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Review of *The Oxford Chronology of English Literature*

Daniel H. Traister

University of Pennsylvania, traister@pobox.upenn.edu

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Abstract

Reference books hide their learning. The reader who opens *The Oxford Chronology of English Literature* to 1815 may read, inter alia, about "[John Galt (1779)]/F *The Majolo / A Tale* / FOR H. COLBURN / Anon. 'Introductory Address' dated Apr. 1815. / Repub. in 2 vols with additional text, 1816" (1:354; "F" stands for "fiction"). Nothing about such an entry surprises or perhaps even seems of interest.

Comments

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The Oxford Chronology of English Literature. 2 vols. Edited by MICHAEL COX. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. Pp. xxix+1299. \$225.00 (cloth). ISBN 0-19-860027-7.

Reference books hide their learning. The reader who opens *The Oxford Chronology of English Literature* to 1815 may read, inter alia, about “[John Galt (1779)] / F *The Majolo* / A tale / FOR H. COLBURN / Anon. ‘Introductory Address’ dated Apr. 1815. / Repub. in 2 vols, with additional text, 1816” (1:354; “F” stands for “fiction”). Nothing about such an entry especially surprises or perhaps even seems of interest.

Yet as recently as 1931, Harry Lumsden, Galt’s bibliographer, knew nothing about an 1815 one-volume *Majolo*. He noted no Galt publications at all for 1815 (*Records of the Glasgow Bibliographical Society*, 9:26). In 1936, Jennie W. Aberdein (*John Galt*, pp. 88–89), and more recently (1972) Ian A. Gordon (*John Galt: The Life of a Writer*, pp. 20, 30), also knew of no 1815 edition. These scholars missed the fact that the 1816 volumes expand an 1815 one-volume novel. Michael Cox’s “Introduction” to the *Chronology* remarks that “many entries” in it “embody the fruits of new research (often by the volume’s advisers) that in some cases correct standard sources” (1: xiii). The Galt entry exemplifies what he is talking about.

But what use has such a fact? Lumsden, Aberdein, and Gordon agree that *The Majolo* is uninteresting or simply bad. Yet unaware that the book was first published in one and then expanded to two volumes, scholars lack the most basic bibliographical information about it. Knowing that publishers spent money to print *The Majolo* in a second, expanded edition is evidence of its contemporary impact that might have provoked more questions about the novel’s merits than any scholar seems to have asked.

Of course, that a corrected fact will impel anyone to take another look at an unknown and extremely hard to find novel by a little-read author of the early nineteenth century is hard to demonstrate, although a guess might be hazarded. (My guess: “No.”) Presumably, however, facts must be loved for themselves. For the facts marshaled correctly in the *Chronology*, one can only be grateful.

What it does with its facts—indeed, which facts it chooses to notice—are other questions. The *Chronology*’s list for 1817, two years after Galt published *The Majolo*, includes an entry for the better known *Northanger Abbey*; and *Persuasion* (Murray, 4 vols.). The entry (1:356) corrects Murray’s 1818 imprint (“Pub. Dec. 1817, dated 1818”). It mentions Henry Austen’s prefatory “biographical notice (naming the author)” without commenting that Jane Austen had not been named the author of her novels before this time; its focus is the date of the notice, and the date of the postscript, too, as evidence for the 1817 date. It also remarks the Philadelphia “1832–3” edition. Every fact is right. But nothing tells the *Chronology*’s user that *Northanger Abbey* was Austen’s first, *Persuasion* the last of her six major novels, and that many years separate their composition, *Northanger Abbey* having roots in the 1790s. This would seem a chronological matter; Why does it go unmentioned? What facts matter? The date of a book’s appearance in print is important. But are their shared imprint dates the only important chronological fact about these two novels?

It is not always clear what information the *Chronology* wants its user to gain. Describing its predecessor, the 1935 *Annals of English Literature*, Cox speaks of “a view of the main literary output of a given year,” a “means of viewing literary works in time, and in relation to other works published in the same year” (1:xiii). But *Northanger Abbey* was published long after Austen had begun and even well after she

had completed it. Its references (if not the reader's) are to novels fashionable when Austen was young, not to other novels from 1817. Privileging imprint dates permits the *Chronology* to rob other dates—which are also “facts”—of context and meaning.

The entry for Malory's 1485 *Morte d'Arthur* (1:5) escapes this error, informing the user that Caxton's edition is based on a prior manuscript (“completed . . . 1469–70”). But the *Chronology* is inconsistent in this practice. Entries for Caxton's Chaucers (for example, 1477 [1:3]) mention no earlier manuscripts. Surely, the editor must have supposed, any reader should know; after all, the *Chronology* cites Chaucer's “1340(?)–1400” lifespan. The entry for Langland's *Piers Plowman* does mention manuscripts (1550; 1:23). Audiences of varied backgrounds consult reference tools. Such inconsistencies, affecting entries for both the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries, suggest that more thought about audience needs might have been worthwhile. (“The B text,” says the entry for *Piers*: What user benefits from those cryptic words?)

The *Chronology*'s bias toward date of print publication, troublesome with respect to fiction, is utterly misleading with respect to drama, where imprint date matters far less than performance date. (Cox comments briefly on the *Chronology*'s print bias with respect to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poets such as Donne, Marvell, and Rochester who circulated in manuscript [1:xiv], but he seems otherwise unselfconscious about it.) The *Annals of English Drama* for 1630, for example, lists nine plays (edited by Alfred Harbage and revised by S. [Samuel] Schoenbaum; 3d ed. revised by Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim; London and New York: Routledge, 1989). Not one was published in 1630. Not one appears in the *Chronology* for 1630, and few anywhere else. Both an Anonymous *Induction* (lost) and a lost John Ford are completely off the *Chronology*'s screen. Eight citations to others of Richard Brome's plays do not suffice to include his 1630 *The City Wit, or The Woman Wears the Breeches*. It might have interested a reader of *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594) and *The Taming of the Shrew* (1623), both listed, or of Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize* (performed 1611, published 1647), not listed. Both of Thomas Randolph's 1630 plays appear in the *Chronology* (1638, 1:108). As parts of a volume labeled “V” (for “verse”), however, that they are plays may escape many users. Jonathan Sidnam rates one entry, but not for his 1630 play (1655, 1:132). Arthur Wilson, also listed once, is included for a nondramatic work (1653, 1:130).

Cox uses words like “arbitrariness” and “impressionistic” when he discusses the principles of inclusion governing editors' choices (1:xv). He implies, but does not explicitly state, that even writers who are included are often included in part, not in whole. Few readers will be able reliably to predict what they will and will not find in the *Chronology*. Anthony Powell, a twentieth-century writer, is present as a novelist, memoirist, and book reviewer. His plays and his poetry go unrecorded. Of the enormously prolific Stanley Middleton, only six of his novels are included. Where are the rest?

What can a reviewer make of this? Extensive in scope, well and (so far as I can tell) accurately indexed (by author, title, and translated author), the *Chronology* is admirable in its devotion to facts and presents, often in corrected form, many of them. It represents the culmination of a massive amount of labor and good intentions. The work presents almost 30,000 titles with authors' birth and death dates, some effort at generic description, publishers' names, and miscellaneous information about illustrations, dedications, and later editions, all attractively and readably printed and organized. Despite its virtues, it pains me to say, I can, all too easily, imagine it confusing beginners without being able to imagine its usefulness to any serious student who needs more than an imprint date. In its print format, moreover, the *Chronology* will not easily be corrected or expanded. What Stephen Booth once

said of a different literary reference work seems equally apposite to this one: it is an expensive toy.

Daniel Traister, *Van Pelt Library, University of Pennsylvania*

Ruling the Root: Internet Governance and the Taming of Cyberspace. MILTON L. MUELLER. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002. Pp. vii+317. \$32.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-262-13412-8.

The Internet is an indispensable service in most libraries today, and as a result, knowledge of its operation is essential for librarians. Yet while a technical focus has strongly entrenched itself in the profession, an understanding of the evolving political economy of the Internet has not. *Ruling the Root* goes a long way to rectifying this equally serious problem through its treatment of Internet name space history. It is also clear, concise, and extremely interesting.

The book is divided into three sections. The first (chaps. 1–4) provides an overview of certain important concepts and technologies. Here we learn that while computers need to be assigned unique identifiers in order to participate effectively in sending and receiving network traffic, all that is necessary from the computer's perspective is that this identifier be a number within an agreed upon range. In such a system there would likely be no conflict over names in much the same way that Ethernet identifiers have not become a topic of controversy. However, the founders of the Internet chose to overlay these simple numerical identifiers (IP addresses) with ones that would be semantically meaningful to humans (domain names). This is the focal point upon which the rest of the story revolves, since particularly meaningful names, if unique, become valuable resources, as does the right to assign these names in the first place. In the case of the Internet the right to assign names is ultimately invested in whoever controls what is called the "root." The root maintains the "master list" of names and contact information for the top-level domains (TLDs), the highest level of the Internet name space hierarchy, thus making it a key resource in the politics of the Internet.

Mueller chooses to base his account of the evolving political economy of the Internet on a framework developed by institutional economics to explain the formation of the property rights in newly discovered resources. According to this framework there are three phases involved in producing these rights. The first, endowment, sees the development of a demand that gives value to a new resource. The second, appropriation, sees attempts by various actors to exploit the resource. Conflict is generated as a result and this, if severe enough, will lead to the third phase, institutionalization. Here, a set of rules is worked out among the actors that serves to settle the disputes (not necessarily in a just or efficient manner) that have arisen and that serves to govern future allocation and use of the resource. It is in the construction of these rules that property rights take shape.

The mapping of these phases to Internet history occupies the second part of the book (chaps. 5–9). We see how the design of TCP/IP as a protocol able to connect very different types of networks, the creation of the domain name system, the implementation of the World Wide Web client-server application, and the financial and institutional support of the U.S. government, made Internet name space into a valuable resource. By 1994, the first disputes over this new resource arose as organizations began to realize the commercial value of the medium and the fact that they were often not the first to register their "real world" names. The TLDs themselves were the source of added conflict. Registering domain names was becoming a lucra-

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