

***Variants: The Journal of the European Society for Textual Scholarship, Vol. 10 (2013)***

Those in literary studies who are not primarily concerned with matters of textual scholarship might get a conflicting set of impressions by looking at the debates of the practitioners of this branch of the discipline. On the one hand, such discussions have a tendency to veer towards the purely theoretical, with participants tackling the fundamental questions that others tend to expel from head-on consideration (what is a text / a work / a document? is authorial intention a legitimate part of the discipline?). On the other hand, these debates are firmly rooted in those irreducibly empirical matters of ink and paper that constitute the bulk of the editor's profession. This issue of the journal provides a rich selection of the kinds of debates that animate the field, concerning both theoretical and practical issues.

Some of the contributions are primarily theoretical, such as Wim Van Mierlo's "Reflections on Textual Editing in the Time of the History of the Book". This is an ambitious essay, which addresses the role of the notion of "the book" in editorship. He contrasts the Anglo-American tradition, which concentrates on the text, with the German tradition, which concentrates on the document. The former, Van Mierlo argues, runs the risk of overlooking the materiality of the document, or in other words, that "editors deal with more than just text" (152). The variability of the critical principles available to the editor is a recurrent concern throughout the volume; in particular, two essays deal with what principles editors should follow when faced with the task of writing for a particular audience. Teresa Marqués-Aguado's "Editions of Middle English Texts and Linguistic Research: Desiderata regarding Palaeography and Editorial Practices" addresses the issue of how to conceive an edition that caters specifically to historical linguists' needs. Marqués-Aguado discusses some of the practical strategies involved in presenting a document to an audience that needs to know as much information as possible about its original linguistic features. Pietro G. Beltrami's "Textual Criticism and Historical Dictionaries" analyses the analogous question of how editors should cater to the needs of lexicographers. Beltrami argues that authorial intention is a valid principle that sometimes overrides the specificities of the document; this is important when dealing with errors: in such cases, Beltrami argues, the editor can and should alter what (s)he finds in a document, so as to try to present to the interested lexicographer what the author actually wrote.

A number of papers concern themselves with the use and consequences of the digital tools that have recently entered the practice of the profession. Tara L. Andrews's "The Third Way: Philology and Critical Edition in the Digital Age" presents a number of suggestions aimed at allowing the digital tools that are being introduced somewhat too timidly into the practice of the profession to express their full potential, so as to break the traditional dichotomy between "old" and "new" philology. Andrews argues that the sheer quantity of data that digital tools can manage can be an opportunity for editors to concentrate on qualitative analysis. In contrast, Franz Fischer's "All texts are equal, but... Textual Plurality and the Critical Text in Digital Scholarly Editions" argues for the continuing importance of the tenets of the "old philology" in the context of digital editions. In particular, Fischer reaffirms the ideal of the "critical text", i.e. "the critical reconstruction of an assumed original text version as intended by the author" (77). Peter Robinson's "Towards a Theory of Digital Editions" is an ambitious and at times contentious contribution to the ongoing theoretical debate about digital tools, and about the three poles of "document", "text" and "work". Robinson delineates the shift which has occurred in the past few decades from the notion of the text as work to that of text as document. His own position is that

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the work is “the object we seek to know” and the text is “the site of meaning which links the document and the work” (121).

A number of essays weave together presentations of case studies with theoretical speculation. Veijo Pulkkinen’s “A Genetic and Semiotic Approach to the Bibliographical Code Exemplified by the Typography of Aaro Hellaakoski’s ‘Dolce Far Niente’” is concerned with the idiosyncratic typographical habits of this Modernist Finnish writer, and with the consequences of interpreting such habits for genetic criticism and literary interpretation. Pulkkinen argues – with varying degrees of success – for the relevance of C.S. Pierce’s semiotics for textual editing. Jon Viklund’s “Gunnar Ekelöf and the Rustle of Language: Genetic Readings of a Modernist Poetic Œuvre” also argues for the relevance of non-definitive drafts for literary interpretation, this time referring to the continual revisions of his work undertaken by Ekelöf, a twentieth-century Swedish writer. Viklund’s indictment of what he takes as literary studies’ complete disregard for non-definitive versions of literary works is occasionally overemphatic, but the problem does exist. David Atkinson’s “Are Broadside Ballads Worth Editing?” attempts to answer its title’s question in the affirmative by considering a series of variations (narrative, lexical, typographical) to be found in some specimens of the genre. Atkinson argues that this multiformity, which one could not presume to reduce to one canonical form, constitutes, at least in some cases, a challenge that editors should take up.

Finally, some of the essays are primarily concerned with straightforward case studies. Annemarie Kets’s “Texts Worth Editing: Polyperspectival Corpora of Letters” describes a project concerning the creation of a corpus of the correspondences of the Dutch writer Albert Verwey, focusing on the digital innovations that have made the project feasible. Giedrė Jankevičiūtė and Mikas Vaicekaskas’s “An Omnipotent Tradition: The Illustrations of Kristijonas Donelaitis’s Poem *Metai* and the Creation of a Visual Canon” takes readers through the fascinating publication history of Lithuania’s national poem, concentrating on the sets of illustrations contained in the various editions and on their embodiment of a number of interpretive and ideological choices. Kiyoko Myojo’s “The Functions of *Zenshū* in Japanese Book Culture: Practices and Problems of Modern Textual Editing in Japan” presents this Japanese publishing practice, roughly translatable as “complete works”. Myojo argues that Japanese print culture, in which not much has been undertaken in the way of theorisation, should take a cue from Western editorial theories and methods. Arianna Antonielli and Mark Nixon’s “Towards an Edition of Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats’s *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic and Critical*” presents an account of a project of digital editing which is being undertaken in collaboration by the Universities of Reading and Florence, and which concerns a little-known critical work co-penned by Yeats.

Overall, this is a solid connection of essays which explores a number of vital debates that indirectly concern not just editors, but all readers. Those of us who are primarily concerned with literary interpretation, as well as those whose primary interest is “pure” theory, sometimes tend to forget about the kind of work that brings literary works, especially ancient ones, to today’s readers. A more widespread acquaintance with the practice and concerns of textual scholars would remedy what may be seen as a certain naiveté as to the actual workings of literary productions within other strands of literary studies, epitomised by the much-deplored but still dominant use of the word “text” to refer to literary works *tout court*. The process whereby a “document” becomes a “work” is a very concrete instance of the “constructedness” of literature, one which has a number of consequences of both a theoretical and a practical order, and one which all scholars would do well to take into consideration.

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