

Annotating Aurelian

Michael P. Parker

Cedric C. Brown, ed. *The Poems and Masques of Aurelian Townshend, with Music by Henry Lawes and William Webb*. Reading, Berkshire, England: Whiteknights Press, 1983. Pp. 126.

During his own lifetime Aurelian Townshend never commanded more than a narrow foothold on the English Parnassus. After devoting much of his life to the service of the Cecils, Townshend suddenly vaulted to prominence in 1631-32 when he was drafted to replace the cantankerous Ben Jonson as Inigo Jones's collaborator in producing entertainments for Charles I and Henrietta Maria. Although his two masques, *Albions Triumph* and *Tempe Restor'd*, were well received, Townshend failed to capitalize on his opportunity: first Thomas Carew, then Sir William Davenant, succeeded him as the masque-writer preferred by the king and queen. During the remaining years of the decade, Townshend paced the antechambers of Whitehall, infrequently penning a poem to mark some literary or courtly occasion. By 1642, the Earl of Pembroke could describe him as "a poore & pocky Poett . . . glad to sell an 100 verses now at sixepence a peice, 50 shillinges an 100 verses." Townshend died in obscurity sometime before 1651; even the precise year of his death is unknown.

Although Aurelian Townshend is unquestionably a minor figure, several of his poems and songs stand in the first rank of early seventeenth-century verse. The lack of reliable texts, however, has denied these pieces their critical due. Townshend's masques and his slim body of verse—some 20-odd poems—remained uncollected until 1912, when E. K. Chambers gathered them in a small, elegantly printed volume for the Tudor and Stuart Library. Although Chambers' edition was excellent for its day, advances in textual scholarship and the discovery of additional poems by Townshend has long made a new edition desirable.

Cedric C. Brown have made a brave attempt to supply that edition, but his success is mixed.

Of the superiority of Brown's texts there is no doubt. Chambers was unaware of the existence of several important manuscripts, in particular the Henry Lawes manuscript (now British Library, Add. MS 53723), which contains words and music for six of Townshend's songs. Chambers, moreover, tended to base his texts on printed songbooks rather than on the manuscripts, which usually have greater authority. Brown's challenge, then, has been to re-edit the entire corpus of Townshend's poetry, and he has done a masterful job. An assessment of the sources and detailed textual notes accompany each poem in the edition; the explanations for Brown's editorial decisions are lucid and persuasive. The reader can be confident that the texts presented in this volume conform closely to Townshend's original intentions.

Unfortunately, the paucity of editorial commentary restricts the usefulness of these texts. Unlike most other editors of seventeenth-century poetry, Brown fails to gloss unfamiliar words and usages. Although context may suggest that *sparver* in the phrase "Thy sparver a well tufted tree" means "canopy," no such helps are available for the reader attempting to puzzle out "which heere we neither pinke nor race" when the antecedent of *which* is utterly unclear. Anyone familiar with "Come not to Me for Scarfs," the poem from which these lines are taken, may well remember that the floating *which* refers to *garments* and establish the sense of the verbs *pinke* and *race* from there; the rest of us, however, are compelled to resort to the *OED*. Townshend's diction is not normally recondite or labored, but his syntax can be knotty; brief glosses could spare the reader considerable confusion and perhaps even arm-strain.

More disturbing is the sparseness of Brown's contextual commentary. A paragraph entitled "Occasion" accompanies a number of poems, but the information contained in these paragraphs is always brief. Perhaps most readers of this edition do not require a recapitulation of the life of Venetia Digby (for whom Townshend wrote an elegy), but lesser luminaries like Mrs. Judith May and the Countess of Bridgewater deserve more than mere rehearsal of dates of birth, marriage, and death. Some useful information about Townshend's literary relations is also absent from Brown's notes. In his commendatory poem on Lord Monmouth's translation of Malvezzi's *Romulus and Tarquin*, Townshend characterizes the styles of Davenant, Carew, and Suckling; Brown never mentions that these three poets also penned commendatory verses for Monmouth's volume. And in his one-line comment on an "Elegy on the death of the King of Sweden: sent to Thomas Carew," Brown neglects to

point the reader to Carew's celebrated response. In almost every case, Chambers provides more copious and detailed notes than does Brown; the serious student of Townshend needs to have both editions at hand.

Surprisingly, Brown assumes that readers *will* use his edition in tandem with that of Chambers. He opens his essay on "The life and the poems" with the statement, "Little has come to light about Townshend's life to add to the material given by Chambers in the introduction to his edition, to which the reader is referred" (12). Such advice is easier to give than to follow: the Chambers edition is exceedingly hard to come by and few college and university libraries in the United States possess a copy. This lack of a biography of Townshend is the most serious flaw in Brown's edition, particularly in light of recent critical interest in the political and cultural climate in which seventeenth-century poets composed their work. Townshend's disheveled life and rather disreputable family, moreover, provide a narrative that deserves to be retold. Like the Villiers family on a more exalted plane, the Townshends seem to have made a career of pandering to the pleasures of the Stuart court. Aurelian's daughter, Mary, became successively the mistress of Prince Charles Louis and of the Earl of Dorset before her marriage to George Kirke, Gentleman of the Robes, at the age of twenty. Their son, Percy, achieved notoriety for the brutality displayed by his "Lambs" in suppressing Monmouth's supporters at Sedgemoor. Of their daughters, Diana and Mary, Chambers discreetly observes that they "became windlestraws on the wanton flood of the Restoration." The details of Townshend's own association with a number of great families—the Cecils, the Egertons, the Sackvilles—are still to be explored. It would be hard for any editor to match Chambers' zest in relating the travails (and occasional triumphs) of the Townshends, but Brown's edition would be better for having made the attempt.

The Poems and Masques of Aurelian Townshend raises questions central to the definition of a standard edition of a minor literary figure. The primacy of an authoritative text is undisputed, but how much more should an edition contain? Given the scarcity of Chambers' edition and the probability that Townshend won't be edited again for another seventy years, Brown should have included a full biography and commentary. To provide less ill serves Pembroke's "poore and pocky Poett"—and his readers as well.

United States Naval Academy