

25 September 1999

Dear Miss Warburton,

Many thanks for your helpful reply of 21 September. I was especially pleased with your list of Edward III citations, for which I'm greatly obliged. I'm rather puzzled by 'interceasing', though. The word that occurs seven lines from the end of the London Library facsimile of the 1596 edition, which I used for my own, is 'intercession'.

As to other quotations: no doubt it depends what one means, and of course you're exceptionally well placed to know the facts of the case. But it would be a great pity, I think, if the explicit assurances contained in the OED's Historical Introduction were now to be modified.

For some years now I've been advocating, in TLS and other articles as well as Yale U.P. books, the dating of Shakespeare plays by their year of first publication; and I was certainly heartened to hear about the OED decision you mention. But I fear it's going to cause no end of trouble, even with the help of the most powerful computers. If I've understood the new approach aright, it means that some 25 plays are going to be redated by some 500 years all told.

Then there are the further problems posed by uncertainties of attribution. Thus the present OED treats R3J 1597, MW 1598, HS 1599, Ham 1602, Tit, HH6, 2HG, 3HS, Mac, Tim, Per and H8 as plays by Shakespeare, whereas the Oxford Shakespeare editors Wells and Taylor say that the first four are memorial reconstructions by actors, and the last eight are collaborative.

In recent times, those editors among others have also accepted parts of Edward III, The Two Noble Kinsmen and Sir Thomas More as authentically Shakespearean. So perhaps some of the first citations you kindly sent me will be now ascribed to Shakespeare.

As to Ironside, a topic to which I plan to return in my next book, I'd be most grateful if you'd kindly let me know the evidence, which I fear I must have missed, for a1594. All the arguments I've so far seen, or offered, over the last twenty years, relate to c.1598.

Finally there's Jürgen Schäfer, on whose work I've made copious notes (to which of course you'd be entirely welcome, if they're of any interest). I've never understood why anyone, least of all the OED editors, should accept his views a priori; I seem to recall for example that he was unable to justify his assumption (p. 65) of a general reliability rate of 60%, and that even his dedicatee Robert Burchfield had reservations. I should have thought that the 3½ million slips you're good enough to mention, carefully compiled by x interested readers from y sources over z years, would outweigh the opinions of any single scholar, however well informed or intentioned. I'd like in due course to publish some thoughts on these problems; and in that context an authoritative quantification of x, y and z above would of course be most welcome and duly acknowledged.

Renewed thanks and good wishes

Yours sincerely

*E. C. Sims*

Dr. Eric Sims

1587  
A. Hart 1942  
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21 October 1999

Dear Miss Warburton,

I'm much obliged for your letter of 18 October. I should have thought that the new OED would use its own expert dating criteria (such as spelling, e.g. the ending inge instead of ing throughout the Ironside MS) rather than rely on the inferences of outside editors (who presumably gave you Love's Labour's Lost '1588', etc.).

But no doubt I'm mistaken about this.

In any event, I trust there'll be no objection to my citing your proposed 'a1594' for Ironside.

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Yours sincerely

Eric Sams

32, Arundel Avenue,  
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CR2 8BB  
25 October 1999

Dear Miss Warburton,

I'm much obliged for your letter of 22 October. Of course I won't mention, if you'd rather I didn't, that you're proposing to accept and thus perpetuate the date that Randall Martin wishes to assign to Edmund Ironside.

But I trust the same embargo doesn't apply to the OED's own objective revision of its previous Shakespeare dating on lines I ventured to recommend in a TLS article of 6 March 1992. I recall that John Simpson kindly wrote to me at the time, confirming that this would indeed be the new policy.

I've duly recorded this change in an article I'm currently contemplating, about the integrity of Edward III. If you'd like to see a preliminary draft of this piece, you'd be entirely welcome.

Best wishes,

Yours sincerely

Eric Sams

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27 October 1999

Dear Miss Warburton,

I'm obliged for your prompt reply. I quite understand your wish to leave your adoption of Martin's 'a1594' for Ironside unmentioned. But I fear I've already jumped the gun (not knowing that there was one) about your new rational Shakespeare dating policy, on which I think you're much to be congratulated. John Simpson imposed no such embargo when he freely told me about the OED's intention, in his very welcome and entirely unsolicited 1993 letter to me; so in my 1996 edition of Edward III (pp. 2, 71, 230, etc.) I felt able to mention, with approbation, that splendid démarche, which I had already ventured to recommend in a 1992 TLS article.

But of course I'm very sorry if I was mistaken in my assumption that there was and is no secret about these intended adjustments. In any event I'd be happy to take into account any comments you may now have on the enclosed Edward III piece (which I haven't submitted anywhere, as yet); and I'll be very ready to consider any re-drafting you deem necessary, or indeed any amendments to my Edward III book, for a possible paperback re-issue. I value my cordial relationship with the OED (as evidenced by your own helpfulness in sending me the relevant word-list), which I trust hasn't been irreparably damaged by what, I now see, may be interpreted as an involuntary indiscretion on my part.

Yours sincerely



Eric Sams

7 November 1999

Dear Miss Warburton,

Many thanks for your letter of 1 November. I'm glad you found something of interest in my draft essay, and I've duly amended it to take full account of the points you make. I was especially grateful for your helpful confirmation of John Simpson's assurance that the revised OED will date Shakespeare's work by its publication date, as opposed to conjecture.

I'm much looking forward to the new edition, which on the same factual basis will I'm sure also find space, under the heading 'Forms', for the further variant spellings found in manuscripts such as Sir Thomas More and Ironside, or in published texts of the same great period. In any event I wish you and your colleagues every success in this supremely worthwhile enterprise.

Yours sincerely

4 June 2000

Dear Miss Warburton,

You may recall my enquiries about the vocabulary of King Edward III; in reply, you were good enough to send me a conspectus, for which I was most grateful, of OED first citations.

In the context of writing a sequel, again for Yale U.P., to my Real Shakespeare (1995, 2/1996). I've recently been looking at The True Chronicle History of King Leir, etc, which was first published in 1605; and I find myself again in need of some guidance about the OED's coverage of this play, which was Shakespeare's main source for his own great tragedy. May I trouble you again? I'm truly sorry to be such a nuisance.

My main difficulty, as before, arises from the OED dating. The word 'foppet' for example is dated 1605, with a reference to a volume called Six Old Plays (.79), which I see means Six Old Plays on which Shakespeare founded his Measure for Measure (and other old plays), 1779. 1605 presumably relates to Leir's publication year. But then 'postulate' v. 1 from the same play is dated 1593 with the gloss Hist King Leir (which I fear I can't find among the sources) 1605D. And then 'touchy', again from the same play, is back at 1605, with the source noted as King Leir & Daughters D, which I'm afraid I again can't find, or follow.

Personally, I far prefer 1593, which was presumably inserted on the ground that what looks very like this same play was performed on 6 April 1594 and was hence already written in the previous year. But not even 1593 makes it the 'old play' everyone says it is. On clear evidence, furthermore, it was a Queen's play; and the heyday of that company was the 1580s. So Leir might well be (and in my next book will be) dated c. 1587.

But if the OED adopted that dating, then much of Leir's vocabulary would reappear in canonical Shakespeare (with e.g. LLL, at present '1588', duly reclassified to a later year); and some Leir words, whenever they were written, seem to be omitted altogether. My preliminary results suggest some 20 words in the former category and half-a-dozen in the latter. Perhaps you'd like a list in due course?

Meanwhile you may like to note that if Leir really is an 'old play', then it presumably precedes canonical Shakespeare, which according to the present OED begins c. 1588; so again c. 1587 seems a good year. Perhaps I should add, though, that Leir c. 1587 and Ironsides c. 1588 are by the same dramatist, as the enclosed table seems to me to show.

There's another point which I find significant (and no doubt I've touched on this topic in earlier correspondence), on which you're sure to be completely vindicated; all that wretched nonsense about 'memorial reconstruction by actors', which, as your book-list makes clear, the OED has never accepted, is now, to my great gratification, being increasingly rejected by the same profession that has been absurdly asserting it for the past eighty inglorious years. By the time your new edition appears, that battle should at long last be won. I trust the same will apply to my sequel as well; I certainly plan to say so.

Best regards and wishes,

Yours sincerely

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14 June 2000

Dear Miss Warburton,

Thanks for your usual helpful reply. You wouldn't, I suppose, find it possible to be as kind about Leir as you were about Edward III, by again letting me have a complete list of OED first citations?

I'm not sure, need I say, about the technicalities of putting OED online: it takes me all my time to manage this ancient Amstrad (the proper place for which, our two Internet sons assure me, is on the Antiques Roadshow). But I imagine that the task will include subsuming all the Leir entries under one date.

As to those entries, I'm sorry about 'D': I'd have been less baffled by e.g. 'D2r' or 'D3v'. As to the date, no doubt both the performances of Leir took place in April 1594 (as the Malone edition suggests). But I confess to some difficulty with the idea of citing Leir as 1605 (if I understand you aright) when the text then published was written years earlier.

I entirely agree with you, as I said in the TLS, that this is the right practice for canonical Shakespeare, because of the scholarly interest in those works, which seems to me well justified and in no way (pace the late Jürgen Schäfer) exaggerated: thus the factual Love's Labour's Lost Q1 1598 is I'm sure preferable to the purely speculative '1588'. But isn't the 'factual' 'by 1594' better than '1605' for Leir, by the same criterion? And the position of plays that remained unpublished seems even plainer: thus '1594' for Ironside is just as unevidenced now as '1588' ever was for Love's Labour's Lost.

Best of all, I'm sure you'd agree, would be a correct and dispassionate evaluation of style. No doubt Wells and Taylor, whether in their Oxford Shakespeare or their Textual Companion, will continue to rank as trustworthy authorities, unless they can be disproved; and they and others are surely just being reasonable in dating Leir c. 1590. Otherwise it could hardly be the 'old play' that everyone calls it, by an 'old dramatist' (nowadays notable mainly for his apparent acquiescence in the shameless plagiarism of his work perpetrated by his own Queen's colleague Shakespeare). Everitt's 1587 for Leir, with Ironside written by the same dramatist somewhat later, 1588, seems to me much more factual than speculative; and Wells and Taylor agree about Leir. They don't yet know about my Ironside evidence, which in my present circumstances is likely to remain unpublished until The Real Shakespeare Part Two which I'm now preparing for submission to Yale U. P.

For what it's worth, c. 1590 seems to sit quite comfortably with the Hamlet mentioned by Nashe in 1589 and your own Troublesome Reign 1591 (for which however the OED double-dating system, unless I have misunderstood it, seems to divide into the first and second editions).

Perhaps, while I'm writing, I may mention some possible perplexities about the canonical plays? Presumably you'll now be dating both The Comedy of Errors and The Two Gentlemen of Verona to their year of first printing, 1623, not '1590' or '1591' respectively? It's true that plays with those titles seem to have existed by 1594 and 1598 respectively, but who knows what their texts actually were? Citations from All's Well, Antony, As You Like It, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, 1-3 Henry VI, Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, King John, Macbeth, Measure for Measure, The Taming of the Shrew, The Tempest, Timon of Athens and Twelfth Night will I

suppose also be allocated to 1623, for similar reasons. I don't know how '1588' applies to Love's Labour's Lost 1598 or Titus Andronicus 1594, '1592' to Romeo and Juliet 1597 and 1599, '1590' to A Midsummer Night's Dream 1600, '1593' to Richard II 1597, '1594' to Richard III 1597, '1596' to The Merchant of Venice, '1596' to The Taming of the Shrew, '1597' to A Lover's Complaint, '1598' to Merry Wives, '1599' to Much Ado, '1600' to the Sonnets 1609, '1604' to Othello 1622, '1608' to Pericles 1609 or Troilus and Cressida 1609, '1616' to Lucrece, or '1619' to Henry V (unless this is the Pavier Q3). The textual differences between Quarto and Folio printings will also need to be separately indicated as necessary, and (I should have thought) passages from Edward III and Sir Thomas More duly included.

I trust too that your public rejection of the theories of 'memorial reconstruction' and of the Oxford editors' theories of 'collaboration' (as I infer from your attribution to Shakespeare of his Folio plays, plus Pericles, in all their various versions) will be duly maintained, especially at the present time, when 'memorial reconstruction' is being increasingly rejected by the Shakespeare profession itself. If my own researches can be of any help in any of these vexed questions, please let me know. In any event, whoever is tackling these taxing topics and tasks has all my sympathy.

In the meantime I'll be very ready to send you my own Leir listings, as you were good enough to suggest, as soon as they can be finalised. But I fear that this may take another month or so, in my present circumstances: my wife had a stroke last year, alas, and is now being cared for in a residential home.

8 April 2001

Dear Miss Warburton,

I'm venturing to write to you, in view of our previous correspondence. If need be, perhaps you'd be good enough to pass this letter on. In any event I trust you are well.

I've been looking again at the notion (which seems to me as factually unevicenced as it is prima facie absurd) that one 'George Wilkins' is a part-author of *Pericles* 1609. In that context I've been studying his *Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre* 1608 in the 1857 edition. That 79-page novella's vocabulary includes over 100 words not found in the whole of Shakespeare (Spevack 1973); and many such words typify Wilkins's addiction to verbal nouns (OED vbl. sb.). I plan to describe and exemplify that unfortunate condition in a sequel to my *Real Shakespeare*. But meanwhile I thought that there might be some interest in the enclosed list of Wilkinsian words (with 1857 page references) which all seem to me to be somewhat perplexingly treated in the present OED volumes. Of course any items in need of amendment are no doubt trivia, and in any event the faults if any may well be my own; if so, I'm sorry.

Yours sincerely

Eric Sams