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Authors and Their Drafts in Context

ESTS 2023 (Canterbury)

Authorship and Editing

Rory Loughnane



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ESTS 2023 (Canterbury)

Rory Loughnane

Introduction

Authorship and Editing

ON 13-14 APRIL 2023, the University of Kent hosted the annual conference of the European Society for Textual Scholarship (ESTS). The theme of the conference was: "Authorship, Identity, and Textual Scholarship". The organisers invited proposals for creative, critical, and analytical papers, panel sessions, roundtables, posters, and digital exhibitions that approached and analysed the overlap between studies in attribution, authorship, biography, and textual scholarship from antiquity to the modern day. Two related questions served to stimulate such work. To what extent does the identification of an author's identity affect how we approach and edit their texts? Or, pursuing a contested poststructuralist line of thinking, the organisers asked why might it matter to an editor, or any reader, that they know who is speaking? Although the Barthesian idea of the "Death of the Author" has been largely dismantled, the organisers noted that theoretical questions about agency, intentionality, and reception still loom large in modern critical discourse. And given present-day concerns with anonymity, fake news, misattributed quotations, and the spread of disinformation, the conference sought to shine a light on the relationship between the identification of an author-figure and the transmission, mediation, and reception of their texts.

The planning committee assembled involved colleagues working together from several institutions: Rory Loughnane (Kent, serving as Chair), Bashir Abu-Manneh (Kent), Anne Alwis (Kent), Claire Bartram (Canterbury Christ Church University), Jennie Batchelor (Kent, now York), Karen Brayshaw (Kent), Robert Gallagher (Kent), Emily Guerri (Kent, now Oxford), Anna Jordanous (Kent), Ryan Perry (Kent), Catherine Richardson (Kent, now UEA), David Rundle (Kent), Amy Sackville (Kent, now Goldsmiths), Wim Van Mierlo (Loughborough University), Matthijs Wibier (Kent, now Cincinnati), and Cressida Williams (Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives). The conference organising committee was led by three Kent PhD students: Ségolène Gence (Programming and Communications Officer), Jon Pinkerton (Registration Officer and Secretary) and Samantha McCarthy (Social Officer and Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives Liaison Officer).

The organisers accepted proposals for 76 papers which were spread across 27 chaired panel sessions. In addition, there were three roundtable sessions: on

Shakespeare's First Folio to mark the quatercentenary anniversary of its publication, on authorship and practice-as-research featuring creative writers, and on early modern dramatic collaboration. During the conference, there was an exhibition at Canterbury Cathedral Library and Archives, a Digital Exhibition, and a Literary Walking Tour of the Canterbury city centre. An opening reception was held at the historic Chapter House of Canterbury Cathedral. Finally, a keynote lecture by Eric Rasmussen (University of Nevada, Reno) on "Shakespeare's Fifth Folio" brought this stimulating event to a close.

My abiding memory of the conference was how so many of the papers sought to address the same issue — how does authorship figure in editing? — through a diverse range of highly inventive approaches, from the theoretical to the practical, and from the case-specific to the global. Some scholars sought to rethink traditional editorial practice, while others introduced new digital methods that broadened the experience of users of critical editions. Again and again, discussion turned to questions of agency: the author's own in the transmission of their work and the responsibilities of editors in producing editions for modern readers. Authorship and the looming author figure introduced debates about what makes a text have authority and/or what makes it authentic. Past treatments of authorship in editing, whether foregrounding the author or rendering them invisible or less visible, were discussed and analysed in terms of good practice.

In this short introductory piece, I want to introduce an instructive set of examples from the early modern English play *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* to describe how practices in editing and attribution studies are intertwined. This romance play is now believed to be the product of two hands, with George Wilkins responsible for the first eleven scenes, and Shakespeare for the remaining seventeen; some doubt remains about the authorship of the so-called "brothel scenes" (Shakespeare 2016: 19, 22, 23), and they may contain mixed writing.¹ Let us consider an example where knowledge of Wilkins's authorship and his past work impacts upon editorial work. In scene three, the hero Pericles reflects upon his fortunate escape from the clutches of the tyrant Antiochus:

Which feare so grew in me I hither fled,
Vnder the couering of a carefull night,
Who seemd my good protector, and being here,
Bethought what was past, what might succeed,

(3.80–83)

Our attention turns here to the unmetrical final line. Nicholas Rowe first introduced "me" after "Bethought" to rectify the deficient meter and address grammatical concerns. While the earlier line at 3.80 ("I") could potentially serve as the subject of "bethought", the use of the reflexive pronoun is more characteristic of George Wilkins's prose style in *The Painfull Adventures* (Wilkins 1609), the play's prose narrative source. In both instances where "bethought" appears in Wilkins' text, it is accompanied by a reflexive pronoun ("bethought

1. For further discussion, see (Taylor and Loughnane 2017).

her" (F1v) and "bethought him" (F2r)) suggesting his habitual idiomatic phrasing. If one accepts Wilkins's authorship or heavy influence in this scene, the emendation thus gains additional support.

Now let us consider this split line as a Shakespearean example:

2. By breake of day, if the Wind cease.

Peri. O make for *Tharsus*,

(Shakespeare 2016, 13.74)

The presence of "O" is questioned by the 1987 Oxford editors, who argue for its removal based on metrical irregularity and interpret it as a likely interpolation by a reporter, reflecting their belief in post-Shakespearean contributions to the play. However, recognising that this speech-opening interjection is a consistent stylistic feature in several of Shakespeare's other scenes in *Pericles* (e.g. 13.22, 25.131, 25.149, 25.179) supports the retention of "O" as authorial. So, too, making the line regular would require the omission of "the". If one attributes the split line to Shakespeare, the apparent metrical irregularity can be reconciled by allowing a caesura after "day" and an inverted foot, both acceptable metrical variations in his verse. Thus, attributing the passage to Shakespeare strengthens the editorial choice to preserve "O".

Both textual decisions can be supported purely on the grounds of poetic meter. Rooted in this is the belief that an early modern dramatist writing in verse would have intended to write a metrically sound line; deviations from normal practice then cause editors to consider the lemma a possible site of disrupted transmission or corruption. Rowe did not know about Wilkins's co-authorship of *Pericles*, or at least he never mentioned it, and the emendation was made purely on the grounds that the line lacks an unstressed syllable in the third position and that the reflexive "me" would correct this. So, too, not emending in the second example could be defended, regardless of authorship, on the grounds that the split-line *can* be read, with a little difficulty, as metrically sound. But knowledge of authorship means that we can push beyond Rowe's conjecture in the first example and find support for its habitual usage in Wilkins's writing. So, too, knowledge of what constitutes normal metrical variation for Shakespeare further supports the retention of the reading from the quarto. Knowledge of authorship in either case does not drive the editorial activity but rather informs it.

All textual emendation or retention deals in degrees of possibility, probability, and plausibility. Many readings are possible, some are probable, and few are plausible. The shift from vaguely possible to the most plausible in defending a selection of either inserting, emending, or retaining relies upon various forms of evidence, and one of the strongest is knowledge of the habitual practices of a working author. Distinguishing the idiolect from the sociolect, an editor can turn to the body of undisputed extant work by an author to help support how they approach the editing of her or his text. For authors from

the early modern period I work on, including Shakespeare, such knowledge of authorship is fraught with challenges about who wrote what and when, and how to work with plays published without an identified author or authors. In such latter cases, we rely entirely upon what the internal evidence tells us about the stylistic preferences evidence in the passage in question. Even if no candidate author can be found, the editorial tendency is to edit the work against the work itself; that is, finding comparable passages elsewhere in the text to support editorial work. Editing and attribution studies are, therefore, irreducibly parallel activities, though those working in editing may be siloed from those working in attribution studies, and vice versa. Both are concerned with establishing the authority and authenticity of the text, analysing how it came to be found in the form in which it is preserved and the intentionality behind it. The 2023 ESTS conference, across its panels and roundtables, suggested some ways in which these disciplinary approaches might be increasingly merged in the future.

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