



Open Research Online

Citation

King, Edmund G. C. (2017). Discovering Shakespeare's Personal Style: Editing and Connoisseurship in the Eighteenth Century. In: Depledge, Emma and Kirwan, Peter eds. Canonising Shakespeare: Stationers and the Book Trade, 1640–1740. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 130–142.

URL

<https://oro.open.ac.uk/50721/>

License

(CC-BY-NC-ND 4.0)Creative Commons: Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0

Policy

This document has been downloaded from Open Research Online, The Open University's repository of research publications. This version is being made available in accordance with Open Research Online policies available from [Open Research Online \(ORO\) Policies](#)

Versions

If this document is identified as the Author Accepted Manuscript it is the version after peer review but before type setting, copy editing or publisher branding

CHAPTER 10

*Discovering Shakespeare's Personal Style: Editing and Connoisseurship in the Eighteenth Century**Edmund G. C. King*

If, as Samuel Johnson declared in 1753, the eighteenth century was an *'Age of Authors'* (Bate, Bullitt and Powell 1963, 457), we could also describe it as 'an age of editors'. Starting in 1709, the Tonson firm embarked on a long-term publishing strategy of engaging high-profile authors and critics to edit their high-end editions of Shakespeare's collected works. Nicholas Rowe's 1709 edition was superseded by Alexander Pope's 1723–5 edition, which was followed in close succession by Lewis Theobald's in 1733, William Warburton's in 1747 and Johnson's own, in various forms, in 1765, 1773 and 1778. The use of an editor's name to front the Tonson Shakespeare 'brand' placed a premium on individual editorial judgement (Dugas 2006, 158–9). Editorial authority ultimately underwrote the market value of these editions, and that authority derived from an editor's ability to set forth the genuine text and, through connoisseurship, reliably demarcate Shakespeare's authorial canon. This chapter will examine the use of connoisseurial rhetoric by Shakespeare editors and critics over the course of the eighteenth century, beginning with Alexander Pope in 1723–5 and concluding with George Steevens in the 1780s and 1790s. Connoisseurship was originally developed by art critics as a discourse for authenticating paintings and drawings. Beginning with Pope, however, literary editors began to draw upon it as an analogy for representing authorial style. As I shall show through an examination of Steevens's work in compiling the first chronological catalogue of William Hogarth's prints and paintings, this convergence between art criticism and textual criticism involved more than a simple exchange of metaphors. Connoisseurship offered critics such as Steevens new ways of looking at artworks and assessing their genuineness, modes of vision that could be applied as readily to plays as to paintings. The eighteenth-century art market relied upon the expertise of the connoisseur, who could guarantee that a given painting stemmed from the hand of a particular master. The Tonsons' copyright monopoly over Shakespeare likewise came to

depend on the expertise of the editor, who could reliably identify Shakespeare's personal style and distinguish the genuine from the spurious.

Alexander Pope as Connoisseur

In 1727, in the Preface to the *Miscellanies in Prose and Verse*, Alexander Pope catalogued the various ways that an author's reputation might be harmed by reckless acts of authorial attribution. One of the most dangerous textual formats in the book trade, he suggested, was the posthumous edition of an author's collected works:

After a Man's decease . . . the Collectors only considering, that so many more Sheets raise the Price of the Book; and the greater Fame a Writer is in Possession of, the more . . . Trash he may bear to have tack'd to him. Thus it is apparently the Editor's Interest to insert, what the Author's Judgment had rejected; and Care is always taken to intersperse these Additions in such a manner, that scarce any Book of consequence can be bought, without purchasing something unworthy of the Author along with it. (Pope and Swift 1727, 10–11)

It was not simply false attribution that Pope was concerned with. More potentially embarrassing were unsuccessful or obscene anonymous works that nonetheless bore what he called the 'distinguishing Marks of Style, or Peculiarity of Thinking' of their authors, 'whereby Persons of Taste' might potentially identify them (1727, 6). This passage exemplifies what Mark Vareschi calls 'the dispersed and social nature' of the eighteenth-century culture of attribution (2012, 44). The act of 'setting a . . . name' to a piece of 'Writing' was a form of social practice, one which involved the competing interests of authors, editors, booksellers and readers. Yet it also foregrounds Pope's belief that editing necessarily possessed an ethical dimension. Publishers might insist on enlarging an author's body of works for purely commercial reasons. Editors, as gatekeepers of reputation, could act as a bulwark against the book trade's depredations by policing the boundaries of their authors' canons and excluding anything 'unworthy'.¹

The publication of the *Miscellanies* was a direct response to the kind of unscrupulous book-trade practices Pope alluded to in the Preface (1727). By taking on the editorial role himself and effectively constructing his own poetic canon, Pope aimed to prevent the publication of future unauthorised – and potentially embarrassing – collections of his own poetry by booksellers outside his trusted circle (Griffin 2010, 99). Nearly every aspect of the *Miscellanies*' history and textual packaging testifies to what Seth

Rudy calls Pope's preoccupation with 'identity-creation and control' (2011, 9). The Preface to the *Miscellanies* was signed by both Pope and Jonathan Swift, and it was carefully crafted to appear collaborative: the pronouns 'we' and 'our' are used throughout. Nevertheless, Pope was its sole author and, writing to Swift, he described how he had arranged the collection to make the pair seem to readers 'like friends, side by side . . . walking down hand in hand to posterity' (Sherburn 1956, ii.426).² Pope's self-conscious presentation of this material indicates the degree to which the act of 'setting a name' to a piece of literature in the eighteenth century relied on rhetorical performance – and how much insider knowledge could be hidden behind what appears to be a straightforward authorial by-line. The amount of information any outsider could deduce by internal evidence alone – those 'distinguishing marks of style' – was limited. Pope himself alluded teasingly to this power imbalance between insiders and outsiders in the address 'From the Publisher to the Reader' in the 1728 *Dunciad*:

There is certainly nothing in his style and manner of writing, which can distinguish, or discover him. For if it bears any resemblance to that of Mr. *P.* 'tis not improbable but it might be done on purpose, with a view to have it pass for his. (1728, v)

Pope's rehearsal of these preoccupations a year later in Volume ii of the *Posthumous Works of William Wycherley* was more confrontational. Aiming to discredit the edition of Wycherley published in 1728 by Lewis Theobald, Pope wrote that 'It is always some Question, Whether *Posthumous Works* are Genuine?' (1729, ii.A2^v). Using insider knowledge to unlock what he called 'the History' of the Wycherley papers' authorship, 'till now a secret', Pope revealed details of authorship and collaboration that Theobald, as an outsider to the Wycherley circle, had been unable to uncover using internal evidence alone (A2^v).³ Attributing authorship based on style emerges from these transactions as a high-stakes game. Only a small minority, 'Persons of Taste', had the ability to participate, and the consequences of getting attribution details wrong could be public humiliation through print. Literary attribution, as both 'social knowledge' and social practice, was, Pope implies, necessarily restricted to a privileged few.

Pope's acute sensitivity to the problems of authorial attribution reflects the emergence in early eighteenth-century Britain of what Trevor Ross calls 'a system of literary proprietorship founded on the individuation of discourse' (2013, 754). Pope's interventions in Shakespeare publishing were instrumental in focussing editorial attention on Shakespeare's individual style – what it was that made him distinguishable from other dramatists. They also had the effect

of putting the principle of canonical exclusion at the heart of the eighteenth-century Shakespearean editorial project. His 1723–5 Shakespeare edition applies the same thoroughgoing scepticism towards posthumous collected editions, and the commercial motivations that generate them, as the 1727 Preface to the *Miscellanies*. Earlier remarks about the integrity of the Shakespeare canon tended to rely on oral testimony for their evidentiary support. Edward Ravenscroft, in the Preface to his 1687 adaptation of *Titus Andronicus*, records that ‘I have been told by some anciently conversant with the Stage, that it was not Originally his, but brought by a private Author to be Acted, and he only gave some Master-Touches to one or two of the Principal Parts or Characters’ (A2^r). Pope’s Preface to Shakespeare shifts the grounds of evidence from the external to the internal, from the ear to the eye. ‘If I may judge from all the distinguishing marks of his style, and his manner of thinking and writing’, Pope begins (1723–5, i.xx), before using his critical gaze – his sense of Shakespeare’s ‘unique stylistic signature’ (Ross 2013, 754) – to de-attribute not only the seven plays added to the canon in the 1664 Third Folio but also *Loves Labour’s Lost*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Titus Andronicus*. These attributions, Pope writes, only came about because of the theatre’s – and later the book trade’s – lack of regard for Shakespeare’s authorial reputation. ‘[P]ieces produced by unknown authors, or fitted up for the theatre while it was under his administration . . . they were adjudged to him, as they give Strays to the Lord of the Manor. A mistake, which (one must also observe)’, Pope added, ‘it was not in the interest of the House to remove’ (1723–5, i.xx).

Pope’s assault on the canonical integrity of the First Folio was part of a wholesale attack on the Folio and the reliability of its text and its editors. His initial target may have been the additional plays included in the Third Folio, but Pope quickly widened his critique to encompass the canonical reliability of *all* of the Shakespeare Folio editions. Collapsing 1664 and 1623 into the same moment, Pope suggested that some of Heminge and Condell’s canonical inclusions had been as questionable as the addition of *The Puritan* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy* by the Third Folio’s publishers. If the entire Folio publishing tradition was, like the collected editions Pope ridiculed in the Preface to the *Miscellanies*, simply the product of booksellers’ self-interest – each successive edition cynically adding ‘Sheets’ of ‘Trash’ ‘unworthy of the Author’ in order to inflate the price – then its status as external evidence to the authorship of Shakespeare’s works dissolved. The authorship of *any* individual play in the collection was now open to conjecture. Pope’s Preface to Shakespeare created a new vogue for attribution-based Shakespeare criticism on internal grounds. Between 1725 and the publication of the last major eighteenth-century Shakespeare

edition in 1793, individual editors argued for the full-scale de-attribution of no fewer than nine Folio plays – *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Titus Andronicus* and all three parts of *Henry VI*.⁴ Others suggested that there were significant non-Shakespearean interpolations lurking within the texts of particular plays. The French dialogue in Act 3, scene 4 of *Henry V*, the songs in *Measure for Measure* and *Macbeth*, the masque in *Cymbeline*, the play-within-a-play in *Hamlet*, the prologues and epilogues to *Troilus and Cressida* and *Henry VIII* and the final song in *Twelfth Night* were all at one time or another identified as playhouse additions rather than Shakespearean originals.⁵ In the eighteenth-century editorial imagination, the early modern playhouse thereby became a kind of engine of corruption (King 2010, 4–5). Theatrical manuscript practices were believed capable of introducing all manner of non-Shakespearean revisions into the text. Actors, it was thought, might add new speeches to their parts, while stage directors might interleave promptbooks with new scenes or songs. Any plays which had spent any time in the early modern repertory were assumed in the eighteenth century to have been subject to these kinds of non-authorial interventions.

Connoisseurship and the Arts

The growing interest in style and connoisseurship in Shakespeare scholarship was closely bound up with the economics of eighteenth-century Shakespeare publishing. Between 1707 and 1767, the Tonson publishing cartel owned roughly two-thirds of the copyrights in Shakespeare's plays (Belanger 1975, 202). With the exception of the Walker–Tonson price wars, which effectively flooded the market with cheap editions in 1734–5 (see Anthony Brano, Chapter 6 in this volume), the Tonsons used their near-monopoly to market Shakespeare to the very richest segment of the eighteenth-century book-buying public. Pope's 1723–5 edition retailed for 126 shillings, Lewis Theobald's 1733 edition for 42 shillings and Samuel Johnson's 1765 edition for 48 shillings.⁶ These prices put collected editions of Shakespeare out of the reach of all but a tiny proportion of the total British population – less than 1 per cent of British households could have afforded books at these prices (Milhous and Hume 2015, 162). To keep this elite book-buying market primed, the Tonsons issued a regular stream of new Shakespeare collections, each fronted by a high-profile editor. The result was a kind of co-branding strategy, whereby the appeal of Shakespeare's name was enhanced through association with the names of prominent contemporary literary celebrities.⁷

Critical taste and editorial judgement became the authorising glue binding these collections together. Connoisseurship enabled eighteenth-century critics to interpose their own authority between text and reader. In the absence of the now-discredited Heminge and Condell, they became the new ‘insiders’, whose possession of the tools of taste would allow them to detect the ‘distinguishing marks’ of Shakespeare’s authorial presence.

The language of connoisseurship did not emerge from a vacuum, however, nor was it limited to the field of literary editing. It drew upon a set of conceptual tools that originated in the art world for isolating personal style and defining the boundaries of canons. In 1719, Jonathan Richardson published his *Two Discourses* including the *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as It Relates to Painting*, which promised readers ‘Requisites’ to becoming ‘a Connoisseur in Hands’ (1719, A3^r). In his account of ‘Originals and Coppies’, Richardson wrote that:

To know whether a Picture, or Drawing be of the Hand of such a Master, or After him One must be so well acquainted with the Hand of that Master as to be able to distinguish what is Genuine, from what is not so; The Best Counterfeiter of Hands cannot do it so well as to deceive a good *Connoisseur*; the Handling, the Colouring . . . Some, nay All of these discover the Author; More, or Less Easily . . . as the Manner of the Master happens to be. (185–6)

In a passage that Pope would later adapt in his 1727 Preface to the *Miscellanies*, Richardson extrapolated from the first principles of individuation in everyday experience – ‘No two Men in the World Think, and Act alike’ – to argue that ‘There are such Peculiarities in the turn of Thought, and Hand to be seen in Some of the Masters . . . that ’tis the easiest thing in the world to know them at first sight’ (100, 104). In attributing a painting, experienced connoisseurs, according to Richardson, compared the ‘Ideas’ each possessed of the ‘Manner’ of different ‘Masters’, until a precise identification could be made (107–8). What Richardson had effectively done in the *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism* was to summarise and develop nearly two centuries of continental discourse on the authenticity of art objects. Seventeenth-century Dutch treatises had advised collectors to pay special attention to painters’ brushstrokes, comparing their individuality to that of handwriting. The word ‘manner’, which by the sixteenth century had come to define a painter’s personal style, was originally a handwriting term (Tummers 2011, 116). Richardson’s key intervention was to translate these ideas into an English intellectual framework, providing elite consumers entering the eighteenth-century art market with both the means to authenticate art objects and the confidence that such judgements could be reliably performed (Warwick 2000, 76). ‘Buying and

selling art', as Carol Gibson-Wood writes, 'was the immediate context for the skills of the connoisseur' (2000, 206).

Richardson's terms for defining the nature of personal style soon started to migrate from art theory into Shakespearean textual scholarship. Arguing in 1746 against Shakespeare's authorship of *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, John Upton drew explicitly on Richardson's account of the difference between originals and copies in the *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism*. 'If any proof can be formed from manner and style', he wrote, 'Then should these [plays] be sent packing, and seek for their parent elsewhere. How otherwise does the painter distinguish copies from originals? And have not authors their peculiar style and manner, from which a true critic can form as unerring a judgment as a painter?' (1746, 209). Drawing the two disciplines together, Upton wrote: 'in this respect the critic and the connoisseur are upon a level' (291). The analogy between originals and copies in the visual arts also provided an organising framework for Thomas Seward to compare the personal styles of Shakespeare and John Fletcher. A 'Reader' who compared Ophelia with the Jailer's Daughter in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, he wrote, would find that 'the *Copy* is so extremely like the *Original* that either the same *Hand* drew both, or *Fletcher's* [style] is not to be distinguish'd from *Shakespear's*' (Seward and Theobald 1750, i.xxxv). Seward's point here is not that Shakespeare and Fletcher were stylistically identical, but that the similarity between Ophelia and the Jailer's Daughter showed that Shakespeare had been responsible for writing both characters. In Richardson's terms, it was Seward's 'idea' of Shakespeare's style that enabled him to recognise it in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and to distinguish Shakespeare's contributions to the play from those portions of it written by Fletcher.

In Upton's usage of connoisseurial rhetoric, the parallel between literary and artistic attribution was essentially exclusive – a way of stigmatising spurious plays and arguing against their place in the collected works. However, as Seward's speculation about Shakespeare's authorial role in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* indicates, the language of connoisseurship could also extend outwards, suggesting a familial relationship between Shakespeare's accepted plays and those on the margins of the canon. In the 1780 *Supplement* to the 1778 Johnson–Steevens *Shakespeare*, George Steevens suggested that the *Yorkshire Tragedy* was 'a genuine but a hasty production of our author' (Steevens and Malone 1780, ii.675). The parallel that Steevens drew to make his case was not with paint but with pencil. 'Perhaps', he wrote, the play 'was only intended as a sketch which the author would at leisure have transplanted on a more extensive canvas' (ii.676). Making the link between drawing and play-script more apparent, he concluded his discussion of the play's putative authenticity

by placing it ‘among the slight outlines of our theatrical Raphael, and not among his finished paintings’ (ii.678). In his *Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism*, Richardson had suggested that drawings and sketches were often easier to attribute than finished paintings – ‘What is highly Finished’, he wrote, ‘is more easily Imitated than what is Loose, and Free’ (1719, 186).⁸ Steevens’s argument in favour of Shakespeare’s authorship of the *Yorkshire Tragedy* relies upon a similar assertion of virtuoso critical authority. Just as Richardson could look at a few pen-strokes and see the ‘Terrible Fire’ of Michelangelo’s style (188), so too could Steevens claim to discern the ‘characteristics’ of Shakespeare’s authorial presence within the small confines of what he called ‘this tragedy in miniature’ (Steevens and Malone 1780, ii.678). Connoisseurial rhetoric therefore not only provided a vivid way of describing the nature of authorial style, but it was also a means of asserting Shakespeare’s artistic prominence on an international level. He is, as Steevens puts it, nothing less than ‘our theatrical Raphael’ (Steevens and Malone 1780, ii.678).

For Upton and Seward, the appeal of the painting metaphor undoubtedly lay in the air of impartiality that connoisseurial discourse offered. Like Richardson’s ideal connoisseurs, who compare their ‘ideas’ of each master’s style in order to arrive at an attribution, they present themselves making objective comparisons between plays, using the ‘unerring . . . judgment’ of the critical observer to decide which represents the Shakespearean ‘original’ and which the non-authorial ‘copy’ (Upton 1746, 289).⁹ But the mobility of connoisseurial discourse across disciplinary boundaries reflects a deeper set of convergences between literary editing, the art world and the book trade during the latter part of the eighteenth century. As David Marshall puts it, ‘the Enlightenment desire to discover universal principles’, coupled with ‘the popularity, diffusion, and reproduction of paintings through prints and engravings’ gave a new impetus and relevance to the old rhetorical truism that painting and poetry were ‘sister arts’ (2005, 41). English artists attempted to raise the status and profile of the visual arts in England by painting native literary subjects (Calè 2006, 16–17). New commercial ventures such as the Poets’ Gallery, the Shakspeare Gallery and the Milton Gallery represented concrete manifestations of the sister arts ideal. These spaces were nodal points in a larger social network in which artists, gallery owners, literary scholars, art critics and publishers each participated.

The relationships between editing, the book trade and the visual arts that the literary galleries fostered are particularly striking in the case of the Shakspeare Gallery. Founded by John Boydell in 1789, the gallery opened with an initial exhibition of thirty-four oil paintings illustrating scenes from Shakespeare that Boydell had commissioned from prominent artists.

The purpose of the gallery was not, however, to sell paintings – at least, not directly. Instead, Boydell directed visitors to buy a range of secondary products associated with the Gallery – engravings of paintings in the exhibition and exhibition catalogues – that fed into his existing business as a publisher and print-seller (Brylowe n.d., 15). The Shakspeare Gallery's most enduring legacy – the lavishly illustrated *Dramatic Works of William Shakespeare*, which Boydell engaged George Steevens to oversee as textual editor – provided an additional venue for the sale of engravings (Thomas 2010, 360). Subscribers to the edition were promised four folio-sized prints with each number, with additional quarto-sized reproductions which could be bound into each volume of the edition (Brylowe n.d., 13). During the time it was open, the Shakspeare Gallery functioned simultaneously as an exhibition space, a business venue for artists and a space for literary and critical debate. For several weeks at the turn of 1795–6, it hosted what was effectively a trial of William Henry Ireland's Shakespeare forgeries, in which visitors met daily to discuss the documents' authenticity and exchange news (Dias 2003, 81). At one of these informal meetings in December 1795, Steevens entered bearing the manuscript of Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, so that other witnesses could see with their own eyes just how far the Ireland forgeries diverged from genuine early modern orthography (Kahan 1998, 153). For painters and gallery owners, the literary galleries were venues for the education of a new market of consumers. They provided, as the proprietor of the Milton Gallery Henry Fuseli put it, opportunities for 'turning readers into spectators' (Calè 2006, 5). The closely networked nature of the sister arts in eighteenth-century London encouraged a similar degree of formal exchange at the level of critical practice. In the 1780 *Supplement*, Steevens presents himself reading *A Yorkshire Tragedy* like a connoisseur examining a canvas for clues to the artist's hand. In appropriating the authenticating rhetoric of the art world, the editor has effectively become a spectator, scrutinising the surfaces of texts as though they were paintings.

George Steevens as Connoisseur

A decade before being engaged to edit the Boydell Shakespeare, and at more or less the same time as he was defining the sketch-like qualities of the *Yorkshire Tragedy*, Steevens was compiling a chronological catalogue of William Hogarth's drawings, paintings and prints, the first edition of which appeared in 1781. Although the catalogue and its paratexts were either unsigned or attributed misleadingly to 'J.N.' during Steevens's lifetime, John Nichols added a note to the 1808–17 *Genuine Works of William Hogarth*

acknowledging that ‘It may be proper here to observe, once and for all, that these preliminary remarks, with almost every line of the Catalogue that appears in the shape of a critique, were the production of my late accomplished coadjutor Mr. Steevens’s’ (Nichols and Steevens 1808–17, ii.3).¹⁰ Steevens’s preface and postscript to the catalogue display a strikingly similar set of concerns with restricting canons by omitting ‘unworthy’ elements, as had Pope’s Preface to the *Miscellanies*. ‘The judicious connoisseur’, he wrote, ‘would be content to possess the pictures of *Raffaelle*, without aiming at a complete assemblage of the earthen ware that passes under his name’ (Nichols and Steevens 1782, 108). The problems facing the Hogarth connoisseur were two-fold. Firstly, while Hogarth had been an apprentice, he had been unable to sign his name to those works he had completed under his master’s authority (1782, 107). Secondly, the sheer variety of artworks Hogarth crafted over his lifetime made the isolation of a single characteristic style extremely difficult. This difficulty was compounded by the frequently ‘low’ and occasional nature of the objects Hogarth sometimes created. A bored Hogarth had on one occasion engraved scales and fins onto some ‘plain ivory fishes’ he found decorating his ‘future wife’s card-table’. However, Steevens observed drily, as ‘a *button* decorated by’ Hogarth had already been listed in the catalogue, ‘it can hardly be disgraced by this brief mention of the ornaments he bestowed on a *counter*’ (1808–17, ii.12).

By describing these kinds of apparently genuine, but aesthetically marginal objects, Steevens was clearly poking fun at the emerging collectors’ market in Hogarth ephemera. Commenting further in the *Gentleman’s Magazine* on what he saw as the absurdities involved in assigning value to these items, Steevens wrote that:

Of all the trifling works of art, coats of arms must be reckoned the most contemptible. These early productions of our artist, on silver tea-tables, mugs and waiters, have no sort of merit to recommend them . . . what taste or genius can be manifested in the disposition of a cat’s whiskers, or a fox’s tail? . . . Let me hope . . . that . . . every sensible collector will think his assemblage of Hogarth’s prints sufficiently complete, without the foolish adjuncts already described and reprobated. (Steevens 1786, 300)

Just as Pope had done, Steevens implied that this tendency towards canonical expansion endangered the reputation of the artist. In seeking to satisfy the ‘rage of collection’ by creating a market in ephemeral works, art dealers ‘open a door to imposition’ while having ‘added nothing to [Hogarth’s] fame’ (1782, 359–60). ‘A work like the *Harlot’s Progress*’, Steevens observed,

will certainly remain unimitated as well as inimitable; but it is in the power of every bungler to create fresh coats of arms, or shop-bills with our artist's name subscribed to them . . . A crafty selection of paper, and a slight attention to chronology and choice of subjects, with the aid of the hot-press, may, in the end, prove an overmatch for the sagacity of the ablest connoisseur. . . How many fraudulent imitations of the smaller works of *Rembrandt* are known to have been circulated with success! (1782, 359)

Scattered throughout the various editions of the *Biographical Anecdotes* and *Genuine Works of William Hogarth* are brief references to the acts of practical connoisseurship that Steevens carried out to determine the contents of the catalogue. Nichols records that Steevens identified 'no less than eight piratical imitations' of *The Harlot's Progress* circulating on the London art market (1808–17, i.72 n). He also seems to have successfully identified a number of early pirated copies of *The Rake's Progress* still being offered for sale decades after their original creation (Nichols and Steevens 1781, 156–7). Steevens was especially suspicious of any new attributions to the Hogarth canon made by Samuel Ireland. According to Nichols, he 'critically analysed' every new discovery emerging from Ireland's networks, a process of authentication that resulted in a number of forged sketches and prints being 'stifled at their birth by the penetrating glance of Steevens's' (Hart 1971, 55). These acts of detection appear to have been highly visible to others operating in the contemporary London art world. In a June 1781 letter, Horace Walpole mentions having heard that Steevens 'has been allowed to ransack Mrs Hogarth's house for obsolete and unfinished plates, which are to be completed and published' (Lewis and Wallace 1937, ii.273). In a postscript to the 1782 second edition of the *Biographical Anecdotes*, Steevens even offers collectors advice on determining whether particular Hogarth prints have been retouched by looking closely at the colour of the ink (1782, 361–2). These hints were testimony to Steevens's own experience as a draughtsman and his first-hand knowledge of the processes of engraving and print-making (Hart 1971, 55; Sherbo 1990, 159).

What Nichols later described as Steevens's 'watchful eye' was thus instrumental in enabling both dealers and consumers to obtain a more accurate estimation of Hogarth's market value, through both the detection of unauthorised copies and fakes and the identification of unfinished works (1808–17, i.438). Seen in this light, Steevens's observations about *A Yorkshire Tragedy's* sketch-like qualities seem less like simple metaphor than an attempt to foreground his own dual forms of expertise – to suggest, even, that the two skillsets were interchangeable. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, a market for artists' preparatory sketches

began to emerge across Europe, bolstered by the widespread critical belief that drawings were the ‘frankest revelation of [an] artist’s individual character or style’ (Warwick 2000, 173). The attraction of these pieces for collectors lay in the latitude they allowed for the display of personal taste. Ownership of one of these ‘slight sketches’ suggested that the collector possessed the aesthetic sensitivity necessary to recognise an artist’s personal style from a limited set of visual traces. Steevens’s confidence in attributing *A Yorkshire Tragedy* to Shakespeare carried with it the same assertion of connoisseurial taste. Unlike the credulous collector who might be taken in by a ‘fraudulent imitation of the smaller works of *Rembrandt*’, he was able to discern the presence of Shakespeare’s hand in a ‘slight outline’ as well as a full-length play.

Conclusion

None of Shakespeare’s eighteenth-century editors aspired to create a ‘complete’ edition of Shakespeare’s collected works. Indeed, the idea of a complete edition would have appeared undesirable – even, perhaps, culturally threatening – to an eighteenth-century sensibility. Steevens’s excoriation of those who wanted to append ‘foolish adjuncts’ to the Hogarth canon in the form of genuine, yet artistically unremarkable ephemera shows that an object undoubtedly crafted by Hogarth’s hand was not necessarily the same thing as *canonical* Hogarth. Steevens’s notorious refusal in his 1793 Shakespeare edition to follow Malone in printing the *Sonnets* proceeds from the same spirit. Steevens’s rejection of the *Sonnets*’ canonicity did not hinge on whether or not they were genuine works, but instead on the potential their content had to sully Shakespeare’s posthumous reputation (Stallybrass 1993, 94–6). What editors like Pope and Steevens sought were criteria for *selecting* canons and excluding anything either spurious or ‘unworthy’ of their creator. The language of connoisseurship offered one set of rhetorical tools for making these kinds of distinctions. Connoisseurship’s origins in the two centuries before Richardson show that the idea that critics were capable of distinguishing between personal styles was by no means a novel development – the product solely of new ‘romantic or pre-romantic aesthetics’ (Chartier 2009, 18). However, changes in the way elite cultural goods were sold during the first half of the eighteenth century ascribed a new value to the critic’s ability to reliably identify an artist’s or a writer’s work (Cowan 2004, 181). As court patronage declined in importance, publishers, art dealers and gallery owners became the new drivers of elite culture (Hume 2006, 525–6). This transfer of cultural authority placed a premium on the value and reliability of the

commodities being sold, whether they were prints, paintings or scholarly editions of Shakespeare. Canon formation in both the visual and literary arts now demanded the same sorts of scholarly labour. The authenticity of any particular work depended on its accordance with a range of specialist criteria – style, chronology, documentary evidence, biographical data – which only an expert could reliably deploy. In each case, the authorising power of a critic's canonical judgement underpinned literary and artistic property. Like the paintings that adorned the walls of the aristocratic collector, the eighteenth-century editions of Shakespeare that populated the bookcases of elite consumers ultimately derived their value from the authority of the critic who could distinguish between genuine and spurious works. In this respect, the Shakespeare critic and the connoisseur were, as John Upton (1746) might put it, 'on a level'.

Notes

1. For more detailed accounts of Pope's reputation-based criteria for canonicity, see King 2012, 82–9; and Kirwan 2012, 258–9.
2. On the authorship of the Preface, see Cowler 1986, 86.
3. On the background to the dispute between Pope and Theobald over the editing of Wycherley, see Rogers 2001.
4. On *Love's Labour's Lost* and *The Winter's Tale*, see Pope 1723–5, i.xx. On the *Comedy of Errors*, see Pope 1728, i.xxi. For *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, see Hanmer 1744, i.145n. On the *Henry VI* plays, see Theobald 1733, v.308n, and Malone 1790, vi.377–429.
5. On *Henry V*, see Hanmer 1744, i.iii, and Farmer 1767, 84–85. On *Measure for Measure*, see Malone and Boswell 1821, xx.420n. For *Macbeth*, see Steevens's note in Reed 1803, x.208n. On *Cymbeline*, see Malone, 1790, i.1.407n. On *Hamlet*, see Farmer 1767, 69. On *Troilus and Cressida*, see Steevens 1793, xi.214n; 449–50n. For *Henry VIII*, see Sherbo 1968, i.658. On *Twelfth Night*, see Steevens 1793, iv.173n.
6. See St. Clair 2004, 701–4.
7. For a definition of 'co-branding', see Helmig, Huber and Leeflang 2008, 360.
8. On Richardson and the attribution of drawings, see Gibson-Wood 2003, 168.
9. On this aspect of connoisseurial discourse, see Smentek 2014, 116.
10. See also i.437–51 of the *Genuine Works* for Nichols's posthumous attribution to Steevens of other passages in the *Biographical Anecdotes* that had originally appeared under Nichols's initials. See Sherbo 1990, 154–5, and Pooley 2013 for further comments on the extent of Steevens's contributions to the chronological catalogue.