

## CHAPTER I

*Introduction**The Book, the Work and the Scholarly Edition*

It's April 2007 and I'm sitting in my study at home, reading poetry. To be precise, I'm checking proofs of a scholarly edition of Mary Gilmore's complete verse in a series that I have responsibility for. I have taken my mind off the proofing job and am enjoying the poems from her *Wild Swans* collection of 1930, afresh, for the first time. I've read them in typescript – painstakingly, thoroughly, fatiguingly – twice before, calculating what special instructions to write for the typesetter about their future page layout and considering, too, what to tell the editor about the shape and accuracy of each annotation and of each textual apparatus entry: whether the entries tend to support or dispute the line of textual transmission that she has laid out in the textual note. I was concerned, too, about whether the volume's conventions had been consistently followed, and how the editor's explanatory notes could be shortened since I could see this volume was pushing up against the limits of its possible page-extent.

But instead, on this occasion, I am at last reading the main texts as poems. I'm in their space. The typesetting has granted me this luxury for the first time. The typography is soothing, all-but-transparent. The scholarly detail is properly subordinated on the page and yet remains readable. Nothing about the page design irks me, and I'm sensitive to such things. It's quiet where I am, and the poems work on me. This is – what else to call it? – my aesthetic experience of them. The object on whose production I have lavished so much anxious attention, is now only the trigger or vehicle – but an indispensable one all the same. As the 1930s phenomenologist Roman Ingarden would say I am *realising* these works.

Then I recognise with a start that I'm now reading a poem about grief, knowing that in half an hour a friend, whose father has just died, will be dropping by with her now-widowed mother. The poem hits home. 'Grief builds no barns/ Its plough rusts at the door', writes Gilmore – writes, it seems, for me, right now, even though she died in 1962 and can never have envisioned a scholarly edition of her complete poetry, whose proofs I am, at last, *reading*.

A van pulls up in my neighbour's driveway, just across from my study window. It's a tradesman. He leaves his radio on after he gets out and he whistles as he walks round to the back door.  
The spell is broken.

What does this rediscovered note of mine – mostly written, as I recall, while the tradesman was still there – tell me about the reading of literary works and the role of scholarly editions in them? Such editions, at their best, are both aesthetic trigger and historical resource. The one seems miraculously granted, the other obviously hard won. In the edition that I was checking, a mini textual history is captured on each well-designed page.<sup>1</sup> Each poem's biographical, bibliographical and book-historical contexts are accurately and economically conveyed for the reader to ponder as, soon, I was doing once again as I resumed my proofreading task. My note goes on:

There is an act of historical understanding on offer. The poem takes up another form of life for me. I compare the facts and backgrounds of each successive poem till the shape of the published volume *Wild Swans* as a sequenced collection, now captured in the scholarly edition, resolves itself against the poems' richly chaotic back-stories in manuscript, revision and magazine publication.

Proofreading is a hyper-conscious form of reading – reading the material object as well as the content – that I would not wish upon the published volume's readers. But it is revealing nonetheless in the way it insists on the edition's capacity to work, so gratifyingly, with the grain, granting that aesthetic experience, but also against the grain, unlocking meanings by detailing the reading text's location in the broader contexts of its own becoming.

In any scholarly edition, the literary transaction that is going on is more complicated than is usual, even paradoxical.<sup>2</sup> How might we explain the relations between its various material and textual components? And how will that explanation alter if we shift our gaze to the digital scholarly editions that have been looming on the horizon for a couple of decades now? There has been more promise than delivery so far, but their day is coming. Some would say it has arrived, although university presses are still commissioning new series of printed scholarly editions. Will digital editions afford us the same mixture of reactions that their printed counterparts do? Or will the logic of the different medium dictate other, unpredicted outcomes?

Although the methodologies of scholarly editing are well established and change slowly over the decades, the rougher leaps and bounds of the

theories behind them demand attention if questions such as these are to be addressed, especially if the answer is to be kept in harmony with empirical practice. The answer will have to allow for the fact that the edition insists on the relation between the varying texts of versions and each one's own historical-material vehicle, its documentary embodiment in book or manuscript. We have known this for some time. But where are their readers to be accommodated in the explanation? The answer must not leave them out of the account – if only because I *am* one and that blessed half-hour has vouchsafed me something special.

### **'Social' Texts**

From the mid-1980s a climate change occurred in the thinking of bibliographers and editorial theorists about the social relations of texts. It encouraged the asking of broader questions and seemed to point the way towards more encompassing responses including, potentially, from scholarly editors. This opening-out of bibliography, following D. F. McKenzie's lead, was liberating at the time.<sup>3</sup> We began to see that textuality has a 'social dimension', as Jerome McGann has more recently put it, as meanings of texts in their versional and redesigned and reprinted forms are realised by successive readerships.<sup>4</sup> It was as if written or printed works of literature were now to be understood as running in parallel with oral works, which are always evolutionary in their shifting forms. They live off their partly formulaic but also freshly impromptu remakings in new settings for new audiences.<sup>5</sup>

While not a blindingly new insight in itself, the implications of this unrolling of works through time had been overlooked. Since then, this general approach to texts has carried nearly all before it, in part because of its incorporation of the meanings laden in the material forms of texts, which McKenzie, and most notably McGann after him, emphasised.<sup>6</sup> Those meanings simultaneously revealed the collaboration of skilled workers that any book production requires. McKenzie showed that, with enough bibliographical training, the making of a book becomes at least partially legible. Its history of production is there between the covers and on the page, as it were, able to be read off, recovered.<sup>7</sup>

At the time, the new social-texts approach appeared to have powerful implications for the operations of scholarly editors, who had traditionally aimed at establishing the texts of works as intended by their authors. Yet no new model of the work was on offer that might ground freshly conceived editorial operations. Grateful though I was at the time for the

encouragement of a broad purview for bibliographical thinking, I was soon critical of the prospect of the new social-texts approach applying to scholarly editing.<sup>8</sup> I could see that McGann's emphasis on the historically determinate circumstances of any printing might, say, license the editing of facsimile reproductions. Yet even they, as I commented in the early 1990s, could reproduce only the visual appearance of the original document or book, not the socialised circumstances that gave rise to it.<sup>9</sup> This displacing of attention from texts understood as agented acts of composition, revision and production onto texts understood as collaboratively or socially achieved gave editors no purchase on the phenomenon or any right to emend the text. Strictly speaking, this was so even if some passages made no sense or had been deliberately censored or bowdlerised. So how could those textual interventions, which editors had traditionally found the need to undertake, be defended? What model of the work would underwrite intervention? Where would editing find its point of attachment to texts considered as being in social evolution? 'McGann', I concluded, 'may have a theory of textual production, but he does not *yet*, it seems to me, have a theory of editing'.<sup>10</sup>

Peter Shillingsburg has recently taken the case much further. He shows that 'McKenzie directed his insights toward the history of the book far more than he did toward editorial policies'. The implication is then irresistible: in practice, '*the sociology of texts*, as defined by McKenzie in his Panizzi Lectures [of 1985], *has no editorial consequences*'. Shillingsburg goes on to argue that McGann's view does not either. Having got halfway to the same insight myself in 1992 I can now only concur. It is one, as Shillingsburg notes, that McKenzie's own (long-delayed, posthumous) edition of *The Works of William Congreve* itself demonstrated in 2011.<sup>11</sup> In Chapter 6 I show how other editions, presumed to be in the general swim of McGann's ideas, turn out to be beholden to older methods. The argument is that social-text editing needs to be redefined.

Courtesy of the powerful post-structuralist movement in the 1980s, previously fashionable author-concepts could no longer be unproblematically asserted. They used to attend literary-critical deployments of intention and to underwrite the editorial assumption that works needed to be fitted out with a single text of final intention. The inherited but rarely inspected work-concept that they reflected was itself now also thrown into doubt. Conscientious editors who needed to intervene on behalf of a new readership and according to an argued principle seemed to be left with no ground to stand on. Printed facsimile editions could still be justified as they only aimed to capture one or more stages of the evolution of social texts.

And in due course, in the digital realm, documentary editions (transcriptions of existing documents) would be legitimate, that is, if the editor were being consistent. But that was the extent of it. (Chapters 5 and 6 explore this dilemma and propose a solution.)

It was soon realised, however, that abandoning the old capital-*R* Romantic author understood as the unsullied source of text origination did not exhaust the broader concept of textual agency, which in virtually all textual productions is not limited to the author. It is a flatter and more comprehensive term than authorship and is consistent with intentionality, a concept that retains the potential to lift recorded text onto another plane of interpretation. Agents have intentions in their inscription or alteration of documents, and these intentions may be postulated and intelligently disputed. In combination with a refreshed and remodelled work-concept (if one can be postulated), the study of intentions as manifested in their material inscriptions can embrace and justify the analysis of textual agency. The question of who changed the texts of a work, for what reasons and under what pressures or stimuli would be central to such an editorial approach. Paradoxically, this would be so, I argue in Chapter 5, even if the editor chose to appeal to the readership, to its rights in the work, by preferring one of the received texts and emending it only to remove obvious errors.

Any new work-concept will need to be a broader one than before. Importantly, it will underwrite the version-concept, one that would legitimate the editorial establishment and the literary-critical study of the stages in the development of a work. But how to articulate that model? How, for literary studies, to find a model of the work that would incorporate the riches that book-history research has revealed since the 1980s and yet find a legitimate place for editorial interventions that, for millennia, have proven to be necessary if readers are to be served?

### **Books and Readers**

In *Securing the Past* (2009) I proposed that each scholarly edition be understood as an argument, embodied in its reading text and apparatus, about the textual materials relevant to the work being edited.<sup>12</sup> I have since become more confident about the claim, and it is taken further in this book. I also presented a formal argument in 2009 that the reader needs to be considered part of the functioning of the work, not external to it as we have traditionally done. Samuel Johnson, amongst others, was influential in crafting the latter assumption. For instance, in his 1765 edition of the

works of Shakespeare he exemplified the business of the critic: judgement of an achieved thing. Criticism was a public duty and would be based on an appeal to shared standards of reasonableness used to judge literary works consciously acknowledged to be held in common. Reading in the eighteenth century, as Abigail Williams has extensively documented, usually took the form of reading aloud to a group of listeners. As such, it was a sociable activity where the work was performed by a reader and then discussed – although Johnson himself jealously preferred his own company for the activity.<sup>13</sup>

One's own private reactions as a reader could be mentioned but only as they related to the refining of the larger, public case. For example, in his textual commentary on *King Lear*, Johnson felt it obligatory to assess and to fault the play's tragic ending – which, as editor, he had respected – given that, in his period, Nahum Tate's adaptation, with Cordelia happily alive and well at the end, was far preferred upon the stage by contemporary audiences:

A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life: but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.

In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add anything to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor.<sup>14</sup>

The very qualities of Johnson's prose in his commentaries and Preface – his carefully prepared, nicely weighted, often magisterial judgements – expose, for us now, the contours of the period in which he wrote and which, indeed, he actively helped to bring into being under his pen. Yet to grant this is simultaneously to recognise the role of readers in the work, in the edition, whether in 1765 or now.

### The Reader As Intrinsic to the Scholarly Edition

The scholarly edition enacts, cannot help but enact, a theory or a proposition about how the work exists and has existed in the world (rather than as an ideal entity) and *therefore* about how it may be more

profitably encountered in the edition by a new readership. In having a presence (as in my special half-hour), a history and a material form, the scholarly edition-as-book anticipates its readers in a myriad of ways. Thought of in this functional, anticipatory way the edition may be said to inhabit the field (literature in the world) that it simultaneously models for the work or works it edits.<sup>15</sup>

The digital realm has been prompting a new understanding of the scholarly edition. It is making us see that the print edition must be and has always been both edition and archive, or at least archive-substitute. The scholarly edition functions in this way by providing a highly organised distillation and recording in its textual apparatus of the textual traces of the life of the work witnessed in manuscripts and early printings. The digital archive, on which the digital edition now depends, goes a step further, typically providing facsimile images and transcriptions.

In the digital environment the edition is but the topmost layer of the archive. It remains the embodiment of an argument about materials that it has painstakingly organised both for its purposes and for those of collaborating scholars and others in the future. The reading text of the work or of the version still needs to be established according to argued principles. It remains an intervention between the sources (whether extant or inferred) and an anticipated readership. The digital realm changes much, but it does not change this fundamental editorial fact.

Another way of putting it is to say that the edition makes the work present. It does this by resting on a documented past. It is a re-presentation but not a representation: the hyphen makes all the difference. (This argument is pursued in Chapter 5.) Whether invoking the author's intentions or the rights of the historical readership as the source of authenticity of the now emended text, every scholarly edition implicitly builds the reader into itself. Every emendation, every regularisation, every instance of modernised spelling admits this unavoidable reality – that the needs of the readership are being anticipated and incorporated – showing that there is no securely external position for the editor or the edition.<sup>16</sup> Both are down there in the midst of the fray.

This is why, as I have shown in a diachronic study of Henry Lawson's short stories from the 1890s, the life of a long-lived work or collection of works may be understood as a cultural index unfolding over time.<sup>17</sup> The new editions of the work or works are implicated in the shifting cultural awarenesses that they simultaneously perform in their productions and receptions.

The tracing of the life of a work is initially a bibliographical matter. Yet one soon finds that the bibliographical questions have editorial implications; that editorial questions are in turn book-historical and literary critical; and that, finally, all of them trail clouds of theory that complicate their category distinctions. That situation is what this book aims to unpack and to clarify. It defines and defends a literary-aware form of book history and, equally, a book-historically informed literary criticism. It recruits editorial and other theory to better understand those vehicles of material textuality that, for simplicity, we call books and that readers bring to semiotic life each time they choose to encounter them – each time they engage in that ancient and enduring pastime called reading.

### Works and the Digital Medium

One of the unexpected benefits of the coming of digital forms of the scholarly edition has been the gradual sharpening of conceptual distinctions about the nature of texts. Practical questions arose concerning which aspects of structure and physical presentation in the documentary witnesses being transcribed needed to be explicitly coded. Such coding was necessary so that the resulting files could then be computer-processed and subsequently reused. Aspects of texts that had become all but invisible in book form had to be brought more consciously into mind as the needs of new users and a poetics of screen presentation began to be enunciated.

On another front a new generation of editorial theorists, most of them practising scholarly editors, as well as practitioners of the new anglophone book-history movement, had already and for the most part unknowingly, primed the discussion. The editors' discoveries of textual processes driven by authors – processes of composition and revision before and after first publication – destabilised the inherited work-concept. In addition, as we have seen, editors realised that material carriers of text bore meanings that could no longer be sidelined in the literary transaction. The work as finished textual product seemed suddenly less concrete and the study of it as a finished thing no longer the inevitable aim. For their part, the book historians laid radical emphasis on the materiality of books – objects with histories – so that the 'work' was now treated, under this purview, as a manufactured and saleable *title*, an object of distribution, collection and consumption.

Because the proponents of the areas I have been describing saw their procedures as empirical – partly in opposition to the waves of literary and cultural theory of the 1970s and after – the newly generated awarenesses



have rarely been taken up for systematic reflection. This is a pity because they have, potentially, powerful practical benefits for the conduct of literary studies. The present book aims to make good. In this, it centres itself around the much overlooked concept of the work, pursuing its implications first through a number of theoretical inquiries and then through several case studies.

### **Modelling the Work for Literary Study**

The individual case studies in Chapters 6–9 explore the relations of documents to versions, versions to works, and works to adaptations. These relations, I argue, are played out by readers on agented documents, whether print or digital, within broader contexts that require specification. When considered as a whole – less as a system than as an unfolding material-and-semiotic process – a common model for the life of the literary work emerges. I am calling it the living work: the work embodied. Many of its elements are self-evident but the model itself deserves some spelling out since methods of literary study typically operate in ignorance of the dimensions not under immediate purview.<sup>18</sup>

For any work there is always a production–consumption continuum that typically embraces the writing, revision, copying, editing, publication (whether single or multiple, whether aimed at one audience or another), then some form of distribution, sale or gift, and finally third-party reading and commentary. In this continuum, versions are created and materially recorded prior to publication but they are generally overlooked once the work reaches the marketplace when, for copyright reasons, one version tends to displace or supersede the others.

Minus the writing and with or without revision, this iteration of the model will be repeated if the work gains traction in the marketplace. Many such iterations over decades grant the work the status of a classic, and placements of a selection of such classic works on educational syllabi gradually grant them a higher-level canonical status. Though apparently permanent, that status is continually renegotiated as newly emerging cultural interests either re-engage the work or do not. All of this takes place over time, is humanly agented (and therefore contextually situated) at every point, *and* is conditioned by the technology of the day, from goose feather to steel-nibbed pen, from typewriter to keyboard to Kindle.

The textual events of writing, revision and production have immediate material outcomes, whether on screen, paper or another medium. The reading of them propels the next stage in the process: by the writer who

reads and then revises in successive cycles; then by the amanuensis, typist, typesetter, agent and publisher's reader, each of whom must read in order to copy, boost or assess; and finally in the reading done by the public and reviewers.

Since material outcomes of textual events involve the potential creation of intellectual property there is, additionally, a money trail created. It is another conditioning factor in the continuum. Creativity may be gloriously exercised at the initiating point of the continuum but it is never unfettered since it is always already the forerunner to production and distribution.<sup>19</sup> Book-historical considerations are never far away, as the case studies show.

Literary criticism produces 'readings', as we conventionally put it, and thus has its rightful place in the model. The activity is a skilled reading practice that generates interpretations and aesthetic assessments of literary works that in turn go on to influence subsequent readers and readings. Within the model, the reading public, reviewers and, at a further remove, professional critics count as the *dramatis personae* of successive scenes of literary-critical engagement. Some of these professional readers may wish to aim theoretical critique at the work, to unmask its submerged ideological claims. Others, of a very different bent, may wish to enunciate the felt life, the play of awareness that their reading of the work has brought out into the open. In either case, and equally in any other case, the reader's role in the work's unfolding is participatory.<sup>20</sup>

Vitally important though it is, the literary-critical activity typically leaves unaddressed, as somehow beneath notice, the question of exactly what it is that is read, what it is that is interpreted. At what stage in the production–consumption cycle – and therefore in relation to what materialised version – do critics and, more broadly, the general public play their role within these scenes of reading? This is a question that the model I am proposing draws explicitly into the light and that the historical–bibliographical purview of scholarly editions insists upon. Traditional bibliography comes into play here as it provides a vocabulary for describing, as well as methods for analysing, the production of the physical object that is read – and, crucially for the model, for drawing attention to the human agents involved in its production.

Works require documents to carry them forward along the continuum, so that the question of what is read is versional and material at once. In the textual transaction, the document figures as both the surface of writing and the surface of reading. It is the interface for the reader. Meaning occurs above that surface: in the mind in the act of reading, in the memory and in