BLIND IMPRESSIONS

METHODS AND MYTHOLOGIES IN BOOK HISTORY

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CHAPTER 6

An Editorial Propaedeutic

Bibliography as understood or defined by Anglo-American bibliographers has always been closely associated with editing, and the following chapter focuses on what appears to be the most basic function of traditional editing—organizing and evaluating extant variants (a set of facts) in such a way as to indicate an original reading, or perhaps the source of error in these extant texts. A danger common to many of the editorial projects I have dealt with is their very complexity and sophistication. The richer and more impressive the method, and the more elaborate the set of facts defined by these projects, the farther these methods get from what appears to be the basic task of any editorial project. The question I pose here concerns students or novices in this field, and what they might do to learn, practice, and improve what I believe are considered basic editorial skills.

The Words of the Sybil: The Editorial Introduction

To the uninitiated, what is called the textual apparatus of standard editions of the classics is only marginally intelligible; the often bizarrely laconic introductions seem the perfect expression of the equally mysterious principles that brought that text to be. Oxford Classical Texts, producing basic editions of classics for decades, and once in common use in college classrooms (we used them for second- and third-year Latin when I was in college) have their introductions written in Latin. The following sentence appears in the introduction to my college Catullus. Its impenetrability never struck me as strange at the time, but only because I never paid much attention to any books I was assigned and none whatsoever to their introductions.
Hinc credo explicari tot alternantes lectiones quae in $G$ et $R$ reperirentur; quae ut ab archetypon diuere interpretantibus sine dubio ortae sunt, $\eta$ ex archetypon non ipso semper, sed apographis eius depromi poterant, qualia inter 1323 et 1375 quo anno descriptus est $G$, exarata esse credibile est.¹

Today, things are different: students care much more about what they are told to read than we did. Yet I doubt many students who have ever used these editions, today or decades ago, have the competence to construe this introductory note grammatically, much less read it or understand what it purports to explain. Even if their Latin is good enough to wade through it, whatever “to wade through” might mean in this context, they are hardly in a position to deal with it critically or to be much enlightened by it. General editorial assertions here are not supported by details; few if any examples or noteworthy readings are given, and there is no detailed presentation of how manuscript groupings came to be. Scholars capable of a critical evaluation are thus not provided the evidence required to perform one. Those who read this introduction, if anyone does, can have no idea how this text was created or what principles it is based on, and their teachers, if they have them, are likely not in a position to assist them.

Users of such editions can only conclude that textual criticism is not something ordinary readers can understood, much less deal with critically. Those who buy more user-friendly editions, with introductions in the vernacular, are little better off. The following is from Schmidt’s Everyman Edition of Piers Plowman, an edition often used as a school edition.

The group $g$ is independent of $w$, having XII 103 and XV 373 and (here with $F$) what seems the right reading at IX 11. It is also larger and more complex than $w$, falling into two smaller subgroups. These are represented respectively by the lost medieval source of the sixteenth-century MS $G$, and by $y$, the postulated source of YOC²CB. Of these, $y$ has in turn four constituents, $Y$, $OC²$ (which form a genetic pair), $C$ and $B$ (the three members of which, BmBoCot, derive from a single immediate ancestor $B$).²

The textual tradition of Piers Plowman is extraordinarily complex, and Schmidt can hardly be faulted for failing to clarify this for general readers or for the undergraduates who might use this edition. Schmidt’s summary
statement above is very similar to the far more abstruse discussion in George Kane and E. T. Donaldson's edition, addressed only to specialists. Kane's rhetoric obscures the fact that his presentation of minute detail is often quite vague:

Neither YOC\(^2\) nor GOC\(^2\) is strikingly persistent, and the difference in strength of support is not very great. Nor does the respective distribution of agreements appear significant. It is however to be recalled that G has figured in variational groups of two with F, C\(^2\), Cr, Hm and S (of which GC\(^2\) may be genetic for part of the poem) whereas Y is a very stable manuscript. For this reason, unless both groups are random, YOC\(^2\) seems the more probably genetic; that presumption will be supported by the texts of congruency, and it then seems that GOC\(^2\) is a random group created by convergent variation, and more specifically in view of the character of its agreements, by coincident substitution.\(^3\)

Even when read by sophisticated reviewers, much must be taken on faith in these cases, and much has been taken on faith. One of the most striking expressions of this is the often cited review of the Kane-Donaldson edition by Lee Patterson: “As a system, this edition validates each individual reading in terms of every other reading, which means that if some of the readings are correct, then—unless the editorial principles have in an individual instance been misapplied—they all must be correct” (69)\(^4\) The logic is breathtaking: because the critical evaluation of particular detail is well-nigh impossible in Kane's edition (there is, for example, no index coordinating individual editorial corrections with the principles set out in the introduction for making a correction),\(^5\) therefore critical evaluation is unnecessary and superfluous; if some readings are correct, then all of them are (the same principle, I suppose, applies to a stopped clock). It is not surprising that the rhetoric of the monumental text is conflated by some scholars with that of the monumental edition:\(^6\) the unfortunate implication is that both are beyond ordinary human understanding.

Even garden-variety editions of relatively uncomplicated texts share in this mystification. It is difficult to imagine the function of the following, although its purpose seems to be to create the illusion shared by editor and professor that they fully understand the complex textual situation of the
work. I'm sure there are better examples than this. To convince myself that
my generalization above was valid, I determined simply to quote from what-
ever edition I could find lying around my summer home.

The collation is A1 recto (originally blank), Meighen's title page;
A1 verso, blank; A2 recto, the title page; A2 verso, blank; A3-6, up-
paged, the Prologue, the Persons of the Play, the Induction; B to M
in fours, pages 1 to 88 (with pp. 12, 13, 31 misnumbered as 6, 3, 13,
respectively), the text of the play and the Epilogue.

Though the Clarendon Press kindly granted to the University
of Nebraska Press permission to modernize the text of the Herford
and Simpson edition, the present text is not simply a modern spell-
ing version of the Herford and Simpson text. Risking both a su-
pererogation of virtue and the presumptuousness of doing over
(and overdoing) what had been so magnificently done, the present
editor has collated five copies of the play—two in the Folger
Shakespeare Library, two in the Library of Congress, and one in the
Newberry Library Chicago. For the text as well as for the annota-
tion, the Herford and Simpson edition and an excellent modern
spelling edition by E. A. Horsman in the Revels Plays have proven
invaluable.7

This was written by a justly respected Jonson scholar, whom I much admire,
and I suppose the reason I have this text at all is because of that. It is only the
distance, I think, between the date of this paragraph (1964) and our reading
it that makes the problems with its logic and assumptions apparent. In what
way are the two most prominent recent editions "invaluable"? To whom? For
what? What does it mean to have collated five copies of the many printed cop-
ies of the play? which copies? copies of the same edition? different editions?
against each other? against the Herford-Simpson text? And why these five
copies? Does "modernized" refer only to spelling? Or has the syntax been
modernized as well? Could we see examples of this?

Digital editions have so far only compounded these tendencies. Putting
more information in the hands of readers does not make that information
more coherent or even usable: facts do not speak, in Bradshaw's terms, simply
because there are more of them.8 Furthermore, if the purpose of editing is to
get back to an original, the number of facts can actually be a hindrance: the
more variants (exemplars) we have of an author's works, the more difficult it is to see our way past them to what we are willing to call an original.

The How-To Manual

A student wanting to edit is not going to get very far by consulting a fully professional edition such as Schmidt's or Kane's, and certainly will not get even a clue as to how editing is done by consulting the Oxford Classical Texts series; and there are consequently many "how-to" manuals that claim to be pedagogical guides to editing. Some of these are perfunctory. Some are sober and quite reasonable, in fact, much more reasonable than I imagined when I began to write this chapter. Others are laughably abstruse, epitomizing all the absurdities of literary scholarship in general. Some confuse the ideal editor with the Ideal Citizen or Lawgiver. And some seem to be written for other writers of how-to manuals rather than for those who might actually use them to edit. At their most extreme, editorial dictates lapse into self-parody, as in the many guidelines and revisions issued by the MLA Center for (or Committee on) Scholarly Editions, whose combination of arrogance, pomposity, self-contradiction, and banality is, I think, unmatched in a sometimes very competitive field. When I first heard friends speaking of their edition as earning (or aspiring to earn) a CSE "emblem," I assumed they were joking.

The purposes of these manuals, even at their most helpful, seem to be quite similar: they focus primarily on the question "How to Produce an Edition," which is quite a different question from "How to Edit" or "How to Perform an Editorial Task." In other words, they avoid the basic task and purpose of editing and concentrate on what amounts to a side issue: formatting the results of editing rather than making editorial choices. These guides thus tell would-be editors how to get an answer, and how to present that answer in an intelligible, coherent, or approved manner. But they do not give much guidance in how to go about getting the right answer, which I assume is an essential purpose of all editing.

The Relation of Editorial Conjecture to Factuality

The present chapter addresses this aspect of editions, that is, getting the right answer. I focus not on the production of editions (of whatever complexity)
but rather on what I think is the basic work that constitutes editions. Most editing produces its text, or multiple and variant texts, by showing the relationship between various real or hypothetical texts and witnesses and subsequently evaluating what those relationships mean; for example, the editor must distinguish between scribal errors, authorial revisions, pure accidents of transmission. The rejection of Lachmannian stemmatics or Housmanian divination does not change this: whether an editor replaces a genetic grouping with cladistic analysis (insofar as I understand this), or the authorial text with the “social text,” that editor is still talking about historical events, perhaps even in the most naïve sense of that phrase, and attempting to reconstruct them. In other words, at the heart of editing is the assumption that extant texts can be described in terms of what happened, or how they came to be. The editorial arrangement of variants represents the history of those variants: one text was copied from another; two extant texts are to be grouped together because certain events in history (which may not be finally determinable) occurred that linked them in essential ways. Textual details that have no bearing on these questions (Greg’s accidentals) are not editorial facts at all.

Editing decisions, because they concern a history external to the editing process, should thus be judged not because they conform to the logic of editing (whatever that is), but rather because they produce results that reflect what happened historically. This is what distinguishes editing from most other forms of literary criticism. Editors do not justify what they do simply because their systems are consistent, systematic, or elegant, or because their arguments are persuasive, powerful, or simply belligerent. Editing is not mathematics; it is more akin to counting.

A second problem I address is an extension of the first. Although we can speak intelligibly of schools of editors, there seems no accepted method or program of training in its basic procedures. You can learn to produce an edition, or to transcribe a text according to certain editorial protocols, or to manipulate a computer program. You can doubtless teach these things as well. You can also teach students how to ventriloquize a mentor’s voice, or to construct a literary-critical reading of any given text according to the guidelines of a particular school such that it will be recognizable as a product of that school. But how to determine, say, what an author wrote, or the precise relationship between two versions of a text and, more important, how to be reasonably certain you are correct—that remains a mystery.
What I want to do here is suggest a way, based on what editors claim to do, that will make them better at what they claim to do. My exercise distinguishes the process of editing from edition-making, two aspects of editing that in all how-to manuals I have seen are conflated. This exercise targets what editors purportedly do before they become engaged in the more arcane task of edition-making; it is designed to make them better, not at writing the kind of introductory statements quoted above (these have already achieved such levels of sophistication that editors hardly need improvement in these skills), but at performing the activities those statements claim to justify.

This is a version, a basic and elementary one, of the much more sophisticated challenge issued almost twenty years ago by Peter Robinson, during the early development of cladistic analysis in relation to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. The case involved 44 late manuscript versions of the Old Norse “Grougaldr” and “Fjolsvinnsmal” (approximately 1,500 words). The question posed by Robinson to textual critics was what method (or program) would produce results most consistent with “what is known.” Success was determined by the ability of various programs to identify particular groups of manuscripts known to be related by descent, and to distinguish significant readings (or characteristic ones) from random readings of no textual significance.

There are two problems I see with Robinson’s experiment, the first being the sheer complexity of the exercise: there is no way anyone other than an experienced textual critic or programmer could possibly hope to answer this challenge, and no way anyone other than an Old Norse scholar and linguist could critique the results (I certainly don’t pretend to do that). A second problem is that while “much” about these manuscript relationships may be known from external evidence, this does not mean that “all” is known about these relationships. Including texts whose precise relation to others was not known from external evidence meant that results could only be judged in terms of what was consistent with other textual-critical methods, and not in terms of “what was known” (as Robinson certainly implied, but did not I think state directly).16 Limiting the evidence to variants whose precise relationship was known by external evidence might make the results far less interesting and impressive perhaps, but the results would speak more directly to the exact question Robinson and O’Hara claimed to be posing. The basic question concerning the truth or validity of an editorial method is not how self-consistent a method is, or how closely the results of a new method re-
seemle those of an old one, but rather how close any of these are to the external facts or truths they claim to reveal.

A Practical Exercise

*Purpose*

The following exercise is absurdly simple, easily reproducible, and could be used to complement any of the present instruction books in editing. It addresses the problems noted above in the most direct manner I can think of:

(1) It provides a clear test of editorial skills and procedures, and allows individual editors to demonstrate their skills; results are quantifiable, and there is no question about the difference between a correct editorial choice and a wrong one. In this exercise, a good editor should make mincemeat of a mere amateur; great editors will edit circles around good ones.

(2) It allows editors to practice their skills, and because it provides the unambiguous feedback that cannot be had in ordinary editorial situations, it allows editors to improve those skills. Amateur editors can become good ones; good editors can become great ones.

(3) It provides a tool with which editing procedures can be taught.

So far as I know, none of these obvious desiderata have ever been articulated in introductory guides to editing, nor alluded to in the preliminaries of published editions.

*Materials*

A group of students, contemporary readers, and literate colleagues.

*Procedure*

I copied what I believe is a poem (in reconstructing this exercise, any literary work, historical or contemporary, would do; for notes on the effect of the
literary quality of this work, see Concluding Remarks below). I handed out photocopies of my handwritten copy to a select group of readers and asked them to transcribe it. I instructed them to identify themselves, to note clearly the date of their own copying, and to identify the source they copied. (As the exercise proceeded, this posed far more problems than I expected, as there is an almost ineradicable tendency among literate copyists to misconstrue their instructions and to copy out the attributive details they see in their copy as if these were their own; professional scribes and typesetters of course do the same thing.) I then collected their transcriptions. A week later I handed a selection of the transcriptions, including the initial one, back to them in random order. I gave out transcriptions to other readers, then transcriptions of transcriptions. I varied my instructions, trying to find an infallible way of recording which scribe was transcribing which copy. I gathered up my transcriptions and gave them to others to copy. I copied some myself. I let the project go. I returned to it, handing out copies of copies to other copyists with the same instructions. Each time, I attempted in good faith to record who did the transcription, when they did it, and what the source of their transcription was.

Having produced "many" of these copies over the last two years, I made out a detailed chart noting the filiations of each copy, that is, I constructed a stemma showing the precise historical relations among the extant copies. (Note that such a stemma is not comparable to the stemmata of ordinary editions: those stemmata are necessarily conjectural; mine is an account of what happened.) I then selected a few copies at random. I have transcribed these below, although I cannot guarantee that my transcriptions are error-free, nor that more errors will not appear when this text goes to press. I know what percentage of the actual copies those I have transcribed here constitute, but obviously, I cannot at this point divulge that information. I assume a combination of logical and critical thinking supported by one of many textual-critical methods could fairly easily determine that.

I am now done with my part of this experiment, and anyone can easily construct a comparable version along the lines suggested here. What I am interested in is how well traditional editorial schools and procedures do in determining the history of these versions. I want you to reconstruct the filiation of the examples transcribed at the end of this chapter, or at least give a coherent account of their relations, and see, finally, how that compares with the real filiation of these texts that I have recorded in my stemma. Are any of these texts copied directly from other ones? Can you reconstruct for me the
archetype for all of these? Can you reconstruct the hyperarchetype for any
group of them, and if so, how does that compare with the real hyperarche-
type in my files? Can you find coherent and transcribable versions of the text?
Are all groups blurred through obvious contamination?

As an example of what we might do and what some of the problems
might be, consider a simplified version of what I set out in the Appendix:
here are three versions of a well-known text copied by a group of the same
scribes I use in my more extensive exercise:

A

That thou haft herit is not all my griefe,
And yet it may be said I lou’d her deerely,
That she hath thee is of my wayling cheese,
A losse in loue that touches me more nearely.

B

That thou has herit is not all my griefe,
And yet it may be said I lou’d her deerly,
That she haist thee is of my wayling cheese,
A losse in loue that touches me more nearly.

C

That thou hast her it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I lou’d her deerl,
That she hast thee is of my wayling cheefe,
A losse in loue that touches me more nearly.

If I were editing these, I might start by noting groups of what seem to me to
be clear errors. On the basis of “herit,” “loffe,” and “cheese,” it appears that
AB form a group against C. They are from the same exemplar, or one is cop-
ied from the other (I don’t know so far which one is the original).

That is logical, but it is not correct. My notes tell me that A and B are in fact
independent copies of the same source. C is copied from B; thus C and B form
a branch against A. I don’t know how to explain this; I just know that it is true.17

Now I remove from the exercise version B, and provide instead version
D, a version my notes tell me is a direct copy of B:
D
That thou has her it is not all my grief,
And yet it may be said I loved her deerly
That she has thee is of my wayling cheefe,
A losse in love that touches me more nearly.

With only the three texts C, D, and A, now it appears C and D (from B) form a group against A. Here, we are fortunate in knowing that this is correct. I am a bit disturbed to find that in a casual example I drew up simply to use as an example, a partial sample of copies (3 of 4) produced a more accurate stemma than a complete one (3 of 3).

This exercise has to do with historical states of affairs, and this is not quite the same as what editorial procedures do, although the language of editing and the direct claims often contradict that. Editing procedures, particularly more recent ones, focus on the evidence (“facts”) defined as groupings of individual variants, or more broadly, of the versions that contain those variants. Even Kane’s analysis of *Piers Plowman*, which did not have the benefit of computer programs, works in this manner, organizing manuscripts into groups based on individual variants, which then become what Kane describes as “persistent groups” (this is somewhat different from describing them as genetic groups). But even though variants are abstractions (they are texts) and thus in some sense contemporary with the editor who studies them, the manuscripts or printed versions in which they exist are material and historical (that individual genes cannot be separated from the real and finite beings that contain those genes is, I assume, analogous). To organize the variants in terms of their “carriers” is to imply a relationship among those physical sources, and this implication is no different from that implied by the stemmata of textual criticism, whether those are taken as literal, or as allegories representing abstract textual relations.

Before I began dealing with specific examples (those recalcitrant versions of the Shakespeare sonnet above), I thought this exercise would pose no problems for editors of today. In no other textual situation is the cultural background of copying and transmission so well known and familiar to the editors who will unravel it. My scribes are twenty-first-century students, not professionals and amateurs living centuries ago. We also know that these examples are produced in historical circumstances far simpler than those that would ever exist in the real world of literary texts and editing histories, and
these circumstances are roughly the ones we ourselves work in all the time. Furthermore, these circumstances are fairly homogeneous: no one is transcribing a copy for personal use; no one is making a fair-copy for a printing house; they are all following the same set of instructions. And while none of these was written with the sole purpose of exactly transcribing its copy-text, none was written deliberately to cause error or confusion. I'm not sure the same thing could be said about any other editorial situation.

Note that this exercise does not demand that an editor provide explanations of principles or techniques, or provide the basis for any decision. There are doubtless cases of eyeskip, lectiones difficiliores, smoothing, contamination, convergence, homeoteleuton. But they are not the point here, and they don't need to be identified. These concepts have little or nothing to do with the actual practice of editing; they have to do only with editorial theory: they are ex post facto explanations, chosen to justify an editorial decision; they do not serve as the basis for those decisions, and in that sense, they could be considered a smokescreen to obscure what should be the real work of editing—finding the right answer. The point of this exercise is not to practice explaining an editorial decision or to understand the language of editorial theory; it is to practice and improve editing skills. You don't need to explain how rack-and-pinion steering works in order to park your car.

The most important difference between this exercise and every other editorial situation I have encountered is that the correct answer is known; thus editorial conjectures that do not provide that correct answer are unarguably wrong and the methods that produce them suspect. They are wrong however elegant they may be, however irrefutable the theory behind them, and however sound the logic that argues in their favor.18

Using this and similar materials, anyone of reasonable intelligence should be able to acquire the skills necessary for the tasks that editors claim to do. Or at least anyone can improve what editors regard as the most basic of editorial skills. (Note that this is not the same as becoming what modern scholars consider a “skilled” editor or, in one of its more amusing variants, a “gifted editor”; these things have no more to do with whether editorial decisions are correct than does the phrase “gifted poet” have anything to do with whether a poetic statement is true.) You just keep working until you get that right answer and until you begin getting right answers consistently. When you make a mistake, then adjust your thinking. When you are right, do the same thing again. Editing is like everything else we do. No one will ever agree on what the adjustments to your thinking should be, but anyone can
tell a good result from a bad one, just as they can in many other types of human endeavor—painting a landscape, driving a golf ball.

Limitations

I am focused only on one small aspect of editing, getting the right answer. And editions certainly have purposes greater than this one. They serve as convenient compendia of literary-historical material (for example, Skeat’s late nineteenth-century edition of Chaucer); we understand through complex editing projects such as those for Langland the practical implications of various abstract critical terms, such as Paul Zumthor’s notion of textual mouvance. None of that is at issue here.¹⁹

There are additional limitations here, of course. The further I proceed, the less confidence I have in my own ability to keep these facts straight, or even to record them. In addition, this and any exercise derived from it deal only with the unsettled scribal conventions of contemporary, literate readers, who are amateur scribes and in some cases have little experience with actually writing longhand. This may be such a far cry from professional scribes of the medieval period or from printers of the hand-press period that there is no relation between them. But if the procedures and habits of medieval scribes are different from those of modern scribes, such that scholarly descriptions of one are not applicable to the other, it would be most interesting to hear editors advance that claim or concede that. If error is singular, and not universal, then the situation of the medieval transcription is singular, utterly and disarmingly historical, and as a product of human minds and consciousnesses completely unlike our own, thoroughly, I would think, irrecoverable.²⁰

The Editing Process: Preliminary Steps and Impasse

I could leave this exercise here. But since I have asked professional or prospective editors to take this exercise on, it is fitting that I take a shot at it myself, or at least make some first steps. The following discussion is based on the transcriptions I have provided in the Appendix to this chapter. I can see certain editorial statements that could be made here, the beginnings of a set of facts that might well be set out rigorously:
(1) In line 2, *canton* is certainly an error, although I'm not sure from these examples what the correct reading is or whether the correct reading was in the original (O'). Therefore, those texts that have it or the variant *cauton* are likely related.

(2) *Shakespeare* is obviously correct. The only relationships to be found would be between those that transcribe it unintelligibly. *Shalexase* might be regarded as a substantive error if it appeared in other texts; all the others are accidentals.

(3) Underlined words (likely original, although it is difficult to see errors as related). Verse form: It is obvious that this is in verse. But nothing can be said about the relationship of those that transcribe it otherwise, unless the line length is identical (which it is not).

This part of the exercise is straightforward. There are obvious relations among the variant details of these texts, and to tabulate them is not difficult. The few examples above distinguish significant variants (Greg's "substan-
tives"), certain meaningless ones (Greg's "accidentals"), and certain extremely significant ones that might be called "sub-accidentals" (formal features of line length, underlining). To set them out systematically or rigorously seems difficult (I have given an example of each category of error above). But to set them out in such a way that the conclusions one could draw from them are true—that seems impossible.

I am able, I think, to construct a passably coherent and intelligible original. But some details are difficult. I have no idea what the original is for line 2, even though I know I transcribed the original myself not long ago. It might be "caution," or "count on." I'm not sure what the point would be of trying to determine O’ from the unintelligible variants here, since any one of them could arise from the other. 21

By making a few choices, and assuming arbitrarily that the original I am trying to reconstruct is coherent (that is, I am trying to reconstruct an autho-
rial original, not O', the textual source of all variants), I am able to do more or less what nineteenth-century eclectic editors did. What I am not able to do is what I want to test: to construct the stemma or organize groups of readings that would get to this original in any systematic or scientific way. And the more evidence I get, the less clear things become: that is, the more texts I have before me, the more variants I need to explain or to explain away through whatever textual-critical language is at my disposal (coincident error, for example). Increasing the evidence does not get me closer to the origi-
nal (if reconstructing the original is my goal), and it does not clarify the
relationship between versions (if reconstructing the reception of the original is the goal).

Archetype and Hyperarchetype, Texts and "Variant-carriers"

In now traditional textual criticism, variants are grouped by family and a conjectured hyperarchetypal source placed at their origin. As one works up the stemma, eventually one comes to a group (usually a pair) of conjectured hyperarchetypes from which one (theoretically) can reconstruct the archetype (O').\textsuperscript{22} No edition I have ever seen has provided a complete transcription of these hyperarchetypes, nor should that be necessary for textual criticism to work.\textsuperscript{23} The only true texts and the only things that editors feel obliged to transcribe are the extant witnesses and the conjectured O' (or perhaps the original). But this points out how the process of editing is opposed to the real historical situation that is its object. My hyperarchetypes are not "variant-carriers"; they are texts contained in a folder ready to hand. The more real witnesses I have, the more of these sources I have to conjecture in order to explain their relationships, and the less these logical conjectures (variant-carriers) have to do with the real texts in my files.

Concluding Remarks: Great Texts Versus Run-of-the-Mill Texts; Great Editors Versus Bad Ones

Editing theories and procedures have not been designed to deal with situations like the one I have presented; they were never designed to deal with cases where their results were testable, and they depend, in some sense, on the absence of confirmation or even the possibility of confirmation (truth is excluded by the very definition of the editorial enterprise). The historical situations they faced were at times of their own creation. Certain types of editing (Kane's, derived from Housman) demand that the source text be authored by a "great" or "powerful" poet (like Lucretius, Langland, or, somewhat less understandably, Manilius). This assumption is necessary to distinguish errors made by scribes, who are not intellectually or artistically equal to the poet, from a text that is possibly from the poet's own hand. The original text in my exercise is obviously not by a poet who would be considered great or strong;
certain of my students (not all of them) are certainly the intellectual equals of the poet whose text is transmitted here. Therefore, the Kane-Housman theory of editing and all the amusing rhetoric that goes with it (and may well be its foundation) has no place, and obviously will not work. To test those methods, it might be argued, would require using as a base some unknown text by Shakespeare, or obscure but powerful work by, say, a Romantic poet.

That consideration, or concession, then, leads to a series of even greater absurdities. But I do not see how these are logically avoidable. I will state them in the most extreme sense.

If an editorial exercise such as this will only work in the case of a particular group of poets or authors, then logically it could be used as a means of distinguishing that group. What I have designed as a mere editorial tool might then be put in the service of greater things: not in evaluating competing editorial schools (my original intent) but in evaluating literary works themselves. If a particular editorial procedure works with great or strong poets, and fails with weak ones, it ought to be a relatively simple matter to use those textual-critical methods as tools for testing the strength or greatness of different poets or different poetic works. All that is needed is a set of transcriptions of a given poet's work; any transcriptions, even contemporary ones, will do. The poets on whose works the "Great Poet" editorial procedures work and provide the correct answers—those poets are obviously superior or stronger than those whose poems are recoverable only through other editorial procedures.

I had thought this chapter might act to challenge certain editorial principles by forcing them to consider real-world problems with real-world solutions. But if all I have finally accomplished is the development of a method to distinguish great poets from ordinary poets, I consider the time I have devoted to "getting my facts before me" well spent.

Appendix. Transcriptions

1

Fletcher Arise! Usurers share thy bags,
They canton thy vast wit to build small plays
He comes! His Volume breaks through clouds and dust
Down, little wits! ye must refund ye must
Nor comes he private, here's great Beaumont too;
How could one single world encompass two?
For these Co-heirs had equal power to tech
All that all wits both can and cannot reach.
Shakespeare was early up and went so dust
as for those dawning heirs he knew was best
But, when the sun shone forth you too thought fit
To wear just robes and leave off trunkhole wit.

2

Fletcher Arise! Usurpers share thy bags,
They canton thy vast wit to build small plays
He comes! His volume breaks through
clouds and dust
Down, little wits! Ye must refund ye must
Now comes he private, here's great Beaumont too;
How could one single elephant
world encompass two?
For these Co-heirs had equal power to
teach All that all wits both can and
cannot reach. Shakespeare was early
up and went so dust as for those
dawning heirs he knew was best
But, when the sun shone forth
You too thought fit to wear just robes
and leave off trunkhole W.T.

3

Flecher, arise! Usupers share thy bays
They canton thy vast wit to build small plays: He
comes! His volume breaks through clouds and dust;
Dawn, little wits! Ye must refund, ye must
Nor comes he private, here's great Boumont too;
How could one single world encompass two?
For how co-heers had equal power to teach all
that all wits bath can, and cannot reach.
Shakesheare can early at, and went to dreamt
As far these dawning heavy to know who about;
but, when the sun shown forth, you two thought
to wear just robes, and leave off trunkhole wit.

4

Flethcer, arise! Usurpers share thy bays, they
can’t they vast wit to build small plap: no comes! His volume he alas through
and lands and dust; dawn, little wits! Yo must refund, ye must. Nor come he private,
here’s front Boumant, too; How could no single world ecompass two? For how
Co-heirs had equal power to bud all
that all wits both can, and cannot reach. Shalebase even every art, and
went so dreamt. As for these dawning
heavy to know was about. But, when
the sun shown forth, you two thought
it to war just robes, and leave off trunelle wit.

5

Fletcher, arise! Usurhers share thy Bags,
They canton they vast wit to build small Plays.
He comes! his Volume break, through clouds and Darts
Down, little wits! ye must refund, ye must

Nor comes he private, hi’s great Beaumont too;
How could one single world encompass two?
For chose CO-heiss had equal Power to teach
All thou all wits bath can, and cannot, teach,
Shakespeare won early up, and went so crest
So for those dawning hows he knew was bexs
But, when the SunShine forth, You Two thought fit
To wear just Robs, and leave off Trunk-hol Wit
Fletcher, anse! Usurpers shore thy Prey,
They canton thy vast wit to build small Plays.
He comes! his Volume breaks through clouds and dust;
Dawn, little wits! ye must spend, ye must.
Now comes he private, here's great Beamont too;
How could one single world encompass two?
For they co- Hector, had equal Power to teach
Al that all wits both can, adn cannot tough.
Shakespeare was early up, and urn! to dust
as for those dawning have to know best;
Bud, when the sun shone forth, You Two thought fit
to wear jus Robes, and leave oof Turnk-hole wit.

(3.2 from 2.2 signed Geoffrey Plauger by scribe J.K.)
is the Sulpitius of 1494: "After this I have been unable to find any record of an English book with pagination until Leland’s *Egkamon teis eiprepes*, Wolfe, 1546." A few can be added: STC 13746 (1509) (in roman); STC 18394 (1534); STC 171 (1535); STC 10661 (and 10662) (1542) STC 24334 (1542) (in roman); STC 14634 (1543).


CHAPTER 6. AN EDITORIAL PROPÆDEUTIC


5. Producing such an index was purely mechanical, and I thank David Fowler for providing me with one years ago. Others are now in print, e.g., Peter Barney, "Line-Number Index to the Athlone Edition of Piers Plowman," *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 7 (1993): 97–114.

6. Andrew Galloway, "Reading Piers Plowman in the Fifteenth and the Twenty-First Centuries: Notes on Manuscripts F and W in the Piers Plowman Electronic Archive," *JEGP* 103 (2004): 232: the Archive "will be the supreme tool for carrying forward textual work on PP"; the Athlone editions are "monuments of daring and shrewd Middle English textual criticism."


8. To understand fully an electronic edition requires understanding the computer programs that are at its foundation, a point made by Peter Robinson, "Current Issues in Making Digital Editions of Medieval Texts, or Do Electronic Scholarly Texts Have a Future?" *Digital Medievalist* 1 (2005), www.digitalmedievalist.org/journal/1.1/robinson.

For notes on how an amateur can deal with these editions, see my *Who Is Buried in Chaucer’s Tomb*, chap. 9, and *Out of Sorts*, chap 6.


10. See the very amusing review of R. B. C. Huygens, *Ars Edendi: A Practical Introduction to Editing Medieval Latin Texts* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2000), by Scott Gwara, *Speculum* 78 (2003): 331–33, noting Huygens’s dicta that editors should be “thoroughly at home in classical Latin Literature,” “thoroughly familiar with Paleography,” “painstakingly accurate,” “your work should aim at being the last word in editing.” If this expertise were attainable by the novice editor on the basis of the apparently deficient resources now available, what compelling reason would there be for new resources?

11. See M. G. Carter, on editing Arabic, describing “the perfect manuscript from an editor’s point of view,” and with much of his editorial homily in the optative; “Arabic Literature,” in D. C. Greetham, ed., *Scholarly Editing: A Guide to Research* (New York: MLA, 1996), 546–74; also included are tips such as the following: “One will hope for a clear and accurate hand (Endress, ‘Handschriften-kunde’ 281, consult also Schimmel for a survey of calligraphy with a sizable bibliography; Gibb et al., s.v. ‘Khatt’),” 561. I once assumed this section was ironic, but now I’m far from certain. The absurdity of demands placed on beginning editors was noted long ago by Charles Moorman, *Editing the Middle English Manuscript* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1975), 3–4.

12. My favorite version is the 1977 pamphlet: *The Center for Scholarly Editions: An Introductory Statement* (New York: MLA 1977)—a self-parodying mish-mash of contradictory and vague principles couched in the grandest morality for “editors interested in a CSE emblem” (2), a seal designating “An Approved Edition” (3), not to be mistaken for “The Approved Edition” as the writers generously concede on page 4. After all, “the CSE expects editors to think seriously about these features” (3). The more recent statement revises these genially expressed sententiae into about a hundred solemnly numbered principles: “Guidelines for Editors of Scholarly Editions,” Committee on Scholarly Editions, MLA (2006) in Lou Burnard, H. Katherine O’Brien O’Keeffe, and John Unsworth, eds., *Electronic Textual Editing* (New York: MLA, 2006), 23–49. Doubtless, most of the absurdities are due not to the thinking of any individual contributor but rather to the fact that this is a committee production; that, however, does not excuse the decision to publish them as a unit.


15. Point was raised in an on-line discussion group some fifteen years ago in *Humanist Archives*, 12: “It is a profoundly disturbing comment on the state of the art. Scholars who come into editing from the perspective of their discipline have no idea how to get started” (Charles Faulhaber).


17. Lose for loffe of course violates the all-too-familiar and much cited rule of *lectio difficultior*, which in my experience, however widely promulgated, very rarely works in practice.

18. There are a few cases where the textual source of a medieval book or manuscript is known. N. F. Blake, “Aftermath: Manuscript to Print,” in Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall, eds., *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375–1475* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 403–32; “MS Chetham 6709 and Some Manuscript Copies of Caxton Prints,” in Claudia Blank, ed., *Language and Civilization: Essays in Honour of Otto Hintsch* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 239–54. There are also many cases where the copytext for a modern text is known. The variations that occur have not to my knowledge been studied systematically enough to demonstrate, except in a few cases, what actually occurs in these situations.


20. The absolute singularity of each textual error or variation was a point made to me many years ago by Jeffrey Henderson, based, I assume on Housmanian principles. But I don’t see how any textual or editorial correction or conjecture can be made if this principle is accepted.
21. O’ is not necessarily a coherent text, and the assumption that it is can lead to problems, both in the edition itself and in the way it is read and received. The Manly-Rickert edition of the Canterbury Tales and its reception is a clear example.


23. They are referred to by Paul Maas only as “reconstructed variant-carriers”; Paul Maas, Textual Criticism (1927) trans. Barbara Flower (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 6. Cf., however, the discussion in Robinson, “Cladistic Analysis,” implying that these can be constructed without reference to the original.

PLAYING BIBLIOGRAPHY


III. BOOK HISTORY AND BOOK HISTORIES: ON THE MAKING OF LISTS


2. I am parodying Elizabeth Eisenstein’s absurd but psychologically telling claim that when she began to study printing history, there was “not . . . even a small literature available for consultation” on the subject: Eisenstein, The Printing Press as an Agent of Change, 1: x.


4. G. Thomas Tanselle, Introduction to Bibliography, Seminar Syllabus (nineteenth revision; Charlottesville: Book Arts Press, 2002); Introduction to Scholarly Editing (2002). Both available on-line. Greetham, Textual Scholarship: An Introduction (1994). It is not feasible to compare Greetham’s bibliography with Tanselle’s in any detail, but from my spot checks neither seems in any way dependent on or related to the other.


6. See introductory statement, xi.

7. I was surprised and somewhat chagrined, reviewing this, to find illustrations of Heywood’s Mery Play 1533 compared with the edition from the Type Facsimile Society (384–87), illustrations I used several years later. I didn’t realize, taking my own obviously