

**THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY OF AUSTRALIA
AND NEW ZEALAND**

BULLETIN

Volume Five

First Quarter 1981

**STANDARDS FOR SCHOLARLY EDITIONS OF
AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND WRITERS***

I THINK I CAN ASSUME that everyone present at this meeting will be familiar with the work of the Center for Editions of American Authors, or, as it has now renamed itself, the Center for Scholarly Editions, of the Modern Languages Association of America. Under its first name, this body was responsible for initiating a number of highly distinguished editions of American writers — principally prose writers — of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Any scholar or critic working on Stephen Crane, John Dewey, Emerson, Hawthorne, Fennimore Cooper, Washington Irving, William James, Melville, Thoreau, Mark Twain or Whitman will automatically turn to the texts which have been published, or are in process of publication, by presses working under the guidance of the CEAA and CSE. It would also be fair to say that many editions of classical English writers undertaken in the United States are being conducted in accordance with CSE guidelines. In the first phase of its existence, the Center was a funding as well as an accrediting body. At present its function is one of providing a clearing house for information on editorial procedures, and of evaluating and giving its imprimatur to editions which it judges to meet acceptable scholarly standards.

The fundamental accomplishment of the CEAA and CSE has been to introduce into the editing of nineteenth and twentieth century texts, and in particular of long prose texts, those sophisticated and rigorous standards of editing which were worked out in the crucible of Elizabethan studies, and which will remain associated with such names as Greg, McKerrow and Bowers. The basic assumption behind the new American editions is that writers of the relatively recent past deserve to be edited with the same scrupulous care, methodological thoughtfulness and attention to the minutiae of textual detail that have come to

*Presidential address to the Society's A.G.M., held at the State Library of Victoria on Saturday 6 September 1980.

be accepted for writers of the pre-1700 period; and I can imagine no reason for disagreeing with this assumption. It is true that there have been dissenting voices — and I think in particular of a famous, maverick, but searingly eloquent essay by Edmund Wilson — who claim that the texts of lesser nineteenth-century American writers simply do not deserve the huge investment in time, capital and scholarly energy that these editions require. But, on the other hand, I cannot see how we can possibly have *too* good a text of Hawthorne or Melville or Twain or Thoreau or Whitman; and an Australian or New Zealander may very well want to add to that list names such as Marcus Clarke, Katherine Mansfield, Henry Handel Richardson, Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy or Shaw Neilson.

In 1970 I paid a visit to the headquarters of the Northwestern University Melville edition, perhaps the most valuable for non-Americans of those overseen by the CEEA. This was set up in a wing of the Newberry Library in Chicago. Within the very ample working area, the Newberry and Northwestern University had brought together a library of every edition of every work by Melville, and, as far as I was able to judge, a copy of every book that any editor of Melville would conceivably wish to consult. It was an example of cooperation between a group of scholars and a great library of a kind which has never taken place in Australia — I cannot speak for New Zealand — though there is no irresolvable reason why it should not take place. It only requires our librarians to realise that they should be active and essential sharers in the tasks of scholarship. In the centre of the Melville hall at the Newberry stood the Hinman collator — an absolutely essential tool for the editors of lengthy prose texts. How long is it going to be before editors working in Australia and New Zealand do not have to travel overseas to use these machines?

The achievements of the CEEA belonged to the boom conditions of the 50s and 60s and to the flourishing state of the graduate schools of American universities at the time of the Vietnam war. Australia and New Zealand missed that particular boat; and yet surely that need not mean that we must be prepared for ever to endure editions of our major classical authors which, when they are not positively inaccurate, are at the very least seriously inadequate by the standards now accepted for editions of American authors and also for major modern British authors such as D.H. Lawrence. Let me recapitulate to you what the CSE requires of editions which are to receive its approval. In the first place there must be a thorough explanation of the issues governing the selection and emendation of the copy-text. A prospective editor must be in full command of the literature on this subject listed in the introductory statement on the CSE which appeared in *PMLA* 92 (1977), 583–97. Such an edition should be concerned to preserve the accidentals as well as the substantives of its author insofar as this is feasible. Such an edition should also contain a textual apparatus which should include a record of all emendations, accidental as well as substantive, of the copy-text, a full record of variant readings in all other authoritative texts, notes on particular textual difficulties, and an indication of line-end hyphens to be retained when the text is quoted from. It is also necessary that editors should make sure that altera-

tions were not made to the type or stereotypes of authoritative printed sources during the original process of production.

I am not claiming that an edition of Marcus Clarke or Henry Handel Richardson should necessarily model itself in every particular on the CSE pattern. Here economic as well as scholarly factors would have to be taken into account. But I do think we have a right to expect that editions of those Australian and New Zealand writers whose worth has been tested by time should be prepared with the same kind of professionalism that has come to be taken for granted in editions of classical English and American literature. That this has most singularly not been the case in the past is shown by an article by Dennis Douglas that was delivered to the second conference of our society in 1971 and which is published in the third number of our *Bulletin*, pp. 48-53. This concerned an edition of Lawson's prose which had failed to remove a large number of errors and sophistications present in its sources. Since that time the dedicated labour of Colin Roderick has provided us with a vastly improved text of Lawson; but our other major authors are left in much the same situation as Lawson was at the beginning of the last decade. And even Colin Roderick's editions of Lawson do not give us all the textual information that the user of a scholarly edition of an English or American classical author would expect to find.

In the course of this conference we have heard from Maureen Mann that the text of what may well be Henry Handel Richardson's most accomplished single novel has never been made available in print in anything approaching its entirety. We have also heard from Bruce Steele about one small and fascinating part of the careful research he has bestowed on the editing of texts for the complete edition of D.H. Lawrence. We have heard of a major bibliographical discovery by Brian McMullin, who is simultaneously at work on a critical edition of the plays of the Restoration dramatist John Crowne. In the same context I could also mention my own forthcoming edition, in collaboration with Robert Jordan, of the plays of a second Restoration dramatist, Thomas Southerne, Don McKenzie's editorial work on a third Restoration dramatist, William Congreve, and Alan Brissenden's distinguished work in the Elizabethan field. What we have heard at this conference will, I hope, make clear that our universities possess a growing body of skilled and experienced editors; and I am convinced that many of these would be glad to make their expertise, and that of their students, available for the preparation of critical complete editions of major Australian and New Zealand authors. I am therefore suggesting that the society should at this stage of its existence be interesting itself actively in ways to encourage editorial enterprise and to ensure that it is conducted at an acceptable standard of professionalism; and I would like to conclude by putting to the meeting the following practical proposals:

(i) that the society should establish a standing committee to consider what standards should be held desirable for scholarly editions of Australian and New Zealand authors;

(ii) that this committee should be encouraged to communicate with other learned bodies in our two nations which might be expected to sympathize with the

goals proposed in this address; and that

(iii) we should be prepared to give every assistance in our power to scholars and institutions who may attempt to launch such editions, provided only that we are satisfied that they will be of an acceptable standard; but that, on the other hand, we should do our best to ensure that precious funds are not wasted on inadequate editions, however well intentioned.

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