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Richardson's Unknown Writings: an Afterword

by David Richard Beasley

In the Autumn 2021 issue of *Ontario History* my article “John Richardson’s Unknown Writings” argues that Richardson wrote the novels *The Roué* and its sequel *The Oxonians*. The novels were published by Colburn in the late 1820s, and, although listed as “Anonymous”, they were attributed to Bulwer-Lytton shortly afterwards and throughout their printings until recently. A rival for the authorship was the playwright Samuel Beazley as presented by Gorel Garlick in *The Theatre Designs and Plays of Samuel Beazley* (2003). By textual analysis I thought to have proven my case when by chance I came across a footnote in Richardson’s *Eight Years in Canada* in which Richardson refers to William Jerdan’s vicious attack on his novel *Ecarté*. “And it was in this spirit that he, who lauded ‘Beazley’s Roué’ to the skies, pronounced ‘Ecarté’ (a book which others have said ought to be in the hands of every young man designing to visit Paris) a publication fit only for the stewes of London.”¹

Was my skillful argument for Richardson’s authorship to be undermined by Richardson himself? *The Roué* depicted unscrupulous men deceiving innocent

women. *Ecarté* described naive Englishmen being deceived by unscrupulous Frenchmen in gambling casinos. *Eight Years in Canada* was first published in Richardson’s newspaper *The Weekly Expositor* printed in Montreal in 1846 and a year later in book form. *The Roué* was published eighteen years earlier in London in 1828. Beazley had not been suggested as the author of *The Roué* by anyone else until Garlick’s book. Although Richardson could have learned from Colburn that Beazley wrote the novel, it is unlikely as anonymity was strictly kept. Richardson could have known only if he was connected to its writing. And this is why I think Richardson’s statement supports my argument.

Richardson is ever subtle in his allusions. He did not simply write “The Roué” as praised by Jerdan, as would be expected. He wrote “Beazley’s Roué”, in quotation marks. He seemed to be diverting speculation that he was the author while *suggesting* Beazley, though still speculatively. If he had written Beazley’s “Roué” he would be positive though dishonest if Beazley had not written it. In my article I hinted in a footnote that

¹ Major John Richardson, *Eight Years in Canada* (Montreal. H. H. Cunningham, 1847), p. 9.

by using a phrase exclusive to the theatre Richardson may have wanted to accentuate the impression to Colburn that Beazley was the author. Richardson feared being “outed” as an author which would destroy his hopes for reinstatement in an army career.

Furthermore, by using the phrase “Beazley’s Roué” he implied that Beazley was the author by name only. Samuel Beazley was a prankster and an obliging

fellow who would have given the cover of his name to Richardson and his own reputation as a writer to Colburn to assure the book’s publication. Also, by referring to Jerdan’s praise for *The Roué* as against his trashing of *Ecarté*, Richardson was pointing out not just that both books dealt with subjects of a similar nature but, for his private satisfaction, were by the same author, which made Jerdan’s criticism of *Ecarté* look unscrupulous.

