

they are meant to privilege the source, to explain why the witness deserves respectful attention. At least *PMLA* and other journals in literature and language studies have not yet gone the route of certain journals in mathematics and psychology that include photographs of the authors. The cues of race, gender, age, ethnicity, and body type that photographs reveal probably influence the reception of evidence by even the most conscientious observers.

The eleven participants in the roundtable are identified only by institutional affiliation, as are most of those whose letters are included in the Forum section. It seems that in such contexts one's ideas are expected to fend for themselves, while the evidence presented by article authors is given a salutary send-off.

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Attributing *A Funeral Elegy*

To the Editor:

In rereading Donald W. Foster's "A *Funeral Elegy*: W[il]liam] S[hakespeare]'s 'Best-Speaking Witnesses'" (111 [1996]: 1080–1105), I checked his calculations of the percentages of rare words used by Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors* in proportion to the total number of *Errors* rare words found in *Henry VIII*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and the elegy whose authorship is in question (1090). (Egeon was supposedly played by Shakespeare, and the character's words are consequently assumed to have lodged disproportionately in the playwright's creative imagination.) I've uncovered consistent discrepancies. They're small, but they're important to Foster's case because the numbers of rare words measured by the percentages are small in proportion to the total number of rare words in each of these works. The discrepancies are important to future users of Shaxicon also, because the errors seem to rest on a mistake in using this important tool.

I'm working with Shaxicon 2.0, generously provided by Foster some years ago. He now works with a new, presumably much improved version, but the number of words removed or added since version 2.0 is no doubt small, because in this respect the early version was accurate. Foster promises to license his new version for access on the World Wide Web, but professional responsibilities and the flood of correspondence about his other accomplishments (particularly his identification of the author of the roman à clef *Primary Colors*) may have delayed this eagerly awaited project.

What I believe prompted Foster's errors (and what led me into several initial wrong results) was confusion be-

tween the two halves of a divided screen that appears when one combines word lists in *WordCruncher*, the database program used by Shaxicon. Start in the wrong half of the screen, and if you are looking for, say, the number of occurrences of rare words, including repetitions, in *A Funeral Elegy* that appear as well in *The Comedy of Errors* through their basic inflectional forms, you get instead the number of relevant words and their repetitions in *The Comedy of Errors*, not in *A Funeral Elegy*.

Calculating in this mistaken way with Shaxicon 2.0, I come up with percentages that are practically identical with those given by Foster and derived from the new version of the database. But calculating in the correct way, I arrive at 36.4%, not 39.0%, for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (12 Egeon rare words out of a total of 33 *Errors* rare words in Shakespeare's supposed part of the entire work); 31.3%, not 22.0%, for *Henry VIII* (15 Egeon words out of 48 *Errors* words in Shakespeare's supposed part of *Henry VIII*); 35.7%, not 40.5%, for *A Funeral Elegy* (10 Egeon words out of 28 *Errors* words in that work).

A simple demonstration shows the correct way to calculate in Shaxicon 2.0. Follow the directions Foster supplied with that version to find the number of Egeon's rare words, including repetitions, that appear in "R2" (the basic text of *Richard II*). You will arrive at 12. A further step shows you a list of the words. Going down the list you will see two cases of "hopeless." But it is not R2 that contains two such cases; it's Egeon's speeches in *Errors*. You can check this by consulting Shaxicon's Output List or by looking up "hopeless" in Marvin Spevack's *Harvard Concordance to Shakespeare*, the chief source for Shaxicon: there are two occurrences in *Errors* and one in *Richard II*. Foster did not change his method in his revised version or in his *PMLA* article: his results can be approximated by wrongly reversing the lists on the screen.

Foster's case stands: the elegy still has a surprising proportion of Egeon words—higher than *Henry VIII*, although lower than *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—but the inaccuracy does not inspire confidence and may affect his results when he tries to show, to considerably smaller tolerances, the disproportionate return in the playwright's works of words Shakespeare recited earlier as an actor and consequently to illustrate the curve of Shakespeare's acting career.

Above all, however, I am struck by a corollary: the number of Egeon rare words in any of these works (not the percentage) seems to me statistically trivial in relation to the total number of rare words in the work (10 Egeon rare words in the mass of 435 rare words in *A Funeral Elegy*, for instance, or only 12 in the 963 rare words in Shakespeare's supposed part of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*).

Foster may speak of a general tendency among his small totals, but I remain doubtful.

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To the Editor:

I appreciate Don Foster's generosity in giving versions of Shaxicon on disk to colleagues. Charles Hieatt and I have made use of it since 1993, while waiting for part of the now complete Shakespeare Dictionary materials from the Shakespeare Database in Münster, a project associated with the names of Marvin Spevack and H. J. Neuhaus.

Foster's formula and the graphs constructed from it develop a principally accurate picture, based on statistically appreciable quantities (1090–91). However, I'm puzzled to find in one numerator a total of rare words including all their repetitions but in both denominators totals of rare words excluding their repetitions. And in fact Foster finally multiplies instead of dividing as his formula asks. [Editor's note. See the correction on page 434.]

Unless you've used Shaxicon, you can't appreciate its power and (as we see it) its pitfalls. A "rare word" in Foster's sense is one used in up to twelve of Shakespeare's plays, and the count embraces all possible inflectional forms of the word, because any competent English speaker who can use one form has mastery of them all. *Sums* as a verb is one word with *summ'd*, *summeth*, *hath summed*, *are summed*, and so on, but not with the nouns *sum*, *sums*, *sum's*, and *sums'*. These nouns together form another word, as in a dictionary entry. Consequently, for Shaxicon the difference between the verb *sum* and the noun *sum* is as great as the difference between *sum* (n. or vb.) and *dearth*, an arrangement that seems at best approximative. Second, Shaxicon (contrary to dictionaries and to our practice) treats two nonfinite forms of a verb as separate words. For Shaxicon the phrases "defeated enemy" and "defeating the enemy" would entail two words distinct from the finite verb, although both the participial adjective and the gerund are automatically available to any competent English speaker who says, "She defeated enemies." This turns hosts of unrare words into rare ones. There are other important difficulties, some unavoidable.

Foster seems to me to impose on this structure loads that it can't bear. For instance, Foster says that because Shakespeare played the part of Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors* at various times, he held Egeon rare words in creative memory when he wrote *Henry VIII*. Thus, although Egeon rare words form only 11.9% of the rare words in *Errors*, they make up 22.0% of the *Errors* rare words ap-

pearing in *Henry VIII* (1090). But this increase in percentage amounts to only 6 words of the 853 rare words in Shakespeare's presumed part of *Henry VIII*, a statistically trivial quantity.

Vocabulary can identify its owner, but a word relates to context as well as to user. In a mass of Shakespeare's words, contexts may cancel one another out, and the author may be revealed; however, a set of 6 words out of 853 reliably indicates only the fictional events being evoked. This observation is especially important for Foster's claim that Shakespearean authorship of *A Funeral Elegy* is more assured because 40.5% of the *Errors* rare words in the poem are Egeon words. Foster neglects the point that Egeon's speeches and *Elegy* are both mostly lugubrious recitals of disaster. How many of the insignificant number of rare words common to the two texts are more likely to be required by shared contexts than by shared authorship? Only attentive study of the contexts of each pair of words will give an answer. Foster's corresponding point that only 11.4% of the *Errors* rare words shared with Jonson's *Every Man in His Humor* are Egeon words is unsurprising: Jonson's comedy is unlugubrious (1092).

Even the persona of the poet, deduced in this case from forty-four works, is an equally valid datum, faulty as it has sometimes proved in the past. Some of Foster's evidence (e.g., the Shakespearean *who* for *which* [1084]) is striking, yet I still prefer to believe that the persona behind the Tudor commonplaces and sanctimony in *Elegy* belongs to some other WS, a sometime Oxonian under strong Shakespearean influence (as Foster describes John Ford in another connection).

Admittedly, none of WS's other works have been identified, but nor have those of many an Anon. And where are the outpourings of William Peter's "well-abled quill" (*Elegy* 238)? I'm not convinced by Foster's comments in his annotations of the poem or by the implausible notion of the Bard's hoping to regain credit in Oxford, where malice had ruined his youthful hopes (*Elegy* 145–52; note to 154). The poet describes Peter as "there" (presumably Oxford) and then "here," where parents bear witness to children—presumably around Exeter, not Stratford (154, 156–74). But was even Oxford meant? Are "there" and "here" ambiguous? In an article forthcoming in *Shakespeare Studies* in 1997, Katherine Duncan-Jones shows that "education and new being" (152) likely means "birth and upbringing." So "there" may mean not Oxford but the West Country of both Peter and her William Sclater (who, unlike Peter, attended Cambridge, not Oxford; see Foster 1092).

Using Shaxicon, furthermore, Charles Hieatt and I have arrived at dates for the composition and revision of