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978-0-521-12348-8 - The Problem of the Reign of King Edward III: A Statistical Approach

Eliot Slater

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STUDIES AND SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTSThe Problem of *The Reign of King Edward III*:
A Statistical Approach

The Reign of King Edward III (1596) is a little-known Elizabethan play of uncertain authorship, some or all of which has long been considered possibly to have been Shakespeare's work. In assessing the origins of *King Edward III*, Slater's book is pioneering in its use and extension of vocabulary tests to solve problems of authorship. The author reviews the debate regarding the creation of *Edward III*. Following a survey of applications of quantitative methods to literary problems, he examines the authorship of *Edward III* by means of a statistical study of the play's rare words, and their links with rare words in Shakespeare's canonical plays. This is a technique developed by Slater himself and is of particular interest to literary scholars and stylometrists. The investigation indicates that the play was written by Shakespeare. The book therefore provides important new evidence to suggest that an exciting and much-neglected play should be admitted into the canon of Shakespeare's early history plays.

The rewards of Slater's research range beyond the provenance of only one work. He offers a persuasive set of adjustments to the traditional chronological order of Shakespeare's plays, based on his study of the rare-word links between them. The word lists and appendices assemble invaluable raw materials from which further tests can be carried out on Shakespeare's plays, poems, and apocrypha, to help resolve questions of chronology and authorship.

Dr Eliot Slater enjoyed an internationally eminent career in psychiatry and for many years served as Editor-in-Chief of the *British Journal of Psychiatry*. In retirement he pursued his longstanding interest in Shakespeare, publishing in *Notes and Queries* and *The Bard* before bringing his research into a book-length study.

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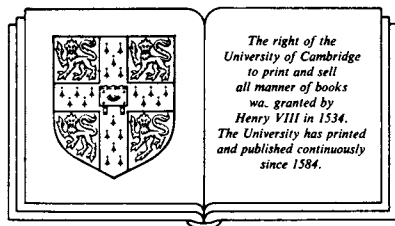
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It was sad that Cambridge University Press should have accepted this work for publication shortly after my father's death in May 1983. Since he was not able to see the book through the press himself, it has been reproduced from his original doctoral dissertation without alteration, save for the excision of one chapter of general literary criticism of *Edward III*, and the addition of an appendix on word links between *Edmund Ironside*, *Edward III*, *Henry VI* Parts 1 to 3, and *Titus Andronicus*. This appendix is drawn from a letter published by *The Times Literary Supplement* on 18 March 1983, and a corrected word list found among my father's papers after his death.

Ann Pasternak Slater

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Preface

DR ELIOT TREVOR OAKESHOTT SLATER

The late Dr Eliot Slater registered as a postgraduate student in the Department of English at King's College, London in the autumn of 1977. He was awarded the London PhD in February 1982 for his statistical work on the vocabulary of the anonymous Elizabethan play *The Reign of King Edward III* (1596). These facts might seem unremarkable, were it not that this graduate student entered professional English studies in his seventy-fourth year and in his retirement from an internationally eminent career in psychiatry.

Dr Slater's interest in Shakespeare was sustained and deeply personal. Before he came to King's he had already published articles and notes in *Notes and Queries* and in *The Bard* on the subject of the chronology of Shakespeare's works, based on analysis of the rarer elements in their vocabulary. With the encouragement of the late James Maxwell, then editor of *Notes and Queries*, Dr Slater decided to devote himself to more sustained study in his retirement. Unlike many other amateurs of Shakespearean scholarship, he resolutely set on one side his deep curiosity about the personality and psychology of Shakespeare and asked to be given a useful job to do. On my suggestion, he turned back to the work of Alfred Hart on the vocabulary of plays attributed to Shakespeare. He soon decided that the authorship of *Edward III* offered a suitable case for his treatment.

With increasing difficulty as his health deteriorated and in face of a number of disappointments and set-backs – most dauntingly, his reluctant acceptance that computer-aided analysis of vocabulary could not alone determine the chronology of Shakespeare's works – Eliot Slater completed his PhD thesis, 'The Problem of *The Reign of King Edward III* (1596): a Statistical Approach'. He took his own line of enquiry as far as it could go. His findings, though in the nature of the case they could not be decisive in favour of Shakespeare's authorship of the play, will remain an important point of reference for future investigators. His study bears the print of a rare personality, whose sharp observation and dry wit impart life to the dry bones of a statistical argument. Not least, it offers a trenchant critique of some earlier methods used in the attempt to solve the question of attribution.

As a final, personal note I wish to record my gratitude to a remarkable student for his patient forbearance with a supervisor many years his junior in years, experience and wisdom. Guiding, and following, his work was an educative experience I should have been sorry to miss.

Richard Proudfoot
King's College, London
26 October 1987

Acknowledgements

My first thanks go to my Supervisor at King's College, Dr. Richard Proudfoot, who has guided my progress throughout (apart from the more purely statistical work). His comments, based on a scholarship to which the writer can lay no claim, though silently accepted as a rule, have been subjoined in footnotes to the text, where that was called for. I have received indispensable help from the Computer Unit at King's College, and especially from Miss Margaret Skinner and Mrs Christine Brown. I have had much help from the London Library and the Senate House Library of the University of London. Lastly my daughter, Dr. Ann Pasternak of St Anne's College, Oxford, has given me unfailing support, in assembling sources, reading and commenting on the text, and correcting lapses or errors in the written word.