kenilworth entertainment, Robert Dudley played a sexually and politically frustrated character named Deep Desire, and the entertainment laments his mistreatment by his "courteous cruell" mistress Elizabeth.<sup>57</sup> The quarto shows us strong, self-governing wives who share certain values with the reigning monarch. The Folio more boldly suggests that these women have learned how to govern themselves, their households, and their community from Elizabeth's example. Meanwhile, its pageant mocks the courtiers she favors, and its Fairy Queen parodies her image as the Virgin Queen. For these reasons, the Folio could be risky to perform for a monarch whose interruptions at Kenilworth and elsewhere reveal that she was sensitive to unflattering representations and underhanded reproach.

#### IV

Twenty years ago, Paul Werstine and Leah Marcus invited us to suspend our judgments about "good" or "bad" Shakespearean texts, and although early quartos and parallel texts are increasingly available for classroom use, we continue to treat the first quarto of *Merry Wives* as a pirated and inferior version.<sup>58</sup> To accept the theory that the Folio was staged for Elizabeth and the quarto was not, we must ignore or obscure the quarto title page, even though it provides a rare piece of evidence about the play's history. This essay has examined the possibility that the quarto title page is accurate and that this text might actually represent an Elizabethan court performance. After analyzing both texts and their inter-

<sup>56</sup> Erickson, 129–30.

<sup>57</sup> Gascoigne, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Werstine, "Narratives," 65–86; Marcus, "Levelling Shakespeare," 168–78. *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* and *The Norton Shakespeare* print parallel texts of *King Lear*, and the New Cambridge Shakespeare series includes edited early quartos of *Lear*, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *Richard III*, and *The Taming of a Shrew*. Q1 of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is less available to our students.

textuality with royal pageantry, I see no convincing reason why the quarto (or a performance like it) could not have been staged at court. Both versions of the play allude to Elizabethan entertainment and share certain representations of Englishness and gender. Both see regional identity as a crucial component of the Elizabethan experience and Queen Elizabeth as an inspirational figure for other women. But the two texts' allusions to the Elizabethan court produce different results. When we analyze the quarto alongside late Elizabethan country-house entertainments, it makes sense as a performance for Elizabeth that celebrates the local but adheres to royal ideology. Its pageant resembles actual entertainments in language, structure, characters, and theme, and like these entertainments and their texts, the *Merry Wives* quarto includes layers of meaning that can appeal in different ways to members of broad and varied audiences. It honors and shows as self-sufficient those of middling rank, but it is not exclusively oriented toward citizens. The quarto appeared in print at the end of Elizabeth's reign, when her image as the Virgin Queen had been well developed and often rehearsed, and it draws on late Elizabethan iconography to offer her subtle compliments.

Just because the Folio alludes more to the court does not mean it exhibits a more positive relationship between Elizabeth's court and the town. Instead, it creates a more ambivalent view of her harsh and perhaps unrealistic expectations about female chastity, as well as the questionable morals of the courtiers she favors. Based on this internal evidence, it seems likely that the Folio text exploits aspects of her court for the pleasure of a post-Elizabethan audience. The Folio's development of ideologies present in more subtle ways in the quarto, such as its heightened celebration of self-governing women, lends support to the possibility that the quarto is an early text and that the Folio is a revised version. The theory of authorial revision dates back to the eighteenth century, and Michael Warren, Steven Urkowitz, and Gary Taylor more recently promoted this theory in their studies and editions of *King Lear*.<sup>59</sup> We can approach the Folio as a later text without insisting that it is superior or improved. Its alterations might reflect less the quarto's shortcomings and more the changes in audience and political climate.

If the Folio is indeed a Jacobean version of an Elizabethan play, what might have prompted its revision? Although there were certainly continuities between the reigns of Elizabeth and James, the change in monarch may have been enough to inspire a reexamination of the play's treatment of the Virgin Queen. The Folio's heightened allusions to Elizabeth reveal a desire to consider her influ-

<sup>59</sup> Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare's Revisions of King Lear* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1980); Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of "King Lear"* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

ences when she is no longer physically present. Richard Dutton has recently argued that the Folio text is a Jacobean revision for a November 1604 court performance, and the internal evidence I highlight works well with this narrative.<sup>60</sup> Although the Folio has anticourt elements that might indicate commercial appeal, its appropriation and critique of aspects of Elizabeth's legacy would fit an early Jacobean performance. Even while it parodies her court, the Folio argues for the lasting effect of Elizabeth's rule on women of various ranks by showing female characters who have learned their governing strategies from her. The Folio and its allusions to Elizabeth could imply that King James and Queen Anna preserved and modified certain aspects of her image. Like the quarto in an Elizabethan context, the Folio has something to offer Jacobean audiences both elite and common. I offer these speculations not to argue for one definitive history, but to encourage us to identify and query the assumptions we have inherited about both texts—assumptions that limit our interpretations of them. Literary critics long dismissed many country-house entertainments as inferior, poorly written texts that lacked narrative cohesion, but when we stop judging and start analyzing, these texts teach us a great deal about the social and political climate in late Elizabethan England.<sup>61</sup> If we suspend our judgment about the *Merry Wives* quarto, it just might do the same.

<sup>60</sup> Dutton, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Roger Howell, for example, refers to Sidney's "Lady of May" as "a trifling work" and finds "little to be gained from detailed analysis" of it in *Philip Sidney: The Shepherd Knight* (Boston: Little Brown, 1968), 155. Even those who have analyzed entertainments in detail are often compelled to acknowledge these texts' lack of literary merit. Louis Montrose says of the 1592 Sudeley entertainment that "its literary merits are relatively slight" in "Eliza, Queene of Shepherdes' and the Pastoral of Power," *English Literary Renaissance* 10 (1980): 153–82, esp. 171. Alexandra Johnston calls the entertainment at Bisham "syntactically difficult" and "trite" and adds, "No one would call this modest piece a work of great literature" in "The 'lady of the farme': The Context of Lady Russell's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Bisham, 1592," *Early Theatre* 5.3 (2002): 71–81, esp. 78.