

Introduction

This book sets out to examine the theoretical bases, more especially the hermeneutic bases, of a remarkable and important cultural phenomenon, the eighteenth-century beginnings of the editing of English secular literature. The works of English poets and dramatists had in some sense been 'edited' before: the successive Shakespearean Folios, for instance, constitute a form of textual editing, and commentaries on English literary writings include E. K.'s Glosses on *The Shepheardes Calender*, and Sir Kenelm Digby's *Observations* (1644) on Spenser's Castle of Alma (*Faerie Queene*, 2. 9. 22). There is nothing however before the last years of the seventeenth century like the concerted project of 'intelligent' annotating and textual editing of Shakespeare and Milton (amongst other English writers) by such scholars as Patrick Hume, Alexander Pope, Lewis Theobald, Richard Bentley, Samuel Johnson, and Edward Capell.

The occasions for this development, and the reasons for its timing, lie partly no doubt in social, economic, and legal histories of the book and book readers, of the profession of letters, and of property and copyright. They lie too in the history of a more general process by which English culture required and developed a sense of its own identity and its own history, and began to seek literary classics of its own, comparable with, if not yet replacing, those of antiquity.

Many of the issues in this cultural process have already been discussed, in a number of distinguished studies. Accounts of the formation of an English literary history, of the ordering and canonizing of English literature, of the development of a new philological and historical scholarship concerned with vernacular writings, and the rise of a distinctively British literature have notably been provided by René Wellek, Lawrence Lipking, Joseph Levine, and Howard Weinbrot.

More particularly, in recent years there has been a gathering interest in, and to some extent a re-evaluation of, the work of the eighteenth-century literary editors, and more especially of editors of Shakespeare. Peter Seary has provided a scholarly reassessment of Lewis Theobald. Considerable attention has been paid to text-critical methods and policies, in Simon Jarvis's examination in his recent book of the work of Theobald and

I



Shakespeare, Milton, and eighteenth-century literary editing

Johnson, as well as by Steven Urkowitz, Grace Ioppolo, and other scholars. Perhaps above all recent work has been characterized by a focus on the scholarly assumptions and procedures of the eighteenth-century editors as responses to the social and cultural conditions of their own time. Margreta de Grazia argues that Edmond Malone's concern for 'authenticity' in his 1790 edition of Shakespeare is not neutral or essential but 'embedded in history', arising out of 'the determinate needs of a specific historical situation', that is, the Enlightenment. Simon Jarvis is concerned especially with conditions of literary production, and with constructions and representations of learning and scholarship, in the early and mid eighteenth century.

In all this there has been surprisingly little investigation of the theoretical foundations, and more especially the hermeneutic foundations, of eighteenth-century editing. Editing of course can never be wholly neutral, and can never be wholly divorced from its historical circumstances. Equally, however, editing is not merely a function determined by social or political or economic conditions, but a discipline possessed of its own principles, methods, procedures, and purposes, however variously defined and debated they have been, and remain. The first editors of English literature have been thought, and continue in some quarters to be thought, unmethodical, unprincipled, idiosyncratic. I attempt in this book to show that, on the contrary, the work of such figures as Lewis Theobald, Zachary Pearce, and Edward Capell was grounded in developed, sophisticated, and often clearly articulated theoretical understandings. I argue from the outset that editing is a necessarily interpretative activity, and I attempt to identify and illustrate the development and application of interpretative methods and assumptions in eighteenth-century editing. In particular I set out to demonstrate the extent to which editors in the period followed, in Peter Shillingsburg's phrase, an 'authorial orientation'. Many scholars and editors of the time sought to recover what their authors intended to write and what their authors intended to mean, and believed that such an enterprise was made possible by close examination of the text, and by knowledge of the author's writings and those of his contemporaries and, more generally, of the 'history and manners' of the author's time. I argue in my second chapter and elsewhere that what I take to be the essentially historicist and intentionalist methods and principles of much eighteenthcentury secular literary editing may derive at least in part from those of Protestant, and more specifically Anglican, biblical hermeneutics of the previous century. With such issues in mind I concentrate less on the textual criticism as such of the eighteenth-century editors than on the interpretative grounds and rationales of their textual decisions, and, more broadly, on their attempt to understand and explain their texts. I shall be



Introduction

3

concerned, in fact, primarily with issues in the historiography of textual understanding.

I have focussed on the editing of Shakespeare and Milton, where the central issues are extensively debated, explored, and exemplified, aiming to provide, not a survey or a history of eighteenth-century editing, but an account of some of its important characteristics and tendencies, as revealed in the editorial practice, and theoretical and methodological statements, of some of its leading figures. The historical termini of my enquiry are Patrick Hume's Annotations on Paradise Lost (1695), the first full-length learned commentary on a major English literary work, and Edward Capell's editorial work on Shakespeare (1768–83), which seems to me in many ways a high point in the development and application of historicizing textual and interpretative scholarship.

It will be apparent that the work of the eighteenth-century editors raises issues that continue to be actively debated amongst modern editorial theorists, and I have attempted, at some length in my first chapter, and to some extent throughout this study, to assess the relation of eighteenthcentury editing to the terms and categories of modern arguments about editing and interpretation. It is not my intention, however, to accommodate the eighteenth-century editors to our own positions. Indeed, one of my motives in writing this book has been the sense that, in some recent discussions, the eighteenth century has been judged, unsympathetically, by inappropriate and modern criteria. Notions in editorial theory - of the author, of authorial intention, and of commentary, most pertinently - need to be seen as historically specific. It is an essential part of my argument that the work of the first English literary scholars should be assessed in the light of their specific, and different, understandings of these and other key editorial and hermeneutic issues. Those understandings, and the use they made of them, may have some significant resonances for our own time.



I

Some theoretical perspectives for the study of eighteenth-century editing

Orientations of editing

To a modern eye, the work of the first editors of Shakespeare and Milton in the eighteenth century can seem most unfamiliar. While much has been written in appreciation of their work, some recent commentators have found many of them guilty of a tendency to the speculative and conjectural, of a preference for 'taste' over textual recension, and of a general ignorance of recent theory and practice in textual criticism. By contrast, I shall wish to argue that some at least of these editorial pioneers had a highly developed understanding, though not a modern understanding, of the problems and possibilities involved. The eighteenth-century editors were innovators facing particular, and new, sets of editorial and interpretative questions, within their own historical and intellectual setting. If we are to understand how they approached their task it is necessary for us to have a sense of how they conceived the questions which faced them, of what they took the functions of editing to be, and of what literary and intellectual resources were open to them, in their own time. If we are properly to envision their work, we need in fact to reconstruct (to borrow a Popperian terminology) their specific historical 'problem situation'. In the course of this book I shall in particular attempt to argue that the emphases of many of the eighteenth-century literary editors were fundamentally interpretative, and to describe some of the grounds and characteristics of their interpretative methods. I shall begin by suggesting in this chapter how, and how far, their work might be related to some modern terms of the editorial debate.

The explosion of editorial and textual theorizing in this century has provided us not only with a range of conceptual and methodological tools for the reproduction and interpretation of past writings, but also with a number of positions from which we might view the editorial theories and practices of the past. For a number of reasons, however, we must choose

¹ See Karl R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge* (revised edn: Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp. 170–7. Popper applies the precept to the understanding of works of art, as well as to the understanding of scientific problem situations (see *Objective Knowledge*, p. 180).



Some theoretical perspectives

the positions we adopt with some care. Many modern discussions address problems and subject matters which had scarcely begun to be recognized in the early eighteenth century, or start with assumptions more or less foreign to that period. To believe we have now achieved confident editorial enlightenment, and to describe the history of editing as a progress towards that enlightenment, would of course be merely another chapter in Whig history. And in fact, as most of their practitioners readily acknowledge, textual criticism and editing are now amongst the most contested and problematized areas of the humanities. If the specific character of eight-eenth-century editing is to be understood, it will certainly be necessary to consider which modern conceptualizations of textual criticism and editing might possibly provide us with useful and appropriate optics for its examination, and which cannot.

I would like to begin that process of discrimination, for the purposes of this study, by an appeal to what seems to me the clearest and most useful modern taxonomy of textual editing, that presented by Peter Shillingsburg in his Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age: Theory and Practice (1986). I shall use Shillingsburg's taxonomy throughout this book as a heuristic tool in assessing the positions and directions of eighteenth-century editing, though it will be apparent that I understand and apply some of his categories in somewhat modified ways.

Shillingsburg argues that there are four possible formal orientations of textual editing, the historical (or documentary), the aesthetic, the authorial, and the sociological, depending on where the editor chooses to locate authority for the text. Though no edition is constructed purely and exclusively with regard to any one orientation, most may be characterized as predominantly pursuing one or another of these four defining possibilities. Shillingsburg thinks of his four formal orientations more particularly with reference to their effect on 'the readings preserved in an edition'. I shall however extend their application beyond the realm of pure textual criticism to the realm of interpretation, believing, for reasons which will I hope become clear later in this chapter, and throughout my discussion in this book, that the two realms have no clear boundary, and, indeed, cover some of the same terrain.2 I shall be concerned, in fact, with the forms and the theory of exegesis, as well as of textual criticism. Eighteenth-century editors rarely drew an unbroken line between the two. It is a salient characteristic of the work of such scholar-editors as Lewis Theobald and

5

² Professor Shillingsburg has since considerably developed his position. In his later article, 'Text as matter, concept, and action' (Studies in Bibliography, 44 (1991), 31–82), he substantially redraws the map of relations between Work, Document, Language, Author, Reader, and Book, taking postmodern scepticism and relativism almost as givens. I believe his earlier statement of the orientations of textual editing in Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age (Athens, Georgia, and London: University of Georgia Press, 1986) nonetheless remains coherent.



6 Shakespeare, Milton, and eighteenth-century literary editing

Edward Capell that their textual choices are regularly made on explicitly formulated interpretative grounds.

Of the four orientations, the historical 'places a high value on the chronology of forms'.³ Authority, for this orientation, resides primarily in the historical document. Historically orientated editors resist the eclectic mixing of discrete texts. In the pure or strong form of the historical orientation, as practised by professional historians rather than literary scholars, dealing especially with manuscript or typescript, a single document is treated as a particular piece of historical evidence, and reproduced more or less exactly, perhaps even by photographic or type facsimile or microfilm.⁴

At the beginning of the eighteenth century there was in some quarters a resistance to excessive faith in particular documents. The work of Richard Bentley did much to nurture a presumption that ancient manuscripts were corrupt, and required both correction against other available witnesses, and conjectural emendation. Alexander Pope attacked the pedantic antiquarianism which refused, out of a blind idolatry for ancient documents, to make necessary (and necessarily eclectic) editorial decisions. Thomas Hearne had boasted that it was 'a Principle with me not to alter MSS even where better and more proper Readings are very plain and obvious'. He would be immortalized as 'Wormius' in the *Dunciad*, and mocked in the poem's very first note: 'I can never enough praise my very good Friend, the exact Mr. *Tho. Hearne*; who if any word occur which to him and all mankind is evidently wrong, yet keeps it in the Text with due reverence, and only remarks in the Margin, *sic M.S.*'5

Eighteenth-century literary editing almost never follows a purely historical, or documentary, orientation. The question of the degree of status and authority properly to be accorded to particular surviving witnesses was nonetheless, as we shall see, at the centre of debates between, for example, Pope and Theobald, or Bentley and his answerers. And as the century progressed, such scholar-editors as Thomas Newton and Edward Capell took an increasingly exact approach to the original documents with which they dealt.

In the sociological orientation, authority is located 'in the institutional unit of author and publisher'. For sociological editors the contribution made by publishers, publishers' editors, and others is to be understood not as corruption or dilution of a pristine creative act, but as 'a social

³ Shillingsburg, Scholarly Editing, p. 19.

⁴ For important discussions of the rival claims of 'literary' and 'historical' editing see G. Thomas Tanselle, 'The editing of historical documents', *Studies in Bibliography*, 31 (1978), 1–56, and 'Historicism and critical editing', *Studies in Bibliography*, 39 (1986), 1–46 (pp. 3–4, 9).

⁵ Hearne, A Collection of Curious Discourses (2nd edn enlarged, 2 vols., London, 1771), 1. lxx (first published Oxford, 1720); Dunciad Variorum (1729), note on the title, and 3. 184.



Some theoretical perspectives

phenomenon integral to the creative process'. A sociologically orientated edition is likely to be based not on an author's manuscript but on a published text precisely because it has 'passed through the normal social process of becoming a printed work'. With the exception of the introduction of computerized technologies, there has been no more significant development in modern bibliography and editing than the pursuit of arguments for a sociological orientation. Editors now may think of texts not as the communications of autonomous creative individuals but as indeterminate and changeable products of a variety of social forces operating over time. There is an obvious consonance with a number of modern movements away from the authorial and canonical, including New Historicism and reception theory.

Eighteenth-century scholarly editors did not have an extensive modern knowledge of the conditions of production of earlier writing, and entertained as we shall see rather different ideas of the author and of the text. Eighteenth-century editing therefore offers very few anticipations of this distinctively modern revolution. Scholars were aware that Shakespeare's plays were altered in the playhouse, but they normally thought of that as corruption and degradation rather than cooperative creativity. In the century's main argument about the initial process of publication of Paradise Lost, Richard Bentley subjected the early texts to a process of amendment in order to remove what he thought or represented to be dishonest and inept changes introduced by Milton's first 'editor' and printer. His answerers defended the early text on the grounds that the process of publication of the first two editions adequately communicated the poem Milton intended, without such external intrusions. In this debate neither Bentley nor his opponents were inclined to describe contributions by anyone but the author John Milton as anything but contamination.

In the aesthetic orientation, according to Shillingsburg, authority is located 'in a concept of *artistic* forms – either the author's, the editor's, or those fashionable at some time'. The aesthetic orientation may lie behind an editor's choice of the 'best' text of a work, or behind any particular choice of reading. Aesthetic editors choose between texts and readings on

7

⁶ Shillingsburg, Scholarly Editing, pp. 24-6.

See especially Jerome J. McGann, A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); McGann, 'The monks and the giants: textual and bibliographical studies and the interpretation of literary works', in Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. 180-99; McGann, 'Interpretation, meaning, and textual criticism: a homily', TEXT, 3 (1987), 55-62; and Donald F. McKenzie's 1985 Panizzi Lectures, Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts (London: British Library, 1986).

⁸ For a development of these points, see G. Thomas Tanselle, 'Textual criticism and literary sociology', Studies in Bibliography, 44 (1991), 83-143.

⁹ Shillingsburg, Scholarly Editing, p. 22. It will be apparent that Shillingsburg's understanding of the aesthetic in relation to editing is a particular and restricted one.



Shakespeare, Milton, and eighteenth-century literary editing

the basis of their consistency with some artistic standard, of metre for example, or the linguistic proprieties of the author's or the editor's period, or consonance with the 'genre' of the piece of writing, or some ideal of poetic richness and suggestivity. If it is possible to distinguish, as E. D. Hirsch does, 10 between determinate 'meaning' inherent in the writing, and 'significance', which is the relationship of that meaning to anything else, then the aesthetic orientation is concerned chiefly with significance. An edition which adapts a text to the tastes and knowledges of either the editor or the reader is to that extent aesthetic. Modern scholarly literary editors appealing to this orientation 'usually restrict their selection of forms to those already existing in historical documents, though most will provide nonhistorical forms in the place of readings which they consider to be erroneous in all surviving texts' (Shillingsburg, Scholarly Editing, p. 22). In the strongest forms of the aesthetic orientation, editorial choices may be made on the basis of an essentially subjective taste.

The aesthetic orientation is rarely adopted, at least openly, by modern literary editors, but is not inherently criminal, even in its stronger forms. F. A. Wolf understood that the Alexandrian editors laboured more to present a consistent and elegant Homer than an accurate one, proceeding 'from poetic rather than from diplomatic standards of accuracy'. 11 In our own century, G. Thomas Tanselle has similarly argued that

a person of taste and sensitivity, choosing among variant readings on the basis of his own preference and making additional emendations of his own, can be expected to produce a text that is aesthetically satisfying and effective . . . editing which does not have as its goal the recovery of the author's words is not necessarily illegitimate – it is creative, rather than scholarly, but not therefore unthinkable. 12

The point may be made with a more general reference to literary interpretation. Michael Hancher amongst others has urged the necessity of providing for interpretations which, though unconcerned with the author's intended meaning, are nonetheless valuable; such interpretations 'will not be scientific in method', and 'will not issue in knowledge'. 13 E. D. Hirsch argues, more strongly, that no special privilege can be claimed for intrinsic principles, and that a 'judicial evaluation need fulfill only two criteria: (1) that it be a judgment about the work and not about a distorted version of

11 Prolegomena to Homer (1795), trans. and ed. Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and James E. G. Zetzel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 157-8.

'The science of interpretation, and the art of interpretation', Modern Language Notes, 85 (1970), 791-802 (p. 797). Compare Marcia Muelder Eaton, 'Good and correct interpretations of

literature', Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 29 (1970-1), 227-33.

¹⁰ Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 8.

^{12 &#}x27;Textual study and literary judgment', in Tanselle's Textual Criticism and Scholarly Editing (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1990), pp. 325-37 (p. 329). Compare Tanselle, 'The editorial problem of final authorial intention', Studies in Bibliography, 29 (1976), 167-211 (p. 180 and n. 28).



Some theoretical perspectives

it, and (2) that the judgment be accurate with respect to the criteria applied . . . Judgments that are accurately made upon explicit criteria furnish the grounds of their own validation and therefore qualify as knowledge.' So if we disagree with Thomas Rymer's attack on Shakespearean tragedy in his Short View of Tragedy (1693), where Rymer's neo-Aristotelian criteria are made sufficiently explicit, we must do so either on the grounds that Rymer distorts the plays he discusses, or that he applies those criteria to them inaccurately. We may consider Rymer's criteria wholly inappropriate, but (if we accept Hirsch's argument) that in itself would not disable Rymer's judgment as knowledge in its own terms.

Certainly the aesthetic orientation plays a major part in much eighteenth-century editing. Some eighteenth-century editors, notably Pope and Bentley and Warburton, have been accused of adopting a grossly subjective aesthetic approach, changing the texts of Shakespeare and Milton more or less freely in order to accommodate them to their own tastes. The appropriate question, however, is not whether they adopted an aesthetic approach, but whether they made their editorial decisions accurately and according to openly stated and coherent criteria. If Bentley and Warburton will emerge in my ensuing discussion as problematic at best from this point of view, it will also appear that some eighteenth-century editors, where they make editorial judgments on grounds at least partly aesthetic, do so 'accurately . . . upon explicit criteria'. Thomas Newton's Milton is perhaps the most obvious case. My main argument in relation to this issue however will be that, as the century progressed, eighteenth-century scholarly editing depended less on the aesthetic orientation, and more on the fourth of Shillingsburg's categories, the authorial.

In the authorial orientation, authority is located in the author. The editor seeks to include authorial forms, but, so far as is possible, to exclude errors and non-authorial forms, producing 'a purified authorial text' (Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing*, p. 28). Authorially orientated editors are likely to privilege holographs, and published versions which the author has proof-read. Shillingsburg's definition does not conceal the problematic nature of this orientation:

Most editorial principles which discuss authorial intentions, whether 'original' or 'final', reveal an authorial orientation. Phrases such as 'the text the author wanted his readers to have', 'the author's final intentions', his 'artistic intentions', 'the product of the creative process', or even 'what the author did' reveal an authorial orientation.

Authority for the authorial orientation resides with the author, though editors do not agree on what that means. (p. 24)

`

¹⁴ The Aims of Interpretation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 108; Hirsch's essays here on 'Evaluation as knowledge' and 'Privileged criteria in evaluation' (pp. 95-109, 110-23) bear on this issue throughout.



Shakespeare, Milton, and eighteenth-century literary editing

The authorial orientation has been dominant in twentieth-century editing, from McKerrow and Greg through Bowers, and down to Bowers's heir, G. Thomas Tanselle. Greg declares that 'the aim of a critical edition should be to present the text, so far as the available evidence permits, in the form in which we may suppose that it would have stood in a fair copy, made by the author himself, of the work as he finally intended it'. Fredson Bowers approved of Greg's 'Rationale of copy-text' as a method for producing 'the nearest approximation in every respect of the author's final intentions', and, in a late essay, insisted that 'the main scholarly demand is for an established critical text embodying the author's full intentions'. Tanselle has explored a number of the theoretical implications of editing which seeks to reconstruct an author's developed intentions in an essay which is the fullest recent treatment of the issue, and has reaffirmed in many of his writings both the desirability and possibility of this orientation.

The authorial orientation and ideas of the author

A central part of my thesis in this book is that, despite some early and persistent aesthetic tendencies, the authorial orientation was increasingly dominant in eighteenth-century scholarly editing of vernacular literary texts, and that the work of the eighteenth-century editors will not be well understood if the reasons for and the nature of their authorial orientation are not taken into account. Such editors as Theobald and Capell, and such commentators as Zachary Pearce, set out to establish and to explain, in the phrase they regularly used, 'what the author wrote'. In what remains of this chapter I shall explore some of the problems and implications of the authorial orientation in editing as they shed light on theory and practice in the eighteenth century.

Certainly the extent to which scholarship, commentary, and editing have focussed on the author has developed and varied historically with changes in the valuation of the status and agency of the author. A. J. Minnis has influentially argued that the author, both of Scripture and of non-scriptural texts, came into his own in the late middle ages. As the emphasis in biblical interpretation shifted from the allegorical to the literary sense, so it began to be possible to think that 'the intention of the human *auctor* was believed to be expressed by the literal sense'. ¹⁸ So texts,

Editing (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1975), pp. 488-528 (p. 527).

'The editorial problem of final authorial intention'. Compare, for example, Tanselle's 'Historicism and critical editing', p. 21.

© Cambridge University Press

W. W. Greg, The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1942), p. x.
 'Some principles for scholarly editions of nineteenth-century American authors', Studies in Bibliography, 17 (1964), 227; 'Remarks on eclectic texts', in Bowers's Essays in Bibliography, Text, and

¹⁸ A. J. Minnis, Medieval Theory of Authorship (2nd edn, Aldershot: Wildwood House, 1988), p. 5.