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978-0-521-76657-9 - Texts, Editors, and Readers: Methods and Problems in Latin Textual Criticism

Richard Tarrant

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Texts, Editors, and Readers

This book re-examines the most traditional area of classical scholarship, offering critical assessments of the current state of the field, its methods and controversies, and its prospects for the future in a digital environment. Each stage of the editorial process is examined, from gathering and evaluating manuscript evidence to constructing the text and critical apparatus, with particular attention given to areas of dispute, such as the role of conjecture. The importance of subjective factors at every point is highlighted. An Appendix offers practical guidance in reading a critical apparatus. The discussion is framed in a way that is accessible to non-specialists, with all Latin texts translated. The book will be useful both to classicists who are not textual critics and to non-classicists interested in issues of editing.

RICHARD TARRANT is Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature at Harvard University. He has long been interested in issues of editing classical texts, and has produced editions of two tragedies by Seneca (*Agamemnon* and *Thyestes*), and edited Ovid's *Metamorphoses* for the Oxford Classical Texts series. His most recent book, a commentary on Virgil, *Aeneid* Book XII, published in the Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics series, has received the Charles J. Goodwin Award of Merit from the Society for Classical Studies and the Premio Internazionale 'Virgilio' from the Accademia Nazionale Virgiliana, in Mantova.

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Pope Professor of Latin

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Robin Nisbet

In Memoriam

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page xi</i>
Introduction	I
1 Textual criticism in a post-heroic age	18
2 The rhetoric of textual criticism/textual criticism as rhetoric	30
3 Establishing the text 1: recension	49
4 Establishing the text 2: conjecture	65
5 Establishing the text 3: interpolation, collaboration, and intertextuality	85
6 Textual criticism and literary criticism: the case of Propertius	105
7 Presenting the text: the critical edition and its discontents	124
8 The future: problems and prospects	145
<i>Appendix: Reading a critical apparatus</i>	157
<i>Bibliography</i>	170
<i>General index</i>	182
<i>Index of passages discussed</i>	186
<i>Index of scholars</i>	189

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‘Richard, isn’t it curious that any damn fool who has edited a text thinks he can write a book on textual criticism?’ (Roger Mynors in conversation, 1975). Roger’s words struck me with particular force, partly because of their atypical vehemence and partly because at the time, fresh from editing a text and reviewing a couple of books on textual criticism, I had indeed begun to think that I might write a book on the subject. His remark made me postpone the project for nearly four decades. I must leave it to readers to decide whether I should have put it off still longer.

This set of essays is neither a handbook nor a history of classical textual criticism. Good examples of both genres are available, such as Martin West’s *Textual Criticism and Editorial Technique* and Leighton Reynolds’s and Nigel Wilson’s *Scribes and Scholars*. My aim is instead to offer critical assessments of the current state of the field and some thoughts on the challenges and possibilities facing it in the near future. But I hope that the book may also serve as a way into textual criticism for classicists who do not specialize in the subject and for scholars in related disciplines.

Textual criticism affects all students of the classics, whether or not they are aware of its influence. That influence is mainly exerted by the editions that we all depend on, and so one of my goals is to provide guidance for users of critical editions, at a general level by examining the rationales that underlie classical editing and more specifically through sections on apparatus format and terminology.

I have tried to take nothing for granted and to regard no assumption or practice as self-evidently valid, but to subject all of them to scrutiny, which will often result in acknowledging their limitations. A recurring theme is the role played in textual criticism by non-objective factors. Textual criticism

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[More information](#)

PREFACE

deals with relative probability and persuasiveness, not with demonstration, and as a result its conclusions must always be to a degree provisional.

This is a personal book, both in the sense of being written in a first-person style that reflects its origins in lectures and also in being rooted in my own editorial experiences: many of my examples of textual problems are drawn from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. One of the pleasant consequences of writing it has been the opportunity to reconsider my critical outlook and the scholars who have shaped it.

It is likewise a pleasure to thank the many colleagues and friends who have helped me in putting the book together. Denis Feeney and Stephen Hinds suggested the topic many years ago, persevered through long stretches in which progress was invisible, and offered acute and supportive responses when draft chapters at last began to appear. Gian Biagio Conte prompted the invitation to deliver the Comparetti Lectures in 2008 at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa, which provided the stimulus needed to turn inchoate thoughts into the semblance of a book. Audience members in Pisa contributed helpful questions and comments; there are too many for me to thank them all, but I cannot leave out Giuliana Crevatin, Rolando Ferri, Glenn Most, Lisa Piazzi, Seth Schein, and Mario Telò. For advice and information of various kinds I am grateful to Archie Burnett, Cynthia Damon, Albertus Horsting, Bob Kaster, Tom Keeline, Dániel Kiss, Matt McGowan, James McKeown, Stephen Oakley, Christopher Parrott, Irene Peirano, Richard Rutherford, Justin Stover, Richard Thomas, Julian Yolles, and James Zetzel. Special thanks are due to the anonymous reader for Cambridge University Press, whose comments helped me to clarify my arguments at several points, to Gail Trimble, who read the manuscript at a late stage and improved it in many places, and to Michael Sharp, for his unfailing support and advice.

Chapter 6 has acquired its own set of benefactors. I am once again grateful to Gian Biagio Conte and the Scuola Normale for the opportunity to discuss some of the ideas in that chapter, also to the participants in a seminar on the text of Propertius at the 2010 meeting of the American Philological Association, and to Stephen Heyworth for his spirited response to the papers at that session.

When I began graduate work, I was quite unsure of my future direction; the one thing of which I felt certain was that I would never engage in textual criticism. Robin Nisbet gently led me to see that the only way I could write the dissertation I had undertaken – a commentary on Seneca's *Agamemnon* – would be to edit the text as well. In gratitude for that realization, for so much else that followed, and above all for his example, I dedicate this book to his memory.