1 Introduction

1.1 Textual Histories, Editorial Practices

Textual scholarship is concerned with how texts have been made since the invention of writing. Editions evolve out of a variety of situations and needs: the discovery of a Latin inscription of political graffiti in a buried Roman stone façade, or a newly found manuscript copy of a poem, or a draft manuscript or typescript of a novel, or the discovery of a cache of unpublished letters and notebooks that a historically significant person has left behind. These cannot be read until an editor *prepares* accurate texts and creates varieties of *apparatus* (e.g., introductions, notes, glossaries) to help readers understand the ways in which the texts were made and understood. Such editorial activities consist of layers of analysis and decisions. Every text comes with a history, as well as a collection of puzzles that illuminate an author's creative process, a publishing history, or the text's historical context.

The discipline of scholarly editing has long operated under Samuel Johnson's principle that it serves to 'correct what is corrupt, and to explain what is obscure' and A. E. Housman's definition of it as the 'science of discovering error in texts and the art of removing it'. Editing can now do better than correction by also embracing a creative-critical mode of experimentation and invention. Like Housman, John Dewey held that 'science is an art', but he also promoted a continuity between creative practices and critical appreciation, suggesting a focus on theories and practices 'which are full of enjoyed meanings'.[1] The editorial acts of transcribing, annotating, and organising and designing editions shape 'enjoyed meanings', but they can feel as much like creative as critical activities.

Studying Herman Melville introduced me to scholarly editing and textual studies. Textual scholarship taught me to read carefully and to engage with histories of the creative process and the making of books. While I learned that Melville's marginalia in his books offered enigmatic forms of pre-writing for works such as *Moby-Dick* for which no manuscript survives, I was also working with a team to edit a digital surrogate of one of

---

[1] Housman, 'The Application of Thought to Textual Criticism', p. 68; Dewey, 'Experience, Nature and Art', in Menand (ed.), *Pragmatism: A Reader*, p. 236.

the books that he read and annotated during its composition – Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story collection *Mosses from an Old Manse* (1846) – for Melville's Marginalia Online (http://melvillesmarginalia.org/). Apart from his first book *Typee*, his late poems, and his final novella *Billy Budd, Sailor*, little original evidence of his composition process survives, so many mysteries remain for the editor of Melville.[2] When *Moby-Dick* was published in 1851, for example, Melville issued two books for two different audiences: an American audience that read *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale*, and a British one that read *The Whale*. Melville had decided to hire a private printer to set the type, produce stereotype plates, and print proof sheets for the first American edition, published by Harper & Brothers. He sent those proof sheets to the British publisher Richard Bentley, with additional revisions to the text. Since Melville had considerable control over the wording of his book until he handed it over to his British publisher, modern editors tend to prefer the authority of the first American edition. The British edition has an additional dimension of authority because it includes further revisions by Melville, despite substantive changes made by the publisher regarding its coarse language, homoerotic scenes, anti-monarchical views, and blasphemous passages. The British edition also accidentally left out the epilogue, in which Ishmael explains that he was the only member of the *Pequod* to survive, and moved the opening section of epigraphs called 'Extracts' to the end of the book. The absence of Melville's manuscript or printer's proof sheets means that the editor must guess which changes in the British edition were Melville's and which were made by the publisher. In the cases of censorship, the answer is obvious, but in some other cases it is difficult to know who the reviser is.

Sometimes a single word changes everything. In chapter 132, 'The Symphony', when Captain Ahab delivers a monologue on the nature of his revenge against the White Whale before engaging in his final hunt, he asks, in the first American edition:

[2] For more on the *Typee* manuscript fragment, as well as its fascinating publication history, see '*Typee* Manuscript Fragment', in Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Uncompleted Writings*, pp. 936–72; Bryant, *Melville Unfolding*; 'Historical Note' in Melville, *Typee*, pp. 277–85. In Exhibition 1, Chapter 2, I examine *Billy Budd* in more detail.

> Is Ahab, Ahab? Is it I, God, or who, that lifts this arm? But if
> the great sun move not of himself; but is as an errand-boy in
> heaven; nor one single star can revolve, but by some invi-
> sible power; how then can this one small heart beat; this one
> small brain think thoughts; unless God does that beating,
> does that thinking, does that living, and not I.

The British edition begins that first sentence, 'Is it Ahab, Ahab? . . .'. By
adding 'it', the British edition matches the syntax with its previous and
subsequent sentences, 'What is it' and 'Is it I, God . . . ?'. 'Is it Ahab, Ahab?'
changes the meaning of the original 'Is Ahab, Ahab?'. In the American
version, he is doubting his own identity, whereas in the British he seems to
be asking himself about an 'inscrutable' aspect of his agency which may be
inauthentic or influenced by innate depravity. Did Melville or the British
publisher make that change? Or is it a printer's error with a meaning of
some sort? How does the editor decide which phrase to print, and on what
grounds?

It is impossible to know whether Melville added 'it' to the British
version. The standard Northwestern-Newberry (NN) edition (1988)
printed the reading from the first American edition ('Is Ahab, Ahab?'),
which is its 'copy text' (or the authoritative base text from which the edition
is produced). NN creates an 'eclectic' reading text by emending its
American copy text with British variants or conjectures about Melville's
final intentions. The NN edition discusses the crux in the textual apparatus
in the back of the book, and readers will not know about it unless they
happen to find it. The Melville Electronic Library (MEL) digital edition, on
the other hand, also uses the first American edition reading in the 'base
version' of its *Moby-Dick* reading text. In the spirit of its print prototype,
namely, John Bryant and Haskell Springer's Longman Critical Edition
of *Moby-Dick* (2009), MEL gives immediate access to the crux and high-
lights the problem – and its attendant critical consequences – of the
American and British versions in its 'revision narrative' notes. NN and
MEL both show the American 'Is Ahab, Ahab?' in their reading texts, but
for different reasons.

In another instance, from Melville's Civil War poetry collection, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War* (1866), editors may disagree on the crucial last line of one of his best-known poems, 'The March into Virginia', which concerns the Union's surprising defeat at the First Battle of Bull Run (or First Manassas) in July 1861. Many readers of the poem will see the final stanza rendered this way:

> But some who this blithe mood present,
>   As on in lightsome files they fare,
> Shall die experienced ere three days are spent –
>   Perish, enlightened by the vollied glare;
> Or shame survive, and, like to adamant,
>   Thy after shock, Manassas, share.

However, the first edition of the poem, as well as many other subsequent print and online versions, shows a different final line: 'The throe of Second Manassas share'. The last line is different because Melville revised it in one of his post-publication copies of *Battle-Pieces*, so scholarly editors have determined that Melville's change of mind, after publication, should be respected as a 'final intention' in a reliable, authoritative text. Hence the reading above of 'Thy after shock, Manassas, share'. But it is not that simple. Two of Melville's post-publication copies of the poem, now identified as Copy A and Copy C, show two different revision processes, as Figure 1 shows.

In one revision sequence (Copy A), Melville seeks to fix the parallelism in the last stanza of 'But some who this blithe mood present' with 'Or some survive' (to replace the original 'Or shame survive'). The substitution of 'some' for 'shame' changes the meaning of the line to focus on the survivors of the battle rather than an abstract sense of shame. In a separate sequence (in Copy C), Melville did not make that some/shame substitution but revised the last line of the poem. He first tried 'Manassas' second throe and deadlier share' – using the possessive of 'Manassas' second throe' to foreshadow the second battle of Manassas (29–30 August 1862), which was an even worse defeat for the Union. He then inscribed a new line, 'Thy second shock, Manassas, share', before settling on 'Thy after shock,
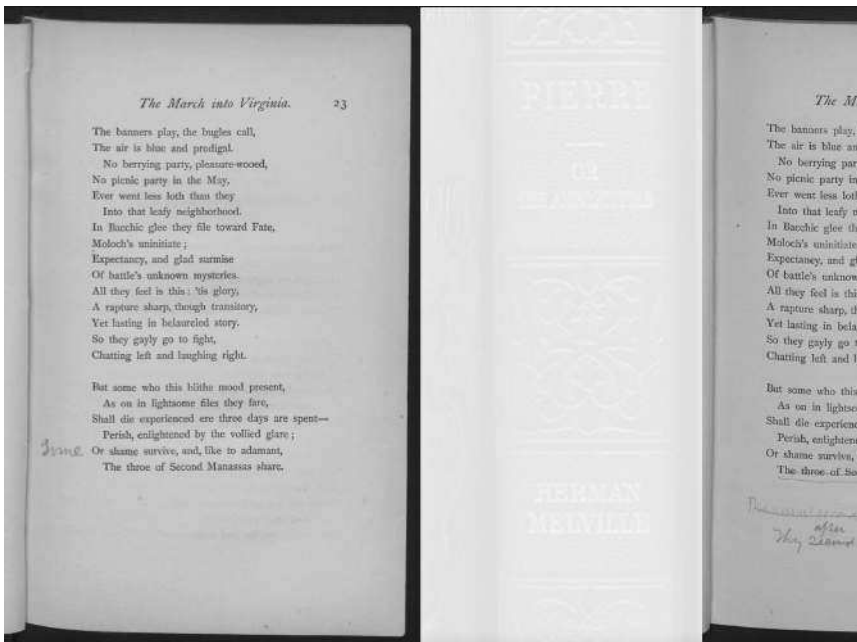
Figure 1 'The March into Virginia', in two of Melville's post-publication copies of *Battle-Pieces*
(1866): on the left, his bound copy of the first edition (Copy A), with a single pencil revision in the
last stanza; on the right, his custom-bound set of printer's sheets (Copy C), with revisions in
the last stanza. Houghton Library, Harvard *AC85 M4977 866b (A) and AC85 M4977 866b (
at https://melville.electroniclibrary.org/battle-pieces-corrected-first-edition-and-bound-pr

Manassas, share' – again changing the meaning and the meter of the poem's ending. He also considered substituting 'three days be spent' for 'three days are spent'. But the question mark in the right margin between the two revisions in Copy C could indicate a continuing puzzlement or dissatisfaction with the last line.

Editors of *Battle-Pieces* need to address multiple questions for this poem: do they print both texts side-by-side, ignore the post-publication revisions as tentative or incomplete tinkering and just edit the first edition, create a single reading text that conflates the revisions of both pages in A and C, or consider Melville's more extensive revisions in Copy C to be final and print only those revisions? What is the rationale for each of these editorial choices? And how would an editor explain these textual problems while providing the historical context of the two Civil War battles? These are the kinds of questions whose answers form the basis of editorial principles. What does the evidence suggest about the writing of these texts, and how can technology facilitate a reliable editorial process while opening up the texts to readers for their own intellectual and creative aims? MEL editors chose to present the two images (from Copy A and C), coupled with revision narrative notes in the reading text of *Battle-Pieces*, to offer immediate insights into Melville's creative process and to demonstrate how a sequential set of practices in a digital edition can help readers navigate Melville's composition. The conditions of the writing practice that produced these variant final lines should guide editors in choosing how to present those lines, enabling readers to experience writing and editing as forms of experimentation.

The abiding spirit of this book is what editing *does*, as opposed to what it *is*. Rather than defining concepts or theories, I will demonstrate the significance of *making* editions – the editorial practices and aesthetic affordances of editing works of literature with current technologies.[3] By 'practices' I am alluding to Emerson's dictum to 'reduceth [your] learning to practice',[4] as well as Wittgenstein's late aphorism that '[t]he *practice*

---

[3] Crymble has recently made a similar argument about the practices of historians in *Technology and the Historian*, pp. 7–9, 161–6.

[4] Emerson, 'The Method of Nature', in Cramer (ed.), *The Portable Emerson*, p. 110.

gives words their meaning'.[5] I am also reminded of the poet-scholar Donald Davie:

> The practice of an art
> is to convert all terms
> into the terms of art.[6]

Bringing the pragmatic principle of the 'primacy of practice'[7] to editing means that editors should focus on the interrelated practices of writers, publishers, and editors. As Susan Greenberg has also suggested, these activities inevitably generate historical insights about creation, explanation, appreciation, and interpretation in the making of texts, from composition to publication.[8] A text may merely be a string of characters or digital binary code, or even an idea in one's head, but the intentional practices of writers, readers, and even publishers set the contours of the literary work.[9] And practice is stable insofar as there is sufficient agreement among practitioners to constrain the activities that define it. Grounding intentions and practices in *application* means that editorial rules are fluid, yet they are grounded in important histories. Editing therefore requires training to master such practices, but also self-examination, re-calibrating its relation to its traditions, its concepts, and its resource limitations. When editors consider the options for publication in this burgeoning digital epoch, their self-examination is even more intensified. Editors now need to be earnest – and pragmatic – about what publishing options are available to them.

The word 'edition' comes from the Latin *editio*, which connotes several practical products or *exhibitions*. Editing participates in various traditions of

---

[5] Wittgenstein, *Remarks on Colour*, §317. [6] Davie, 'July, 1964', *Essex Poems*, p. 5.

[7] Putnam, *Pragmatism*, p. 52.

[8] In *A Poetics of Editing*, Greenberg conceives of editing as forward-looking and full of possibilities, rather than being merely the gatekeeper of accuracy. Greenberg's model of *autopoiesis* cuts across practical and scholarly conventions of editorial practice, suggesting that the 'ideal editor' exists in a nexus of author, text, and reader.

[9] Lamarque, 'Wittgenstein, Literature, and the Idea of a Practice', pp. 376–77.

textual transmission and mediation. What the Melville examples show is the constraints not only of mixed version ('eclectic' or 'copy-text') critical editing – which previously had to operate within the limitations of print technology – but also of any insular, top-down theory of editing. Each example given earlier concerns the same author but suggests different practices based on different problems arising from different kinds of documentary evidence. The process inherent in pragmatism leads to principles that can still allow for counter-principles while promoting continuities between a variety of experiences of the text, recalling Christopher Ricks's invocation to use 'hard thinking [that] is resolutely unelaborated beyond the exposition and application of principles'.[10] Digital editing is able to create a workflow for not only books as books, and texts as texts, and texts shaped by books, but also data that can be visualised, queried, networked, shared, and manipulated. Technology facilitates critical engagement with all these different textual conditions, enabling a digital edition or archive to accommodate a variety of approaches: book history, textual and contextual notes, narratives of revision, data analysis, critical interpretation, translation, and creative adaptation.

An editor must begin with questions about preparing texts for publication. Is an editor an arbiter or an archivist of texts? Should editors keep versions of texts intact as they were presented to the public or saved in repositories, or should editors create a new text that is more accurate, readable, or faithful to some conception of the originating writer's intentions? Does a reader enter the edition through a single reading text, with a record of variant wordings, multiple versions of texts, or multiple interfaces? Does the editor see their primary role as explaining textual change, the critical discourse, or the historical significance of the text through contextual notes? The answers will dictate how one prepares, encodes, and publishes the edition, and those decisions need to be situated within the traditions of textual scholarship and bibliography. These traditions, as the great practitioner W. W. Greg put it, fundamentally concern the historical reconstruction of the 'living word' in its material forms.[11] Two questions

---

[10] Ricks, 'In Theory'.
[11] Greg, 'Bibliography: A Retrospect' (1945), quoted in Howard-Hill, 'W. W. Greg as Bibliographer', p. 68.

arise from attempting such reconstructions: which writer, editor, or group of writers and editors is worth attending to, and which stages of creative output merit editorial attention?[12]

Why begin a study of textual editing and technology with an argument for editorial practices? Textual scholarship and bibliography are now neglected in several humanities disciplines, which leaves students lacking in exposure to the fundamental stories of how the making of texts shapes their reading experiences and critical interpretations. In my digital editing workshops and modules, I have noticed many participants caught in a double-bind: they need to be trained in both textual scholarship *and* digital technology. The pressure on many of these courses is to skim over, if not ignore outright, the history and methods of editing and bibliography if only because the tech skills are difficult enough to fill an entire course.[13] On the one hand, many of the nuances about *why* and *under which principles* we edit texts have been overwhelmed by the near-prescriptive digital ethos of *how* to encode texts in computer languages such as XML (extensible markup language), which has given an unfortunate impression that digital editing is mechanical work for 'non-critical' tech workers.[14] On the other hand, the methods of traditional textual editing have become ossified by an uncritical acceptance of abstractions such as 'foul papers', 'accidentals', 'final intention', 'social forces', 'paratext', and, lately, 'data models'. As Paul Werstine has argued, editing ought to apply a critical view towards those concepts and proceed by 'respecting the limits of the documentary evidence in hand'.[15]

---

[12] See Tanselle, *Rationale of Textual Criticism*, pp. 70–4.

[13] For example, two popular summer courses on TEI XML, at the Digital Humanities Summer Institute and the Oxford Digital Humanities Summer School, typically have not devoted sufficient attention to surveying methods of textual scholarship and bibliography. Their primary aim is technical training.

[14] Earhart, *Traces of the Old, Uses of the New*, p. 34.

[15] Werstine, *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare*, pp. 1, 231. See also Olsen-Smith, *The Inscription of Walt Whitman's 'Live Oak, with Moss' Sequence*. Olsen-Smith finds that the shortcoming of Bowers's theory of critical editing of Whitman is 'conceptual rather than methodological' – that is, it is beholden to a dogma of final intention instead of examining the context of

Digital editing and text analysis require a grounding in textual scholarship, by which I mean the historical treatments of texts and accuracy, provenance, editorial design and presentation of texts, and textual and contextual apparatus (or forms of annotation).[16] Textual scholarship is central to the life of several disciplines ranging from literature and music to history and sociology.[17] Despite the spirited editorial debates among practitioners since the inception of philology in the nineteenth century, 'the question has very rarely been which editorial framework was best for the type of document under consideration', as Elena Pierazzo has argued.[18] Digital technology may have increased speed, flexibility, and accessibility, but it has not changed the dynamic nature of textual scholarship itself.[19]

Editors and bibliographers must continue to push their thinking further by experimenting with computing and adopting a pragmatic view towards its principles. Unfortunately, the past twenty years or so of born-digital and hybrid print-digital editing have yielded few editions that do more than books can do. Many editors are still stuck in a document- and codex-oriented mode that expects book reading to translate into screen reading, even though studies have been suggesting that users of digital resources prefer basic and advanced searching for specific information over long-term

---

Whitman's manuscript revisions and publication process of the *Calamus* poems on their own merits.

[16] For foundational guides to scholarly editing, see Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography*; Greetham, *Textual Scholarship*; Williams and Abbott, *An Introduction to Bibliographical and Textual Studies*; and Pierazzo, *Digital Scholarly Editing*.

[17] Christopher Ricks and Archie Burnett (and, before him, Geoffrey Hill) made this the operating principle of the Editorial Institute at Boston University: 'the textually sound, contextually annotated edition is central to the life of many disciplines. Its primary aims are the promotion of critical awareness of editorial issues and practices and the provision of training in editorial methods'. See also Jerome McGann's *A New Republic of Letters*, which makes a renewed call for the poetic and critical possibilities of editing.

[18] Pierazzo, *Digital Scholarly Editing*, p. 77.

[19] See Bordalejo, 'Digital versus Analogue Textual Scholarship'.