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Textual Criticism

Richard Tarrant

Excerpt

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Introduction

I

When I pick up a new novel or work of non-fiction, I do not expect to see an editor credited; I assume that I am in direct contact with a text created by an author and put into circulation by a publisher. In fact, matters may be more complicated if, for example, the publisher has employed a copy-editor to correct the author's manuscript, a practice once common but now increasingly rare outside academic publishing. Yet such behind-the-scenes activity is hardly ever acknowledged, which maintains the impression of an unmediated communication between author and reader.

So the presence of an editor implies that something has occurred that requires assistance from a third party in putting an author's work into the hands of readers. In the case of a contemporary work, the author may have died before the text had reached a final form, and the editor's task is to construct as far as possible the text that the author would have wished to see published. Such undertakings can involve extensive intervention, as with David Foster Wallace's novel *The Pale King*, left unfinished at his death in 2008 and published in 2011. The editor, Michael Pietsch, began with a manuscript of more than 1,000 pages and arrived at a version of roughly half that length.

An ancient parallel is Virgil's *Aeneid*, left unrevised at the poet's death and prepared for publication by his friend and fellow-poet L. Varius Rufus.¹ The biographical tradition reports that the emperor Augustus, in overruling Virgil's wish that the manuscript of the poem be burned, directed Varius to make as little change to the text as was necessary to render it publishable;

¹ L. Plotius Tucca is named as a co-editor, but since nothing is known of his literary pursuits it seems likely that Varius was principally responsible for the editorial work.

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even if that account is accurate, we have no way of knowing how much of what we read as Virgil is in fact the work of Varius.

The other main function of an editor in the contemporary context is to bring together work that has been dispersed in separate publications or that has not been previously published. A recent example is Archie Burnett's edition of the poetry of Philip Larkin (2012), which has been criticized for including poems that Larkin never published and that he may not have wished to see in print. That activity as well has parallels in Antiquity: the corpus of Catullus' poetry in its transmitted form, a miscellany whose formal and generic diversity is unique in ancient literature, is more likely to be the product of posthumous editorial collecting than anything Catullus himself meant to publish.²

Although there are some similarities between what a contemporary editor does and what was done in the ancient world, the task of an editor of a classical text today differs from that of the editor of a modern text in a fundamental way. Editors of classical texts have no difficulty in defining their aim as that of reconstructing the author's original version, while at the same time recognizing that, given the evidence available, that aim can never be fully achieved. We have no authors' autographs of classical texts, and in most cases the earliest surviving copies are from the ninth century CE, separated by many hundreds of years from the original copies.³ As a result, no classical text can be recovered in all its details; the most that can be hoped for is a close approximation to the original.⁴ For many editors of modern texts, however, an abundance of evidence with a direct connection to the author can render the concept of an original text problematic.

The editor of a modern text must often decide *which* authorial version of a text to edit. An extreme case is Byron's poem *The Giaour*, which survives in versions that range from 344 verses in the holograph draft to 1,334 in the seventh printed edition.⁵ But many other texts present similar problems on a

² The dedicatory poem to Cornelius Nepos puts it beyond doubt that Catullus published a collection of his poems, but I do not believe that it contained more than the first sixty poems in our corpus, if that much. This view is controversial; see, for example, Wiseman (1969), (1979) for a contrary hypothesis and Thomson (1997), 6–10 for a judicious summary of the issues. See also pp. 39–40.

³ Only for some patristic texts do we possess manuscripts close in time to the original texts: e.g., Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*, completed in the 420s, of which a fifth-century copy is extant (now in St Petersburg); the manuscript was once thought to have come from Augustine's own library.

⁴ I will come back to this point from another direction in Chapter 2 (p. 40).

⁵ McGann (1983), 59.

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smaller scale. A notable example is Shakespeare's *King Lear*, of which the texts found in the First Quarto and the First Folio arguably reflect distinct authorial versions, Q1 a draft of the play before it was performed and F1 a text revised at some time after performance.

Confronted with situations of that kind, editors must choose between an eclectic approach that draws on multiple witnesses and constructs a text that is identical to none of them and what Gary Taylor has called a 'versioning' approach, that is, reconstructing or reproducing separate authorial versions of a text.⁶ In recent years the versioning method has won more and more adherents: for example, the Norton Shakespeare prints *Lear* as found in Q1 and F1 as independent texts on facing pages; for good measure it also provides a text conflated from both sources, the form in which the play has traditionally been read.

Multiple authorial versions are also a recognized phenomenon in medieval vernacular literature: a conspicuous instance is Langland's *Piers Plowman*, which survives in at least three authorial forms (conventionally designated the A, B, and C texts), each of which has been edited as a separate entity and which have also been presented (along with a possible fourth version, Z) in a parallel-text edition.⁷

Similar questions can arise in the editing of musical scores, as is shown by the tangled editorial history of Anton Bruckner's symphonies. Bruckner revised many of his symphonies after their first performances, partly on his own initiative and partly in response to suggestions from friends and conductors. The first published editions also incorporated many unauthorized departures from Bruckner's autographs introduced by former students on whom he had relied for editorial help. Robert Haas, who was responsible for the first attempt at a critical edition, conflated wherever possible material from several versions to arrive at an 'ideal' synthesis; most performers today use the editions by Leopold Nowak, who attempted to keep those versions distinct.⁸

Such considerations are almost entirely absent from classical editing, because in nearly all cases the differences between manuscript copies of a classical text do not represent different versions of the work, but rather

⁶ Taylor (2007), 847–8. He makes the important point that, depending on the documentary evidence available, a version may need to be reconstructed using an eclectic approach.

⁷ For the parallel-text edition and a review of the poem's editorial history, see Schmidt (2008).

⁸ Details in Hawshaw and Jackson (2001), 467–71.

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scribal attempts (more or less successful) to reproduce a single form of a text.⁹ In a few texts (Ovid's *Metamorphoses* being one) the presence of authorial variants has been asserted, although in my view their existence has not been convincingly established. Even if all the alleged examples were accepted, they would amount only to minor retouching, not the kind of thorough revision that can be documented for many modern texts and musical scores. A number of classical texts were revised by their authors, but in no case do both the first and the revised version survive.¹⁰ Ovid's *Amores* is the best-known example: the extant collection, comprising three books, is preceded by an 'epigramma', which states that there were once five books of poems but that the author preferred the shorter version. It is plausible that the revised text, with its explicit authorial approval, drove the earlier version out of circulation, although it is still somewhat surprising that no traces of the prior form made their way into the transmission.

For good reasons, then, the eclectic approach has been the dominant model in classical editing. That is likely to remain true, although in the last chapter I will mention the possibility created by digital technology of disseminating the individual transmitted forms of a text alongside an editorial reconstruction of the putative original.

In addition to modifying the notion of a single original text, modern textual criticism has also called into question the notion of the author as the unique source of texts. Jerome McGann has emphasized instead the collaborative nature of text production, in which the author is one component – admittedly an indispensable one – in a chain of agents that may include friends of the author, publisher's readers, copyeditors, printers, and proofreaders, all of whom may be responsible for alterations of the author's original text. It is often difficult to disentangle the contributions of these agents, and, McGann would argue, the attempt to do so places the author's manuscript in an unduly exalted position and ignores the realities of how texts (in the sense of what reaches readers) are created.¹¹

⁹ A rare exception is the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, which survives in two recensions, RA and RB; for parallel-text editions see Kortekaas (1984), (2004). This work might be called 'semi-classical' both in its date (late fifth or early sixth century CE) and in the extensive Christian influence it displays.

¹⁰ Cicero recast his *Academica*, originally in two books, into a four-book form. The original second book survives, as does part of the first book of the second edition. See Brittain (2006).

¹¹ McGann (1983).

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McGann's stress on the role played by figures other than the author fits what is known or can be surmised for a number of classical texts. The *Aeneid* and Catullus have already been mentioned. Friends of Ovid may have been instrumental in putting the *Metamorphoses* into circulation after he went into exile. Friends of the author could also become involved before a work reached its final form: the Younger Pliny describes an elaborate process of reading a work-in-progress first to himself, then to two or three listeners, then giving the text to others for their comments, and finally reading to a larger audience, making changes at every step of the way.¹² The transmitted texts of the comedies of Plautus and Terence almost certainly incorporate changes made by actors and producers in both the original performances and in subsequent revivals, as well as readings arising from ancient scholarly study of the texts.¹³ Medieval manuscripts of Horace's *Odes* include material that is certainly non-authorial (e.g., metrical analyses) and other elements that are probably non-authorial (such as titles for individual poems, e.g., *Ad Pyrrham* for *C. 1.5*).¹⁴ Our texts have also been affected by processes that are now impossible to reverse, such as changes in orthography. It seems very likely from the evidence of inscriptions that Cicero employed such forms as *caussa* for *causa*, and the Qasr Ibrim papyrus of poetry by Cornelius Gallus from the late first century BCE uses *quom* instead of *cum* and the older *ei* where we are accustomed to *i* (e.g., *deiuitiora tueis* = *diuitiora tuis*). On the whole, however, the extant manuscripts of Latin authors employ a 'modernized' orthography (i.e., that prevalent in late Antiquity), which is in turn the orthography of most modern editions of classical texts.

Classical texts were, one imagines, no less the product of a collaborative process than are modern ones; the difference is that in the classical sphere the collaborators are either too close to the author for their contributions to be discernible (e.g., Varius and the *Aeneid*) or else too distant from the author to be given weight in the editorial process (e.g., medieval scribes, who can only affect a text by miscopying it).¹⁵

¹² *Epist.* 7.17.7. Being a friend of Pliny was obviously no joke.

¹³ Marshall (2006), 257–79 argues that any given performance of a Plautine comedy contained a certain amount of improvisation by actors; he thinks it is possible that some originally unscripted moments were incorporated into later performing texts (261).

¹⁴ On titles, see Schröder (1999).

¹⁵ In an intermediate position are the interpolators, especially of the kind I call 'collaborative' (see Chapter 5). My use of the term is independent of McGann's, but fits well with his emphasis on the communal nature of text production.

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Classical editors' fixation on the author's original does not necessarily betoken ignorance of or hostility to the questioning of that concept in other areas of textual criticism, but is rather the result of the circumstances in which classical literature has been preserved.

II

In order to survive into the ninth century and to have some chance of being copied subsequently, an ancient text had to pass through two bottlenecks, each resulting from an advance in the technology of script or book production. The first was the transition from the papyrus roll to the parchment codex, a process that probably began in the second century CE and was substantially complete by the fifth century.¹⁶ Because papyrus lasts for a relatively short time unless accidentally preserved, it seems safe to conclude that any text that had not been recopied on parchment by the end of the fifth century would have been lost by the time of the second great transition, from the scripts of antiquity to the Caroline minuscule that was developed in the last decades of the eighth century. Surviving the first of those two transitions did not guarantee that a text would survive the second: parchment, although far more durable than papyrus, was also much more expensive and more limited in quantity, and in the centuries of cultural and economic constriction following the breakup of the Roman Empire in the West, book production often entailed painful choices – shall it be Cicero or St. Augustine? – or else a sort of zero-sum situation in which new books were created by reusing the scrubbed-off ('palimpsested') leaves of earlier codices.¹⁷ Extant palimpsested manuscripts contain fragments of several classical texts that have been otherwise lost, but that had survived the transition to the codex. The best-known example is Cicero's *De re publica*, of which substantial sections were discovered in 1819 by Angelo Mai in a Vatican manuscript.¹⁸ A single palimpsest, Vat. Pal. lat. 24, put together in southern Italy in the late sixth or early seventh century, contains portions of ten earlier manuscripts, with texts including Seneca's lost *De amicitia* and *De vita patris*, Livy Book 91, and Hyginus' *Fabulae*, as well as works of Cicero, Lucan, and Aulus Gellius that survive in medieval copies.¹⁹ It would be natural to assume that the monastic copyists responsible for palimpsesting manuscripts were animated by a bias

¹⁶ For a brief account, see my article 'Codex' in Thomas and Ziolkowski (2014).

¹⁷ See Reynolds (1983), xiv–xvii; for a list, see Lowe (1964).

¹⁸ Facsimile by Mercati (1934); see Reynolds (1983), 132.

¹⁹ Full study by Fohlen (1979).

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against pagan texts, but in fact utility rather than ideology seems to have been their overriding concern, as can be seen from the fact that the text most often palimpsested was the early Latin translation of the Bible (the *Vetus Latina*), which had been rendered obsolete by Jerome's 'Vulgate' version.

Few texts seem to have survived into the late eighth or early ninth century only then to disappear. A possible instance was described in heart-rending terms by A. E. Housman:

[O]ne day toward the end of the eighth century the scribe of cod. Paris. Lat. 7530 ... began to copy out for us, on the 28th leaf of the MS, the *Thyestes* of Varius. He transcribed the title and the prefatory note ... Then he changed his mind: he proceeded with a list of the *notae* employed by Probus and Aristarchus, and the masterpiece of Roman tragedy has rejoined its author in the shades.²⁰

Housman's scenario is probably too melodramatic, since it seems likely that the text of Varius' play had already disappeared by this time, leaving its *titulus* behind, like the Cheshire Cat's grin.²¹

The transition from manuscript to print, which for most of the Latin classics took place between about 1475 and 1525, did not entail the kind of winnowing experienced at the earlier two stages. In a few instances, such as Velleius Paterculus' *Roman History* and the *Fabulae* of Hyginus, the unique manuscript used for the printed edition seems to have been discarded and lost, but I know of no text that survived in manuscript form to the age of printing that did not eventually reach print.

The passage from manuscript to print does, however, have some points in common with the earlier salvaging of classical texts after the collapse of the Roman Empire. Neither process was planned or coordinated so as to produce optimal results. Classical texts survived in the first place because they had the good fortune to be copied at critical moments, and the quality of those copies determined the character of the later transmission; that explains why, for example, Ovid's *Fasti* is relatively well preserved while the text of his *Heroides* is much more corrupt and interpolated. Texts entered print in a similarly haphazard fashion, sometimes on the basis of good manuscripts but probably more often on the basis of indifferent or bad ones, and the nature of those first printed editions also had a powerful influence on the character of later editions.

A form of evidence that is important for editing classical texts but that has no exact counterpart in the modern period consists of quotations in ancient

²⁰ Housman (1917), 42.

²¹ Also, to be precise, a one-line fragment that survives as a quotation in Quintilian.

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sources. Seneca, for example, in his *Epistulae morales*, cites almost fifty Greek and Latin authors. Along with well-attested canonical figures such as Virgil and Horace are a few otherwise lost texts; perhaps the most remarkable of Seneca's quotations are several eye-popping specimens of the mannered writing of Maecenas, the patron of Virgil and Horace.²² But it is the grammarians, with their habit of illustrating forms or usages with citations from a wide range of authors, who offer the richest troves of indirect tradition. A single book of Priscian's *Institutiones grammaticae* (Book 6, which deals with the nominative and genitive cases) contains citations from fifty-three authors, thirty of whom lack direct manuscript attestation. Among the highlights are a dozen fragments each from Ennius' *Annales* and Sallust's *Histories* and quotations from seven plays by the Republican tragedian Accius.

In addition to preserving fragments of lost works, quotations can also harbour potentially original readings that have disappeared in all manuscripts. In Propertius 4.5.47 *ianitor ad dantes uigilet; si pulsat inanis* ('let the doorkeeper stay awake for those with gifts; if someone knocks empty-handed'), the entire manuscript tradition reads *pulset*, an unwanted subjunctive form influenced by the preceding *uigilet*; the correct *pulsat* is found in a graffito on a wall in Pompeii.²³

Although quotations in ancient sources constitute evidence much older than the medieval manuscripts of the author being quoted, they are not immune to corruption, whether from cross-influence of manuscripts of the quoted text or simply from the usual processes of scribal error. Ovid's account of the weaving contest between Arachne and Minerva in *Metamorphoses* 6 contains the splendidly alliterative line *percusso pauunt insecti pectine dentes* (58 'as the comb beats <the weft> the notched teeth tap <it> into place'). The rare but certainly correct verb *pauunt* (from *pauire*, a technical term for tamping down the weft) has been replaced in most of the Ovid tradition by easier synonyms, *feriunt* or *quatiunt* (both verbs for 'striking'), which may have originated as glosses on *pauunt*;²⁴ a trace of the original reading lingered in one older manuscript, which had a nonsensical *pauent* ('they fear') before it was 'corrected' to *feriunt*. Ovid's line is quoted by Seneca in *Epist.* 90.20, where again *pauunt* has been corrupted, this time to *pariunt* ('they give birth') in the oldest manuscript, with *feriunt* common in later manuscripts. Jan Gruter (1560–1627) conjectured *pauunt* in the Seneca passage, and the conjecture has been adopted by all

²² *Epist.* 19.9, 92.35, 101.11, 114.4–8.

²³ See Heyworth (2007b), 455.

²⁴ The lexicon of Festus contains the entry '*pauire est ferire*' (p. 244 M.).

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modern editors of Ovid.²⁵ Another source of error in indirect transmission is the habit of ancient authors of quoting from memory rather than after consulting a text. As a result their citations may contain readings due entirely to the faulty recollection of the quoting author: Seneca's citation of *Met.* 6.58 reads *quod lato for percusso*.

III

Scribal error is an inevitable component of a manuscript medium of transmission. That ancient scribes were as fallible as their medieval successors, and that they fell prey to many of the same types of error, can be clearly seen from the small number of ancient copies that survive. Ancient and medieval scribes alike had to deal with a wide range of pitfalls. Some were inherent in the material they copied, which often confronted them with unfamiliar names, recondite vocabulary, complex syntax, and baffling metrical patterns. Others were posed by the particular form in which the scribe encountered the text: the exemplar might have been damaged, or was for other reasons difficult to read; the script might be an unfamiliar one, and letters or abbreviations might be incorrectly interpreted; punctuation and/or word division might be inconsistent, faulty, or absent; marginal notes or glosses might be mistaken for parts of the text (in Seneca's *Epist.* 42.4, most manuscripts have the syntactical direction *subaudi si*, 'understand *si*', in the text); if the scribe was copying from dictation, auditory confusions might arise.²⁶

A beautiful example of an error produced in part by palaeographical factors occurs in Catullus' epithalamium for Manlius Torquatus, when the poet calls for the traditional banter directed at the newly married couple: *ne diu taceat procax | Fescennina iocatio* (61.119–20 'let the ribald Fescennine jesting not be long silent'). The manuscripts read *locatio*, 'renting out', which makes no sense in the context; an Italian humanist, Coluccio Salutati, corrected to *locutio* ('utterance, expression'), but a much better correction, *iocatio* ('jesting'), was made by Heinsius. There is an excellent palaeographical explanation for the error: in the ancient Roman script called 'Rustic Capital', the letters I and L closely resemble each other and so are easily confused. Even in this case, however, the palaeographical element is

²⁵ Nicolas Heinsius thought of the same conjecture in Ovid, but declined to alter the common reading *feriunt*, in part because he thought *feriunt* was the reading of the Senecan quotation.

²⁶ For a useful collection of errors of various kinds, see Reynolds and Wilson (2013), 223–35.

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only one factor, others being the greater familiarity of the combination LOC vis-à-vis IOC (because of the frequency of words such as *locus*) and the scribe's lack of acquaintance with the ancient custom in question. Confusion of letters is most likely to occur when ignorance of the content removes the control that would otherwise prevent a scribe from writing what he knows is nonsense.

Errors could occur even when the text posed no particular challenges of reading or comprehension. Some were produced by inattention, such as copying the same word(s) twice (dittography), failing to copy a repeated word or words (haplography), or skipping from one occurrence of a word to another in the same context, omitting the intervening words (*saut du même au même*; sometimes called homoeoarchon or homoeoteleuton if the similarity lies in the beginning or end of the respective words). Others appear to result from slips in eye-brain-hand communication, such as transpositions of letters or syllables that produce nonsense: for example, Virgil *Georgics* 3.166 *criclos* for *circlos* (M), *Aeneid* 11.711 *rapu* for *pura* (M¹), Valerius Flaccus 2.268 *falamuribus* for *famularibus* (V). Still others may have been caused by the scribe's speaking the text to himself as he copied (what Alphonse Dain called 'dictée intérieure') and altering the form to suit his pronunciation: so perhaps Quintilian 6.3.93 *pane et aqua uiuo* > *bibo*, Horace *Carm.* 1.25.20 *Euro* > (*H*)*ebro*.²⁷

Another large class of errors can be called 'psychological' in that they arise from the scribe's mental interaction with the text he is copying. So, for example, the text may be altered because it evokes some association in the scribe's mind. The change may be the simple substitution of a synonym, such as *ferrum* for *telum* or *labores* for *dolores*, or it may replace a word with another of similar shape, but different meaning, as often happens with dactylic words (*tempore/corpore*, *nomine/sanguine*, *uulnera/pectora*, etc.). If the scribe is attempting to make sense of the text as he copies, he may rearrange word order for easier comprehension; and since scribes often construe small strings of words rather than entire sentences, they may unconsciously alter a form to fit what they wrongly believe is its syntactical function. The oldest recorded scribal error in a Latin literary text, in the Qasr Ibrim papyrus with verses by Cornelius Gallus, is probably of that type: in the phrase *quom tu | maxima Romanae pars eris historiae* ('when you will be the greatest part of Roman history'), addressed to a 'Caesar' (probably Julius), the papyrus

²⁷ For collections of verbal confusions, see Housman (1903), liv–lix (on transposition of letters and syllables), Havet (1911), Courtney (1970), xxxii–xlvi.