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Marcus Walsh

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The first developments in the editing of English literary texts in the eighteenth century were remarkable and important, and they have recently begun to attract considerable interest, particularly in relation to conditions and constructions of scholarship in the period. This study sets out to investigate, rather, the theoretical and especially the interpretative bases of eighteenth-century literary editing. Extended chapters on Shakespearean and Miltonic commentary and editing demonstrate that the work of pioneering editors and commentators, such as Patrick Hume, Lewis Theobald, Zachary Pearce, and Edward Capell, was based on developed, sophisticated, and often clearly articulated theories and methods of textual understanding and explanation. Marcus Walsh relates these interpretative assumptions and methods to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Anglican biblical hermeneutics, and to a number of key debates in modern editorial theory.

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The beginnings of interpretative scholarship

MARCUS WALSH

University of Birmingham



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For Wendy Perkins

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I know not why our editors should, with such implacable anger, persecute their predecessors . . . the dead it is true can make no resistance, they may be attacked with great security; but since they can neither feel nor mend, the safety of mauling them seems greater than the pleasure; nor perhaps would it much misbeseem us to remember, amidst our triumphs over the ‘nonsensical’ and the ‘senseless’, that we likewise are men; that *debemur morti*, and as Swift observed to Brunet, shall soon be among the dead ourselves.

Samuel Johnson, in his note on *Hamlet*, 3.2.121–2

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