Proposal for ASECS 2024 session 80 Overdetermined and Under-determined Authorship: Methods and Progress in Identity [Society for the History of Authorship, Reading, and Publishing (SHARP)]

**Scribes as Authors in Restoration Manuscript Culture: The Case of *Sodom***

Jeremy Webster

Ohio University

webstej1@ohio.edu

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The only known surviving printed copy of *Sodom*, one of the great authorial puzzles of the Restoration era, was auctioned by Sotheby’s in 2004 to a private collector for £45,600. The presale catalogue contains an image of the book’s title page, which attributes the pornographic work to “the E. of R.,” John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester. Scholars have long debated this attribution, which looms so large over the text that it is rarely studied apart from this controversy.

My paper posits that it is time to decouple the study of *Sodom*, specifically, and Restoration manuscript satires generally, from the paradigm of single authorship by taking seriously the authorial roles of the scribes who produced the manuscript miscellanies that eventually formed the bases for printed editions in the early eighteenth century. Indeed, what Matthew Fisher writes of Medieval scribes is equally true of Restoration ones: “Scribes did much more than copy the exemplars before them.” As Paul Hammond similarly suggests, amateur and professional scribes during the Restoration period not only copied texts but created new ones along with new frameworks for understanding them. Yet the authorial function of scribes isre largely absent from our study of what Peter Beal calls “the last great flourishing of manuscript literary culture in England.” I argue that studying *Sodom* as a product of what Fisher calls “scribal authorship” is an excellent case study for understanding the under-determined authorial role of scribes in Restoration manuscript culture. To make this argument, I will outline the textual development of *Sodom* from its earliest incarnation (likely Princeton C0199) to the early eighteenth-century print edition and show how scribes likely created the text as we now know it. Based on this example, I further argue for seeing scribal authorship as an equally (if not more) seminal component in the production and transition of late seventeenth-century satire from manuscript to print, from scribal miscellanies to printed works such as *Poems on Affairs of State*, and forchallenging the primacy of single-author studies.