

Book Reviews

Rogues, Vagabonds, and Sturdy Beggars:

A New Gallery of Tudor and Early Stuart Rogue Literature

edited by Arthur F. Kinney; 18 illustrations by John Lawrence.

328 pp. \$18.95, paper University of Massachusetts Press

Reviewed by John Mucci.

Mr. Mucci is Associate Editor of *The Elizabethan Review*.

On the endless road of popular culture, there has always been a genre of entertainment which supposedly reveals the mysteries of the underworld. Although whatever insight might be exposed, from the canting jargon to the details of a crime, accuracy seems to take a back seat to satisfying curiosity and a need for sensationalism.

Today, there are interesting things to be learned about ourselves by reading the peculiar genre of Elizabethan pamphleteering known as *rogue literature*. Popular with all levels of literate society, these slender books purported to set down the manner by which con artists of all types might abscond with decent peoples' money and goods. Ostensibly written as a public service, to warn and arm society against rogues of all types, in their fascinating variety, they are an Elizabethan version of mob stories, with curious and lurid detail. This interest with the underworld and the seamiest side of life is one which has obvious parallels in modern times, particularly with readers who are most threatened by and distanced from such criminals.

This so-called practical element of defending the populace against these all-too-prevalent creatures falls to second place against the pleasure of reading about others who have been hoodwinked by them (and better still, hearing the details about rogues who have been caught in the act and punished).

This book is a compilation of several rogue pamphlets published in England between 1552-1612, including some by the playwrights Robert Greene and Thomas Dekker. While specialists in Elizabethan literature are no doubt familiar with these works, they are generally little known, except by title or reputation (one might say the same thing about a book such as Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, which few have ever read full through). The plays of

Jonson, Dekker, and Greene certainly abound with characters such as appear exposed in these works; Shakespeare less often, although *A Winter's Tale*, *Henry IV*, and *King Lear* have overtones of roguery and vagabondage. [In the latest issue of *The Elizabethan Review* note the reference to one of these works, cited by Delia Bacon (ER, Spring 98)].

In the first pamphlet, *A Manifest Detection of Diceplay*, Gilbert Walker maintains that he is “disclosing the principal of practices of the cheaters’ crafty faculty.” These disclosures consist of anecdotes, which are among the most amusing in the book, even though written early (1552)—viz. a bawd who was preparing a draught of ultra-astringent “sweet-water” to shrink the less-than-virginal cavity of an advertised “virgin,” finds that her kitchen boy has mistakenly washed his face with it, and has become as puckered as a pickled prune, with barely any face visible.

From a philological standpoint, the vocabulary describing these types is varied and enormous. Many of the pamphlets collected in (a phrase apparently coined by Elizabeth, in a proclamation against them), detail nothing more than elaborate lists of what each brand of perpetrator is called, what their con-game is, and what lingo is peculiar to their kind. Some examples: Palliard, Whipjack, Kintchin-Cos, Hooker, Swigman, Jarkman, Tinkard, Curtal, Queerbird, Jacks of the Clock-House... it is heady stuff, musical and ironic, invented by desperate people who guarded their language to disarm their victims. A hooker, by the way, was someone who went about with a long staff, on the end of which was affixed an iron hook; he would pass by villages where laundry was airing or drying from upper stories, and remotely filch selected duds. It smacks of a quaintness which could only be Elizabethan, thought of as something so vile and wicked as to be punishable in the typically brutal manner of Elizabeth’s time.

Some of the cant phrases and descriptors were invented by friars displaced from the monasteries closed by Henry VIII, and have a latinate flavor (Quaroms, Patrico, Autem-Mort); some were brought over from soldiers and sailors, who when their assignments were over, could find no other source of income than cozening to stay alive. But some of these terms are probably invented whole cloth by the pamphleteers, never to be used, or heard outside the pages of the book. After all, ever-changing slang and gutter jargon—then and now—refuses to be pinned down; words would be changed as soon as the jig were up. When John Awdley, in *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* (1561) lists such rogues as the Curry Favel—one who lies abed all day and curries his coverlets rather than his horse—the ring of truth seems subjugated to the need for a long list of colorfully-named perps, the burden of which seem dearly bought.

Thomas Harman’s *A Caveat For Common Cursitors* (1566) not only has expanded definitions of these varied street-denizens (Swaddlers, Dummerers, Doxies, Demanders-for-Glimmer), but goes so far as to classify and name actual persons living in Middlesex County at the time. “*Upright Men: Harry*

Smith. He driveleth when he speaketh. Thomas Gray: His toes be gone." He completes this Baedeker of baseness with a glossary of terms and a sort of Berlitz dialogue: Rogue: "She hath a Cackling-cheat, a grunting-cheat, ruff-peck, cassan, and poplar of yarrum." [Meaning:] "She hath a hen, a pig, bacon, cheese & milk porridge."

Linguistically, Harman's introductory essay to the reader holds one of those odd mirrors to the times, which spring up now and then in unlikely places. Under the guise of proving his honesty in the pamphlet to follow, he writes:

I thought it necessary, at this second impression, to acquaint thee with a great fault... calling these vagabonds *curstors* in the entitling of my book, as runners or rangers... derived of this Latin word *curro*. Neither do I write it cooresetores with a double oo, or cowresetors, with a w, which hath another signification.

His fussiness over spelling (in 1566, mind) is apposite to those who insist that Elizabethan orthography was haphazard and devoid of rules. Looking at the title page (typographically reproduced in the notes), we see

A Caueat
FOR COMMEN CVR
SETORS VVLGARELY CALLED
Vagabones...

— what are we to make of that immediate contradiction? (It is further complicated by the Stationer's Register calling it a "Cavaiait for commen Torsetors" and our editor referring to it as "Common Curstors")—but Harman's text goes on further:

Is there no diversity between a gardein and a garden, maynteynaunce and maintenance, streytes and stretes? Those that have understanding know there is a great difference.

Although one has the feeling Harman is talking about an ideal which could be seldom attained in his day, his protestations against mis-readings and sloppy spelling is worth reading in its entirety. At the end of his life (1591-2), Robert Greene published *A Notable Discovery of Cozenage* and *The Black Book's Messenger*, both of which pessimistically portray life in London to be fraught with all sorts of characters out to swindle at every turn. It is a great comedy in the guise of cautionary tales, divided into "The Art of Cony Catching" and "The Art of Crosbiting," both of which are so minutely examined that the descriptions become more than the "how-to's" seen in the previous works, they have become playlets. The descriptions contain dialogue, action cues, characterizations, and complex motives, as thorough as in any of Greene's theater works.

As the genre hit its stride and began to decline, Thomas Dekker's work in *Lanthurne and Candle-Light* (1608) displays much the same attributes as other cony-catching pamphlets, yet Dekker seems more in control of his material. He too, has comprehensive descriptions of the same types we have read about before, but he drops them for more easily-readable terms, and organizes his material in a more popular manner. He calls the various predators and victims by more common names, making his enumerated encounters almost allegorical. Thus we hear of not only conies being caught, but the warrens in which they live, and ferrets who root them out. We hear of falconers and concomittant falconry images: casting lures and bait, Tercel-Gentles, anglers with jades, and such material so rich in metaphor, it nearly out-lingoes the rogues themselves.

Dekker also makes use of familiar plays to draw comparisons, everything from Doctor Doddypol to *Hamlet*. It is a novel approach, one which causes the material to be more accessible to a mass audience. In context with the rest of the collection, it is evident that the rogue genre has branched onto paths which intersect with the highways of the commonplace; where the anecdotes become diluted into everyday speech and literature.

The remaining selection, Samuel Rid's *The Art of Juggling*, seems pale in comparison, and is literally a handbook on magic tricks; no longer shocking, no longer challenging in its language, it is flat and derivative. The road fans out and disappears.

These reprints are carefully collated and selected by Arthur Kinney with an eye toward showing the progression in style with a minimum of intrusion in the body of the work. However, this is despite an introduction which is inexplicably heavy-handed, with notes glossing the obvious, giving an alarming impression of the editor. One sample of a dozen suffices in his giving an authentic Elizabethan quote:

..men that are abroade se[e]kinge the spoile and confusion of land are able, if they weare [were] reduced to good subjeccion [subjection] to give the greatest enimie [enemy] her Majestie hath a stronge battell [battle]; And as they ar[e] nowe they are so mych [much] strength...

Indeed, this is commenting on sand in the desert. However, in the bulk of the text Mr. Kinney updates the spelling (and why not do that in the introduction—spare the reader these overelucidations), and we are generally free from his fussy explications. One which persists, however, is his expansion of “[I[n] th[e]” —an Elizabethan locution if there ever was one, typographically spoiled by pedanticism.

His footnotes are thorough, if bewildering. Tyburn, for example, is glossed no fewer than four times in the text, and not always in the same way. Later, the footnotes inexplicably jump from number 64 to 67. The two missing notes make their appearance later on, and we are treated also to 61a, 61b, and 81a.

Surely in a reprint, there is the opportunity to sort such tangles out. There is no need to strew such a scholarly path with brambles.

Appendix:
Full text of Harman's Epistle to the Reader

Although, good reader, I write in plain terms, and not so plainly as truly concerning the matter, meaning honestly to all men, and wish them as much good as to mine own heart, yet as there hath been, so there is now, and hereafter will be, curious heads to find faults. Wherefore I thought it necessary, now at this second impression, to acquaint thee with a great fault, as some taketh it, but none as I mean it, calling these vagabonds cursitors in the entitling of my book, as runners or rangers about the country, derived of this Latin word *curro*. Neither do I write it cooresetores, with a double oo, or cowresetors, with a w, which hath another signification. Is there no diversity between a gardein and a garden, maynteynaunce and maintenance, streytes and stretes? Those that have understanding know there is a great difference.

Who is so ignorant by these days as knoweth not the meaning of a vagabond? And if an idle loiterer should be called of any man, would not he think it both odious and reproachful? Will he not shun the name? Yea, and whereas he may dare, with bent brows will revenge that name of ignominy. Yet this plain name vagabond is derived, as other be, of Latin words, and now use makes it common to all men. But let us look back four hundred years sithence, and let us see whether this plain word vagabond was used or no. I believe not. And why? Because I read of no such name in the old statues of this realm, unless it be in the margin of the book, or in the Table, which in the collection and printing was set in. But these were then the common names of these lewd loiterers: faitours, Roberdsmen, draw-latches, and valiant beggars. If I should have used such words, or the same order of writing as this realm used in King Henry the Third or Edward the First's time, Oh, what a gross barbarous fellow have we here! His writing is both homely and dark, that we had need to have an interpreter. Yet then it was very well, and in short season a great change we see. Well, this delicate age shall have his time on the other side. Eloquence have I none; I never was acquainted with the Muses; I never tasted Helicon. But according to my plain order, I have set forth this work simply and truly, with such usual words and terms as is among us well known and frequented. So that, as the proverb saith, "Although truth blamed, it shall never be shamed." Well, good reader, I mean not to be tedious unto thee, but have added five or six more tales, because some of them were done while my book was first in the press. And as I trust I have deserved no rebuke for my good will, even so I desire no praise for my pain, cost, and travail. But faithfully for the profit and benefit of my country I have done it, that the whole body of the realm may see and understand their

lewd life and pernicious practices, that all may speedily help to amend that is amiss. Amen, say all, with me.

Finis.

De Vere is Shakespeare: Evidence from the biography and wordplay.
by Dennis Baron

Cambridge & New York: Oleander Press, 1997.

Reviewed by Peter Morton

School of English and Drama, Flinders University of South Australia

Say what you will about the supporters of the Earl of Oxford as the true Shakespeare, they are certainly industrious people who produce big, fat books. You wouldn't want to drop the Ogburns' *This Star of England* (1270 pp) or *The Mysterious William Shakespeare* (800+pp) on your toe. Sobran's recent *Alias Shakespeare* is a substantial tome too. Even a fictive autobiography of Oxford, *The Lost Chronicle of Edward de Vere* by Andrew Field, runs to 260pp in the Penguin edition. It is something of a relief, then, to open Dennis Baron's slim paperback, which takes a mere 130 pages to promote the cause of Edward de Vere, the 17th Earl. And what's more, it promotes him from an unorthodox and striking angle—though striking in not quite the way the author perhaps hoped for.

Despite the sub-title of his book, Baron actually wastes very little time on the biographical and chronological conundrums which have so exercised the Ogburns, Sobran and other defenders. Probably the most critical difficulty with the Oxford attribution, as with any of the Shakespeare claimants, is just why the secret should have been preserved inviolate into Jacobean and Stuart times, decades after the only people with any conceivable reason to keep it were in their graves. The sheer implausibility of this, among a pack of ex-courtiers and garrulous old theatrical folk who surely relished a tasty bit of literary gossip just as much as their counterparts do today, troubles Baron not a whit: the secret, he says airily, "gradually, with each succeeding generation" was simply forgotten.

Baron's case is simply that extensive wordplay in the texts reveals the name of their true author. We are not talking here about ciphers. Once popular among the Baconians, ciphers seem to have gone rather out of fashion since professional cryptographers, using the same codes, managed to extract the