

Issues in Review

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New Approaches to Thomas Heywood

Introduction: Entire Hands and Main Fingers

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The ten-volume edition of The Collected Works of Thomas Heywood, forthcoming from Oxford University Press from 2015 to 2022, will attempt to place Heywood's plays, poetry, and prose back where they belong: at the centre of the study of early modern English literature, drama, and theatre history. Especially as an actor, playwright, reviser, editor, and historical chronicler, Heywood had the longest and widest-ranging career of his contemporaries and thus can reveal how sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors and theatrical and literary audiences came to see the practice and production of drama.

When I was approached in 2007 by Andrew McNeillie at Oxford University Press to act as general editor for a collected edition of Heywood's works, I readily agreed on the principle that Heywood deserved better than he was getting from academics and publishers. Thomas Heywood (ca 1574–1641), who claimed to have had '*either an entire hand, or at least a maine finger*' in 220 plays,¹ was one of the most prolific and influential dramatists of the Elizabethan, Jacobean, and early Caroline theatre. From at least as early as 1596, Heywood began writing plays for the Lord Admiral's Men, one of

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the two most prominent acting companies of the period, and by 1598 the writer Francis Meres could praise Heywood's plays as amongst 'the best for Comedy'. Heywood also worked from the 1600s to 1630s as an actor and dramatist for the earl of Worcester's, later Queen Anne's, Men, the Lady Elizabeth's Men, Queen Henrietta's Men, and the King's Men. His plays were performed at the Rose, Curtain, Red Bull, and Phoenix playhouses, among others, as well as at court. In addition to writing plays alone or in collaboration, Heywood specialized in 'doctoring', as we would call it now, or revising the play-scripts of many of the most prominent dramatists of the period. His treatise *An Apology for Actors* (1612) provides one of the most illuminating examinations of the social, political, and cultural effects of early modern acting and playwriting. Yet most early modern drama specialists have never read it, either in whole or in part.

While we may assume that 'the popularity of Thomas Heywood's dramatic works during the author's lifetime is a commonplace of stage history',² we still fail to recognize that his reputation and status since that time have suffered at the hands of scholars. The essays below examine Heywood today in terms of modern theory, staging, textual scholarship, and reading in the hopes that we can give Heywood, both as a sole author and a collaborator, the wide perspective and influence that he deserves in the twenty-first century. My own essay, 'Thomas Heywood, Just in Time', attempts to provide an overview of his reputation from the mid-twentieth to the early twenty-first centuries that shows how Heywood studies have begun to accelerate in the last ten years and outlines why now is the precisely the right time to produce a collected edition of his works. William Proctor Williams and William B. Long, both of whom are distinguished editors, bibliographers, and manuscript scholars, as well as members of the editing team for the OUP collected edition, offer case histories in 'Playhouse Shadows: The Manuscripts behind *Dick of Devonshire*' and in "'Stolne and Surreptitious": Heywood as a Test Case' of what we can still learn about the original and modern staging of Heywood's texts. In 1928, Louis B. Wright, one of Heywood's most vocal champions of the last four centuries, wistfully hoped that 'some day, perhaps, the voracious motion picture industry will seize on *The Fair Maid of the West*, and old Heywood will have a ghostly resurrection among the shadows of the screen'.³ While we have been waiting eighty-six years for that event, the authors of the essays below wish to argue that we no longer need to see Heywood as a ghost but as a still-influential and very material presence in early modern drama.

Notes

- 1 Heywood, 'To the Reader', *The English Traveller* (London, 1633; ESTC S104058), A3r.
- 2 Louis B. Wright, 'Notes on Thomas Heywood's Later Reputation', *The Review of English Studies* 4 (1928), 135–44.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 144.