

THE | PRINCIPLES | OF | NEGOTIATIONS: | OR, AN |
 INTRODUCTION | TO THE | PUBLIC LAW OF EUROPE |
 Founded on TREATIES, &c. | ———Humanis quæ
 sit fiducia rebus | Admonet——— ornament
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STANDARDS FOR THE EDITING OF AUSTRALIAN LITERARY TEXTS*

The aim of this paper is to outline some of the difficulties encountered in editing Australian literary texts and some of the problems raised by any serious attempt to better the situation.

The first point I want to make is that a tradit-

* Delivered as an introductory paper to a discussion of this topic at the Society's Annual Conference, August 1971.

ion of editorial scholarship, insofar as it exists in this country, hardly focuses its attention on the provision of authoritative texts of Australian writers. Australian writers are edited by-and-large along lines that leave *textual* responsibility in the hands of the publishing house. I have reason to suspect that some Australian editors have put texts together without ever seeing proofs and without being given the opportunity to collate readings. The principle followed here is that if the last printed text was based on one before it, which was based on one that the author probably saw, there would be no reason to doubt the reliability of the copying in each case; and so the compilation of the text can be left safely in the hands of the compositors who after all make their living at it. Anyone who has seen what can happen in the way of deterioration of a text over two, three, or four editions will be horrified by the bland innocence of this procedure, and I may be quite mistaken about its prevalence as a publishing habit; but it seems to me that the only explanation for a number of anomalies in some editions which have passed through my hands is that the editor's responsibilities were defined in a way that excluded any textual jurisdiction.

If an editor is given the task of compiling a text, he is often faced with a time-consuming search for rare issues of obscure country newspapers and old numbers of short-lived periodicals. Only an editor who has regarded a given author as his own private preserve over a decade or more is going to be in a position to know where to put his hands on a large part of the textual evidence. The situation as regards Professor Roderick's editions of Lawson is an ideal one in that respect.

The possibility of a scholar's being given the task of editing an Australian writer whose work has been a specialty of his for some years is a fairly remote one. Most research students and university staff working in Australian literature are also engaged on specific and more demanding English fields and study Australian literature on a fairly broad front. From the scholar's point of view to devote the greater part of his energies to an Australian author would often be to neglect other urgent commitments. From the publisher's point of view sending someone off to work on an authoritative text is of questionable value. It is necessary after all to admit from the start that editorial work is demanding in time, in energy, in patience, and requires standards of accuracy that are not commonly found. Definitive editions

are nowhere regarded as part of the normal book-market. They require a special investment of time, of money, and of effort.

What return would come from a programme of upgrading editing standards for classic Australian authors? If we take that question quite seriously I think we find ourselves admitting that a strong case, a very strong case, has to be made for the inclusion of any given author in such a programme. On the other hand I also suspect that once the idea gained currency the general level of editing standards would be raised. The slackness of editing standards at the moment in Australia represents a fairly extreme case.

What kind of requirements ought to be applied to authoritative editing? Let us not assume that there is one, and only one, definition of an authoritative edition, but let us try to describe the particular requirements relevant to the Australian situation. I feel myself that it is not sufficient for an editor to give us an accurate copy of the last version published in the author's lifetime and under the author's approval. It is often assumed that if the author was available he must have corrected the proofs, and accurately. There are many examples in Australian literature of writers who have proofread rigorously and battled manfully for what they had actually written. There are also examples of writers who were in a peculiarly vulnerable position *vis-à-vis* their publishers, writers who were regarded as semi-literate and whose work was felt to be susceptible of "improvement" by publishers who were men of no mean intellect and prided themselves on their literary judgement and discretion. And Lawson is an excellent example of both tendencies. He often refused to make alterations despite strong representations from George Robertson and Arthur Jose. There are other occasions on which he appears to have been willing to hand the whole text over to the collective wisdom of the Angus & Robertson shop-staff if only someone would provide the necessary five bob for a couple of drinks to iron himself out. I suspect that A. G. Stephens' attitude to Neilson was one that laid down no clear dividing-line between Neilson's literary genius and his own. The first step, I fear, is the location of the various forms of the text and the establishment of which of them are likeliest to represent the author's intention.

This means that I am placing more emphasis than others might on the closeness of text to manuscript. Where a manuscript exists it ought to be regarded as of high authority, and where none exists the earliest printed form of the text will often be a more reliable guide to what the author wanted than later versions.

The problems of working on manuscripts of Australian writers are the same as with any manuscripts, of course. Australian writers are not alone in having illegible calligraphy, in entrusting the copying of texts to a bewildering series of amanuenses, in leaving their manuscripts to be eaten by mice, silverfish, and children, in having literary executors who burnt, defaced, or deposited on rubbish-tips extremely important documents. Getting back to the manuscript does not always provide the answer on disputed readings. Let me give you an example. In the manuscript fragment written by Lawson for George Robertson as something like an autobiography there is a story about a teacher in a country school Lawson attended who sees his pupils coming back from lunch one day with armfuls of flowers and jumps to the conclusion that they have been raiding someone's garden. He flies into a rage, abuses the children, spoils the flowers, and then learns that one of the neighbours had given the children permission to pick them. So you have a not-uncommon schoolroom situation, where the voice of authority and moral indignation has been found to be fallible. The teacher's response to this situation is to turn away and—the next word in the manuscript could be "sob." Or it could be "set." The interpretation commonly placed on the text is that he started to set the lesson for the afternoon's work and the words "the lesson" are inserted in square brackets. My preference is for the other reading. It seems exactly the kind of self-revealing gesture that Lawson often seizes on in his stories. But there is simply no way of knowing which is the word Lawson intended to write. One is tempted to be dogmatic about such matters but one's final choice is going to be based on aesthetic criteria.

In such a situation the reader ought to be told that an alternative reading exists. Nobody who has not been to the Mitchell and examined the manuscript can possibly know about the particular textual crux I just mentioned because it is not glossed in available editions of Lawson; and I think it ought to be. So what I am moving towards is a definition of textual authoritative-ness that saddles the editor and publisher with the ob-

lication of including variants.

It may not be obvious that this is an outrageous demand but try to think of English authors of the modern period whose work is available in editions that include variants. There are not many, and they tend to be poets. I am very definitely thinking of editions of prose as well as poetry. It would be absurd to insist that every undergraduate should be able to buy an edition of Lawson's short stories with all the variant readings but it is enormously encouraging to have the textual notes Professor Roderick has added to his new selection of Lawson's prose. And it will make an enormous difference to have the complete prose with variants when it comes off the press, because such definitive editions should be available to students at least through libraries and once a definitive edition has been compiled popular editions are more likely to follow its textual authority.

I am trying to stress at every step of the way the special kind of project represented by a definitive edition, its difficulty, and its cost. The last thing I want to do is to suggest that a simon-pure edition of every Australian author should be compiled immediately and put on the market quite cheaply. That would be a true expedition into cloud-cuckoo-land. One of the facts one has to face about this kind of work is that it requires patience and special skills. Armies of trained editors cannot be conjured out of the air—although I sometimes wonder how many graduates of our courses in bibliography and textual criticism ever get a chance to put their training to use.

The enormous American graduate schools give the American field an advantage which has been capitalized on recently in a way that suggests certain guide-lines for us and may lead to a discriminating assessment of possible procedures when the results can be weighed against the energy poured in. At the University of South Carolina there is an administrative group called the Center for Editions of American Authors. They receive a grant from the National Foundation of the Arts and Humanities as well as raising money in other ways and they sponsor projects to produce definitive editions of American classics. At the moment fourteen projects are receiving support at fourteen different universities. An edition which achieves definitive status is granted

a seal certifying its reliability. The criteria used for adjudging definitiveness depend on collation of all significant texts (including comparisons of several copies of key-editions using the Hinman Collator), use of a reliable copy-text, the provision of notes listing all editorial decisions and giving the evidence on which the decision was based, absence of silent emendation, and adjudication by an independent authority. It is also required that the editors should have foregone all royalties—this avoids some of the curious situations which arise when a commercial publishing-house has invested heavily in specific authors and finds itself competing with other publishing-houses for the scholarly market—and that reprint publishers may avail themselves of the text for a reasonable fee.

The Center for Editions of American Authors was set up only in 1963. It now channels funds to over two hundred scholars. No edition sponsored by it is yet complete—they may all end up punctiliously unfinished, like the better sort of Gothic cathedral; and one wonders whether all that organization and teamwork are really necessary. However, about thirty volumes belonging to different editing projects have so far received the seal, including four volumes of the University of Virginia edition of Stephen Crane, five volumes of the Centenary edition of Hawthorne, and five volumes of the Melville collection being published by Northwestern University Press and the Newberry Library. Only a generation of use is going to show how good these editions really are; however, if the American situation is as competitive as it appears I should think it would be very difficult for the editors to get away with even minor editorial blunders.

I have barely skimmed the surface of my topic; but my final point would be that priorities seem to me an urgent and debatable issue. My own amateurish investigations of Lawson and Neilson may have given me a gloomier picture of the situation than is strictly warranted—but I should like to know what other authors are in grave need of the kind of skilled attention Professor Roderick has been giving Lawson of late. Some of the people involved in the New Zealand area might also like to comment. It is a little frustrating to talk about such things in such a purely theoretical way but there is need for a patient sifting of ideas before any really productive effort can be undertaken.

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