

## REVIEW

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**John Nichols's *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth I: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*. 5 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. Cloth, £495.00**

'It's in Nichols'. This was normally enough. Generations of Elizabethan scholars since the nineteenth century were certain that their interlocutor, if sufficiently well read, would understand: the text they were referring to was included in John Nichols's *Progresses*. The phrase was, not long ago, sometimes used as a test for doctoral students. The most clever would ask 'which edition?'. It was a smart retort indeed: whether aware or not of the existence of another 'Nichols' (*The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First*, 1828), one would—quite often unwittingly—be posing the right question. The Elizabethan *Progresses*, in fact, was published not only in the frequently cited 1823 three-volume edition (henceforth *1823*) but also in four volumes, between 1788 and 1821. Not many people, however, knew (or know) that no copy of the last of these, vol. 4 part 1, is known to survive, just as many ignore the fact that *1823* is not an 'enlarged edition' of the previous set, but that it adds as well as omits materials.

Even quite apart from academic tests and bibliographical data, one can immediately see that Nichols's *Progresses* is a famous book with a complex, frequently less well-known, textual history. Such is the challenge which faced the General Editors of this magnificent new edition. As they state in the introduction to the first volume, it is 'difficult to come to Nichols's volumes with fresh eyes' (I, p. 3). Almost paradoxically, however, one soon discovers that 'Nichols' is not, nor ever was, 'Nichols' in many senses. The following example may suffice to explain. The new *Progresses* is based, with some exceptions (and with the introduction of the most significant transcripts which appeared in the first edition), on *1823* (cf. I, p. 26). In the new five-volume set, however, the original, almost 50-page long, Preface from *1823*, volume I, has been omitted, and the 'bridging' narrative that links many of the excerpts from the early modern texts has been edited, revised, and sometimes cut. Readers interested in Nichols's own 'voice' may think they need to consult the earlier alongside the new edition; in fact, as the editors explain (cf., e.g., I, pp. 10–11), such a voice existed only in part: the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century volumes probably saw the intervention of many collaborators. Not even all of the transcriptions can be safely ascribed to John Nichols; many of these came from his antiquarian milieu, a large number of correspondents and friends including scholars such as bishop Percy and the editor of John Harington's *Nugae Antiquae*, Thomas Park (cf. I, pp. 18–21, 25). In the original editions, such transcriptions were not immune from error, or sometimes 'heavy' editing (corrections of anything perceived as a 'mistake' in terms of grammar, spelling, or capitalization; cf. I, 21). That is why the editors have chosen to return 'to the early modern sources, sometimes—although not always—selecting alternative copy-texts to those used by Nichols' (I, p. 25). One notable example can be found in volume II, where the text Nichols reproduced from Strype (whom the editors unequivocally class as 'a careless historian', II, p. 54) has been in part replaced with transcripts from the original manuscripts. In the new edition, then, the description of Elizabeth's progress to Canterbury (II, pp. 55–61), opens with a sentence from Nichols, but then continues with an amended version of Strype's *Life and*

*Acts of Matthew Parker*, later moving to Parker's own letter to William Cecil, now British Library Landsdowne MS 17, fos. 98-9, reverting later on to Strype and later to the Landsdowne manuscript again. While such an eclectic choice of copy-text (which changes five times within seven pages) might perplex some textual theorists, the result is a perfectly legible narrative, made even more useful by means of abundant and detailed notes on places, people, and lexis.

Such notes (and a companion essay volume, *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, edited by Archer, Goldring and Knight in 2007 for Oxford University Press) makes the new *Progresses* a mine of useful information, and provide an unprecedented amount of data which extend far beyond the original collection—which was in itself a treasure trove of anecdotes and curious information. More than 50 scholars from different fields (including historians of the calibre of Simon Adams, Paul E. J. Hammer, and the late Patrick Collinson, eminent neo-latinists and classicists such as Dana Sutton and David Money, recognized manuscript experts such as Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Gabriel Heaton—who also served, together with Sarah Knight, as Assistant General Editor—in addition to well-known literary scholars such as Lisa Hopkins and Elizabeth Clarke, and a good portion of the staff of the Centre for the Study of the Renaissance at the University of Warwick) have contributed to this edition, and the result of such an interdisciplinary effort is certainly remarkable.

Even the best annotators, however, can sometimes be baffled by the difficulty of identifying people whose names, all too frequently, are spelled erratically both by Nichols and in the original sources. The fact that these detailed footnotes almost invariably acknowledge a large number of other modern publications, however, allows readers to make further enquiries with significant ease. When reading through the transcripts from the new year's gift rolls present in these volumes, for example, readers are justly advised to turn to Jane Lawson's excellent *The Elizabethan New Year's Gift Exchanges, 1559-1603* (OUP/British Academy, 2013). Here, for example, one can find that the unidentified 'Marke Anthony Eryzo', mentioned in the transcript of the gift roll for 1562 (I, p. 252) is in fact Marcantonio Erizzo, an exiled Venetian citizen who was deeply involved in the English intelligence network from the mid-1550s to the mid-1560s. Lawson, incidentally, also occasionally corrects some minor errors contained in the notes, as in the case of the date of Giovanni Battista Castiglione's death (1598, and not 1589 as mentioned in vol. I, p. 249).

Looking at Nichols from the vantage point of almost two centuries of scholarship provides readers with new, broader perspectives on the material included in the original editions. Should a scholar examine Cambridge University Library Add. MS 8915 without the support of Elisabeth Leedham-Green and Faith Eales's introduction and notes to Nichols's narrative of Elizabeth's entertainments at Cambridge (I, pp. 375–435) a number of questions would simply remain unresolved. The binding and the contents of this manuscript, in fact, suggest that it was connected to the Queen's visit to the University in 1564. This book, however, is certainly not a highly refined product, either in terms of its cover or its *mise en page*: its title, written on the spine, 'Orationes et carmina Academiae Cantabrigensis Ad Elizabetham Reginam, 1564', was most likely added later, and is inaccurate not only in its spelling of 'academia' but also in the reference to 'orationes': this volume, in reality, contains a long collection of poems, but no speeches. Its rather inelegant (even if gold-stamped) vellum binding would hardly please Elizabeth, who was known to appreciate red velvet. Some hastily copied sections bear visible corrections and blotting. It is no surprise, one would say, that Add. MS 8915 apparently never became part of the Royal collection, but was it ever at least *presented* to Elizabeth? Was it really intended for the Queen's eyes? Convincing evidence, including documents from the Cambridge University

Archives, printed in the new *Progresses*, allow to identify this manuscript as the one mentioned in the 1788 volume (quire I, ‘Entertainments at Cambridge’, 18) as a book ‘delyvered vnto master Secretorye’ (i.e. William Cecil, then Secretary of State and Chancellor of the University), and carried by him ‘in his owne handes’ while the Queen was making her progress around the colleges during her 1564 visit to Cambridge. Through the detailed information provided in the introduction, one can make sense of the physical features of this manuscript. What we might consider a rather poor binding was in fact ‘one of the earliest Cambridge examples of the use of gold leaf: an effort was clearly being made to produce something special (cf. I, 417, note 184). This book testifies to an important moment for the life of the University—it was Elizabeth’s first visit—and reflects, in a way, a very academic attitude to reality. The verses contained in the manuscript were in all likelihood composed and copied in the space of just 3 weeks. The corrections visible throughout, then, were intended to be an improvement (although, not necessarily in terms of elegance); each college seems to have appointed a corrector who revised its section and amended some faults, usually in metrical scanning and Greek accents. Here, ironically, one can see a genuine touch of the academics’ obsession with their own effort and disdain for mundane formality.

Such is the richness of detail that can be found in the new *Progresses*. At times, though, one feels that some information is tactfully omitted. The short but very intriguing extract from Cecil’s diary for August 1565 (which one may perhaps prefer to quote as ‘Cecil Papers 209(1), fo. 31r’ to avoid confusion with the second section of the diary) states that ‘the Queens Maiesty, semed to be much offended with the Erl of lecestre: and so she wrot an obscure sentence in a book at Wyndsor’ (I, p. 441). It may be of interest to readers to know that these lines have been linked to Elizabeth’s short poem ‘No crooked leg’ in Janel Mueller and Leah Marcus’s *Elizabeth I: Collected Works* (Chicago UP, 2000, p. 132) and in their *Autograph Compositions and Foreign Language Originals* (2003, pp. 37–8, note 1). One wonders if the editor, who quite correctly quotes work from Alan Kendall and Simon Adams on this topic, implicitly disagrees with Marcus and Mueller’s hypotheses concerning these lines. It is less easy to understand, though, why no reference is made to Katherine Duncan-Jones’s admirable article which prints Sir Robert Cecil’s 1602 verses for Elizabeth in full (“‘Preserved Dainties’: Late Elizabethan Poems by Sir Robert Cecil and the Earl of Clanricarde’ *Bodleian Library Record* 14, 1992, pp. 136–43) where appropriate, since one may be lead to believe that this poem has never been identified (cf. I, 17 and IV, pp. 198–9).

No work of such proportion can be entirely free from some minor faults, and the very few one can find here are, as seen above, easily corrected. As the editors—almost too modestly—state, this set of volumes is not meant to be ‘the “last word”’ on either Nichols or on Elizabethan progresses, entertainments and court culture’, but ‘an authoritative collection of source materials for early modernists to be used as a gateway and tool for further research’ (I, 25). It is certainly a great ‘tool’, providing as it does admirably edited texts and copious, informative footnotes for some of the key literary and historical sources of the Elizabethan age. Scholars are now put in a position to say, again, ‘it’s in Nichols’—but one is not allowed to ask ‘which edition?’ any more. It is the Oxford *New Edition*, no doubt about that.