

READING, SOCIETY AND
POLITICS IN EARLY
MODERN ENGLAND

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CHAPTER ONE

*Errata: print, politics and poetry in early
modern England*

Seth Lerer

Agnosco, fateor . . .

Guillaume Budé, letter to Erasmus, 1 May 1516 (epistle 403)

I do not think that I have ever published anything that did not have an error in it. Typos have crept in and escaped proofreading. Mis-citations and mistranslations have refused correction. Facts and judgements have, at times, seemed almost wilfully in opposition to empirical evidence or received opinion. It is the duty of our readers, so it seems, to catch such errors. Referees for publishers and book reviewers for journals often begin well and well-meaningly enough. But praise soon shatters into pedantry, and reports and reviews will often end with catalogues of broken lines and phrases: errata uncaught by editor or author, blots on the reputation of the scholar's knowledge or his critical acumen.

I'm not alone. All creatures of the academic life subject themselves to such reviewing, and most practise it themselves. To have been savaged and to savage, whether veiled behind the scrim of the anonymous report or displayed in the full acknowledgement of the printed by-line, is the mark of my business: the rite of passage and the passing of one's rights. It is as if I've led an erroneous life, as if what should be totted up on the pages of the book of judgement – or, more prosaically, in annual decanal salary reviews – are not achievements but mistakes. We live, in the academy, by blunder.

What are the sources of this life, the origins of such a business?¹ I seek both cultural-historical and autotherapeutic answers to this question, and my working claim is that the origins of error – as an ideology, a practice, a defining mode of scholarly identity – lie in that nexus of the editorial, the academic and the political that shaped the textual adventures of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. My initial focus lies in the errata sheet, that marker not just of mistake but of authorial or editorial control, which emerges out of the early print shops and which stands, I argue, as the defining moment of both humanist erudition and early modern subjectivity.

The errata sheet is the place where the past is publicly brought into line with the present, where errors not just of typography but of usage, dialect, even of dogma, may be confessed and corrected. To explore its early history is to explore the loci of authority and action that make academic life both a performance and a defence. The form of the errata sheet – together with the rhetoric of humanist textual criticism, publishers' self-advertisements and the early Renaissance lyric – reveals the making of the text as (to appropriate Jonathan Crewe's phrasing) one of the 'trials of authorship', or, to put it in the words of Beth Pittenger, part of the 'noise' that fills 'a historically specific moment in which performative speech and theatrical handwriting meet a nascent technology and try to effect a translation into print conventions that have a different, although not completely separate, relation to writing'.²

What interests me are not so much the individuated errors of the early printers or even the techniques of collation, comparison and critical decision that went into the production of editions as the rhetoric of error and editorship and the stories told through prefaces, errata sheets and correspondence about the making (or mismaking) of books. The humanist account of error is invariably temporal: it locates the production of the book in a specific historical moment, charts its progress across time, and then invites the reader to locate it (and the reader's own act of reading) on a temporally defined continuum. The story of correction and the artifact of the errata sheet historicize the book, much as the humanist practice of philology historicized the text. For, by acknowledging the historical difference between text and reader, the humanist critic not only recognized linguistic change or corruption of copies, but also the fact that the completed work was not an autonomous object but a counter in the historical story of its making and reception. The early book is always a work in progress and in process, a text intruded upon for emendation, a text that invites the correction of the reader. There is nothing like an errata sheet to prompt the reader to seek out yet more errata – that is, nothing like the admission of *some* errors to provoke us to believe that the work is just *full* of errors. Moreover, the need to narrativize the story of such errors – to offer up a personal history of detection and correction – makes the true subject of the early humanist book not so much its content but the complex relationships among textual and political fealty that write the history of its own production.³

The errata sheet stands not as a static marker of uncaught mistakes but as a place holder in the ongoing narratives of book making and book reading themselves. Like many of the paratexts of early print – the prefaces, notes, correspondence and occasional handwritten comments in the margins of

the book – errata sheets record the temporality of reading. They illustrate the ways in which the early printed book was used by the first ones to see it, and such sheets were often guides to reading itself. Several early books survive with handwritten corrections drawn from those sheets: illustrations of rereading, in which owner's pen corrected printer's faults.⁴ More broadly, however, study of the errata sheet and of the rhetoric of error also helps us understand the ways in which the disciplines of editorial review, legal judgement, political control and religious devotion shared an idiom and imagery. In an age when the practice of confession came under close scrutiny, errata sheets and their accompanying paratexts became the places where the urge to confess could still find a voice, and where the seeking of forgiveness found its listener not among the booths of the church but in the stalls of the bookseller.

The rhetoric of early modern Europe (and, more specifically for my present purposes, of early modern England) is the rhetoric of error, whether it be in the form of the confession of the typo or the heresy.⁵ In positing a history of that rhetoric, I offer here three interlocking areas of inquiry. First, I pursue the origins of the errata sheet itself in early European book making. Central to my inquiry is the awareness that these early sheets recorded errors typographical and substantive, if not doctrinal, and that in what I believe to be the earliest appropriation of this device in the English book – in the printed volumes of Sir Thomas More – the correction of error becomes both a method and a theme of intellectual self-presentation. More, and later Sir Thomas Elyot, use errata to tell stories of political correction, and in an extended reading of the corrections to Elyot's *Dictionary* (1538) I trace out the allegories of self-abnegation told through the emending of the typo. From this matrix of early sixteenth-century political and typographical alignment, I turn to the poetry of Wyatt, illustrating the way the instability of the handwritten text is often framed in terms directly borrowed from print, rather than manuscript, technologies. The 'quaking pen', in Wyatt's Chaucerian idiom, leads to reflections on the insecurities of 'proof,' while Wyatt's prose tracts seeking to defend himself against the accusations of heresy in the wake of Cromwell's death define political fealty in terms of editorial method. Together with Erasmus's reflections on the practices of textual criticism, and the work of More and Elyot that I examine in detail, these works of Wyatt open up a set of intellectual associations between forensic judgement and editorship. Wyatt posits a poetics of error for the early modern period – a poetics that has still-resonating implications for the history of scholarship itself, and in particular for modern confrontations with the texts of Wyatt and his age. But in the end this essay is itself a

confrontation with my own erroneous scholarship. And if it seeks to correct claims I have made elsewhere, it implies (by argument and by example) that the inheritance of humanist scholarship is not the unadulterated search for truth but the all-too-often adulterated collations of the errant self.

I

From the start, errata sheets recorded more than typos. The earliest account we have of one comes from the atelier of Sweynheim and Pannarz.⁶ Library catalogues record, for their edition of Lactantius published on October 29 1465, two concluding pages of the volume titled ‘Lactantii Firmiani errata quibus ipse deceptus est per fratrem Antonium Randesem theologicum collecta et exarata sunt’ (‘The errata of Lactantius Firmianus, which he himself did not catch, have been gathered and written down by brother Antonio Randesi, theologian’).⁷ Other kinds of errors fill the sheets of early Italian printers. Francesco Bonaccorsi published an edition of the *Laude* of Jacopone da Todi in September 1490 that included not just a list of typographical mistakes but also those of dialect and historical idiom – in the words of Brian Richardson, an index that ‘had a threefold function as a glossary, an errata, and a kind of apparatus criticus’.⁸ Early editions of the works of Boccaccio, Sannazaro, Dante and other Italian authors often contained, in addition to ‘errori de la stampa’, those of dialect and usage,⁹ while classical texts used the errata sheet as the occasion to review, re-edit and reprimand earlier editions or defective manuscripts. A Horace *Opera* printed by Antonio Miscomini in Florence in 1482 has on its last two pages the *errori* to be found in the edition. Here, what is important is that this is not some tipped-in extra sheet but an integral part of the foliation of the book. The errors noted are not printers’ mistakes but substantive emendations to the text. Errata sheets become the place where textual criticism is done – not in the body of the poetry itself or in the commentary.¹⁰

Similarly, in the *Miscellanea* of Poliziano (1489), also published by Miscomini, the final pages of ‘Emendationes’ offer up not only corrections to the printed text but also new readings based, apparently, on fresh consultation with the manuscripts of Poliziano’s sources. Comments, for example, on the Greek text of Callimachus betray Poliziano’s concern (voiced in his letters, and in the later remarks to his readers at the close of this volume) with the proper accents in the Greek. His final, general remarks bear noting, too, as statements of the larger relationships of will and intention in the making of the book and the establishing of author–audience association.

If any accents in the Greek words should be missing or wrongly written, let the well educated restore or emend them according to their judgement. But if, reader, you find in addition to these errors anything which escaped our hasty eyes, you will emend those too according to your judgement. Nor will you, whoever you are, consider ours that which is not quite right. Rather, you will ascribe all errors either to the printers or to the editors [*curatoribus*]. For if you believe me to be responsible for any error herein, then I will believe you have nothing in your heart.¹¹

Here, under the heading ‘*Emendationes*’, are emended not just textual but personal relationships. The author offers up avowals of diligence and good faith, and an invitation – or a threat – to readers for continued emendation ‘*pro iudicio*’.

By the beginning of the sixteenth century, errata sheets had become commonplace in European books. They are the stuff of scholarship in Latin volumes – Aldus Manutius’s famous printing of the *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (1499), for example, has a full page of errata – and the markers of interpretation in vernacular ones. Paolo Trovato has detailed the ways in which errata sheets were used in Italian-language books to correct differences in dialect, or even to emend the text. They appear under titles such as ‘*Errata corrige*’, ‘*Errori de la stampa*’, ‘*Errori notabili fatti nel stampare*’, and the like. They stood, as Trovato illustrates, as invitations for the reader to correct the text. ‘*Errori de la stampa*’ guided the corrections ‘*con la penna*’. Any other corrections could be made, in the language of one mid-sixteenth-century Italian book, ‘*a la discretion de lettore*’, the equivalent of Poliziano’s invitation, three-quarters of a century earlier, for readers to emend ‘*pro iudicio*’.¹²

In England, the errata sheet becomes the stage for claiming authorial fidelity not only to text and type but to ruler and doctrine. There is evidence that, by the early 1520s, English printers were alert to the possibilities of typographical error. Of course, such sensitivities had been voiced half a century earlier by William Caxton, who had claimed that he himself had ‘*dilygently ouerseene*’ (i.e. proofread) the text of the revised, new edition of the *Canterbury Tales* of 1484 and who had similarly invoked John Skelton as overseer of the *Eneydos* of 1490.¹³ Yet from Caxton’s shop, and from that of his successor Wynkyn de Worde, there does not appear to be anything approaching the errata sheets or lists of emendations or corrections that were coming to be commonplace in continental printers. Only with the next generation is something like this European attention to error voiced. John Constable’s *Epigrammata*, printed by Berthelett in 1520, has a letter from the printer mentioning the possibility of errors being introduced.¹⁴

By 1523, proofreading had become so central a part of the English print shop, that the printer Richard Pynson felt the need to define its task in an indenture between himself and John Palsgrave.¹⁵

Perhaps the earliest sustained engagement with errata in the English book, however, lies with Thomas More and the printing of a range of doctrinal texts he published in the 1520s and 1530s.¹⁶ The *Responsio ad Lutherum* (STC¹⁷ 18089), printed by Pynson in 1523, has an errata sheet appended to the second issue of the work.¹⁸ The *Supplication of Souls* of 1529 (STC 18092, 18093), printed by Rastell, had in both of its editions errata sheets added to it.¹⁹ And the 1533 *Apology* (STC 18078), also printed by Rastell, offers an errata sheet, followed by another four pages of errata for the second part of the *Confutation*, printed with it.²⁰ These texts have been explored in detail, most recently by the editors of the Yale edition of More's works, and there is some consensus that the role of More himself in their proofreading is debatable. The errata often list simple typographical errors. On occasion, there are substantive corrections made for sense or grammar. But what is significant, especially in the case of the *Supplication*, is the fact that the second editions of these works leave uncorrected 'dozens of . . . misprints' from the first editions. Are we dealing with the author reading proof or, in the case of the second text of the 1529 printing of the *Supplication*, what the Yale editors call 'a careless compositor [who] hastily proofread to produce the brief and inadequate list of errata'?'²¹

In the case of the *Dialogue Concerning Heresies*, however, it is clear that More himself was very much involved in reading proof and offering corrections to his work. In the editions of 1529 (STC 18084) and 1531 (STC 18085) there are substantive changes made in the errata sheets, titled in both editions 'The fawtys escaped in the pryntyng'. Space does not permit an extensive engagement with the myriad alterations More made to his texts (indeed, the discussion of the textual condition of this work takes up nearly forty pages in the Yale edition).²² But what should be pointed out, especially, is that More used the 'fawtys' pages to correct what he perceived to be doctrinal error in his text. For example, the phrase 'nothing faut worthy / only to enface that' is corrected in the errata sheet to 'nothing blame worthy / only to deface & enface that'. The phrase 'pleasure and ellys' becomes 'plesure / where wha[n] and wherfore god shal worke his myracles / and ellys'.²³ The Yale editors also point out that More made substantive corrections between the 1529 and the 1531 edition; and, furthermore, when corrections to both editions needed to be made More had cancel slips inserted in the texts.²⁴ What is also significant is that the 1531 edition occasionally perpetuates some of the errors, typographical and doctrinal, of the 1529 edition – errors which were noted in the errata sheet to the 1529

edition. As the Yale editors put it, 'The fact that the text of the 1531 perpetuates mistakes in passages like these which deal with important matters of doctrine raises the possibility that More did not proofread the entire second edition as carefully as he did the first, in which the errors were emended on the errata sheet.'²⁵

These corrections do more than nuance an argument. They draw attention to the authority of More's authorship itself, the need for the writer to 'oversee' the publication of his work. But the main motive for this scrupulous proofreading was the theological purpose of the *Dialogue*. Calibrated as a refutation of Protestant doctrine in the late 1520s, the *Dialogue* takes as its very theme the problem of error. In its central character, the Messenger, 'More creates a composite picture of the layman who is tempted to break from the ancient oral traditions of the church and accept the Protestant idea that all doctrine and practices of the church must be based on the written word of the Bible'.²⁶ Protestant texts, he argues, are 'maliciously' printed books, and his own text – submitted, as he states, to 'the iudgement of other vertuose & connyng men' before publication – seeks to avoid the problem of the wanton or corrupt book of Protestant belief. One of the central images of the *Dialogue* is the issue of 'ocular proof'. Bad words blind the eyes, and the poor benighted Messenger of the book takes what he has heard rather than what he has read. In an argument against 'sola scriptura' in Protestant doctrine (that is, the notion that the reading of Scripture alone is enough to establish doctrine), More makes a claim for the importance of getting words right. But the larger point is that More's Messenger is not so much a reader as a listener. Much of what he knows comes from what he has heard, and More defines this rough and unverifiable knowledge as 'hearsay'. What you hear is not always what is right. 'For here may a man se that mysse vnderstandynge maketh mysse reportynge.'²⁷ Thus, More advocates 'ocular proof', a conception of understanding keyed to vision and, as such, correct reading. 'Hearsay', then, embraces all the misinformation conveyed through the ear: rumour, false preaching, merry tales, popular belief and jokes. It is, in short, the mark of 'heresy'. In the words of John Fisher, whose sermon of 1526 against Martin Luther has been seen as doctrinal kin to More's *Dialogue*, 'Heresy . . . is . . . the blyndyng of our sight.'²⁸

The point of all this doctrinaire fine-tuning, it seems to me, is that More represents himself in the actual publication of his book as his own overseer and his own corrector. Self-correction in the print shop mimes self-correction in the court or church. It represents the public acknowledgement of error. Rhetorically, such an acknowledgement can only reinforce the power of a work such as More's *Dialogue*, itself concerned with problems of misrepresentation. Corrections of the press become a way of rectifying

the relationship of word and deed, of sign and substance. It has long been noted that More often puns on the two terms of his argument, 'heresy' and 'hearsay', and what I would suggest is that this wordplay works out, in a thematic way, the very notion of the printer's error that it is the purpose of the 'overseeing' to correct.²⁹ For if the logic of the *Dialogue* is ocular proof and careful reading, what better way to self-enact that logic than to offer up the author as his own best proofreader. And if the fear is that hearsay will lead to heresy, then what greater fear is there than that these two words might all too easily be shifted in the errors of the print shop. Correction is both moral and typographical.

Such multiple attentions to errata also govern the *Confutation of Tyndale*, published in 1532. In the preface to the first part of the volume, More returns to the imagery of sight and blindness in the discussion of heresy. He hopes, throughout the course of his refutation, 'to make euery chyld perceyue hys [i.e. Tyndale's] wyly folyse and false craftes . . . wherwyth he fayne wolde & weneth to blynde in such wyse the world'.³⁰ And then he states, reflecting on the great labour such correction requires:

I thinke that no man dowteth but that this worke both hath ben and wyll be some payne and labour to me / and of trouthe so I fynde it. But as helpe me god I fynde all my labour in the wrytynge not halfe so greuouse and pyanefull to me, as the tedyouse redyng of theyr blasphemouse heresyces / that wolde god after all my labour done, so that the remembraunce of theyr pestylent errorrs were araced out of englysshe mennes hertes, and theyr abomynable bookes burned vppre.

More then remarks that 'deuelysshe heresyces' are so strong in his time, that the heretical books are being read privately by people who believe them. But, he goes on,

it were nede as me semeth that dyuerse wyse & well lerned me sholde set thyr pennys to the boke / whych though they shall not satsyfye them that wyll nedes be nought, yet shall they do good to such as fall to these folke of ouersyghte, wenyng y^t theyr new wayes were well.

I take this passage to imply that More imagines better readers coming to these heretical books and setting their pens to them, that is correcting them personally, and that even though such corrections shall not satisfy those readers who believe the heresies, that act may be a good one for those 'folke' (i.e. the good readers) who exercise their 'ouersyghte' in correcting or emending the books.³¹

This is the language of press correction applied to doctrinal debate. It takes words such as 'arace' and 'ouerseer' and applies them to the discussion of the dissemination of heretical volumes. It also refers to a common

practice among early sixteenth-century readers themselves: the act of personally setting the pen to the book to correct its errors. In the two copies of the *Confutation* I have seen in the Cambridge University Library, individual readers have corrected the text in pen according to the printed errata sheet at the end of the first part of the volume.³² But only one of these two volumes actually has the errata sheet still in it (H.3.42). In the other volume (Selden 3.135) only a stub of paper remains where the errata sheet has obviously been cut out. Clearly what has happened is that in one copy the reader has flipped back and forth in order to make the corrections, while in the other the reader has cut out the errata sheet, made the corrections from it (probably keeping it at hand) and then discarded it (the errata having been corrected and the sheet being no longer necessary). Such personal corrections are perfectly in keeping with recorded practice. Indeed, Pynson's own instructions in the second issue of the *Responsio ad Lutherum* of 1523 (in an explanatory note at the end of the volume) ask the reader to 'correct the errata which happened during the printing'.³³ And, as Percy Simpson has noted in great detail, throughout the sixteenth and well into the seventeenth century printers asked their readers to 'correcte those faultes' which have been itemized in the errata sheets.³⁴

Self-correction, then, becomes the impulse for the author and the reader. Even in this preliminary survey of More's publications we can see how the announcement and correction of errata links the act of typographical overseeing with the larger imagery of sight and proof developed in doctrinal contexts. More takes the idioms of the print shop and applies them to the ideologies of argument. But, more pointedly, More may well be the first English author to develop the errata sheet in England. Keyed to his theological and political concerns, developed, perhaps, out of his knowledge of continental humanist publishers' practices, and co-ordinated in the work of two printers, Pynson and Rastell, deeply and self-consciously concerned with their own place in various relationships of author, reader, court and commerce (far more than Caxton or de Worde), the errata sheet emerges from the English book of the 1520s as the venue for the staging of the politics of reading and the reading of politics.

II

Such acts of self-correction are also acts of public fealty, and perhaps the most elaborate, and most telling, of such public acts of overseeing are the 'Corrections' that appear at the beginning of Thomas Elyot's *Dictionary* of 1538.³⁵ In the preface to the volume, Elyot notes that when the work

was already at the printers he became worried that he had neglected some aspects of its definitions. Henry VIII heard of Elyot's anxieties, and placed before him the resources of the royal library. Elyot stopped the presses and revised the entries after M – those before M having already been printed. He then had to revise the first half of the alphabet, and he did so by noting the corrections in the first part of the volume, but also by publishing a list of 'Additions' at the volume's end. Here is his version of the story:

But whyles it was in printyng, and uneth the half deale performed, your hyghnes being informed therof, by the reportes of gentyll maister Antony Denny, for his wysedome and diligence worthily callyd by your highnesse into your priuie Chamber, and of Wyllyam Tildisley, keper of your gracis Lybrarie, and after mooste specially by the recommendation of the most honourable lorde Crumwell, lorde priuie seale, faouurer of honestie, and next to your highnesse chiefe patron of vertue and cunningg, conceyued of my labours a good expectation, and declaryng your moste noble and beneuolent nature, in *fauouryng* them that wyll be well occupied, your hyghnesse in the presence of dyuers your noble men, *commendynge* myne enterprise, *affirmed*, that if I wolde earnestely trauayle therin, your highnes, as well with your excellent *counsaile*, as with suche bokes as your grace had, and I lacked, wold therin ayde me: with the which wordes, I confesse, I receiued a newe spirite, as me semed; wherby I founde forthwith an augmentation of myn understandynge, in so moche, as I iuged all that, whiche I had writen, not worthy to come in your gracis presence, with out an addition. wherfore incontinent I caused the printer to cesse, and beginninge at the letter M, where I lefte, I passed forth to the last letter with a more diligent study. And that done, I eftesones returned to the fyrst letter, and with a semblable diligence performed the remenant. (sig. A2v–A3r, emphasis added)

The story of the *Dictionary* is a story of intrusions and informancy: a story of royal power worked through minion service and Cromwellian intrigue. For Henry, the manipulations of the printed word extended through the 1530s in an arc of parliamentary acts and statutes. Writing, reading and iconic presentation were the marks of fealty or treason. 'Wrytyng ymprintinge [and] cypheringe' could all be seditious acts. The forging of the 'kinges signe manuell signet and preuye seale' were treasonable, for which the punishment was death. And the control of the king's signs, and the inspections of his subjects' texts, found itself relocated in the Privy Chamber.³⁶

Stephen Merriam Foley has argued that the publication of Elyot's *Dictionary*, and a passage such as this one in particular, reifies these relationships between the royal body and the public word. 'The king's body "literally" stands between the two incomplete alphabets of the work . . . [T]he king's intervention in the alphabetical order of the Dictionary demonstrates how the mechanical letters of the printing press and the human letters of the new learning could be reinscribed as the vehicles of a broadly nationalist and

absolutist ideology.³⁷ But a close reading of this passage shows us that it is not so much the king's body as that of his surrogates which interrupt the progress of the *Dictionary* and provoke the correction of Elyot and his book.

First among such surrogates is Anthony Denny. Throughout the 1530s, Denny had risen in the king's bodily service. From the position of Gentleman of the Chamber, he worked his way up through diligence, intrigue and patronage to that of Chief Gentleman of the Privy Chamber (installed by Cromwell in this position in the shake up after the Boleyn affairs), and he ended his royal service by being appointed, in October 1546, as Henry's last Groom of the Stool.³⁸ The roles that Denny played would have embraced the range of diplomatic and political intrigue, bodily service and even bawdry that had been filled by such predecessors as William Compton and Henry Norris. From wiping the royal bottom to securing mistresses for the king, the Gentlemen of the Chamber and the Stool were closest to the personality of power: in the words of David Starkey, 'the mere word of a Gentleman of the Privy Chamber was sufficient evidence in itself for the king's will, without any other form of authentication whatever'. Indeed, Starkey goes on, the Gentleman bore not just word and will but something of 'the indefinable charisma of monarchy' itself.³⁹ Denny himself clearly bore something of this charismatic flair, so much so that John Leland wrote that 'the whole court bore testimony to his "gratia flagrans"' – what we might translate as his blazing repute with the king.⁴⁰

What role, then, does Denny play in Elyot's story, and how does his placement introduce the string of intercessors and interrogators for the king? The *Dictionary* is the subject of inquiry, the object of intelligence gathering that filled the Henrician court in the late 1530s and that has been amply chronicled by G. R. Elton in his tellingly titled *Policy and Police*. The word is out, as it were, and Denny comes first as the chief spy of court and Privy Chamber. From Denny and the Chamber, we move to Tildesley and the library, and finally to Cromwell – here identified specifically as 'lorde priuie seale'. It is as if Elyot himself is walking through the anterooms and private apartments of power, as if he has been granted a succession of audiences, each one of which leads him closer and closer to the body of the king. Cromwell appears here as the 'fauourer of honestie, and next to your highnesse chiefe patron of vertue and cunning'. Virtue and cunning are, indeed, the two poles of Henrician courtly life here, and the language Elyot uses is the language not so much of the scholar or the printer as of the subject: 'fauouryng', 'commendynge', 'affirmed', 'counsaile'. Elyot is himself on trial of a sort here, called before the king and his creatures to render account. The king's words of permission and encouragement do

more than stimulate the mind; they provoke a confession: ‘with the which wordes, I confesse, I receiued a newe spirite, as me semed; wherby I founde forthwith an augmentation of myn understandynge.’ This is the language of conversion, the accounting of a tale of turning from error to rectitude, from wandering to fealty found anew.

So just what was it that Sir Thomas Elyot felt the need to correct? Here is his account:

And for as moche as by haste made in printyng, some letters may happen to lacke, some to be sette in wronge places, or the ortography nat to be truely obserued, I therefore haue put all those fautes in a table folowing this preface: whereby they may be easily corrected: and that done, I truste in god no manne shall fynde cause to reiect this boke. (sig. A3v)

Certainly there are typos: haplographies, dittographies and transposed letters. But occasionally there are mistakes of a different sort. Take, for example, ‘Qui’, where Elyot has felt the need to correct the translation of a Latin phrase offered in definition:

reade after the latine wherefore was Epicurous more happy that he lyued in his owne countray, than Metrodorus whiche lyued at Athenes.

To read such a correction is to feel the need to go back to the source, to re-examine the supposedly erroneous text itself. Now, look at the actual entry for ‘Qui’, defined as ‘the whyche. Alsoo sometyme it sygnifyeth howe.’ What follows is a string of classical quotations illustrating not just grammatical but social and political correctness. The extracts tell a story of identity and power, of discovery and shame (I quote his English translations of the Latin excerpts):

Doo what ye canne, howe or by whatte meanes thou mayste haue hyr.
Howe arte thou callyd?

...

From whens is this suspycion happened vnto the?
I pray god that a vengeaunce lyghte on hym.

And then we get to a remarkable self-reference:

For he spendethe his labour in wrytyng of Prologues, not bycause he wyll telle the argumente, but for as moche as he wolde make answeere to the yuell reportes of the olde envyouse Poete.

And finally, the quotation that Elyot corrects (and the last one in the entry):

Wherefore was Eypcure moore happye, that he *dyyde dye* in his countrye, than Metrodours *that he dyed* at Athenes [emphasis added].

In this correction lies, perhaps, an allegory of an Elyotic scholarly devotion, a miniature story that recaps the longer story of the preface. Happy is the man who lives in his own country, who needs not Athens – more tempting for the scholar – but who serves a king whose generosity extends to opening an Athens of the mind before him in the library. Elyot changes ‘die’ to ‘live’, grants himself a reprieve after the intercessions of a king and his counselors. To read the entry ‘Qui’, now, is to see a story of the making of the man and the book: a story about which, and how, from whence, would to God, because, wherefore. It is the single word that sums up the stories of the preface, an entry that, corrected in the ‘Corrections’, invites the reader to understand the making of a lexicographical subject in a world of royal words and will.

Embedded in errata is the story of correction itself: correction not merely typographical or even theological but human and political. The *Finis* of the *Dictionary* closes with another appeal to correction, now hearkening back to the old manuscript appeals for readerly correction. But now the corrections of these readers, their ‘honest labours’, are described as ‘being benefyciall vnto this theyr countrey’. This is the dictionary of English, the king’s dictionary, the first text that, as Foley argues, ‘helped to establish the schoolroom as a new cultural field for instituting royal absolutism’.⁴¹ The story that this volume tells is, in the end, the story of a man publicly happy ‘in his owne countray’, and it is fitting, then, that at its close it should direct such nationalized ease to readers who, in finding fault, are offering not treason to a work published by Elyot, the servant, or Berthelett, *regius impressor*, but beneficence. The correction, as Elyot announced there, is ‘an exquisite tryall’, whether performed by author or by reader, one that affirms a shared participation in the trials of public service.

This image of the corrector on trial leads to a reconception of errata sheets, and indeed of all pages of editorial avowal, as legal transcripts: as account books in the judgements of political and scholarly loyalty. (I recall in passing that the structure of More’s *Dialogue* itself became a trial, with the author ‘defending the office of the priesthood and the divine right of the ecclesiastical courts to try heresy’.)⁴² The text becomes a piece of evidence entered into the court of judgement. Erasmus recognized this judicial framework to the editorial condition in the letter to Thomas Ruthall of 7 March 1515, published as the preface to his edition of Seneca’s *Lucubrationes* (Froben, August 1515). The product of his English sojourn, and addressed to one of the most powerful men in early Henrician England, the edition of Seneca begins with this epistolary meditation on the similarities between textual criticism and war. The letter begins, in fact, with

an account of the Battle of Flodden Field (9 September 1513), and moves through, by analogy, the ‘infinite army of corruptions’ that Erasmus finds he must retake from the ‘enemy’ in making his edition. ‘I had my pen for a sword,’ he states, and goes on:

Nor had I any outside help in all these difficulties, except two ancient manuscripts, one of which was provided from his own library by the chief patron of my researches, that incomparable glory of our generation, William, archbishop of Canterbury [William Warham], and the other was sent to my assistance by King’s College, Cambridge; but these were imperfect and even more full of error [‘mendosum’] than the current copies, so that less confidence could be placed in one’s auxiliary troops than in the enemy. One thing however helped me: they did not agree in error [‘non consentiebant errata’], as is bound to happen in printed texts set up from the same printer’s copy [‘exemplari’]; and thus, just as it sometimes happens that an experienced and attentive judge pieces together what really took place from the statements of many witnesses, none of whom is telling the truth, so I conjectured the true reading on the basis of their differing mistakes [‘rem colligat, ita nos e diuersis mendis veram coniecimus lectionem’].⁴³

Space does not permit a thorough unpacking of this remarkable letter. But it may suffice to say here that Erasmus’s invocation of the trial judge, together with the military framing of his story, make editing an act shot through with the political and the forensic. At stake in his extended simile is a conception not just of the editorial but of the judicial: a recognition that no witness truly tells the truth, an appeal not to the authorities of history or text but to the judgement of conjecture.

III

If Erasmus deploys the language of the court to make a point about what we might now call, with David Greetham, ‘textual forensics’, then it is left to Thomas Wyatt to invoke the language of the editor in a plea for his own defence against accusations of treason.⁴⁴ Soon after Cromwell’s fall in 1540, Wyatt’s name appeared in papers once suppressed but now examined by the king’s authorities.⁴⁵ In documents from 1538 they found complaints made by Dr Edmund Bonner and Dr Simon Heynes about Wyatt’s potentially treasonous associations and remarks. With Cromwell dead, Wyatt could count on no one, at least at first, to counter the charges made by Bonner, in particular, that he had slandered Henry VIII. Though it was generally believed that Wyatt’s arrest (on 17 January 1541) was a result of his loss of Cromwell as protector and his sympathy for Lutheran opinions, one of the central accusations was that he had said ‘that he feared the King should

be cast out of a cart's arse and that, by God's blood, if he were so, he were well served, and would he were so'. Wyatt wrote two prose texts in 1541 explaining his remarks and justifying his activities during his ambassadorial service in the late 1530s: 'A Declaration . . . of his Innocence' and 'Wyatt's Defence To the Iudges after the Indictement and the evidence'.⁴⁶ In these documents he goes to great lengths to affirm his habitual use of proverbs and to argue that Bonner, knowing of this habit, added one that Wyatt did not utter, in order to lend credence to a slanderous story about Wyatt himself. At the heart of his self-defence is concern with proper speaking, writing and receiving – a concern with language at the syllabic level. The altering of a single syllable, Wyatt argues, 'ether with penne or worde', can change the entire meaning of an utterance, an argument he marshals to claim that his statement was heard and transcribed inaccurately. Wyatt's 'Declaration' and 'Defence' are about many things – the nature of proverbial language, the problems of identity and impersonation – but, taken together, they also constitute a manifesto of editorial principles. Their comments on the modes of writing and reading bear directly on the circulation of Wyatt's own verse. Poem, book and letter are all forms of discourse equally subject to the slippage of the pen, the intrusions of the interceptor, or the mistakes of the proof.

Wyatt begins his 'Declaration' with a claim of innocence. His central task is to recall, years later, 'suche thynges as have passed me . . . by worde, wrytinge, communinge, or receauing'.⁴⁷ This 'Declaration' is not so much an appeal to innocence as a remembrance of letters – an accounting of all the documents passed through his office while at the emperor's court. Letters upon letters stack themselves in Wyatt's prose.⁴⁸ '[L]ettres or wrynges,' he tries to recall, 'came to my handys or thorow my handes vnopened' (p. 180). He never, he protests, knowingly communicated with a traitor. Those documents he could not verify were, as he put it, 'ether so secretly handlede or yett not in couerture' that he could not see them (p. 181). Some letters, he avers, never reached him, in particular the letters of Mason addressed to Wyatt and the earl of Essex (p. 183). And he goes on to define the province of 'an Imbassadoure' as secrecy itself, and to note that 'a prince were as good sende nakede lettres and to receaue naked lettres as to be at charge for Recidencers' (p. 184).

The 'Declaration' concludes, following Wyatt's signature, 'This withowte correctinge, sendinge, or ouerseinge' (p. 184), and in the 'Defence' that follows it Wyatt develops the activities of correcting, sending and overseeing into an essay on the nature of reading and writing itself. Reflection on the practice of diplomacy leads to a meditation on intention and expression:

Intelligens concludethe a familiarite or conferringe of devyses to gyther, which may be by worde, message or wrytinge, which the lawe forbidythe to be had with anye the kinges traytours or rebels, payne of the lyke. Reherse the lawe, declare, my lordes, I beseke you, the meaninge thereof. Am I a traytor by cawse I spake with the kinges traytor? No, not for that, for I may byd him 'avaunte, traytor' or 'defye hym, traytor.' No man will tayke this for treason; but where he is holpen, counceled, advertysed by my worde, there lyethe the treason, there lyethe the treason. In wrytinge yt is lyke. In message yt is lyke; for I may sende hym bothe lettre and message of chalinge or defyaunce. (p. 190)

Just because a man speaks with a traitor it does not mean he is a traitor. Identity lies in intention, in the adherence to codes of conduct or the rules of law. In writing, as in speech, the individual's identity should not be confused with that of the addressee. Such statements resonate profoundly with Wyatt's own poetic practice. The gist of his epistolary satires, to Poyntz and Bryan, lies precisely in these tensions between writer and addressee. It establishes a form of 'intelligens' between the two. Its understanding demands a rehearsal of the laws of literary discourse, an inquiry into 'meaning' made through verse. But the verse epistle also sets up the conventions of reported speech *as* conventions. It makes quotation the defining mode of writer and addressee – indeed, it makes each poem operate entirely, as it were, within quotation marks. The fiction of the letter, now, is the fiction of the voice. The colloquy between friends is an act of 'intelligens' based on 'familiarite'. The problem, therefore, lies along the line between the poetic and the historical. When is a quotation not a quotation? In the satire addressed to Bryan, for example, the poem's speaker goes to great lengths to distance himself from the pandering courtier, while at the same time brilliantly ventriloquizing his position in the other's voice. 'Am I a traytor by cawse I spake with the kinges traytor? . . . In wrytinge yt is lyke.' Am I a panderer because I spoke with, wrote to, *wrote as*, the king's panderer?

How can one defend oneself against words quoted, reported and transcribed? This is the heart of Bonner's accusation and Wyatt's defence. 'And what say my accusares in thes wordes? Do theie swere I spake them trayterously or maliciously? . . . Rede ther depositions, theie say not so. *Confer* ther depositions, yf theie agre worde for worde' (p. 197, emphasis added). The accusations against Wyatt become texts; the texts become subject to conferral – that is, comparison. Such documents are treated here as if they were the objects of an editor: compared, collated and reviewed for accuracy. Wyatt goes on:

Yf theie myseagre in wordis and not in substance, let vs here the woordes theie varie in. For in some lyttell thyng may apere the truthe which I dare saye you seke

for your consciens sake. And besydys that, *yt is a smale thyng in alteringe of one syllable ether with penne or worde that may mayk in the conceavinge of the truthe myche matter or error*. For in thys thyng ‘I fere’, or ‘I truste’, semethe but one smale syllable chaynged, and yet it makethe a great dyfferaunce, and may be of an herer wronge conceaved and worse reported, and yet worste of all altered by an examyner. Agayne ‘fall owte’ ‘caste owte’, or ‘lefte owte’ makethe dyfferaunce, yea and the settinge of the wordes one in an others place may mayke greate dyfferaunce, tho the wordes were all one – as ‘a myll horse’ and ‘a horse myll’. I besyche you therfore examen the matter vnder this sorte. *Confere* theire severall sayinges togyther, *confer* th’examynations vpon the same matter and I dare warrante ye shall fynde mysreportyng and mysvnderstandinge. (p. 197, emphasis added)

In the specific context of the defence, Wyatt argues that his words have been mistaken. His deployment of the proverb ‘I am lefte owte of the cartes ars’ (p. 198) has been taken out of context, misheard, misreported and mistranscribed into the environment of royal offence. Instead of saying what he has been accused of saying (‘ye shall see the kinge our maister cast out at the carts tail’), what Wyatt claims he said was closer to ‘I fere for all these menes fayer promyses the kinge shalbe lefte owte of the cartes ars.’ He recalls that he may have very well said something like that, and may well have invoked this proverbial sentiment on occasion. ‘But that I vsed it with Bonar or Haynes I neuer remembre; and yf I euer dyd I am sure neuer as thei couche the tale’ (p. 198).

But in the larger world of Wyatt’s discourse his appeal to memory and intention takes on the flavour of a theory of textual criticism. Comparison of manuscripts – signalled by the Latin verb ‘conferre’ and its past participial form ‘collatus’ – was the hallmark of the early humanist philological method.⁴⁹ Erasmus frequently deploys the term in his accounts of editing and self-correction; but for my present purposes we can turn to a more local and contemporary analogue, Brian Tuke’s preface to Thynne’s 1532 edition of Chaucer:

as bokes of dyuers imprintes came unto my handes / I easely and without grete study / might and haue deprehended in them many errors / falsyties / and deprauacions / whiche euydently appered by the contrarietees and alteracions founde by *collacion* of the one with the other / wherby I was moued and styred to make dilygent sertch / where I might fynde or recouer any trewe copies or exemplaries of the sayd bookes. (sig. A2v, emphasis added)⁵⁰

The collation of manuscripts helps what Tuke calls ‘the restauracion’ of Chaucer’s works in their authorized form, and this process, he avers, is not just a literary but a political ‘dewtie’ growing out of his ‘very honesty and loue to my country’ (sig. A3r). Tuke’s preface is a statement of national

fealty, an appeal to King Henry VIII as patron to exercise his ‘discrecyon and iugement’ and accept the volume as it has been printed.⁵¹ If Wyatt’s ‘Defence’ reads as a statement of editorial principles, then Tuke’s preface may stand as something of a defence of its own: a plea before a judging king for the authentic value of an author’s works and, in turn, for a recognition of the editor’s own searching out of falsity and error through the collation of texts.

As in the making of an edition, the slightest slip can change the meaning of a line: ‘the settinge of the wordes one in an others place may mayke greate dyfferaunce’. ‘I fere’ or ‘I truste’, Wyatt offers, differ only in ‘one smale syllable’. But what a syllable it is. Certainly, such a case is not a random call. Fear and trust are the two poles of Wyatt’s poetic emotion. I have elsewhere adduced a whole range of Wyatt’s uses of these terms, in the ballads, sonnets and songs, where these two words scope out the literary and emotional anxieties of someone who, as he puts it in the poem printed as the first of the Wyatt poems by Tottel, seeks the ‘trust’ of his beloved, yet also queries,

What may I do when my maister feareth,
But, in the felde, with him to lyve and dye?
(4)⁵²

Fear and trust play into the Petrarchan oxymora of love; in one poem, he distils the Italian lexicon of pain – sighing, hope and desire – into a unique concatenation of his own:

An endles wynd doeth tere the sayll a pace
Of forced sightes and *trusty ferefulnes*.
(27.7–8, emphasis added)

And in one of the ballads preserved in the Blage manuscript Wyatt expounds not just on the nature of his trust but on the very problems of transcription and substitution that are the subject of his ‘Defence’. Concluding the ballad, whose refrain line has been ‘Patiens, parforce, content thy self with wrong’, he offers:

I Burne and boyle withoute redres;
I syegh, I wepe, and all in vayne.
Now Hotte, now Cold, whoo can expresse
The thowsaund parte of my great payne?
But yf I myght her faver Atteigne,
Then wold I trust to chaunge this song,
With pety for paciens, and consciens for wrong.
(121.15–21)

Wyatt performs an act of critical self-revision. He suggests changing words for words, locates the change in 'trust', and posits a revisionary poetics that makes the language of the song always subject to rewriting, depending on the circumstances of performance.

'My word nor I shall not be variable' (II.13). In spite of this protest, Wyatt's words were variable. The very nature of the writing and transmitting of his poetry lies in the variations of the scribe, in the self-cancellations and revisions of the poet, and in the manipulations of the printer. It is, of course, a commonplace of Wyatt criticism to remark on the unstable quality of his verse line, on the idiosyncrasies of his spelling and on the variations generated by competing manuscript and print editions. The practice of textual criticism runs up against the intractable wall of Wyatt's own texts. As Jonathan Crewe recognizes, modern editions of Wyatt's poetry (as of much early sixteenth-century verse) are in themselves modernizations: recastings of his words and lines. 'In quite a fundamental sense,' Crewe notes, 'to print Wyatt modernized is to censor his work.'⁵³

Let us examine an example of such censoring. The Penguin paperback edition of the poems of Sir Thomas Wyatt, edited by R. A. Rebholz, has, since its first publication over twenty years ago, become a standard text.⁵⁴ It is the form in which most students, and most teachers, will encounter Wyatt, and its prefatory explanations of the vexed problem of Wyatt's metres, the status of his work in manuscript, and the complex evidence – and scholarly debates – about the range of Wyatt's canon distil vast amounts of intricate material for modern readers. This is, admittedly, a modern-spelling edition. Rebholz has brought orthography and punctuation into line with current practices, he argues, because 'I became convinced that the sacrifices were eminently worthwhile because they make the poems genuinely available to modern readers when texts preserving old accidentals are frequently unintelligible' (pp. 14–15). He acknowledges that, on occasion, modernization may ruin a rhyme or metrical pattern and that added punctuation may fix syntax that, in Wyatt's time, would have been fluid enough to 'create ambivalent meanings' (p. 14).

I have discussed in detail elsewhere some of the textual problems raised by this edition, especially in the long poem to John Poyntz, where Rebholz's choice of base text and his selective recording of variants suppresses the controlling verbal relationship of this poem to its deep Chaucerian subtext (especially Chaucer's ballad 'Truth', itself a widely read text of the early Tudor period).⁵⁵ Here, I develop and correct an earlier engagement with this edition concerning one ballad that thematizes the problem of error and, in particular, locates that theme in the emergent print practices I

have discussed above. 'I see the change' (Rebholz 215) is a refrain ballad appearing only in the Devonshire Manuscript of Tudor verse. Here is the poem in the conservative, old-spelling edition of Kenneth Muir and Patricia Thompson:

I se the change ffrom that that was
 And how thy ffayth hath tayne his fflyt
 But I with pacyense let yt pase
 And with my pene thys do I wryt
 To show the playn by prowff off syght,
 I se the change.

I se the change off weryd mynd
 And sleper hold hath quet my hyer;
 Lo! how by prowff in the I ffynd
 A bowrnyng ffayth in changyng ffyer.
 Ffarwell my part, prowff ys no lyer!
 I se the change.

I se the change off chance in loue;
 Delyt no lenger may abyde;
 What shold I sek ffurther to proue?
 No, no, my trust, ffor I haue tryd
 The ffolyng of a ffallse gyd:
 I se the change.

I se the change, as in thys case,
 Has mayd me ffre ffrom myn avoo,
 Ffor now another has my plase,
 And or I wist, I wot ner how,
 Yt hapnet thys as ye here now:
 I se the change.

I se the change, seche ys my chance
 To sarue in dowe and hope in vayn;
 But sens my surty so doth glanse,
 Repentens now shal quyit thy payn,
 Neuer to trust the lyke agayn:
 I se the change. (195)

Aside from certain orthographical conventions – the double 'f's, the early sixteenth-century spellings, the consistent use of 'se' for 'see' – the most important piece of verbal trickery in this text is the spelling of both the definite article and the second person pronoun as 'the'. Wyatt's poems are continually preoccupied with his own linguistic instability, and with the inability of the poetic hand to transcribe the intentions of the heart. Even