

The Construction of the Truth-Teller in the Early Issues of the Philosophical Transactions from 1665: The Relationship between Author Functions and Enunciatory Power

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Martin Grünfeld

University College Dublin

Abstract

One astonishing feature characteristic of the early issues of the Philosophical Transactions from 1665 is that each text is not ascribed an author. In this paper, I study this remarkable feature by exploring the relationship between authors and texts through an intra-textual analysis of the various author functions in the texts in order to discuss how (and if) the ascription (or omission) of an author's name marks the truthfulness of a text. By analysing the various author functions, a complex network of positions of the knowing subjects emerges, which shows that the contributors are bestowed with different degrees of enunciatory power to speak the truth. The dispersion of the positions of the knowing subjects ranges from an elevated position of the truth-teller as a gentleman scientist to the dubious entertainer. While the truth-teller is endowed with the authority to speak the truth, the entertainer is in a subordinated position marked by epistemic relativity. Within this distribution of the positions of the knowing subjects, laypersons could contribute to knowledge production, yet they remained in a subordinated position. Thereby, I show how the speaking of truth was distributed unequally in the early issues of the Philosophical Transactions.

Keywords: author function; enunciatory power; knowing subjects; truth.

Introduction

In 1665, the *Philosophical Transactions* (*PTRS*) was founded by the *Royal Society* as one of the first academic journals in the West.¹ *PTRS* was not only one of the first journals, it was also one of the most influential journals in the history of Western science (Atkinson, 1999, 48). Thereby, the earliest issues of *PTRS* provide a privileged access point to the birth of a writing practice that has become widespread today, namely the scientific article. Thus, digging into the past of academic journal writing does not solely tell us something about the past, but re-opens practices of scientific writing that we take for granted, since it makes the historical background of our practices visible. However, certain features of the early issues of *PTRS* appear so alien that they are difficult to believe from a contemporary viewpoint. It is one such feature that I will analyse in this paper, namely the astonishing feature that each text² was not ascribed an author. This feature is almost unthinkable from a contemporary viewpoint given the importance of accumulation of scientific credit within the academic system. Yet in the earliest issues of *PTRS*, the author was not stabilized as a point of reference in the texts.

In this paper, I will explore the role of the author in the earliest issues of *PTRS* from an intra-textual perspective, and analyse the different ways in which the authors function in the texts. When I am studying the *author function*, I am particularly paying attention to the relationship between texts and authors in order to analyse how the ascription (or omission) of an author's name marks the truthfulness of a text and endows it with status.³ I will specifically analyse the variation of ways in which the authors function, and discuss whether these different author functions can be seen as correlative to different positions of the knowing subjects, which are embedded with different enunciatory powers to speak the truth. Here *enunciatory power* refers to the level of authority and truthfulness that a given position is endowed with. This perspective is influenced by Foucault's work, especially his hypothesis that the speaking of truth is always distributed in various ways (1971, 10-11), and his claim that the author function does not affect all discourses in a constant way (1998, 212). From this perspective, I explore the relationship between the position of the authors in the texts and the enunciation of truth, in order to study the construction of the truth-teller in early scientific writing. By looking at the various author functions in relation to the dispersion of positions of the knowing subjects, I will show how the construction of the truth-teller entails an unequal distribution of enunciatory power to speak the truth, distinguishing virtuous gentlemen scientists from common people.

The exploration of the different author functions sets off from an analysis of selected texts from the first issues of *PTRS* from 1665. I have analysed the two earliest issues, which consists of 18 texts in total (including the "Epistle Dedicatory" and the "Introduction"). I have chosen to focus on a small selection of texts from the very first issues in order to explore the distribution of the different ways that the authors function qualitatively. These differences gradually disappear viewed from a broader historical perspective. Indeed, the author function becomes stabilized around 1675 in *PTRS*,

which has been pointed out by Bazerman (1988, chapter 3) and Atkinson (1999, 21) among others. Accordingly, by 1675 the texts were authored and presented in the original author's words. Thereby, what I am studying appears to be a momentary phenomenon, perhaps at a threshold to the author function we know today. Yet, this momentary phenomenon provides an interesting insight into not only the various ways in which the author functions, but also the positions of the knowing subjects and the construction of the truth-teller.

The historical variations of the author function in scientific writing have been studied before. According to Foucault, in the Middle ages, it was indispensable for a scientific text to be attributed to an author, because the text derived its scientific value from its author as an index of its truthfulness, but since the 17th century this principle began its demise (1971, 29). However, given that the author function in *PTRS* is transformed from the multiplicity of presences and absences that I am studying to a stable index for the truthfulness around 1675, perhaps the multiplicity that I am studying is not a sign of the demise of the author, but rather part of the process of stabilization. This points in the opposite direction of Foucault's claim. Moreover, Atkinson has recently argued that it is not until the 19th and 20th centuries that scientific writing moves away from an author-centred basis to an object-centred orientation (1999, xxviii). What he means by this is that scientific texts grow more informational and impersonal. Through a historical analysis, Atkinson shows how the demise of the author in scientific writing occurs much later than Foucault claimed. Nevertheless, as I will show, the question of the demise of the author is complicated further by the heterogeneity of ways in which the author functions in the early issues of *PTRS*.

What I show is that not only is the role of the author in scientific writing historically variable, it is not necessarily stable within a scientific journal at a specific point in time. This has already been pointed out by Valle, who shows how the position of the author is uncertain in the early issues of *PTRS* (Valle, 2006). According to Valle, there does not seem to be a particular reason for the various positions of the authors (Valle, 2006). However, what I discuss here is whether and how the author function is correlative to various positions of the knowing subject invested with different enunciatory powers. Thereby, I add a nuance to the ongoing discussion of the historical role of the author in scientific writing, particularly how the author function may be related to truthfulness.

The Institutional Framework and the Ideal of the Knowing

Subject

Before I move to the analysis of author functions, I will begin by focussing on the two opening texts in the first issue of *PTRS*, namely the "Epistle Dedicatory" and the "Introduction". Taken together, these two texts inaugurate the journal.⁴ Interestingly they provide an insight into the ideal virtues and roles of the contributors qua knowing subjects within an institutionalized production of knowledge. I begin by focussing on these two texts in order to give a glimpse of the institutional framework and ideals

within which *PTRS* is operating, particularly in order to be able to analyse to what extent the ideal of a knowing subject is embodied in the various texts.

PTRS was established by the *Royal Society*, which had ties to the political power at the time. This connection is explicated in the “Epistle Dedicatory” written by the first editor, Oldenburg. The “Epistle Dedicatory” is addressed to the *Royal Society*, but the dedication is primarily directed to the King. In the text, the scientific endeavours are described as working under the King’s approval (RSL, 1665b). However, not only is *PTRS* subordinated to the King, it is inscribed in a threefold framework of authority:

The Great God prosper You in the Noble Engagement of Dispersing the true Lustre of his Glorious Works, and the Happy Inventions of obliging Men all over the World, to the General Benefit of Mankind: so wishes with real Affections,

Your humble and obedient Servant

Henry Oldenburg

(RSL, 1665b)

In these final lines of the “Epistle Dedicatory”, the threefold framework is visible in the dedication to the King and his noble engagement in dispersing the true brilliance of the work of the great God, which benefits all of humanity. Thereby the contributors are inscribed in a subordinated relationship to God, the King, and universal humanity as humble servants attempting to reveal the brilliance of God’s creation. Indeed, when Oldenburg declares himself as a “humble and obedient Servant” it appears as if the scientific endeavours are subordinated to these external forms of power. However, it is precisely by being closely tied to religious and political powers that *PTRS* is capable of circulating knowledge freely without censorship, and corresponding with citizens from other countries (Atkinson, 1999, 16).

Within this framework, Oldenburg functioned as the first editor of the journal and controlled what was published (RSL, 1781). In 1665 at a meeting in the council of the *Royal Society*, it was decided that the *PTRS* should be composed by Oldenburg (Birch, 1968, vol. 2:18). *PTRS* was Oldenburg’s personal enterprise and he chose and edited what was published (Moessner, 2007, 208). The first volumes mainly contained Oldenburg’s versions of the scientific news (Kronick, 1962, 75f; Iliffe, 1995, 173; Bazerman, 1988, 129-133). Indeed, as Bazerman has pointed out: “All was filtered through his voice” (1988, 131). Oldenburg was never pressurized from the outside to publish a particular text; he functioned as a sovereign editor that could choose what to publish, what to extract or rewrite, and what to omit at will (Moessner, 2007, 209). Thus, *PTRS* was invested with power to publish and circulate knowledge freely, and it was indeed Oldenburg who had the sovereign power over the content of the journal. However, while Oldenburg assumed the position of the sovereign editor that controlled the content, the contributors were also subordinated to another internal element, namely

an ideal of the knowing subject. The production of knowledge was subordinated to a specific ideal of the knowing subjects as virtuous tellers of truth, which is explicitly expressed in the “Introduction” to the first issue:

Whereas there is nothing more necessary for promoting the improvement of Philosophical Matters, than the communicating of such, as apply their Studies and Endeavours that way, such things are discovered or put in practice by others; it is therefore thought fit to employ the *Press*, as the most proper way to gratifie those, whose engagement in such studies, and delight in the advancement of Learning and profitable Discoveries, doth entitle them to the knowledge of what this Kingdom, or other parts of the World, do, from time to time, afford, as well of the progress of the Studies, Labours, and attempts of the Curious and learned in things of this kind, as of their compleat Discoveries and performances: To the end, that such Productions being clearly and truly communicated, desires after solid and usefull knowledge may be further entertained, ingenious Endeavours and Undertakings cherished, and those, addicted to and conversant in such matters, may be invited and encouraged to search, try, and find out new things, impart their knowledge to one another, and contribute what they can to the Grand design of improving Natural knowledge, and perfecting all *Philosophical Arts*, and *Sciences*. All for the Glory of God, the Honour and Advantage of these Kingdoms, and the Universal Good of Mankind. (RSL, 1665c)

In this quotation, the undertakings are placed as serving God, the nations, and universal mankind. However, what is of particular interest here is the explication of an ideal knowing subject as a curious, ingenious, and learned subject, who is delighted in the advancement of learning and even addicted to and desiring solid, useful knowledge.⁵ This image of the knowing subject is also visible in the front matter, where *PTRS* is described as “giving some account of the present undertakings, studies, and labours of the ingenious” (RSL, 1665a). Thereby a particular formation of the *will to knowledge* is visible here, which imposes a specific position on the knowing subject, who must search for knowledge for the sake of knowledge and for the benefit of the greater good for humanity.⁶ Social, political, and economic interests are absent from this ideal, which finds resonance in the contemporary gentleman culture. At the time of the emergence of *PTRS*, British science was based on the gentleman as a social category, characterized by disinterestedness and moral rectitude (Atkinson, 1999; Daston, 1991; Shapin, 1995). As Shapin has shown, there was a relationship between the idea of the gentleman and the idea of truth telling (1995, xxi). In particular, the gentleman was marked by social, political, and economic freedom, which positioned him as an autonomous, disinterested, and honourable teller of truth (Ibid., 83-4). Thereby resting on the conventional image of the gentleman, a whole social system was put to work as a way to powerfully speak the truth (Atkinson, 1999, xxvii).

In his description of the contributors as dedicated, desiring, curious, even addicted to knowledge, Oldenburg reveals an ideal of the knowing subject pursuing knowledge for the sake of knowledge. The authority of the contributors is based on this ideal of the

knowing subject, which the contributors must embody as virtuous and honest gentlemen, as well as on the institutional framework within which the knowing subjects are placed. Yet when the various texts in the early issues of *PTRS* are taken into consideration, a broader dispersion of positions of the knowing subjects appears, ranging from a virtuous teller of truth resembling the ideal of the truth-teller present in the “Introduction”, to a subordinated entertainer. In the following sections, I will discuss how these positions are related to the various author functions.

Author Functions

Let me begin with a few brief remarks on the characteristics of the texts that I am analysing. *PTRS* emerged at a time, when the main channels of scientific communication in written form were books and private letters. The production of books was time-consuming and expensive, and books were only published in small numbers, thereby rendering wider circulation difficult (Moessner, 2007, 206). Meanwhile, the private letter was the most convenient form of circulation of scientific knowledge (Kronick, 1962, 50-9). Yet, this form of circulation was slow and vulnerable, and made it inconvenient to share ideas with many fellow researchers (Moessner, 2007, 206 & 220). Within this void, *PTRS* emerged as a medium for sharing scientific ideas, and it greatly stimulated the growth of adepts, providing an excellent means for exchanging views (Gotti, 2014). The journal had four main functions: to report new findings, to establish a forum for debate, to function as scientific newsletters, and to review new scientific literature (Valle, 2006). The first issues are characterized by a multiplicity of accounts, book reviews, narratives, extracts of letters, and an obituary. The texts are relatively short (1-5 pages) and a mixture of different genres. It is generally possible to distinguish between accounts and reviews written in the third person, and letters written in the first person. The difference between the use of a third person and a first person is related to the various ways in which the authors are present or absent in the texts.

If we direct our attention to the position of the author in the texts, something strange appears: there is no explicit author ascribed to each text. Instead, there is a variety of author functions, which suggests that the author is not stabilized as a reference point for the truthfulness of a text, but at the same time, the author has not disappeared altogether. As Valle has pointed out, the textual practices in the early issues of *PTRS* show little concern with identifying the authorial voice (Valle, 2006). The various author functions can roughly be divided into three categories:

- 1) The name of the author is presented in the title
- 2) The author is anonymous, while the name of the observer is presented in the text
- 3) No name is attributed to the text, but can in some cases be inferred from other texts

This is a schematic overview and within each category, there are internal variations. Nonetheless, the majority of the texts analysed can be placed within one of these categories. While this distinction might seem somewhat arbitrary, it will reveal a range of different positions of the knowing subjects, invested with different levels of enunciatory power. Here are some examples of the first category, where the name of the author figures in the title:

An Extract of a Letter, Containing some Observations made in the ordering of Silk-worms, communicated by that known Vertuoso, Mr. Dudley Palmer, from the ingenious Mr. Edward Digges. (RSL, 1665r)

Extract of a Letter, Lately Written from Venice, by the Learned Doctor Walter Pope, to the Reverend Dean of Rippon, Doctor John Wilkins, Concerning the Mines of Mercury in Friuli; And a Way of Producing Wind by the Fall of Water. (RSL, 1665q)

To begin with, it is worth noticing the ascription of personal characteristics in the titles in which the contributors are described as “ingenious” and “learned”. These characteristics resemble the general properties of the ideal knowing subject, and through the ascription of these characteristics to particular contributors, the contributors are marked as embodying the ideal. This emphasis on their personal characteristics bestows them with powers to enunciate knowledge and establishes a relation between the author and the truthfulness of the text. However, the two titles above also show how proximity to the *Royal Society* has important implications for the position from which one can speak. Pope was himself a member of the *Royal Society*, while Digges, who was the colonial governor in Virginia, knew Palmer, who was a member of the *Royal Society* and functioned as an intermediary link. As such, Pope is in a position from which authority and truthfulness is automatically ascribed through the personal pronoun “I”, while Digges is in a mixed position in which he is relying on the mediation of his observations, but is still ascribed authority to speak truthfully. This runs parallel with Valle’s claim that members of the *Royal Society* are more often allowed to speak in their own voice (Valle, 2006). In general, the first category is characterized by the constitution of a knowing subject, who is ascribed authority to enunciate truth.

If we compare the attribution of authority to the author with the second category, where the observer is mentioned by name in the text, we find a similar ascription of authority through personal characteristics:

There was lately sent to one of the *Secretaires* of the *Royal Society* a packet, containing some Copies of a Printed Paper, Entituled, The *Ephemerides* of the *Comet*, made by the same Person, that sent it, Called *Monsieur Auzout*, a *French Gentleman* of no ordinary Merit and Learning. (RSL, 1665f)

Here the contributor is proclaimed to be “a *French Gentleman* of no ordinary Merit and Learning”, and later in the text, he is even described as a “Philosophical Prophet”.

Consequently, the contributor, Auzout, who was a French natural philosopher and member of the Montmor Academy, is ascribed authority to enunciate his calculations and observations truthfully. Yet, he is no longer the author of the actual text, but the person accounting for his calculations and observations, and recounting them for the editor, while the text is written in third person by an anonymous author. The actual writer (and in some cases translator) of these third person accounts was Oldenburg (Banks 2010, 3; Atkinson 1999, 20). This is characteristic of the second category of texts: the observer is not the author of the actual text. This means that the author is effaced, while the observer is ascribed authority. In some cases, the observer is even ascribed the authority to verify his own calculations and observations through his status as virtuous and honest, e.g., “he assureth, that he hath not changed the least number in his Calculations” (RSL, 1665f).¹ In the first category, we see observations in some cases are affirmed automatically through the presence of the author, which secures the truthfulness of the text. Conversely, in the second category, authority is displaced to the position of the observer, who is praised and can affirm the truthfulness of his observations.

So far, the positions of the knowing subjects in categories 1 and 2 resembled the overall ideal of the knowing subject presented in the “Introduction”. However, if we compare the two first categories with the third category, we find larger variations in the positions ascribed to the knowing subjects. In the third category, the authority ascribed to the name of either author or observer has disappeared. However, this is a complex and heterogeneous category, which can be divided into (at least) two subcategories, namely:

a) Anonymous first person letters.

b) Anonymous third person accounts with descriptions of the contributor.

An example of subcategory a) is a letter from Rome, written in the first person using explicitly the personal pronoun “I”, without the name of the author being presented:

Extract of a Letter, lately written from Rome, touching the late Comet, and a New one.

I cannot enough wonder at the strange agreement of the thoughts of that acute French Gentleman, Monsieur *Auzout*, in the *Hypothesis* of the Comets motion, with mine; and particularly, at that of the *tables*. (RSL, 1665n)

The actual author is only indirectly available, since he is revealed to be Cassini in a subsequent text (RSL, 1665o), which is a response to the letter. Furthermore, Cassini, who was an Italian astronomer, is not praised anywhere, which marks a difference from categories 1 and 2, where the positive attributes of a contributor qua knowing subject were emphasized explicitly. In contrast to category 1 and 2, it appears as if the contributor as a point of reference for the truthfulness has been effaced. However, if we look at the following letter, which is also written anonymously, but where the author is indirectly available, it is revealed that the author is no other than the aforementioned and highly praised Auzout. Thereby, there is a tension between the explicit praising of

the contributor in one text and his anonymity in another text.⁷ Given the earlier praise of Auzout, his anonymity cannot be understood as signifying a lower degree of truthfulness or scientific significance in comparison to the other categories. Nevertheless, given the absence of a positive constitution of the knowing subject, which is regularly used in the first two categories, this category is markedly different and does not entail the same level of authority.⁸

While the anonymous letters of category 3a still contained indirect references to their authors, subcategory 3b is characterized by being third person accounts without any references to the name of the contributor. However, within texts from category 3b, there are some descriptions of the contributors e.g.:

Here follows a Relation, somewhat more divertising than the precedent Accounts; which is about the new *Whale fishing* in the *West Indies* about the *Bermudas*, as it was delivered by an understanding and hardy Sea-man, who affirmed he had been at the killing work himself. (RSL, 1665k)

What is worth noticing in this excerpt is the way the observer is described as an “understanding and hardy Sea-man”. In contrast to the ideal of the knowing subject as ingenious and learned, here is an account produced by a hardy seaman, who lacks the autonomy ascribed to the gentleman. Even though the seaman is taking part in the transactions contributing with what he can to the general understanding of nature, and may even incarnate the ideal of curiosity, nonetheless, he remains in a subordinated position in comparison to the other contributors. This can be seen by the demand that he affirms “he had been at the killing work himself”. In contrast to the gentleman scientist, who is tacitly trusted to be a first-hand observer, the seaman must explicitly affirm that he is trustworthy and not only spreading rumours. The subordinate position of the anonymous account of the seaman is also emphasized by the remark that it is “divertising”, thereby taken as entertainment. Here a difference between enunciatory powers ascribed to the various contributors appears, which marks a difference between serious scientific work and entertaining observations with epistemic relativity.

The Dispersion of the Enunciatory Powers of the Knowing Subjects

The analysis of the author functions revealed a differentiation of positions of the knowing subjects that are infused with various enunciatory powers. Thus, rather than the demise of the author as an index for the truthfulness, authority is ascribed in various ways and in varying degrees. In this way, enunciatory powers and truthfulness, as well as general perceptual competences, are distributed unequally.⁹ However, it is important not to take the author functions as directly correlative with the various enunciatory powers of the knowing subjects. For example, even though the texts written within

category 2 are predominantly characterized by the displacement of authority from the author to the observer, who is praised as a knowing subject and endowed with enunciatory powers to speak the truth, there is an important exception:

The *First* regardeth the excellency of the long *Telescopes*, made by the said *Campani*, who pretends to have found a way to work great *Optick Glasses* with a Turne-tool, without any Mould; And whereas hitherto it hath been found by Experience, that *small Glasses* are in proportion better to see with, upon the earth than great ones; that Author affirms, that his are equally good for the Earth, and for making Observations in the Heavens. (RSL, 1665d)

In this quotation, an epistemic relativity appears to be inserted with the use of the word “pretends”. Nevertheless, the use of “pretends” is in and of itself not enough to mark the insertion of epistemic relativity. On the contrary, in 1665 the meaning of “pretends” was more neutral than today, meaning “to assert” rather than “to put forward a false claim”. Indeed, because the author is allowed to affirm his claims, the neutral meaning gains further plausibility. However, in the text, Campani, who was an Italian telescope maker, is not explicitly praised. Meanwhile, in the same text Huygens, who was a Dutch mathematician and member of the Montmor academy, is mentioned as a “worthy Gentleman”. As a result, inequality between Campani and Huygens is established. This example shows how an internal differentiation is at work between virtuous scientists of great merit, and dubious observers, which affects the truthfulness of the texts or in the above case, the different claims within a text.¹⁰ Thus, the differentiation between truth-tellers and dubious observers occurs at various levels, both internally in the texts and inter-textually. Thereby contributors of great merit and virtue, and dubious observers are differentiated, and the speaking of truth is distributed unequally. The genuine truth-teller is constructed through a distinction from dubious knowledge producers. It was Oldenburg, from his position as editor, who ascribed authority to certain contributors, and decided whether credit should be conferred through naming (see also Valle, 2006 and Iliffe, 1995). Indeed, through the naming processes, and particularly the characteristics given by him, to specify the attributes of a person, Oldenburg endows the actual contributors with different enunciatory powers.

The dispersion of the positions of the knowing subjects distributes different levels of truthfulness, ranging from an elevated position of the ingenious and learned gentleman scientist, to a subordinated position of the dubious observer and/or entertainer. However, while these positions cannot be seen as strictly correlative to the different author functions, the elevated position of truth-teller is predominantly present within the author functions found in categories 1 and 2. In categories 1 and 2, the knowing subject is almost exclusively described positively as “ingenious”, “noble”, “knowing”, “curious”, “learned”, “serious”, “gentleman”, etc. These characteristics create an image of a virtuous teller of truth that, besides intelligence, also possesses attributes such as autonomy, honesty, and seriousness, which collectively mould the readers’ assessment of the text.

In the elevated position, the knowing subject functions as an authority for telling the truth. This entails that not everybody is allowed to speak the truth, they need to have certain positive personal attributes and merits. Indeed, the ascription of virtues such as honesty and nobility to the knowing subject grounds the truth of the observations. Honesty plays a crucial role within this system of knowledge production, because the knowledge produced is almost exclusively based on private observations.¹¹ What this entails is that the editor has very little chance of checking the observations before publishing the texts. As Daston has pointed out, modern science depended on the rhetorical technology of trust and proximity (1991). Thus, being a gentleman was the most efficient way to validate one's own science (Atkinson, 1999, xxvii).

The elevated position of the knowing subject as a virtuous teller of truth can be contrasted with the positions of the dubious observers and entertainers. Besides the above example with Campani, another example of a subordinated position is the seaman recounting anonymously, where his recount is characterized as “divertising”, which indicates that his recount is printed because of its entertaining virtues rather than its scientific significance. Furthermore, it is important to notice a specific characteristic of category 3b, namely that while the observers are anonymous and not praised as knowing subjects, their professions are explicated (e.g., as a seaman and as a physician) (See RSL, 1665i and RSL, 1665j). As such, attention is drawn to the knowing subject as a layperson, and the reliability of his testimony is connected to his specific position in society. This position can be contrasted with the autonomy of the gentleman as a genuine disinterested knowledge producer. This point resonates with Shapin's work, particularly his description of how common people were treated as unreliable compared to gentlemen, thus, reliability was ascribed differently to different people (1995, 78).

Now a dynamic relationship between the editor Oldenburg and the contributors is visible: while the space for speaking the truth is distributed unequally, consequently constraining the contributors, the contributors are simultaneously bestowed with various degrees of enunciatory power to speak the truth. Concurrently, the contributors are endowed with powers to produce knowledge and constrained because they are measured up against a restricting ideal of a knowing subject as a virtuous teller of truth.

Conclusion

Through an exploration of the early issues of *PTRS*, I have shown that various author functions are at work, and that the contributors are bestowed with different degrees of enunciatory power to speak the truth.

In my analysis, a complex network of positions of the knowing subjects emerged. In some texts, namely category 1, the author functions as an index for truthfulness. In other texts, the author is effaced, while the authority of the author has been displaced to the position of the observer (category 2). In these cases, the contributors are predominantly constituted as truth-tellers, and described in positive terms as curious, learned, ingenious, addicted to the advancement of learning, and searching for knowledge for the

sake of the greater good for humanity. This ideal of the truth-teller is visible in its pure form in Oldenburg's "Introduction" and it reappears in some of the texts in categories 1 and 2. Yet, there are other texts in which the contributors are anonymous and not ascribed positive characteristics (category 3a), and in some texts the observers are presented as dubious, marked by certain limitations and epistemic relativity (category 3b). However, even though there is a connection between the different author functions and the enunciatory powers of the contributors, still, there is no direct correlation between a specific author function and a given position of the knowing subject. Thereby, a complex mixture of author functions becomes visible, which shows that neither has the author disappeared as an index for truthfulness, nor is the ascription of an author the only way to establish the truthfulness of a text.

The dispersion of the positions of the knowing subjects ranges from the elevated position of the truth-teller as a virtuous and ingenious gentleman scientist to the subordinated dubious entertainer. While the truth-teller is constructed as the reference point for the truthfulness of his own observations, through virtues such as honesty and disinterestedness, establishing the authority to speak the truth, the entertainer is characterized by being a layperson, thereby implicitly having specific interests, which may influence his observations. Thus, the speaking of truth is distributed unequally. From his position as a sovereign editor, Oldenburg orchestrates this hierarchy of voices. While the truth-teller is endowed with the authority to speak the truth, the entertainer finds himself in a constrained position marked by epistemic relativity. The dispersion of the positions of the knowing subjects allows laypersons to contribute to the enterprise of expanding knowledge, while they remain in a subordinated position. Consequently, lesser men could also produce knowledge, but remained lesser men.

Notes

¹ A few months before the publication of the *Philosophical Transactions*, another academic journal emerged in France, namely the *Journal des sçavans*.

² I have chosen to designate the texts in *PTRS* as *texts*, rather than as *articles* or *papers*, because they are very different from what we understand by the terms *articles* and *papers* today. Indeed, some of the early texts in *PTRS* resemble news articles of the day, while others are letters of correspondence.

³ For a general discussion of the *author function*, see Foucault (1998, 205 & 211-216).

⁴ Perhaps these texts can be seen as establishing what Foucault describes as a ritual control of speakers within a discourse (1971, 41).

⁵ In RSL, 1665m, which is an obituary, we find further formulations that indicate the ideal of the knowing subject as not only a genius with extraordinary merit, but also with moral virtues of politeness.

⁶ This runs parallel with Foucault's analysis of the *will to knowledge* in *L'ordre du discours* (see Foucault, 1971).

⁷ This contrast can be seen by comparing RSL, 1665f and RSL, 1665o.

⁸ Here it is also worth noticing that the letters analysed are from Rome and Paris, because it entails that they are translations made by Oldenburg (see also Moessner, 2007, 218). This changes the appearance of the "I", since it is not a direct authorial voice, but rather a translated, paraphrased, and extracted voice.

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the distribution of perceptual competence, see Shapin (1995, 75). There are also some hidden moral implications. Influenced by Christianity, only the morally behaving "man of science" can see the truth and be trusted to communicate it (see Shapin, 2008).

¹⁰ This differentiation can also be seen in RSL, 1665h and RSL, 1665p. For example in RSL, 1665h the noble Boyle is distinguished from an anonymous butcher.

¹¹ This problem is at the core of the controversy between Boyle and Hobbes. While Hobbes advocated for mathematics as an effective science, Boyle and his co-operators established the laboratory with passive onlookers as an attempt to develop an experimental regime of knowledge production that was no longer based on private observations (Shapin and Schaffer, 2011).

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