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978-0-521-03818-8 - Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship

Joseph Loewenstein

Frontmatter

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## Ben Jonson and Possessive Authorship

What is the history of authorship, of invention, of intellectual property? In this book, Joseph Loewenstein describes the fragmentary and eruptive emergence of a key phase of the bibliographical ego, a specifically Early Modern form of authorial identification with printed writing. In the work of many playwrights and non-dramatic writers – and especially in the work of Ben Jonson – that identification is tinged, remarkably, with possessiveness. This book examines the emergence of possessive authorship within a complex industrial and cultural field. It traces the prehistory of modern copyright both within the monopolistic practices of London's acting troupes and its Stationers' Company *and* within a Renaissance cultural heritage. Under the pressures of modern competition, a tradition of literary, artistic, and technological imitation began to fissure, unleashing jealous accusations of plagiarism and ingenious new fantasies of intellectual privacy. Perhaps no one was more creatively attuned to this momentous transformation in Early Modern intellectual life than Ben Jonson.

Joseph Loewenstein is Professor of English Literature at Washington University, St Louis, Missouri. He is author of *Responsive Readings: Versions of Echo in Pastoral, Epic, and the Jonsonian Masque* (Yale, 1984); *The Author's Due: Printing and the Prehistory of Copyright* (Chicago, 2002); editor of *The Staple of News* for the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson* (forthcoming); and a general editor of the *Oxford Edition of the Complete Works of Edmund Spenser* (forthcoming).

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*...Meum Theatrum...*

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## Acknowledgments

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At the outset of this particular book, it seems ironic and superfluous to dwell on how much of it is the work of others. (“Mine own and not mine own,” Helena puts it in a very different context.) This book concerns itself with the complex contingencies – the institutions, the intellectual forbears, the friends, the materials and machines – that enabled one writer to specify a body of writing as his own (and so to know himself and so to puzzle over having written). I remain enough under Jonson’s influence to resist the materialist temptation to acknowledge the fan-fold paper, the archaic keyboard, and the unsupported operating system and word-processing programs (though it’s not clear to me that we can expect tenderness from objects if we deny them our gratitude), but it will be a pleasure to specify the other contingencies of “my own” writing.

*Institutions.* Research for this book was supported by grants from the Exxon Education Foundation, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Washington University. I received useful feedback from audiences including the Renaissance Seminar of the University of Chicago, the English Department at the University of Notre Dame, the Group for Early Modern Culture Studies, the conference on Early Modern Habits of Reading at the Huntington Library, the Early Modern Dissertation Group at Washington University, the Editorial Board of the *Cambridge Edition of the Complete Works of Ben Jonson*, and from readers for *ELH*, *Renaissance Drama*, and, of course, Cambridge University Press. The common rooms in the English Department at Washington University, the Newberry Library, the Warburg Institute, and the National Humanities Center provided invaluable havens.

Portions of this book are based on articles first appearing in *ELH* (published by The Johns Hopkins University Press) and *Renaissance Drama* (published by Northwestern University Press), and on essays for Jennifer Brady and W. H. Herendeen’s *Ben Jonson’s 1616 Folio* and Laurie E. Maguire and Thomas L. Berger’s *Textual Formations and Reformations* (both published by the University of Delaware Press).

*Forbears.* I had the good fortune to study with three great teachers of Jonson, John Hollander, Tom Greene, and Ted Tayler: this is not their sort of work,

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but it was written with them very much in mind. For some reason, the New Bibliographers, and particularly A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg, E. K. Chambers, and (less widely recognized) Evelyn Albright and Leo Kirschbaum, have been much condescended to of late: I hope this book indicates how much remains to be learned from them – as from those of their modern students and critics on whom I've relied here: Peter Blayney, David Gants, Don McKenzie, and Paul Werstine, among others.

*Friends.* At the early stages of this work, it was nurtured along in conversations with Albert Ascoli, Leonard Barkan, Michael Baxandall, Margaret Ferguson, Steve Justice, and Mary Beth Rose. Somewhere in mid-project, Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield challenged me to untangle my argument. And all along, my colleagues at Washington University – especially from Wayne Fields, Naomi Lebowitz, John Morris, George Pepe, Dan Shea, and Steven Zwicker – offered needling and cheer to distract me from my research and writing and to herd me back to it; all along, too, conversation with Richard Halpern, Jon Haynes, Rosemary Kegl, and Chris Kendrick was an occasional, bracing necessity. Theresa Everline, Christiane Auston, and Chris D'Addario have checked references, edited, saved me from some inanities, and asked questions that reminded me why this work might be worth pursuing.

Lynne Tatlock has been this book's most complex and determining contingency; it is therefore hers.