

What is Scholarly Editing?

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ABSTRACT

Scholarly Editing is distinguished here from all other editing by declaring the two rules that scholarly editing requires: to know and make known all relevant facts and to exercise informed judgment while following explicit principles for and details of the editorial work.

Indeed what I have here written makes no claim to novelty in points of detail; and therefore I give no sources, because it is indifferent to me whether what I have thought has already been thought before me by another.

— Wittgenstein, *Tractatus*

I AWOKE ONE MORNING WITH THE IMAGE OF A BOOK AS A CAGE. INSIDE WAS an intangible, ephemeral creature of utmost fascination and elusiveness. The cage or book is not what many people are interested in. Their focus is on the content of the book, which they see as the work. The cage metaphor reflects that distinction, but is it a real distinction? Readers go to a book for the work that it offers. Having read the book, it no longer is needed because they took what they came for. A friend says he does not buy books but borrows them from a library because when he's read one, it is like he ate a banana and now has no need for the peel. The distinction is like Thoreau's who almost bought a farm, but didn't because he already had the landscape, which he prized more. Do these laymen's views about literary art have a bearing on scholarly editing?¹

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1. This essay is an opinion piece, not scholarship. I have written it with the memories of George Bornstein and David Greetham hovering. I refer in summary fashion to traditions of editing familiar to us in ways more appropriate to a coffee shop than a research center. George was an enthusiast with passionate curiosity about editorial responsibility. His readiness to discuss issues rivaled that of our

Books have multiple ways of attracting and holding attention. Industries and educational institutions surround the creation, distribution, sale, and consumption of new books. Old books, too, sustain economies and feed institutional and individual interests. Notions about what constitutes a work, what constitutes authenticity, what has value, and how books conduct or represent significance are also multiple.

It seems quaint, in this condition, to believe that there could be a single right way to edit or a single right way to conduct research into books. So much depends on the questions one is asking and the goals one wishes to achieve. Not everyone is interested in the fascinating creature in the book. Some believe the book is the fascinating creature. Some believe that each reader invents the creature he or she finds in the book. Some believe that the creature could be better seen if only it had a better cage. Some are interested in the history of cages. Others want a standard cage to use as an anchor for information about alternative historical cages.

One principle for editing cannot serve all the interests people have in books. There are, however, two rules that apply to all editing that claims to be scholarly editing. After that, one can ask: what, if any, interests in books are best served by those that contain editorial emendations.

Two Rules

Because the word *edit* has many meanings, it is necessary to make clear what is meant by this key term when used. Not everyone who uses the term *edit* knows that it is not self-explanatory, assuming, perhaps, that it is simple and means universally whatever they have in mind. That could be as simple as the old joke, that editing is the art of detecting elements of a text that one does not understand and substituting things one does. It would follow, in that case, that the most ignorant editors are likely to propose the most emendations. Unfortunately, it does not follow that the editor proposing no emendations is the most knowledgeable editor.

More sophisticated definitions identify what editors are editing, what their objective is, and how they are to achieve it. There are only two rules for all scholarly editing.

The first is that the editor must discover and analyze everything there is to know about a work before expressing an opinion about how to edit it.

mutual friend David, who would listen politely and then ask Socratic questions. I miss them both.

The second is, in the light of that information, the editor must make clear to readers what text is being presented, how and why it was selected or created, and how and why it was changed, if at all.

Editors may do other things as well, but these are the only two rules. There is more than one way to fulfill the requirements of these two rules, but each way should be disciplined and consistently applied.

The first rule was simple to express but is hard to fulfill. To fulfill it the editor must first be a *bibliographer*, finding every relevant form of the text and all the ancillary materials with a bearing on the text. Bibliography is neither textual criticism nor editing. It finds and records the total range of documents that purport to be texts of the creative act of writing and all the documents that seem relevant to understanding the history of the work's material existence. For this purpose, it does not matter what the text means (as W. W. Greg pointed out).

Next, as a *textual critic*, the editor must not only list the textual variants but determine the relationships among the various text forms. The editor needs to establish as closely as the evidence allows when the text was changed, who changed it, why it was changed, and what effect if any the changes have made on readers through time. For this work, the textual critic needs doggedness and the insight of a *critic*, the mind of a *philosopher*, and the skills and knowledge of a *linguist*, first, to see the texts under examination, and then, to establish the ways in which variant forms are related.

Next, as a *biographer*, the editor must get to know the author and as many of the secretaries, scribes, publishers, editors, compositors, pressmen, binders, booksellers, reviewers, and readers of the work as possible. This kind of knowledge will help establish why and how variant texts emerged. It will provide some foundation for evaluating the contributions made to text variation.

As a *book historian*, the editor must account for the influences on the author, the milieu in which the book was written, the readership, the post publication lives of the book, the production and distribution technologies, and the copyright and tax laws that enabled or hindered production. It is widely acknowledged among bibliographers, textual critics, and text editors, that creative writing has a life beyond its first inscription and beyond its first inscriber. We may not ascribe the same value to every form that a work takes during its life, but in order to understand the history of text variation one needs to know the historical contexts in which the agents of change made their decisions about the text.

As a *historian*, the editor must write cogent critical, textual, biographical, and cultural accounts of the work's composition, production, distribution,

and reception. Lives of texts are stories and arguments based on evidence. It is the role of a historian to provide the narrative that leads to an understanding of the life of texts. It is worth noting, however, that histories are subject to revision. Regardless of the amount of research done and the care brought to bear on the evidence, histories are not definitive, though they are essential.

Editors often start editing before meeting the demands of this first rule, but they forfeit thereby the designation of scholarly editor. Although they usually don't, it might be a good idea if literary critics followed rule one as well.

These activities and an open alert mind will prepare an editor to create the first part of the new edition: the apparatus. It will still not prepare the editor to determine how to edit the text. Historical critical editors say that the editor's primary work is to create an apparatus that contains all the facts that can be known about a text: the facts and the editor's understandings about the facts laid out in tables, charts, and historical accounts. Some say that a scholarly edition need not actually produce a reading text to go along with the apparatus. But most editors believe, or at least act as if, the reading text is the true object of an edition. Fulfilling the first rule of editing, incidentally, on purpose, provides all the evidence that editors of reading texts would need in order to have a clear understanding of what they are doing. However, it is still not that simple, for many of the considerations invoked by the second rule of scholarly editing, will have a bearing on just how the charts are arranged and how the historical accounts are written.

The second rule for scholarly editing was equally simple to express and often as difficult to fulfill. To fulfill it the reading text presented must result from a consistent pursuit of a conscious choice from among the possible texts that can be supported by the facts that have been assembled and presented in the apparatus. An editor could follow one editorial principle part of the time and another at other times, depending on which system provides the most desired text, but editors following inconsistent systems also forego any claim to the title scholarly editor. It should go without saying, and perhaps is a third rule, that the editor will make clear to edition users what choices were made and why they were made. To properly address this rule, the editor needs to review assumptions about texts and documents and consider the range of objectives or goals which have guided scholarly editions in the past.

A brief summary will suggest what some of those have been and why emendation is such a fraught subject in editing.

Belles Lettres

The learned scholars of a century ago accepted the responsibility of researching and knowing a great deal about the author and the publishing history of a work to be edited. Having “gotten to know” their author, their strategy was to select the last edition in the author’s lifetime (hoping it contained the most advanced revisions and assuming that last was best) and then to read the text carefully to detect and correct passages that jarred their sense of right usage. They made adjustments necessary to present the work in its best possible form, as they understood it to be. Apparatuses in these editions, if any, focus on biographical, historical, and critical introductions and on explanatory notes, accounting for the environments of the writing and reading of works.

New Bibliography

The New Bibliography in the hands of Greg, Bowers, and Tanselle (there were many others) reacted against the Belles Lettres approach as lacking rigor with regard to textual histories and relying on personal taste for emendation. They showed that examination of manuscripts, printing-house practices, and textual variation increased the assurance with which inferences could be drawn about what the author wanted the text to be. They insisted that the scholarship be shown, not taken on trust. Hence the textual apparatus. Where their predecessors sought the text they thought was best, the New Bibliographers laid aside their personal tastes and sought the text they thought the author wanted.

Sociology of Texts

D. F. McKenzie’s description of the purview of bibliography — and by extension of what textual criticism might concern itself with — marked another turning point. McKenzie’s basic insight, which he called the Sociology of Texts, pointed out that each edition of a work had a cultural and industrial context worthy of examination. Rather than focusing on which presentation of the work was the best or the most authentic — a literary / critical task — McKenzie asked us, as bibliographers, to look at the human context of each presentation and to see each edition as an historical focal point for a fuller understanding of print culture — a sociological task. His agenda was historiographic, not literary. His legacy is the developing world of Book History. McKenzie did not offer the sociology of texts as an editorial

strategy. His edition of the works of Congreve used New Bibliography methods to create a new text not previously achieved.

Social Contract

In the mid-1980s, primarily influenced by Jerome McGann, textual critics explored a new solution. It was offered as a corrective to the errors of New Bibliography, but in fact it merely offered a different goal in editing for which the strategies of the New Bibliography were incompatible. The light McKenzie had shed on bibliography was refracted to illuminate a new editorial strategy. The problem here is not that McGann's social contract was not coherent and did not lead to viable editorial results. It did.

The problem is that the shifted goal in editing only made a different methodology necessary. It was improper to fault Bowers' methodology for not having been designed to serve the ends McGann now identified as desirable. What had been the goal of achieving a more accurate reflection of the author's text, now became a new and greater interest in the texts that had actually been produced. The former was a literary pursuit; the latter was socio-historical.

McGann's theory of texts focused on the human, interactive, collaborative nature of book production. His approach raised the document to the position formerly held by the work. No materialist documentarian could have done more to put the author's conceptual work out of editorial reach. Documents no longer witnessed the work; documents were all that was left of the work. When analysis of textual variation in order to find a better representation of the work was ruled out, the document and the work were treated as congruent. Under this view, each document in the history of textual variation became a potential anchor for a record of textual history and exploration of the human network of labor involved. Emendation was seen as a violation of the integrity of the base document as document and of the socio-political-commercial event that produced it. Sociology, not literature, now ruled editorial goals. There is nothing wrong with this view. It is just different. It does not refute the New Bibliography's view, entailing a different goal and requiring a different method.

The arguments against the New Bibliography, even if some had validity, were irrelevant to the establishment of a social contract interest in books. Those arguments were a distraction with unfortunate consequences, for they posited the notion that one way to edit was wrong and another right, when in fact all that need be said is that the methodology designed to serve one goal does not serve to achieve a different goal.

Of course, proscribing emendation did not prevent the reporting of textual variation in apparatuses or their discussion in introductions. There was nothing in this textual turn that opposed the discovery or presentation of knowledge.

Critique Génétique

A very different view of the text and its history is found in the work of Critique Génétique. In this type of textual criticism, every writing event is agented and contextual. An author's notes and quotations from reading sources are identified and every effort is made to watch the writer's processes of writing, copying, repurposing, and changing the text in place and time of action. The work is in the process of change. The changing work is followed from inception through development, to maturity and to rebirth in multiple variant forms, distribution, and uptake. Any idea that there is "a" work or "a text that represents the work" serves only when connected to the moment in which that form of the work came into physical being before it was changed into something different. A genetic textual critic does not normally produce an edited text of a work; instead, the textual critic provides a tool by which the process of the work's becoming can be seen and perhaps understood or at least admired or deplored.

In a sense, critique génétique is textual criticism in its purest form, using a methodology for seeing the evidence of texts and watching text come into being. It is impossible to imagine a single text serving to reveal what this method discovers. One might imagine a textual apparatus that supported this kind of work so that students of text might see how a work was being developed. But the real satisfaction of this pursuit must be the pursuit itself: watching what was done, by whom it was done, how and when they did it, and trying to see why they did it.

Historical / Critical Editing

An older European tradition in editing emphasized the history of textual change, but defined scholarly editing as the task of finding, organizing, and analyzing the evidence of textual composition, revision, publication, and subsequent history. It is a fact-finding mission requiring critical perception to determine the documentary record, and why and how documents were different. The text produced by an historical-critical editor replicates some historically significant text and uses it to key the apparatus, recording the factual history of textual change. This strategy was not justified by reference

to authors or to publishers or to the personnel of previous text productions. It was justified as the aggregation of all the facts in one place for the use of other historians and other editors regardless of what goals they were pursuing. The urge to improve the text was restricted to the correction of obvious errors, even though the act of correcting a single error undermines the rationale used to prevent further emendation. The text serves as a historical marker, not as a beacon of editorial or authorial or of social significance.

To Emend or not to Emend

This brief summary does not cover all the possible goals of editing. I've said nothing of electronic archives or of audible books. I've not discussed metatexts or the number of other matters that influence a reader's experience of verbal art. Nor have I explored dyslexia or other challenges that editors might wish to address through digital and audible books. Who is to say these matters are irrelevant aspects of texts and can be ignored? Is the work of scholarly editors of importance only to professional students of works of art?

Enough has been said to show that a number of scholarly approaches to editing require that the text produced in the new edition correspond with some historical text. To do otherwise would compromise the historical, documentary, or social interest which drives those editions. It is also apparent that persons who see documents as witnesses to the author's work not only do not require that the newly edited text correspond exactly to that of a historical text but actively demand that the new edition be an improvement over extant documentary texts.

Before attempting an apologia for attempts to emend in pursuit of a better text, it is worth pointing out that, in all editing, the act of treating a written text as a physical object, rather than as the witness of another person's effort to create an expression, depersonalizes the work and denies the importance of the author as a signifying entity or person. All such editing is an appropriation of another person's work for purposes other than that pursued by the writer. As a scholar I do not find that troubling; it is just a fact. It imitates critical approaches that seek meanings for texts without regard for what the writer may have been trying to convey. The potential for personal interaction between authors and readers remains, therefore, an under-explored field of human endeavor in scholarly projects that identify the work with the documents. This was not the case for *Belles Lettres* or *New Bibliography* editorial projects. Their interest in the author's interests

has been denigrated, since the 1980s, with the acknowledgement of the difficulties, if not impossibilities, of “recovering intentions”.

(Un)Intended Works

The primary reasons for abandoning the “intended work” was the absurd notion that “intention” and “intended work” entailed belief in the work as an idea or concept that was the “real” whole work existing as an ideal in the ether from which naive editors sought to snatch it. It was a strawman argument, positing a belief that no one believed in order to dismiss a method they may not have understood. Although no one ever used the phrase “definitive intention”, it seemed to theorists and critics and some textual critics that the whole “Greg-Bowers-Tanselle” “copy-text school of editing” was devoted to reconstructing definitive intended texts. That was an easy target because it was absurd. It seems not to have mattered that no one ever claimed that as the objective of editing.

The so-called copy-text school instead distinguished between bibliographical investigation and textual analysis — separating the collection and analysis of historical documentary facts, on one hand, from the critical construction of a text inferred from the textual history, on the other. It was repeatedly pointed out that examination of the textual record revealed clues about which marks on the page were mistakes, which ones were unauthorized, which were unsatisfactory to the writer, which remained ambiguous, and which showed signs of error without a clear indication of what text was meant to be inscribed. Editors attempted to ferret out the text that authors intended to inscribe, not the meanings they hoped the texts would convey. Determining authorial meaning is not in the purview of textual criticism; determining authorial inscription is. The result of their efforts was always a “critical text”, never a “definitive text”. Seeking authorial texts seemed a better way to find a more immediate connection to an author’s thought than sticking to some flawed extant text.

Bibliography produced facts for which the exhaustiveness of the research could be generously thought of as definitive — at least by comparison with what could be found in previous editions. “Definitive text” is not a thing and never was. The phrase “definitive edition” was used to refer to the whole editorial project, not the critical text. One can fault this notion by pointing out the types of bibliographical facts that New Bibliographers thought to be irrelevant. But any newly edited text was always a critical construction thought by its editor to approximate the author’s intended

inscriptions, one of any number of texts that might be so constructed, none of which could be a “definitive text”. The statements of approval by the CEAA (“An Approved Text,”) and the CSE (“An Approved Edition”) pointedly did not say “The Definitive . . .”.

The turn away from the New Bibliography was not malicious, but it was misdirected. Although the new social contract concept was solid and documentary, it was unimaginative. Further, it was presented as a corrective of a previous methodology instead of what it actually was: a different method that served a new interest in publisher’s books rather than authors’ works. The word “work”, which had served textual critics for hundreds of years to mean the creative verbal art witnessed by or found in the documents, was now made to mean, for editors, no more than the documents. Variant forms of a work could not be melded into a single text or mined for more authentic textual elements because each variant copy had its own history of composition and production, which would be violated by melding or emending. The history of the book, rather than the quality of the work, defined the new editorial goal. As an editorial term “Work” ceased to be something that could be inferred from the variant historical texts. Work became congruent with documents. These are different viable views. One is not wrong. However, it is true that the historical drive is less susceptible to critical error than the literary pursuit. One cannot complain about the editorial decisions made by editors who made none. That a literary goal is more difficult and more risky is not, however, a reason to avoid it, if one has the skills and experience to meet the challenge. Furthermore, those who pursue the literary goal must never forget the fact that, at best, the result of their work is greater plausibility, not triumph atop Parnassus.

Does it Matter that Different Editorial Goals Require Different Methods?

McGann, in the process of establishing a new editorial strategy, denigrated the work of the New Bibliography (declaring it dead as a dodo on one occasion). Some of his objections were well founded: There were gaps in the investigative efforts. There was overreach by some editors in the pursuit of authorial intentions. There were absurd claims attributed to followers of the Bowers-Tanselle methods.

The Social Contract supports a primary interest in the published books — the labor of an industry of individuals with an array of skills useful to the production of books. Bowers and Tanselle supported a primary interest

in the author's work — which involved the right to question the action of others, whether well-intentioned, malicious, or accidental. There is no need to show that McGann's strategy fails the author. Likewise, there is no point in showing that Bowers and Tanselle valued the author over all other agents of textual change. There is no point in showing that by prizing the material text, McGann inadvertently depersonalized the work, appropriating it to his own socio-political interests. It is unnecessary to remark that Bowers and Tanselle, by prizing a potential text, used documents as stepping-stones rather than as the objective of their work. I believe all these statements to be true but irrelevant in any pointless argument about which method or which goal is the real method or goal of scholarly editing. I just hold that there are two rules which distinguish scholarly editing from all other editing.

Does it Matter Where the Work Exists

I used to think so. I thought that if the work were conceptual, developing in the author's mind and more or less successfully recorded in a manuscript, then it would be easier to justify editorial emendation as an effort to help the author clean up the text and achieve a better fair copy. I feared that focusing on the factual material limitation — the undeniable fact that all we have to go on is documentary evidence — we would be forced to accept the documentary texts as the only options. I was afraid that real scholarship that could be verified by pointing a finger at material evidence proscribed "speculation". It does, of course. But what if, instead of speculation, it is inference? Science, which editing is not, employs inference, as does detective work. Without it, a researcher is limited to what can be seen and must forswear what analysis can reveal.

When one asks, what is the primary interest that drives an editor's work and how does that determine editorial methodology, then, one sees that some interests such as history, sociology, politics, and material studies, require one function for the text and that other interests such as communication, verbal art, and creativity studies require different functions for a new text. Thus, what matters is the interest that drives the edition, not some nailed-down notion of precisely what a work is or exactly where it exists.

My work on Script Act Theory led me to believe that the forensics of textual investigation involves building, on the material foundation, an argument supporting an understanding of events leading to the publication

of a work. The argument involves inferences about who did what, when they did it, what reasons prompted the changes, and what effects the changes had. The analyses explain the value judgements about the changes that undergird the editorial argument about the material archive. That understanding of textual events enables the emended text. If the emended text and its rationale make a case, built on the material evidence, it is just that: an argument that readers can find convincing or not, but which, if plausible, can support better communicative interaction between authors and readers, which for many is the point of verbal works of art.

Editors bring different interests in and purposes for texts that can be classified as literary, documentary, historical, sociological, and / or political. Integrity of text is achieved or identified by different criteria in each approach. Editors whose primary notion is the integrity of documents as artifacts (an interest, by the way, already satisfied in the apparatus) will want a text that replicates a previous document.

Social Contract editors may believe that texts are flawed, but they also assume that each document, flaws included, represents the work in a unique and important way. They will choose a historical text, possibly claiming it to be the best, or just claiming that it is one of many, and reproduce it without change.

Editors who see the work as the progressive results of an author's creative imagination will find the work's integrity in the process of the work rather than in any one historical representation of it. Documents for them constitute the primary evidence for seeing the struggle to put on paper the developing imagined work. Critique génétique studies explore this aspect of works more assiduously than most other forms of editing.

Belles Lettres and New Bibliography editors assume that all documents are flawed efforts to represent a work as its author intended. The former will search the documents and their own sensitivity to the author's works for what they believe is the best text. The latter will search the documents and evidence for what they believe is the most authentic text, rejecting the flaws to produce a text that more accurately represents the author's work.

Each kind of edition will have some influence on the design of the apparatus, the arrangement of the documentary facts that facilitate the argument the editor is trying to make about the text and the nature of the work. An apparatus's design should not, however, unnecessarily hinder

the interests of users with a different notion of what constitutes textual integrity.

What then is a scholarly editor? Having fulfilled the requirements of the two rules of scholarly editing, the editor knows all the facts that can be known about a work, knows the contexts in which those facts emerged, knows the history of the reproduction, distribution, and uptake of the work, and, knows the optional methods that have been chosen by other editors. In short, this editor now knows more about the editorial problem than any other human on earth. Such a person is in a position to say how the work is to be edited. No one is better positioned to exercise critical intelligence to edit. What was the point of an author's being an individual with a unique voice to write a book, if it was to be subjected to the homogenizing influence of a commercial industry? What is the point of the individual, the editor, who has reached a pinnacle of knowledge, if the editing is to be done in a mechanical way? The critical scholarly editor has undertaken the investigation and task that is the most difficult, demanding, and rewarding in the study of literature. This is no task for the unfit. An editor is not a mechanic, or a mere follower of instructions. The right has been earned to follow the dictates of reason and of the heart. Art, not instruction manuals, is at stake. May such an editor find a worthy publisher for such an edition.

There is always room for new critical editions. A perfect presentation has not been achieved by anyone for any work — at least not perfect for everyone and for all time. Scholarly editions cannot nail down final texts; instead, editors attempt to discover, and to enable discovery of, verbal art — a work. For readers who are sociologists, political scientists, or historians documents may suffice. For readers who wish to engage with a text in order to understand and to enjoy an author's work, emended texts might help. Regardless of the type of edition one creates, editorial errors of fact are unforgivable; editorial lapses in judgment are inevitable. Get busy, do your homework, be aware of what you are doing (no, you are not editing for all people in all times), have the courage to edit, and be clear about what you did. Help us experience the work better.²

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2. I acknowledge, with thanks, having been influenced in the writing by Paul Eggert, James West, John Gouws, Marta Werner, and Dirk Van Hulle, none of whom is responsible for its final form. Collectively, they are responsible for it being shorter.