

## Fforde's Book Upgrades: Downloaded Errata and Metafictional Cancellation

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When Jasper Fforde's *First Among Sequels* was published in 2007, the first print run of the British Hodder edition was missing essential text.<sup>1</sup> The missing text was "footnoterphone speech," a series of footnotes through which characters in Fforde's fictional book world communicate. The missing footnotes are numbered 1 through 17, and appear on pages 194, 195, 332, 333, 339, 392 and 393 in later printings. The publisher's and author's response to this oversight was to distribute the missing text in a form that allowed readers to "correct" their copies of the book. This case, particularly the way in which the missing text was distributed, offers an opportunity to examine and, perhaps, rethink how bibliographic terminology can be applied in relation to contemporary publishing, particularly where there is direct communication, published online, between the author and book owners, and the errata list itself is articulated metafictionally.

Fforde maintains a website ([www.jasperfforde.com](http://www.jasperfforde.com)) for his novels and photography. The website includes, beyond the usual announcements of forthcoming public appearances, biographical and basic bibliographic information—including a "Bookstack" which offers a selection of international and alternative edition covers of his books—a collection of links to such items as the "Nursery Crime Division" (the fictional police department of the Jack Spratt series of novels), "e-Toad" (an online collection of articles from the fictional tabloid featured in his novels), and "Goliath Merchandising" (named after the novels' fictional multinational, where one can purchase Fforde's merchandise). In the wake of the missing footnoterphone speech, Fforde facilitated the distribution of a downloadable "upgrade" that could be accessed through his website, printed out, and cut and pasted into copies of *First Among Sequels* by readers.

Fforde's action was self-initiated, as he explains:

When we found out about the missing footnotes in 'First Among Sequels' (the Friday before Monday's publication) I instigated the upgrade as it was the logical thing to do, and Hodder printed off tones [sic] of sheets and made sure they were distributed to all the bookshops.<sup>2</sup>

A withdrawal of copies was dismissed, Fforde continues,

on the grounds that it would be damaging to the first week's sales, and that my readership would have no problem with it anyway, as it is very much within the spirit

<sup>1</sup> Fforde's *First Among Sequels* (2007) is the fifth in his Thursday Next series of novels.

<sup>2</sup> Personal email, 18 July 2008.

of the series. Hodder offered a corrected version with every titlepage sent in, but as far as we know, only one person took up the offer.

Fforde believed that his readers would willingly participate in the correction/cancellation<sup>3</sup> of copies of the (faulty) first Hodder edition. The series' focus upon a parallel BookWorld, in which occurs everything from book-jumping to attacks by Grammasites, promotes an awareness of, and engagement with, bibliography as a narrative concern. Consequently, Fforde's readers embraced this interactive system of correction/cancellation. Of course, online errata lists for non fiction are quite common and for fiction are not unknown. Nevertheless, Fforde's "upgrades," addressing works of fiction, are I believe noteworthy in the context of their relation to his fictional narratives and in terms of their material application through downloadable printed materials.

Readers who did not receive a copy of the corrected text with their book, or readers curious about the error and its correction, can obtain the errata sheet through Fforde's website. By clicking on *First Among Sequels*, an image of the British and American covers of the paperback issue (July 2008) appearing as an icon on the first page of the website (as at 20 June 2008), readers of the website are directed as follows: "UK readers of Hodder first edition please click [HERE](#) for immediate Upgrade." Following the embedded link, readers automatically download a pdf file entitled "tn5\_erratum," the "tn5" standing for the fifth novel of the Thursday Next series.

The file includes a single page providing details of the pages on which text is missing. Fforde notes:

Even though I'd like to claim it's an obscure Nextian joke that requires a brain the size of Jupiter to understand, it isn't. It's a balls-up of the highest magnitude for which I and my publishers apologise profusely. So to make amends we have spared every expense to bring you this cut-out-and-paste do-it-yourself-too-many-hyphens-in-this-sentence erratum slip.

The Hodder website ([www.hodder.co.uk](http://www.hodder.co.uk)), as at June 2008, offers no information regarding errata for the book, thus the author takes long-term responsibility for the correction of this first printing. However, as at March 2009, the upgrade page for *First Among Sequels* notes that "The publishers will provide a corrected second edition free of charge to anyone sending the title page and a return address," followed by the relevant address (<http://www.jasperfforde.com/upgrade/upgdtn5.html>).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Brian Gerrard examines the definition of cancellation in *Post-Impression Correction in British Books Printed During the Eighteenth Century* (PhD diss., Monash University, 1993); Gerrard's definitions are followed in this article. I note, however, that the type of post-impression correction discussed here is dependent on twenty-first century technologies and media and there is a need to comprehensively categorise the consequent forms of cancellation-like activities that are emerging.

<sup>4</sup> Fforde likewise posted information about the error on the Amazon.com.uk customer discussion

This assertion of responsibility is reinforced by the appearance at the bottom of the erratum slip of the author's signature (the more informal first name only), in effect personalising the errata. The erratum slip is not only—as Fforde comically alludes—a cheap alternative from the publisher's perspective, but the nature of the slip also places the onus of the correction upon the book's eventual owner and, hence, the reader who reads not only Fforde's novels, but his website, and consequently has the technological equipment necessary to achieve the correction and the familiarity with Fforde's work beyond the novels to initially locate the errata material.

On the erratum slip, seven text boxes, clearly outlined, appear. These boxes include the relevant missing text and page numbers for the respective pages. Beneath the boxes are a list of instructions: "1: Using a sharp pair of scissors, cut out the labels. (please ask your parents first.)<sup>5</sup> 2: Affix firmly in your copy of *First Among Sequels* on the appropriate page. 3: Read book." The instructions indicate clearly the expectation that the owner will paste the text onto the pages of the book, thus correcting the copy that they will then read. Print and paper quality, of course, would vary, depending upon the reader's resources. The corrected page is thus a home-made and effectively self-published collaboration between the author and reader that circumvents the professional publishing houses.

In the context of Fforde's work, this collaborative effort is not unusual, though the extent of this particular correction is significant, possibly warranting—in other circumstances—a new issue. Other errata on Fforde's website are more commonplace, including typographical errors, that do not customarily result in a revised edition when corrected. At the top of the home page of his website, there is a link to "Book Upgrades," taking the reader to the "Book Upgrade Centre" ([www.jasperfforde.com/upgradec.html](http://www.jasperfforde.com/upgradec.html)). The use of the phrase itself, most frequently used in terms of incorporating software improvements, suggests the computer-based context of these errata that I believe often act, through their various incarnations, metafictionally as interminable states. Fforde writes:

Make sure you are reading the most up-to-date copy of my books. Click on a link below to take you to the correct upgrade page.

Contributions always welcome to add to the upgrades as we also use them to finetune the paperback editions, and to correct translation copies. Do check first that your potential upgrade is *not* already listed (they are not always in page order) and that you tell me which version of the book is being upgraded. Please send contributions to:

list, directing readers to his website for the "upgrade." See "Book Upgrade Alert from Jasper Fforde," (3 July 2007) <<http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/forum/cd/discussion.html?ie=UTF8&cdForum=Fx1CXWS02K2HW3V&asin=0340835753&cdThread=Tx3QOXGP01ZJ1WQ>>, accessed 28 January 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *First Among Sequels* is not a children's novel. Fforde's choice of instruction is a humorous allusion to the "cut and paste" style, more commonly associated with tasks assigned to young children, of the correction.

jasper (at) jasperfforde.com (email address in this format to foil spam trawlers. Don't you just hate them? Grrrr.)

On 20 June 2008 the most recent upgrade was dated 2 November 2007.<sup>6</sup> The upgrades themselves are numbered, though not sequentially, Fforde saying, "I sometimes overinflated the version numbers to give it a more 'computer upgradeish' feel to increase the gag."<sup>7</sup> Fforde's remark confirms that bibliographic accuracy is secondary to maintaining the humour rooted in the narrative of his novels. Consequently, fiction undermines bibliographic precision.

As I have stated, the process of correcting copies of his novels becomes a collaboration between author and readers—even to the extent that readers can suggest changes to Fforde that will be taken up by the publisher.<sup>8</sup> Fforde writes: "Hodder and Penguin use my upgrades as the basis for their error-correction for the paperback editions."<sup>9</sup> Such collaborations are not unknown, of course. Canadian science fiction author and journalist, Cory Doctorow, put out a call to readers to contribute to errata on his novel, *Eastern Standard Time* (2004), through his website (www.craphound.com). Entitled "Help squash bugs in the next edition," Doctorow addressed his readers:

The paperback edition of my novel *Eastern Standard Tribe* is in production, and my publisher has requested an errata sheet with collected typos, spelling errors, consistency problems, etc. Last year, William Gibson solicited message-board feedback from his readers to help him produce the errata sheet for the paperback of *Pattern Recognition*, but I wanna go one better, so I've put up a Wiki (a kind of web-page that anyone can edit) for anyone who's got a favorite EST correction that s/he wants to see made in the next edition.<sup>10</sup>

A Wiki, however, is open to direct submissions by readers. Fforde's system is embedded within his own website, allowing him to retain a measure of authorial control. Likewise, Fforde develops the errata in narrative terms and across his bibliography. The Fforde Book Upgrade Centre webpage features a list of Fforde's novels with links to the respective UK/Commonwealth and USA editions. After clicking on the link to the UK/Commonwealth edition of his first novel, *The Eyre*

<sup>6</sup> To avoid confusion, in this article I have consistently utilised material from Fforde's website as it appeared on 20 June 2008 unless otherwise stated. The nature of web-based material is that changes are constant and often difficult to map clearly.

<sup>7</sup> Personal email, 18 July 2008.

<sup>8</sup> While it would be useful to systematically chronicle the corrections in terms of reprints and editions, the scale and cost of such an undertaking has proven prohibitive, there being no comprehensive collection of Fforde's works currently available to me and early printings being very expensive.

<sup>9</sup> Personal email, 18 July 2008.

<sup>10</sup> "Help squash bugs in the next edition," <<http://craphound.com/est/?p=103>>, accessed 1 March 2009.

*Affair*, for instance, the reader is given a list of nineteen steps to follow. Fforde introduces the upgrade by making reference to the narrative, conveniently inter- and meta-textual/fictional itself, with the “Prose Portal,” the fictional avenue through which a person can enter the book world and gain access to original manuscripts of all known books:<sup>11</sup>

Welcome to my FREE UPGRADE page. Since my books are in a constant state of improvement, you might like to stay up-to-date and make sure you have the current edition of *The Eyre Affair*. (Sadly, my Prose Portal is not functioning at present otherwise I could just go into the original manuscript of *The Eyre Affair* and do all this for you.) To upgrade to the new Version 1.4 edition all you have to do is follow the simple steps outlined below.

The Prose Portal reference tells of the possibility of cancellation for which web-based errata is the alternative. The instructions for the errata continue their fortuitous, comic reference to cancellation, including warnings not to “attempt to upgrade any advanced publisher’s proofs or US editions; a ‘deep text crash’ may result which will render your book unreadable and could wipe your entire library.” Such warnings are consistent with the operations of Fforde’s fictional book world, carried through into the actual errata process. The corrections themselves include a German mistranslation, grammatical errors and misquotes. Step 19 directs the reader to download “upgrade1.4.jpg” to paste on “the title page of your copy.” The image is a 8cm x 4cm, outlined text box (see Figure 1) that would readily fit the title page. Once the corrections have been made by the reader’s hand in their own copy of the book, the author-published slip authorises these corrections with the words: “This book is now a version 1.4.” Thus author and reader effectively create a new edition.

Such editions have been circulating in the second-hand book market. These include first editions of *The Eyre Affair* featuring earlier upgrade versions like 1.1 in which the wording of the upgrade is quite different, though it again makes comical reference to the economical nature of the errata. On 25 June 2008, Biblio.com listed a signed first edition that included “the ‘Upgrade your copy of “The Eyre Affair” to “The Eyre Affair” V1.1—at no extra charge!’ sheet with additional information.” Also on 25 June, D. B. Waters Rare Books ([www.dbwatersrarebooks.com](http://www.dbwatersrarebooks.com)) listed a first edition, along with an image of the title page that shows the upgrade notice glued approximately mid-page. The copy is described as

<sup>11</sup> *First Among Sequels* also interchanges fictional and actual bibliographic information on the page listing Fforde’s other titles. Under the Thursday Next series, and after the first four novels of that series, *The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco* is listed, but is conspicuously crossed out with a long line through the middle of the text, followed by the parenthesised “No longer available.” Although listed with Fforde’s actual novels, *The Great Samuel Pepys Fiasco* is a novel from within the narrative that is “erased”; in effect, cancelled and thus overprinted in the text. The fictional novel is, however, indiscriminately identified in Fforde’s bibliography, blurring bibliographic and narrative interests.

An especially interesting and uncommon UPGRADED copy of the author's cult first novel. SIGNED to title-page in the usual upper-case signature. ... very aptly, bearing an upgrade sticker applied to the title-page which carries the following statement: This book is now *The Eyre Affair* VI.4. This copy of *The Eyre Affair* has been fully upgraded and now meets the author's criteria for spelling and continuity 20 Sept. 2001. What a great touch! Copies of this book double-signed are scarce, and to have a copy also containing one of the author's amusing upgrade stickers is very special indeed. To complete this offering, we also have some uncommon Fforde inserts: first, a copy of the upgrade papers."<sup>12</sup>

Notably, in each of these copies the corrections are on a separate sheet of paper; the corrections have not been made in manuscript. Also, these sellers emphasise the appeal of upgraded copies.

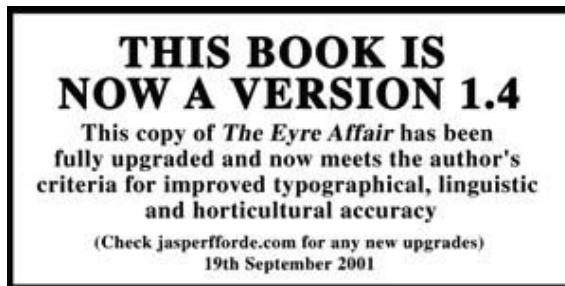


Figure 1. Fforde's *The Eyre Affair* Version 1.4 upgrade label.

The Book Upgrade Centre webpage also provides an "Upgrade History" with a list of previous (fictional) versions, including: "*The Eyre Affair* Version 1.1.2: Small repair patch to stop chapters rearranging themselves alphabetically when the book is left in the sunlight." Such a fictional online history continues this process of integrating book correction with the fictional text. At the end of list of *The Eyre Affair* upgrades, Fforde promises several upcoming upgrades, including "*Tess* V3.8 upgrade: Tess marries Angel in the first place; start dairy farm; lots of pretty children" and "*Paradise Lost Book 1* V1.8 upgrade: God forgives Satan and agrees to coalition." Through his assumption of responsibility for corrections, Fforde takes the opportunity to expand his narrative, embarking upon a metafictional bibliographic endeavour. Thus he expands his narrative net over other texts and books. The Web effectively provides

<sup>12</sup> Signed copies of Fforde's books are readily obtained. They can be purchased, personally addressed, from Fforde's website, but the author likewise does numerous signings elsewhere. In fact, the website includes a short film, *How to sign 1000 books in 1 minute*, in which the author is seen in fast forward, signing copies of his books. In consequence, D. B. Waters Rare Books, for example, does specify the

Fforde an opportunity to direct the correction of his books through communication with his readers. Fforde utilises these “upgrades” as additional narrative tools, thus simultaneously correcting and expanding the text.

How should bibliographers account for these “upgrades”? The traditional model of cancellation is publisher-centred, recognising authorial corrections only if the publisher carries them out and largely ignoring corrections and annotations undertaken by readers (even when such corrections are undertaken—via errata lists—at the instruction of the publishers).<sup>13</sup> Brian Gerrard’s term for a printed text pasted over the top of a printing error, for instance, is “tegentia.”<sup>14</sup> While Gerrard has in mind post-impression correction undertaken by the publisher, can Fforde’s “upgrades,” forms of post-impression correction executed by readers provided with direct instructions and printable matter from the author, be rejected as *tegentia* since they exist outside the preserve of the publishers? Their origins are quite different from the traditional *tegentia*, yet the end result is consistent with the nature of the pasted-on correction. I ask these questions in the hope of encouraging debate regarding the definition and categorisation of this activity.

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two different signings, one in upper case, one in lower case, featured on a signed first edition of *The Eyre Affair* to differentiate their particular copy from other signed copies. Fforde likewise includes the webpage, “The Signature: a page to clear up any misunderstandings,” on his website. Here Fforde explains changes in his signature, with examples provided: “The signature I used last year is a sort of ‘joined up capitalisation’ which I did so my signature was large, flamboyant and legible. It also takes a long time, and painful to do repetitively. My first 600 or so books that morning had this signature, and it was slow going. As the clock ticked on, my signature changed.” “The Signature: a page to clear up any misunderstandings,” <<http://www.jasperfforde.com/moniker.html>>, accessed 1 March 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Gerrard discusses the importance of identifying—and ignoring—manuscript emendations that are “just the work of an owner” of a particular book. See Brian Gerrard, “A New Taxonomy of Post-Impression Corrections,” in *An Index of Civilisation: Studies in Printing and Publishing History in Honour of Keith Maslen*, edited by R. Harvey, W. Kirsop and B. J. McMullin (Melbourne: Monash University Centre for Bibliographical and Textual Studies, 1983), 46–47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.