

George Bornstein, *In Memoriam*

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ABSTRACT

This essay cluster in Textual Cultures commemorates the scholarly legacy of George Bornstein (1942–2021).

GEORGE BORNSTEIN WAS A TOWERING FIGURE IN THE COMMUNITY OF textual scholars and editors. As an editor, he produced six volumes of poems and essays by W. B. Yeats, often in conjunction with Richard Finneran, as well as four major collections on editorial theory and practice: *Representing Modernist Texts* (1991), *Palimpsest* (1993), *Contemporary German Editorial Theory* (1995), and *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture* (1998). As a scholar of modernism, George's work focused initially on modernist revisions of Romanticism, especially in Yeats and Ezra Pound, culminating in *Poetic Remaking* (1988). From there, George increasingly turned his attention to material instantiations of modernist texts, rewriting histories of both the modernist movement and of the often-occluded interactions among Black, Irish, and Jewish cultures in the late nineteenth and early centuries. *Material Modernism* (2001) and *The Colors of Zion* (2011) presented thorough demonstrations of both arguments, and both books remain critical touchstones in their fields now. George was a long-time member of the Society for Textual Scholarship, serving as president from 2007–2008.

For all those scholarly accomplishments (and many more besides that are too numerous to list here), George was perhaps best remembered as a caring and inspirational teacher. Both at the University of Michigan, where he was the C. A. Patrides Professor of Literature and trained several generations of textual editors and modernist scholars, and more broadly in those fields, George was a trusted and sage mentor. Robin Schulze, one of several students of George's who has gone on to her own distinguished career, recalls the "tenants of living and working in the Bornstein zone":

- The materiality of texts changes how we read. As materiality shifts, so does meaning.
- Material texts are historical objects with historical contexts.
- Reading texts as they appeared in their historical material bodies constitutes a delimiting act of great importance that influences interpretation.
- Editions are always acts of interpretation and editors always approach editions through preexisting notions of text, so they had better be aware of them.
- All authors face a world of textual circulation in which their work becomes the product of many hands and competing ideologies. Every author has to consider the compromises that attend wide circulation.
- Editing is critically important, in that acts of editing determine all acts of interpretation that follow.
- Anthologies are evil.

The essays that follow in this cluster each take up one or more principles of the “Bornstein Zone”. Peter Shillingsburg thinks through the recent history of approaches to scholarly editing to return once more to the question of where the work “exists”—and if that ultimately matters. James L.W. West III outlines the pleasures and complications of archival discoveries and the potential editions that result. Jennifer Sorensen riffs on the introduction to *Material Modernism* to examine a range of noteworthy pages from modernist texts. John K. Young proposes the notion of a “magazine aura”, to account for the particularities of periodical publication in relation to what George influentially termed the “textual aura”.

In one of his final publications, “Irish, Jewish, or Both” (2018), George recalls the anti-Semitism of his youth in St. Louis in the 1950s, as well as the casual bigotry prevailing in the English curricula at Harvard and Princeton, where he studied as an undergraduate and Ph.D. student. Told that “as a Jewish boy” he would never truly understand English literature in its inherent Christianity, George settled on Yeats for his dissertation, “partly because of the beauty of his poetry but also because as an Irishman, he was the closest thing to a fellow outsider available to me as a choice” (2018, 136). These early experiences ultimately led to George’s abiding interest in textual and cultural hybridities, which will surely constitute the other most important element of his scholarly legacy, as editorial theory and practice move forward into an increasingly uncertain future.

Works Cited

- BORNSTEIN, George. 2018. "Irish, Jewish, or Both: Hybrid Identities of David Marcus, Stanley Price, and Myself." In *Irish Questions and Jewish Questions: Crossovers in Culture*, edited by Aidan BEATTY and DAN O'BRIEN, 127–39. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.