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For and Against Modernization:

Reflections on the Longman Annotated English Poets[1]

After lunch in the Senior Common Room I was standing in the queue for coffee next to John Barnard, when he turned to me and asked whether I would like to edit Dryden for the Longman Annotated English Poets series. Of course, I said yes, little knowing what it was that I was committing myself to. The edition was planned to be in two volumes, and to take five years. It turned out to be in five volumes, and took twenty-five years, even with the collaboration of David Hopkins on volumes three to five. My involvement with the series has lasted even longer, because John Barnard eventually invited me to join him as General Editor. Together we worked on second editions of A. C. Hamilton's *The Faerie Queene* and of W. H. Stevenson's Blake, and on new editions of Marvell from Nigel Smith and of Donne from Robin Robbins, as well as further volumes in the well-established Longman Shelley (begun in 1989) and Browning (begun in 1991), both of which are still in progress. In due course John Barnard retired, and I currently share the role of General Editor with David Hopkins and Michael Rossington. The series itself has migrated from Longman via Pearson to its present comfortable billet with Routledge. It has also changed its character: the original editions were one-volume hardbacks which were just about affordable by students; now we have multi-volume hardback sets for libraries and the wealthier scholars amongst us, alongside substantial selected editions in paperback, as well as paperback editions of complete poems where the œuvre is sufficiently concise to allow this. Recent additions to the series have been the poems of Shakespeare from Raphael Lyne and Cathy Shrank, volume one of Pope from Paul Baines and Julian Ferraro, more Shelley, and more Browning. There is always, it seems, more Browning. There will be two or three more volumes of Pope, followed by a selected edition; one more volume of Shelley, again followed by a selected; and the next instalment of Browning will be *The Ring and the Book*. We have also commissioned new titles: a Wyatt, a Ben Jonson, a Samuel Johnson, a Keats, a Coleridge, a multi-volume complete Byron, a multi-volume complete Wordsworth, a Christina Rossetti, and a Yeats. We have still more editions in our sights. Some poets have

[1] This is a revised text of a paper given to a conference on textual modernization in Oxford on 24 April 2019. I have preseved the idioms of oral delivery. I am grateful to John Barnard, David Hopkins, and Michael Rossington for their comments on drafts.

eluded our best efforts to find suitable editors; some editors have fallen by the wayside; some have been pushed.

I have offered this roll-call of editions to indicate that with such a wide range of poets no one textual policy could possibly fit all circumstances, even though when F. W. Bateson established the series in the 1960s he seems to have envisaged that editors would by and large take what he called the *textus receptus* and annotate that. A few moments' reflection on Bateson's choice of that term will indicate how illusory that idea was. The term *textus receptus* refers originally to the Greek New Testament put together by Erasmus on the basis of seven manuscripts; with modifications this provided the basis for Luther's German translation and for the Authorized Version in England. But now that we know of some 5,800 extant manuscripts of the Greek New Testament, as well as some 20,000 more in other ancient languages which may be taken into account when establishing the text, it is clear enough that the very concept of a received text is problematic. The considerable work which has been done in recent years on the manuscript circulation of texts in early-modern England, pioneered by Peter Beal and Harold Love,[2] has demonstrated the fluidity of texts and the importance of understanding the different functions of print and manuscript. Even where there is something approaching a *textus receptus*—perhaps Herbert's *The Temple* might be an example—questions remain about the kind of authority it commands. In fact, virtually all the Longman editions have presented a freshly-edited text, and rightly so, since the task of elucidating a poem through annotation cannot really be carried out in isolation from the task of elucidating it through the presentation of the text itself. And that brings me to the question of modernization.

When the first volume of the Longman series, Kenneth Allott's edition of Matthew Arnold, appeared in 1965, the statement of editorial principles was minimalist:

> For the great majority of Arnold's poems the text is based on the *textus receptus*, that is to say, the text of *Poems* (1885), which was the last collected edition to have the benefit of the poet's supervision; for the remainder the textual authority is a variety of printed and MS. sources. The text has been slightly modernized in spelling and

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[2] See Peter Beal's *Catalogue of English Literary Manuscripts 1450-1700* (https://www.ies.sas.ac.uk/research-projects-archives/catalogue-english-literary-manuscripts-1450-1700-celm), and Harold Love's *Scribal Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) and *English Clandestine Satire 1660-1702* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

> punctuation in accordance with editorial policy for the series to which this edition belongs.[3]

Even for a series whose principal *raison d'être* is annotation, this seems an unduly laconic protocol. There is no explanation for the decision to prefer Arnold's last wishes over his first thoughts; no indication of what is meant by 'slightly modernized in spelling and punctuation', or why the accidentals of late-nineteenth-century texts might need such treatment. Nor is the 'editorial policy' of the series explained in any way. The second volume of the series, Carey and Fowler's Milton, appeared in 1968, and I will return to that in a moment. It was only in 1969, in Christopher Ricks's *Tennyson*, that the General Editor's preface by Bateson appeared for the first time, setting out his rationale for the modernization of the text:

> Since the reader in any English-speaking country will tend to pronounce an English poet of the past (at any rate to Chaucer) as if he was a contemporary, whatever impedes the reader's sympathetic identification with the poet that is implicit in that fact—whether of spelling, punctuation or the use of initial capitals—must be regarded as undesirable. A modern pronunciation demands a modern presentation, except occasionally for rhymes (e.g. *bind—wind*) or obsolete archaisms (*eremite*, hermit).[4]

Bateson is quite right to say that modern readers pronounce older poets as if they were contemporaries, and despite the pioneering work of David Crystal and his actor-son Ben students rarely hear Shakespeare spoken in anything approximating to the original pronunciation—which doesn't stop them writing about what we learn of Othello's character from his use of what they confidently tell me are hard or soft sounds. A whole seminar might be devoted to examining Bateson's concept of 'sympathetic identification', but what strikes me as especially curious in his statement is his claim that the identification with a poet as our contemporary proceeds from speaking the words aloud, and his underlying assumption that this sense of contemporaneity is a wholly desirable approach which should be facilitated by editors. I think exactly the opposite: these poets are *not* our contemporaries, While part of their value to us may indeed lie in the way that they hold up a mirror to our own concerns, it often lies precisely in their strangeness, in the way that

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[3] *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965), p. xiii.

[4] *The Poems of Tennyson*, edited by Christopher Ricks (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1969), p. xv.

they can say to us, 'Just stretch your minds to imagine this very different way of thinking and living'; and I suggest that one of the functions of editors is to guard that strangeness—to explain it, yes, but to preserve its singularity, and not to disguise its occasional or systemic remoteness from modern culture. Geoffrey Hill liked to say that public conveniences have to be accessible, but poetry does not. I half-agree with this grumpy *bon mot*: what we as editors have to make accessible is the strangeness of the territory created by poets of the past.

Bateson's statement of editorial principles appears to have been slightly revised for Roger Lonsdale's *Gray, Collins and Goldsmith*, published in the same year as the *Tennyson*, with the addition of the explanation that 'conventions of the original printing-house, including those of the author himself', have been modernized.[5] This addition may have been made in response to the particular textual conditions which pertained to Lonsdale's volume, for the editor devotes two careful pages to explaining exactly what modernizing the texts of his three poets has entailed. Lonsdale defends his practice on the grounds that in this period printers rather than authors were generally responsible for the accidentals of a poem, and points out that for editors of eighteenth-century poetry capitalization poses a special challenge, for around 1750 the practice of capitalizing virtually every noun was abandoned.[6] Goldsmith's poetry was published after the change, so already appears more modern in that respect; Gray's spans the change, while Collins' verse was mostly published before capitals were swept away, and so, says Lonsdale, in the case of Collins 'modernization has involved extensive decapitalization' (p. xiv). But, as Lonsdale concedes, this still leaves the editor with the problem of how to handle personifications; and, of course, there is no binary divide between personified nouns and non-personified nouns: there are different degrees to which a poet may suggest personification, attributing being or agency to abstract ideas through the adjectives, verbs, and adverbs associated with them. An editor who strips away most, but not all, of the capitals from an eighteenth-century poem creates a starker contrast between these two categories of noun than the original readers would have encountered. The *Gray, Collins and Goldsmith* has never been revised and is long out of print. Lonsdale apparently became dissatisfied with the textual policy of this edition, for in 1977 he re-edited Gray and

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[5] *The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, edited by Roger Lonsdale (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1969).

[6] Michael Rossington points out to me that Crabbe's poetry also spanned this change in typographical preferences. See further Gavin Edwards' review of the Oxford edition of Crabbe in *Essays in Criticism*, 39 (1989) 84–91.

Collins for the Oxford Standard Authors series adhering to the original conventions of spelling and punctuation.[7]

Let me take up the case of the Carey and Fowler Milton. There was no preface by the General Editor, perhaps because the editors' practice does not square with what Bateson would announce as the series' policy the following year. It is distinctly peculiar, for Carey and Fowler modernize spelling but retain punctuation 'with diplomatic faithfulness'. Their justification is that punctuation 'is a class of grammatical symbols'; 'not only does it obey conventions of logic but also others whereby it renders the pauses and junctures and tones of spoken language'; if punctuation is modernized, they say, 'ambiguities will have to be removed and enhancing suggestions lost'. They acknowledge that the reader may sometimes encounter difficulties in following Milton's syntax as articulated by this punctuation, 'but when he overcomes the difficulty it will at least be Milton's syntax he has understood, and not the editors".[8] I have some sympathy with this position, though in maintaining that punctuation is a class of grammatical symbols they underestimate the way in which in the early-modern period it is frequently, perhaps primarily, a set of rhetorical symbols, an aid to performance. The point at which I have to part company with the editors, however, is when they say that their punctuation preserves Milton's syntax: what it does is to articulate Milton's syntax as understood by a seventeenth-century compositor. Moreover, we are talking about different compositors in different printing houses over a long period from 1638 to 1674. And when they say that modern punctuation may remove significant ambiguities and introduce distinctions 'that the poet himself may have taken care to exclude' they do not explain how they envisage the blind poet exercising such care over his punctuation, though they admit that their adherence to the original punctuation 'should not be taken to imply that it is necessarily Milton's punctuation'. But if it is not Milton's punctuation, how can it display Milton's syntax to a degree that commands such respect? And how often are there ambiguities which were intended by Milton and created through the punctuation but which would be cleaned away by punctuation supplied by a thoughtful modern editor? It is difficult to see why Carey and Fowler place such evidential value on the punctuation of the early editions while simultaneously maintaining that the spellings of these texts 'could only reasonably be attributed to amanuenses or compositors, since they

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[7] Thomas Gray and William Collins, *Poetical Works*, edited by Roger Lonsdale (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[8] *The Poems of John Milton*, edited by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and Harlow: Longmans, 1968), pp. x-xi.

were completely at variance with Milton's own practice'. Which angel stood guard over Milton's punctuation but not his spellings?[9]

If there are difficulties with the unmodernized punctuation, there are also problems with Carey and Fowler's modernized spelling. Take this line, as it appears in their copy-text, the second (1674) edition of *Paradise Lost*:

Through the strict Senteries and Stations thick (ii 412)

'Senteries' is clearly three syllables, but in Carey and Fowler's text it appears as two:

Through the strict sentries and stations thick

A note explains that 'sentries' is a trisyllable, and records the original spelling, but readers have to dig into the commentary to find this explanation, having first been tripped up by an unmetrical line. Spelling, the editors explain, 'is a vocabulary symbol' and 'all that can generally be expected of orthographic signals is that they should enable the reader to make the right vocabulary selection' and 'modern spelling is perfectly well able to do this for a seventeenth-century text'. Is this true? The problem, as I see it, is that this theory assumes that the reader is being invited to select a single transhistorical item of vocabulary instead of a word which existed at a particular moment. Their text creates the illusion that Milton's words are simply our words, but they are not. They come from a world which is strange to us, and their strangeness should be signalled and preserved.

I keep returning to that word 'strange', because I am sure that the Russian formalists were right when they spoke of 'defamiliarization' as one of the functions or characteristics of literature. That awkward word may belong now in the museum of critical theory, but the idea remains potent. I sometimes try to tell my students that the really difficult words in Shakespeare are not the ones which they have to look up, but the ones which they don't notice because they are too familiar to register. I have tried to explore the complexities which a poet brings to a word's semantic field in the appendix on 'Shakespeare's Complex Words' which I included in my original-spelling edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, and in respect of *Paradise Lost* in my more recent book *Milton's*

[9] For a detailed discussion of the significance of the accidentals of Milton's texts which also considers the textual policy of the Carey and Fowler edition see John Creaser, 'Editorial Problems in Milton',7 *Review of English Studies*, 34 (1983) 279-303, and 35 (1984) 45-60.

Complex Words,[10] and I suggest that one of the functions that an original-spelling text can perform is to alert us to strangeness; conversely, one of the hazards of modernization is that it makes the unfamiliar deceptively familiar.

As the Longman series has developed, editors have sometimes moved away from Bateson's brief. Hamilton's first edition of *The Faerie Queene* reproduced photographically J. C. Smith's Oxford English Texts edition—which I suppose was in this case a kind of *textus receptus*—because Spenser's deliberately archaizing vocabulary demanded that one keep his original spelling. In the second edition Hamilton printed a freshly-edited text contributed by two Japanese collaborators, but it was once again an old-spelling text. The Longman Pope is also in original spelling, because Pope took such pains over the accidentals of his texts that they were evidently important to him as part of the poems' meaning, though, as we know, he changed his mind radically about his typographical ideas in the course of his career. The Longman Pope follows his initial preferences for spelling, punctuation, capitals, and italics because it prints the words of his texts as they were first published. Now we encourage our editors to develop textual policies which suit their particular poets, rather than seeking to impose a uniformity. Tricky decisions await editors of some of the titles currently in progress. What do we do about Byron's notoriously wayward punctuation, which he expected his publisher John Murray to tame? We will try to preserve some of his informality, especially his dashes and double dashes; but what should we do about five consecutive dashes? Do we modernize Wyatt? Yes, and no. Our current thinking in this case is that the Longman edition will print modernized texts of all the poems by or plausibly attributed to Wyatt, but will include as parallel texts a diplomatic transcription of those poems which survive in the Egerton manuscipt in his own handwriting or in the hand of an amanuensis whose work he seems to have checked; this scheme of parallel texts should provide readers with resources with which to reflect for themselves on the process of modernization, and on their own process of reading. There is a special challenge in the case of Wyatt, whose modernizing editors face a particular problem which their old-spelling counterparts can decide not to notice. We might call it an aesthetic problem in that it raises the question of how we suppose that Wyatt thought a line of verse should run. How do we scan his lines? Do we think that he aimed to produce regular iambic metres, or did he

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[10] *Shakespeare's Sonnets: An Original-Spelling Text*, edited by Paul Hammond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 447-83; Paul Hammond, *Milton's Complex Words: Essays on the Conceptual Structure of 'Paradise Lost'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

experiment with a variety of stresses? Rough lines or smooth lines? Or both? *Tottel's Miscellany* began the process of modernizing him just fifteen years after his death by changing some of his lines into forms closer to the regular iambic patterns expected of well-behaved Tudor verse. The original-spelling editor of Wyatt can leave the lines as he or she found them, but the modernizing editor has to made decisions which are not simply textual but also aesthetic: what kind of verse do we suppose Wyatt to have written?

The trap which modernizing editors of Wyatt probably cannot avoid may be illustrated from the selected edition published in 1986 by H. A. Mason.[11] I yield to no one in my admiration for Mason, who was my teacher long ago, and exemplified for me the life of the scholar to which I aspired. But his edition sometimes crosses the boundary between modernizing and rewriting the text on the basis of assumptions about how a line ought to scan, while also sometimes leaving us with lines which I find impossible to scan plausibly. (This is odd coming from a man who insisted on quoting Shakespeare unmodernized from the First Folio.[12]) Take as an example the sonnet beginning 'Farewell love, and all thy laws for ever'. In the Egerton MS the first line reads:

ffarewell Love and all thy lawes for ever[13]

and in the Devonshire MS, which some editors regard as preserving an early version, while others think it a corrupt version, we find:

Nowe fare well love and thye lawes for ever

Mason, who says that he is following the Devonshire MS for this poem, prints:

Now farewell, Love, and all thy laws for ever!

which gives a nicely regular iambic line, though only by silently smuggling in 'all' from the Egerton MS. Rebholz's Penguin edition follows Egerton verbally:

Farewell, Love, and all thy laws forever.[14]

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[11] H. A. Mason, *Sir Thomas Wyatt: A Literary Portrait* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1986).

[12] H. A. Mason, *Shakespeare's Tragedies of Love* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. x.

[13] Quotations from the Egerton and Devonshire MSS are taken from Richard Harrier, *The Canon of Sir Thomas Wyatt's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975).

[14] Sir Thomas Wyatt, *The Complete Poems*, edited by R. A. Rebholz (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1978).

Later in the poem we have this line in the Egerton MS:

In blynde error when I did perseuer ⁻[contractions expanded]⁻

which Mason prints as:

In blind error whilest I did persever

(following Devonshire for 'whilest'), and Rebholz as:

In blind error when I did persevere

Surely we need 'blynde' to be two syllables:

In **blýn** | de **érr** | or **whén** | I **díd** | per**séu** |er

so that the final word is pronounced 'perséver', not 'persevére', and the line finishes with a hypermetrical feminine ending, as, indeed, do the first and fourth lines of the first two quatrains:

Now farewell, Love, and all thy laws | for **év** | er! 1

Thy baited hooks shall tangle me no more.

Senec and Plato call me from thy lore

To perfect wealth my wit for to |end **éa** | vour. 4

In blind error whilest I did |per **sév** | er, 5

Thy sharp repulse, that pricketh eye so sore,

Hath taught me to set in trifles no store

But scape forth since liberty |is **líef** | er. (Mason's text) 8

Here we stumble against the aesthetic problem of what sort of line we think Wyatt was aiming to produce (and also the question of how his scribes thought the lines should sound). To what degree was he trying to write smooth iambics? Did Mason and Rebholz really think that Wyatt started line 5 'In **blínd érr** | or'? Or did Rebholz think that 'error' was pronounced 'err**ór**'? Mason rightly sees that the final word is 'perséver' not 'persevére', but I cannot work out how to scan his line 5 in such a way as to lead up to that pronunciation, and his line has ten syllables instead of the eleven which the pattern of the poem surely requires, unless he expects us to pronounce 'whilest' as two syllables. Mason recognizes that there is a problem in 'how to read aloud the words *ever*, *endeavour*, *persever*, *liefer*. The

Tottel editors assumed that the accent in all was on the last syllable. I think Wyatt followed common practice in treating the last two syllables as one with a sound like *-effi'*.[15] I hear the words as providing hypermetrical feminine endings, but Mason is quite right in seeing that the four words need to be scanned in the same way. The slurred or the feminine ending 'perséver' is matched in line 8 which rhymes with it:

and scape fourth syns libertie is lever (Egerton)

which Mason prints as:

But scape forth since liberty is liefer.

and Rebholz:

And scape forth since liberty is lever.

But 'scape'—which a modern reader of a modernized text assumes to be one syllable—must surely be two syllables, producing an iambic pattern, and so 'liefer' is, like 'perséver', a feminine ending to an eleven-syllable line:

and **scá** | pe **fóurth** | syns **líb** | er**tíe** | is **lév** | er

At several points in this poem we only have a sporting chance of working out the scansion if we attend to the original spelling and what it tells us.

I am not trying to pick holes in the work of these scholars: I could not have done any better myself if I had tried to produce a modernized edition of Wyatt. I am simply trying to illustrate the problem that to modernize Wyatt's spelling is to create a text which invites the reader to pronounce the words in a way that makes it even more difficult to determine the likely rhythm and metre than it is with an original-spelling edition. Elsewhere, Mason himself says that in any encounter with a poem 'it is a fellow-interest the reader finds, not a selfish, totally egoistic, interest. We listen to a voice not our own in our dramatic replay of Wyatt's poem… the reality we both meet and create in reading a poem occurs in a no-man's land, neither the present nor the past'.[16] Quite so: the poem is indeed a *mundus alter et idem*, but how best to create or facilitate that meeting through our editing?

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[15] Mason, p. 150.

[16] H. A. Mason, 'Sir Thomas Wyatt and the Birds of Fortune' *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 7 (1977), 281-96.

When I began editing Dryden, I somewhat reluctantly accepted what was then the normal policy of the Longman series. Howard Erskine-Hill, who was originally approached as a possible co-editor with me, was firmly of the opinion that the edition should be in original spelling. I don't know whether that was the reason why he didn't in the end come on board, though I do regret the loss of his erudition, especially because he confided to me on more than one occasion that he thought Dryden a greater poet than Pope, to whom he devoted much of his own career. In spite of my reservations, I did edit Dryden in modernized spelling, and set out in the preface to the first volume the rationale for doing so, and the case was subsequently made much more fully by David Hopkins in the volume of essays which we edited for the Dryden tercentenary.[17] My argument was that in the early modern period compositors rather than authors were usually responsible for the accidentals of a text; that in the case at least of Dryden's Virgil, and probably for other poems, the printer worked from a scribal copy, not the author's own holograph; and that Dryden himself complained about the poor printing of some of his works. He drew attention to the erroneous punctuation in *Annus Mirabilis* and in *Sylvae*, and struggled for nine days to correct proofs of his Virgil, writing to Tonson that 'the Printer is a beast, and understands nothing I can say to him of correcting the press'.[18] After compiling the errata list, Dryden had to tell readers of his translation that 'There are other Errata both in false pointing, and omissions of words… which the Reader will correct without any trouble. I omit them, because they only lame my *English*, not destroy my meaning'.[19] None of this inspires us with much confidence as to the accuracy of Dryden's printed texts, particularly in respect of their accidentals, and surely provides the modernizing editor with the licence he needs to correct and to clarify. And in editing Dryden I tried particularly to produce a text in which

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[17] *The Poems of John Dryden*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins, 5 vols (Harlow: Longman, 1995-2005), i xvi-xxi; David Hopkins, 'Editing, Authenticity, and Translation: Re-presenting Dryden's Poetry in 2000', in *John Dryden: Tercentenary Essays*, edited by Paul Hammond and David Hopkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp. 330-57. I had previously explored the grounds for modernizing Dryden's texts in my article 'The Autograph Manuscript of Dryden's *Heroique Stanza's* and its Implications for Editors', *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 76 (1982) 457-70.

[18] *The Letters of John Dryden*, edited by Charles E. Ward (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1942), p. 96.

[19] *The Works of Virgil*, translated into English verse by Mr. Dryden (London: Jacob Tonson, 1697), sig. ¶¶¶v.

the punctuation helped readers through the often intricate arguments of Dryden's satires and theological polemics.

And yet, while being proud of this work, I am also somewhat suspicious of the very clarity that I was attempting to produce. One of the ideas to which I find myself returning again and again is that expressed in the title of an essay published some twenty years ago on the French language by Henri Meschonnic, 'Ce que la clarté empêche de voir': 'what clarity prevents us from seeing'.[20] And what the clarity of a modernized text may prevent us from seeing is the distinctive strangeness of the work.

I can date my own preference for original-spelling texts quite precisely to August of 1971, when I bought a Scolar Press facsimile of the second quarto of *Hamlet* from a bookshop in Stratford. The Scolar Press has long gone, and the shop now sells Peter Rabbit memorabilia to Japanese tourists, but that facsimile stays on my shelves. It is an important book for me because it transformed a work which I thought I knew. Having studied the play for A-level, I knew it almost by heart, yet here it was in this strange guise, familiar but remote. Ever since I picked up that facsimile I have been puzzled by the refusal of most Shakespeare scholars to provide original-spelling texts of the plays and poems, because generations of readers have been deprived of the opportunity to think about what they might learn from Shakespeare's texts in their original printed form. The three leading scholarly series, the Arden, Oxford, and Cambridge Shakespeares, all provide only modernized texts, though an original-spelling version of the Oxford Shakespeare does exist in a bulky and prohibitively expensive tome.[21] What really irritates me, however, is the failure of editors to explain and defend their practice of modernization. All three series tell the reader that the text is modernized; none explains why, or considers what might be obscured or lost in that process. Preparatory to his work on the Oxford Shakespeare Stanley Wells published an essay on 'Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling', but he confined himself to discussing 'how, once modernization has been decided upon, it should be carried

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[20] Henri Meschonnic, 'Ce que la clarté empêche de voir', *Esprit*, 230–231 (1997), 51–63.

[21] Oxford University Press has issued two original-spelling editions of Shakespeare: *The Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); and *The Complete Works: Critical Reference Edition*, edited by Gary Taylor et al., 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). I expressed reservations about the former in my 'Review Article: The Oxford Shakespeare', *The Seventeenth Century*, 3 (1988) 85-107.

out'.[22] The only editorial acknowledgement of the problems inherent in modernizing Shakespeare that I have found is the short discussion in E. A. J. Honigmann's Arden edition of *Othello* in which he does explain what he is doing, says that he modernizes reluctantly, and admits that in so doing we lose the 'Elizabethan flavour and suggestiveness of his language, making Shakespeare our contemporary even though his every word is around four hundred years old'.[23] To my mind, the refusal to allow readers to experience Shakespeare in original spelling is analogous to the attitude of those theatre directors who will not attend to Shakespeare's precisely-crafted settings, and insist upon staging his plays in modern dress. (Opera seems even more vulnerable to the triumph of the directorial ego over the artist's own vision.) Audiences are, they suppose, too unimaginative to understand *Othello* unless the characters wander round waving machine guns and shouting into their mobile phones. Yet these are the same audiences who obviously have no problem finding Harry Potter or *Game of Thrones* 'relatable': in those cases they readily use their imaginations to enter a world where strange things are made possible. Indeed, is it not the very strangeness that attracts them?

It was an anxiety about the simplifications that we generate through modernizing that led me to produce my original-spelling edition of *Shakespeare's Sonnets* in 2012. In that volume I readily admitted that the compositors of the 1609 quarto were not particularly competent (it was customary, even in those days, for a sentence to end with a full stop, for example), but I wanted to show that nuances of meaning could be gleaned by careful attention to spelling and punctuation which, if not always Shakespeare's own, were at least those produced by his contemporaries and understood by his contemporaries. And here the alert reader will wonder why I advocate following the original punctuation of the *Sonnets* while criticizing Carey and Fowler for keeping the punctuation of Milton's original editions. Besides seeing no justification for treating punctuation differently from spelling, I am more tentative than they were about the value of this seventeenth-century pointing: sometimes it can be downright sloppy, but at other times it can tell us something important.

Let me briefly rehearse the case which I made in my edition for not modernizing Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, while acknowledging that modernization can bring benefits in clarity,

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[22] Stanley Wells, *Modernizing Shakespeare's Spelling* with Gary Taylor, *Three Studies in the Text of 'Henry V'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), p. 3.

[23] *Othello*, edited by E. A. J. Honigmann (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997), pp. 361-3.

albeit at a cost.[24] Take the long 's', perhaps a mere typographical variant, but even so one which can possibly carry meaning. Here is the opening of Sonnet 126 in the 1609 quarto:

O thou my louely Boy who in thy power,

Doeſt hould times fickle glaſſe, his ſickle, hower: (126:1-2)

The link between the fickle glass and the sickle hour is emphasized by the visual link between 'fickle' and 'sickle' when the long 'ſ' is used: 'fickle... ſickle'. The comma after 'sickle' is regularly deleted by modern editors as an instance of the incompetent pointing which disfigured this quarto, but in fact one of the uses of the comma in early-modern printing was to emphasize the word which preceded it,[25] as we might do by using italics, but the comma does it less blatantly. It's not an example of a careless piece of pointing by the compositor, whether it originates from Shakespeare's desk or from the printer's shop: it's a careful, expressive piece of punctuation. The comma is saying to us: 'Pause for a moment and consider the link between "fickle" and "ſickle"; and while you're about it, stop to reflect on what the poem means by calling this "hour" "sickle"'. In Sonnet 34 we find these opening lines:

VVhy didſt thou promiſe ſuch a beautious day,

And make me trauaile forth without my cloake, (Sonnet 34: 1-2)

In line 2 'trauaile' in *1609* meant both 'travel' and 'travail', both journey and labour, as the same spelling was used for both senses of what was then the same word, but in modern usage is regarded as two distinct words. We find the same use of the word in its double senses in Wyatt's sonnet 'Whoso list to hunt', when he says that 'the vayne travaill hath weried me so sore' (Egerton MS): 'travaill' expresses the painful labour involved in pursuing this deer. Colin Burrow's Oxford text and Cathy Shrank's Longman text of Shakespeare (which I commissioned and greatly admire) both print 'travel', thus losing the secondary

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[24] The following discussion is drawn substantially from pp. 94-5 of my edition, with the permisison of Oxford University Press. The other editions cited are *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, edited by Katherine Duncan-Jones (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1997); *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, edited by Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *The Complete Poems of Shakespeare*, edited by Cathy Shrank and Raphael Lyne (London: Routledge, 2018).

[25] Percy Simpson, *Shakespearian Punctuation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), pp. 26-31. Michael Rossington tells me that this use of the comma for emphasis is also found as late as Shelley's texts.

meaning that the Poet's venturing forth is something difficult, perhaps even a risky piece of self-disclosure. Katherine Duncan-Jones's Arden text prints 'travail', but thereby loses the sense of a journey, which is surely the primary meaning here: the Poet has gone out on a journey without his protective cloak. We need both senses, but we cannot have both in a modernized text. We can have both in an old-spelling text, but only if we are quasi-Jacobean readers who understand the word's two meanings; in practice, we can only have both meanings through an editorial note. There are many such places in the *Sonnets* where the original spelling facilitates a play on the sound or meaning of words which is obscured in a modernized text.

Modern spelling can also cause problems for rhymes. Here is the final couplet of Sonnet 34:

Ah but those teares are pearle which thy loue ſheeds,

And they are ritch, and ranſome all ill deeds. (Sonnet 34: 13-14)

The rhyme words in the couplet are 'sheeds| ...deeds|', 'sheeds' being a normal Renaissance spelling of 'sheds'. It provides a perfect rhyme. But does the modernizing editor preserve the meaning by printing 'sheds', thus wrecking the rhyme; or keep the archaic spelling for the sake of the rhyme by printing a weird word which no one will understand? Modernizing editions regularly choose to change the spelling and thereby prioritize the meaning over the rhyme—a reasonable choice, if you have to make a choice:

Ah, but those tears are pearl which thy love sheds,

And they are rich, and ransom all ill deeds. (Arden, Oxford, and Longman)

An original-spelling text will keep both meaning and rhyme, but its readers cannot make anything of this couplet without a note explaining 'sheeds'. Modern spelling may also alter the metre. In Sonnet 138 line 12 reads thus in *1609*:

And age in loue, loues not t'haue yeares told. (138:12)

We might mark the metrical pattern as follows:

And **ágе** | in **lóue**, | loues **nót** | t'haue **yéa** | res **tóld**. |

where 'yeares' is disyllabic. But Katherine Duncan-Jones modernizes the line thus:

And age in love loves not t' have years told: (Arden)

By keeping the elision of 'to' into 't", and modernizing the spelling of 'yeares' into 'years', the line loses one syllable:

And **áge** | in **lóve** | loves **nót** | t' have **yéars**| ⁅ ⁆ **tóld**: |

One could have modernized the spelling differently, expanding 't" into 'to':

And age in love loves not to have years told. (Oxford)[26]

This is Colin Burrow's solution, which preserves the right number of syllables, but changes the emphasis which is provided by the stress pattern, which becomes:

And **áge** | in **lóve** | loves **nót** | to **háve** | years **tóld**: |

If we are guided by the metre (and, of course, Shakespeare does not expect slavish adherence to the metre) the emphasis falls now on the insignificant verb 'have' instead of the all-important noun 'years', which was appropriately stressed in the *1609* text. It is difficult to see how a modernized text could avoid spoiling either the metre or the required emphasis of this line. Moreover, modern editions remove *1609*'s comma after 'love', though once again the comma functions to emphasize the preceding word: it is precisely when he is *in love* that the older man does not want to have his age calculated by his lover. The comma also provides a brief pause for the reader before the transition from noun to verb, accentuating the word-play.

I would like to conclude by considering briefly the problems posed by one of the poets who has figured from time to time on the wish list for the Longman series without us ever managing to clinch a deal: Rochester.[27] For a while Harold Love considered editing him for the series, but eventually produced instead his magisterial Oxford English Texts edition, a format which allowed him much more scope for textual work than the Longman series could have afforded. The textual problems are immense: pirated printed editions; reputable but posthumous and bowdlerized printed editions; authorial manuscripts; scribal

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[26] Cathy Shrank prints the same text, and explains the problem of scansion in a note.

[27] I have discussed the problems of editing Rochester in *The Making of Restoration Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2006), ch. 10. The editions cited here are: *The Complete Poems of John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester*, edited by David M. Vieth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); *The Poems of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, edited by Keith Walker (Oxford: Shakespeare Head Press, 1984); and *The Works of John Wilmot Earl of Rochester*, edited by Harold Love (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

manuscripts; anonymous texts of poems actually by Rochester; and poems confidently attributed to him which are in fact spurious. With Rochester there are both textual and aesthetic choices to be made, in that the editor will often be presented with a decision about how rough or how smooth a satire should be, or how decorous or indecorous he thinks a love poem is, given that the manuscript transmission of Rochester's verse tended sometimes to bowdlerise and sometimes to add sexually explicit material to the originals. I would like to focus on one example of the hazards of both modernized and original-spelling texts. Take this passage from the *Satire against Reason and Mankind*. For this poem there is no authorial manuscript but a myriad of printed and scribal copies.

Then old age and experience, hand in hand,

Lead him to death, and make him understand,

After a search so painful and so long,

That all his life he has been in the wrong.

Huddled in dirt the reasoning engine lies,

Who was so proud, so witty, and so wise.

Pride drew him in, as cheats their bubbles catch,

And made him venture to be made a wretch.

His wisdom did his happiness destroy,

Aiming to know that world he should enjoy.

This is from the edition by Rochester's great pioneering editor David Vieth in modern American spelling, and with, I think, very sensitive punctuation which deftly articulates the rhetorical structure and emotive force of the lines. But isn't there a missed opportunity to bring out the allegorical force of some of these abstract nouns? Shouldn't 'old age' and 'experience' be capitalized as, hand in hand, they lead the man to Death? By accident 'Pride' is necessarily capitalized at the beginning of its line, and that too is surely a personification, imagined here as a con-man drawing his victim into a scam. But do we read 'Pride' as a personification when the other abstract nouns don't seem to be? And what about 'wisdom' and 'happiness': should they be capitalized, or has the allegory faded by this point in the text? The modernizing editor cannot avoid making interpretative decisions here, and I'm not convinced that Vieth made the right ones.

Here now is the passage as printed in Harold Love's edition, which for its substantives reconstructs its text of this poem from a variety of witnesses and then dresses up the result with accidentals from a single manuscript whose substantives are sometimes rejected (a procedure whose justification I fail to understand):[28]

Then old Age and Experience hand in hand,

Lead him to Death, and make him understand,

After a search so painful and so long

That all his life he has been in the wrong.

Hudled in dirt the reasoning Engine lies,

Who was so proud, so witty and so wise.

Pride drew him in (as Cheats their Bubbles catch)

And made him venture to be made a Wretch.

His Wisedome did his Happiness destroy,

Ayming to know that World he should enjoy.

One wonders what the evidential value is of such a synthetic text. The problem of how to represent personifications is present in Love's text as it is in Vieth's, albeit in a different form, for here most of the nouns are capitalized, so that the allegory is not made visible typographically. More problematic still is the old-spelling text edited by Keith Walker:

Then Old Age, and experience, hand in hand,

Lead him to death, and make him understand,

After a search so painful, and so long,

That all his Life he has been in the wrong;

Hudled in dirt, the reas'ning *Engine* lyes,

Who was so proud, so witty, and so wise.

Pride drew him in, as *Cheats*, their *Bubbles* catch,

[28] Love says that he has selected the source for his accidentals because of the care which its scribe took over punctuation (p. 563).

And makes him venture, to be made a *Wretch.*

His wisdom did his happiness destroy,

Aiming to know that *World* he shou'd enjoy.

Walker uses as his copy-text the 1680 printed edition of Rochester's poems, which has no special authority for substantives and none at all for accidentals, and at several points in this passage the accidentals are positively unhelpful: the inconsistent capitalization marks out 'Old Age' but not 'experience', and the italicized words seem arbitrarily chosen: in the last line '*World*' is one of the less significant words in a line whose point is the antithesis between 'know' and 'enjoy', which the typography does nothing to mark.

The last chapter of Samuel Johnson's *Rasselas* is called 'The conclusion: in which nothing is concluded', and this is the position in which I find myself as well. Clearly there is a need for both modernized and unmodernized texts for different kinds of readership, though I do think that educational opportunities are lost when students have ready access only to modernized editions. Personally, I prefer original-spelling texts because they open the door into world which is radically different from my own, and whose very difference is part of what fascinates me. But if we present readers with such texts we need to do a lot of work to explain how to interpret (and sometimes how to ignore) the unusual spelling and punctuation. In a world where attentive literacy is fast disappearing even from English literature undergraduates, this may be asking too much. But if we give our students modernized texts, we also have to work hard to explain the ways in which these may misrepresent the original works and the conceptual world which these works both inhabit and create. Who would be an editor?

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