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THE MEANINGS OF A SCHOLARLY EDITION*

THIS TOPIC OCCURRED TO ME as a whimsy; but, as I examined it, it seemed to me more and more revealing and, therefore, potentially important both to edition makers and edition users. It is a paper about ideologies. It would not hurt, however, to begin by treating the subject as a whimsy, which allows us to ask questions that might not appear to be serious. There are many questions to ask; I divide them into groups. The first group of questions has to do with the meanings of the physical substance and appearance of the books: questions like, What is the meaning of the binding, of the dust-wrapper, of the height, thickness and weight of the book, of the cover design, of the title-page, of the paper stock, of the width of margins, of the spacing between lines of text, of the typefaces? The second group of questions has to do with the institutional relations of the book: questions like, What is the meaning of the publisher's imprint, of the presence or absence of the Modern Language Association's seal of approval, and the institutional affiliations of the editor and editorial board members. Closely related is a third group of questions about the market status and market strategies of the book: questions like, What is the meaning of the price of the book and of the advertisement fliers? Finally, there is a group of questions about internal arrangements that indicate certain things about the relation between the author's text and the editor's texts: questions like, What is the meaning of the table of contents, of the position given to the listing of editorial board members and other acknowledgements, of the size and position of the textual apparatus, of the presence or absence of explanatory notes and critical introductions? Are there notes at the foot of pages or only at the end? Do the editorial introductions precede or follow the text of the work?

There are, of course, other kinds of questions to ask, but we have been asking them for decades: What are the editorial principles, did the editors work from originals or photocopies, did the collations include all life-time editions, did they include multiple collations within editions, how many proof-readings by how many teams of proof-readers assured the accuracy of the product? I don't want to ask those questions here; let us assume that they have been answered to someone's satisfaction.

* A revised version of a paper read to members of the Bibliographical Society of Australia and New Zealand at their annual conference, 29-30 September 1989.

I also do not want to speculate on whether these meanings were consciously intended or merely unconsciously present and revealing, though I have my suspicions. Once we start asking about the meanings of the books, as opposed to the meanings of the texts they contain, we become aware of the potential implications of the 'book as text'; and, then, I suppose that an editor might try consciously to shape the book in the hopes of producing desired effects.

We are all already familiar to some extent with the meanings of books — that is, with the associations that have attached themselves to books in such a way that we know what is meant, at least generally, by terms such as yellowbacks, sleazy paperbacks, hardbound editions, gift-books, coffee-table books, and text-books. From these terms we can guess, with some degree of accuracy, both the contents and the prices of the books indicated. I think, therefore, that a good many of the meanings of scholarly editions will pop out at us, so to speak, just by asking the questions I have posed; so I will try not to belabour the obvious. It appears obvious, for example, if the book is tall and thick and substantial, with an elegantly plain dust-wrapper, issued from a reputable press, edited by a professor at a reputable university, attested by famous editorial board members, then the user can feel confident that this edition of the work is the established, the standard, the safe, in short the best edition to use.

The conclusion does not necessarily follow from the evidence, we all know, but generally speaking we allow the conclusion until such a time as it is disproven. For example, the University of Ohio Press edition of the works of Robert Browning, under the direction of Professor Roma King and with editorial board members including the likes of Professor Morse Peckham, began publication in 1969 with all the appearances of scholarship. The books were big, well printed, well bound, and well marketed. It took a series of hostile reviews, indicating that the research had been sloppy and sketchy, and finally the public repudiation of the first two volumes by editorial board member Morse Peckham before the meaning of the books as physical objects was belied. Then it began to dawn on folks that the University of Ohio Press was not the same as the Ohio State University Press, which was already world famous for the majestic Nathaniel Hawthorne edition boasting Professor Fredson Bowers as textual editor. Then we heard that Professor Roma King had abandoned the profession and gone into the Church, and we felt that that phase was over and the Browning edition could begin again. This new conclusion, by the way, does not follow from the evidence any better than the first, for the first two volumes of the Browning edition in their pristine glory still stand on the shelves of the libraries that first bought them, beckoning users with the meaning of their spines and of the entries in the card catalogues, which do not call attention to reviews or repudiations. Perhaps we are lucky that the works involved are *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, and *Strafford* and *Sordello*, not *Bells and Pomegranates*, *Men and Women*, or *The Ring and the Book*.¹

The Browning example indicates one of the reasons we might be interested in the meaning of the scholarly edition. We want to know if that meaning is deserved. Generally speaking, we have granted the meaning of the tall, thick, reputable object, and we want to feel justified in trusting it. When we are not justified in trusting it, we

get very indignant. We see Dr John Kidd, for example, doing his best to discredit the work of Dr Hans Gabler on the Garland edition of Joyce's *Ulysses*, and we find, in addition to the quibbles about editorial decisions and about the error rate, that the ultimate objection Kidd has to the Gabler edition is that as a book — in three tall, thick volumes and in one 'Corrected' volume — it has usurped the physical spaces that might have been occupied by other editions (perhaps one to be edited by Kidd). The physical space is limited, in the case of Joyce, because his works are not yet a free-market commodity. That is, the market base, which probably would easily accommodate rival editions of *Ulysses*, is controlled at the moment by the legal base — copyright. To displace the Gabler edition, Kidd must prove, or persuade people to believe, that the Gabler edition does not deserve the 'establishment' meanings of the physical book.²

But finding whether or not the shape and weight and reputation of a scholarly edition are deserved is only one reason to be interested in the meaning of the scholarly edition. That is important, but other things are important as well. So, let us assume for the duration of this whimsy that the editions have been scrupulously edited and produced and are the epitome of the ideals of scholarship as understood by the editors. In what other ways does the shape of a scholarly edition make some responses easier than others?

The Northwestern/Newberry (NN) edition of *Moby-Dick* looks like an *established* text. Its thickness (573 pages of Melville's text, 570 pages of apparatus), its typefont and spacing between lines, its margins, its dust-wrapper, its black, red and gold binding, and its colophon all attest to its establishment character. Its opening credentials certify the volume's authority, beginning with the announcement that this is volume six of a complete works and followed by two separate, slightly variant, full-page listings of nineteen editors, associates, board members, and contributors.

Nothing else stands between the reader and the text to indicate which *Moby-Dick* is contained here. Readers who work their way through from the beginning find no notes, no commentary, no instructions, no external facts to interfere with an untrammelled access to the text. The CEEA (Center for Editions of American Authors) emblem says, correctly, that it is *An Approved Text*, but the volume's physical appearance and arrangement proclaim that it is *The Novel Itself*. Is it likely that any reader is going to doubt that this text is *Moby-Dick* as Melville wanted it to be?

Well, yes, but not easily. I think the NN edition produces a third *Moby-Dick*, not an 'established' *Moby-Dick*. It represents the notion one group of editors have of what the text would have been had the first New York edition incorporated authorial revisions, or had the first English edition not been copy-edited and bowdlerized by the publisher. This is a 1960s edition fully deserving the CEEA emblem. There is nothing to prevent the first 573 pages from being detached for separate sailing in a sea of readers ready and willing to accept it as *the text itself* of *Moby-Dick*. That is both the tragedy and triumph of CEEA editions.

Of course, no reader of this 1043-page book can long remain ignorant of the last half of the book where the edition redeems itself from the arrogance of its pristine appearance. Though the editorial principles of this edition commit it to establishing a reading text of *Moby-Dick* that presents itself with monolithic confidence, and though

huge portions of the Editorial Appendix are devoted to justifying that text as the best reading text over all others, this edition also offers to the most demanding sceptic nearly all the materials needed to rectify its own ideological stance.

The pursuit of Pure Virgin Text or Author's Final Intentions is fraught, as at least some persons will agree, with decisions that depend entirely on critical interpretation. The editor of a critical edition cannot avoid making decisions others would make another way. The resulting edition is an interpretation and must be supported by arguments based on evidence. As reading text the NN edition prints a critically determined compromise between the two original versions of the work, thus creating a third version; the decisions are extensively, if not always convincingly, argued. The beauty of this edition is that the salient features of both original texts are easily available as well. If the editors seem strenuously to invite readers to accept their text as the best possible text, they also invite (or at least allow) them to disagree, and they provide the wherewithal to do so. In that regard, I think the NN editors have exercised professional ethics, but at the same time they have allowed the book itself to say that which they had no right to say: to wit, this IS *Moby-Dick* as *Moby-Dick* should be.³

My next example I quote directly from an essay by Jack Stillinger. In an extended discussion of the consequences of editing Wordsworth as the Cornell edition has chosen to do it, he comes round finally to the question of the appearance of the volumes as it affects their use.

The fourth and largest problem, a product and extension of everything I have so far discussed in this section, is the general effect that the Cornell emphasis on early texts may have on the study and understanding of Wordsworth in the next several decades. I shall use some examples from Jared Curtis' edition of *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems* (1983), which like all the others is an exemplary piece of scholarly editing. Let us imagine a student in the library seeking a respectable text of, say, *I wandered lonely as a cloud*. Let us further imagine the student standing in front of the twenty or so grayish-green volumes of the Cornell Wordsworth, clearly the handsomest, most substantial, most scholarly edition in sight, and somehow (by luck or by means of a general index in the final volume) managing to locate the poem in Curtis' volume, on pages 207-8. In this version the poem is eighteen lines long (not twenty-four, as formerly in the standard texts); has 'dancing' instead of 'golden' daffodils in 4; has 'Ten thousand dancing' instead of 'Fluttering and dancing' in 6; has a 'laughing' instead of a 'jocund' company in the fourth line of the second stanza (what standardly used to be the third); and has lost the following stanza that formerly constituted 7-12:

Continuous as the stars that shine
 And Twinkle on the milky way,
 They stretched in never-ending line
 Along the margin of a bay:
 Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
 Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

Reading the shorter, plainer text in the Cornell volume, the student may well wonder how the poem came to be so famous. It is an attractive piece, certainly, but somehow not so vivid and imaginative as one had thought it would be.⁴

The second conclusion of this whimsical survey is, then, that the meaning of the scholarly edition might, in Jack Stillinger's terms, inadvertently standardize one of several equally viable or defensible texts, making other versions of the work too hard to access even though no deliberate malice in that regard might have been intended and high standards of accuracy were maintained.

A third reason to be interested in and concerned about the meaning of the scholarly edition has to do with the relation between the author's text and the editor's text. In this regard the NN Melville and the Cornell Wordsworth editions are poles apart. I have noted that the NN edition offers the author's text first. This is typical of CEAA editions of the 60s and early 70s and has become a standard of American critical editions. The practice has several possible meanings, some of them apparently contradictory. First, it seems to mean that the author's text gets pride of place and is 'foregrounded.' The editor's role is 'backgrounded' to demonstrate his lower status, that of a servant of the author and of the text. It also means that the editors trust the readers to deal directly with author and text without officious intervention by the editor. Finally, it means that the text can be reprinted easily without any editorial apparatus, which the format announces is of negligible importance after all. All of these meanings point to the humility of the editor. A contradictory meaning, however, is equally operative though not so obvious. The total separation of the reading text from the editorial apparatus hints broadly that the reading text IS the author's and not the editor's. If it is a critical edition, however, that is not true. From this point of view, the backgrounding of the editorial work — hiding it from sight — is the most arrogant thing an editor can do. He says, in effect, 'I have done it right; trust me.'

Let us look by contrast at the Cornell Wordsworth. Although it has some appendices and though the mechanical transcriptions of documents are slightly separated from the reading texts, the edition never lets the reader forget that this is an edition of the poems and that other forms exist. The recto running heads proclaim the pages to contain 'Reading Texts', the clear implication being that there must be other texts to do other things with. At the bottom of every page are the alternative readings; these also are parts of the reading text. To be fair to the Cornell edition, the student Jack Stillinger imagines pulling down Jared Curtis's edition and reading 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' need only look to the foot of the page to find the omitted stanza. She may resist doing that or be timid about putting back that which the editor has dropped down, but she cannot escape the fact that the editor has been at work. One could say, then, that the meaning of apparatuses on the page itself is either that the editor is so proud of his work that he wants the reader to be constantly aware of it, or that he is honest about his interventions in the text and anxious to give the reader all the information possible relevant to the reading text or texts. (I am afraid I cannot hide my opinion that the Cornell solution is far superior to the NN one.)

I say that in spite of the format and meaning of the Garland Thackeray edition, of which I am General Editor. I only became aware of the important meanings of the

relation between author's and editor's texts after the format for the Thackeray edition was set beyond practical recall. My solution is two-fold. First, there is a prominent notice to the reader at the beginning briefly describing the purpose of the edition and drawing attention to the existence and uses of the textual apparatus. Second, I divided the apparatus into that part relating to what the author did to his text and that part that editors have done to it. I now wish that the first part of the apparatus, describing composition and revision, were at the foot of the reading text, constantly reminding the user that the reading text is a construct that need not be taken as gospel. I am concerned about this not out of fear that I or my other editors may have made some wrong choices, but because we have inevitably made choices where other 'correct' options existed. That these choices can make significant differences in reader responses is amply demonstrated by the editors of the NN *Moby-Dick* when they trace the general tenor of reviews of the English and American first editions in part to the differences between the specific texts under review.

Between the poles represented by the Melville and Wordsworth editions is an infinite gradation. Like the Melville edition, the Cambridge Lawrence edition presents what it hopes will be taken as THE text of Lawrence's works. The 'General Editor's Preface' preceding the text in each volume emphasizes the corruption and censorship Lawrence's texts have suffered and claims that all that could humanly be done to rescue the texts has been done so that they 'are as close as can now be determined to those he would have wished to see printed'. But the presence of the editor is, after all, thus foregrounded; there is an editorial introduction preceding the author's text; and the text itself has line numbers in the margins, which any discerning reader must soon figure out are to aid in the cross-referencing of author text and editor texts in the apparatus.

By contrast, let us look at the meanings of a less pretentious scholarly edition: Ada Cambridge's *A Woman's Friendship*, edited by Elizabeth Morrison as the first volume in 'The Colonial Texts Series.' Any Australian will know better than I the implications of the publisher's imprint, University of New South Wales Press, and of the Series' institution of origin, the English Department of University College at the Australian Defence Force Academy. But it will be immediately apparent to any user in the world that this work is not long on pretension. It is a paperback, shorter and thinner than any of the other editions I have mentioned. It is an elegant paperback, with flaps like a dust-wrapper, but the flap text does not claim anything extravagant for the edition — only that it is 'a careful rendering of the newspaper text, with an extended introduction and notes.' In short, the book does not claim much for itself by its outward appearance. One clutches at straws to see ways in which it could be thought to be bold: it is part of a series calling itself 'The Colonial Texts Series' — is that bold because it is THE series, not merely A series? Is it brash because it left out the word 'Australian' to distinguish itself from other English language colonies? These are hardly worth dwelling on. But *A Woman's Friendship* is, nevertheless, a scholarly edition and a careful rendering, indeed — though for honesty's sake I will admit that I found one typo in the text and disagreed with one niggling editorial intervention I thought unnecessary. (Perhaps some of you will note that I waited to make specific complaints until I got to an edition that lacked a magisterial presence and that was edited by a woman.) But

these matters, too, are my subject: the meanings of the scholarly edition includes our reactions to the pretensions of the book and of the editor.

The text of *A Woman's Friendship* is lodged in this edition between the introductions, including the general editor's remarks, and the explanatory notes and appendices. The General Editor focuses on the series as a means to make reliable texts available where there were none. As for the texts, he says they should 'be considered as a combination of the copy-text and apparatus.' Although there is only one source text for *A Woman's Friendship*, the sincerity of the general editor's claim is attested by the fact that note numbers are used in the text to call the reader's attention to relevant editorial texts in the apparatus.

My sense of what this book means by its physical presence and its arrangement is this: Here is a useful, inexpensive, unpretentious, clear and scholarly presentation. It does not ask to be admired; it asks to be used. In this I see a bold statement. Here is a scholarly edition that is a Working Copy, not a show piece for the shelf. For years the textual critical establishment in the United States has been groaning and complaining because critics have not properly used the scholarly editions provided by the CEAA and CSE (Center for Scholarly Editions). They complain that critics prefer to cite paperback editions, either because the critics find them handier or because the critics want to cite what everyone is using. And as they complain they go on validating their own critical efforts by publishing monuments: tall, thick, heavy, respectable editions. I find it pleasingly Australian that the Colonial Texts Series has taken a democratic course. I hope in my heart that that was an intended meaning and not an adventitious one resulting from an economic measure imposed by a timid or cautious publisher. Whether the Australian academic community realizes what a treasure, both real and potential, is represented in this series remains to be seen, for as far as I know I am the only one to have set *A Woman's Friendship* for a course, and I have yet to see the first review of this work. I congratulate you and challenge you to be worthy of your own achievement both in using what you have and adding new efforts, for the sad fact is that there are no scholarly editions, thin or thick, tall or short, of Australia's great books.

I have been discussing these editions in relation to my third reason for paying attention to the meaning of the books, particularly the implications of arrangements of author and editor texts, but fourth and fifth reasons have been obtruding themselves all along. The fourth relates to the question, What books have been chosen and do they deserve to have been chosen to be 'edited as scholarly editions.' If we think that the editorial effort, the care for research and proof-reading involved, the elegance of design and quality of printing and binding are deserved only by our sacred texts or by texts of our sacred authors, then several propositions would follow: one is that if there is a tall, heavy, reputable edition of a text, that text and its author have been canonized. By this standard *Wieland* by Charles Brockden Brown is a more sacred or at least more honoured work than Marcus Clarke's *For the Term of His Natural Life*, for which there is no scholarly edition, or even than Ada Cambridge's *A Woman's Friendship*, for which the scholarly edition is a paperback. Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* is even further down the canonical ladder, by this standard, for though it has been republished

and is in print, it is a 'mere reprint' without introduction or notes or any other editorial validation.

It might seem logical to conclude that the honour of a full-scale edition on good paper, etc. is a tribute to the author and the text, whereas in fact it serves more effectively as a monument to the editors and the presses, demonstrating their mastery. Thus, many of the big American editions have been virtually ignored by the public to whom they were addressed but who go on preferring cheaper paperbacks or the works of authors not yet dignified by a scholarly edition, though the editors have reaped the academic kudos attending the production of a scholarly edition.

These possible subtexts raise a fifth reason to be interested in the meaning of the scholarly edition, relating to the implied audience. Traditionally, the scholarly edition is undertaken and designed to 'make the author's text more accurately and/or fully available to the reader.' I think it is usually assumed this means the edition user is one who reads the author's text or at least wishes to. But if we think of the author or 'implied author' as addressing an implied reader through the text of the original edition, perhaps we should consider the editor or 'implied editor' as addressing, not the author's implied reader, but the edition's implied user. What, in short, does a scholarly edition imply about its users, or what does the editor assume about the edition user?⁵ The answer to this question will be different for each edition, but among the common ones are, surely, that the edition user will be grateful for the editorial effort, will study the text in relation to the apparatus, or does not mind obfuscation or the physical contortions required in holding one's place in three or four sections of the book at once. Further, the assumption seems to be that the user is wealthy or does not mind checking a book out from a library for extended use in study.

These assumptions about edition users seem, of course, far-fetched in some ways, but it is not uncommon to hear arguments in favour of reprint series which rebound from these views of the reading public. We are told that readers use cheap books which they can own themselves and mark, and we are told that the important thing is the author's text, not the elaborate apparatus obviously designed for scholars only. Two approaches to reprinting are defended in this way: one is to produce cheap reprints with perfunctory introductions designed to make the texts available as quickly and cheaply as possible (which is exemplified by the Virago series and Picador imprints), the other is to strip the scholarly edition of its scholarly apparatus and make the 'established text' available by itself or with a simplified introduction in paperback. The latter approach is slower but only slightly, in my opinion, less reprehensible than the former.

It is difficult to calculate the damage done by Virago, Picador, and other reprint houses. The naivety, often combined with an exploitive commercial motive, provides poorly proof-read texts based on poorly selected source texts inadequately described. The user spends her money and gets who knows what — something that can be treated as the work of art but which all modern textual criticism indicates is not the work of art and which cannot be read by the vast majority of buyers with any sense of the provenance or operative contexts relevant to the works. Buying a cheap reprint of a book is rather like buying a cheap VCR with no instructions. Perhaps one of its functions can be fulfilled, but the full range of satisfying use is inaccessible. Not only

has the cheap reprint closed doors for the person who buys it, it closes the doors for replacement texts more intelligently and carefully produced because the temporary market-place for those better texts has been usurped by materials that any responsible consumer protection group would have recalled from sale.

Without going into tedious detail, one could point out that cheap reprints perpetuate texts with variant readings of which the user is unaware and which, if he were aware, would not know what to make. They pretend to make a more or less shoddy linguistic text equivalent with the work itself. And each new reprint appears in new covers and with a new date having, in a sense, shrugged off the contexts of its origination. The importance of these deficiencies was brought home to me this year as, for the first time in my life, I began reading some Australian fiction. First on my list was Ada Cambridge's *A Woman's Friendship* in the Colonial Texts Series. The newspaper origins, the historical social setting of the work, the critical reception and reputation of the work were described in the introduction and a wealth of local references were explained in the notes. Further studies were indicated in the notes to the introduction. My experience of reading that book was made rich and satisfying without diminishing the pleasure of trying to work out the highly problematical ironic, or at least potentially ironic, 'intent' of the text. From that experience I went to Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career* and Henry Handel Richardson's *The Getting of Wisdom*, both of which are available only in cheap reprints without introductions, notes, or description of the text. Both were curious and wonderful texts, but neither gave anything like the satisfaction of *A Woman's Friendship* without the aid of additional materials I was required to hunt up on my own. And yet it could be argued that both are as good as or better than the Cambridge book and equally deserving of the status given by a scholarly edition — even a paperback one like the Colonial Texts Series provides. Cambridge's *The Three Miss Kings* is equally poorly served, though my poorly informed opinion is that there are other books better deserving scholarly editorial attention — one of them being Cambridge's magnificent *A Marked Man* (or *A Black Sheep*, to use its proper title), currently available from Pandora with a perfunctory introduction more interested in critical remarks than information, and a short note on the text more remarkable for its textual naivety than its helpful description of the provenance of the text. My reading of these two Cambridge works was influenced more by the edition of *A Woman's Friendship* than by any editorial expertise evident in the reprints I read.

Australia's literary heritage has not been well served, reprints standing in where scholarly editions are desperately needed; America's literary heritage has suffered another fate, being appropriated by monument builders.

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NOTES

1. See Thomas J. Collins' review in *Victorian Studies*, 13 (June 1970), 441-444; John Pettigrew's in *Essays in Criticism*, 22 (1972), 436-441; Michael Hancher's in *Yearbook of English Studies*, 2 (1972), 312-314. See also Roma King's defence in *Essays in Criticism*, 24 (1974), 317-319, and John Pettigrew's response in *Essays in Criticism*, 25 (1975), 482-483.
2. See the recurring debate in *Irish Literary Supplement*, Autumn 1985 and Spring 1986; *TLS*, July 1, 8, 22, Aug. 12, Sept. 2, 9, Oct. 7, Nov. 4, Dec. 2, 9, 16 (1988); and *The New York Review of Books*, June 30, Aug. 18, Sept. 29, and Dec. 8 (1988). See also Charles Rossman, 'The Critical Reception of the "Gabler *Ulysses*": or, Gabler's *Ulysses* Kidd-napped', *Studies in the Novel*, 21(1989), 154-181.
3. The remarks on the NN edition are substantially the same as those I make in 'The Three *Moby-Dicks*', a review forthcoming in *American Literary History*, 1 (OUP, 1990).
4. Jack Stillinger, 'The Editing of Wordsworth', *Studies in Romanticism*, 28 (Spring 1989), pp.3-28. The quotation is from pp.19-20.
5. This idea was suggested to me by Stephanie Trigg who heard the shorter presentation at the BSANZ annual conference, September 1989.

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