The importance of *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* lies in the way that it links the often quite mechanical issues of editing to the larger issues of "hermeneutics which currently preoccupy literary interpreters" and offers to heal "the schism between textual and interpretive studies, opened so long ago." It is an offer that every would-be editor, especially of texts from the Romantics onwards, ought to be grateful for.

—Keats-Shelley Journal

What the *Critique* achieved was to show . . . students of the old philology that the crisis of faith and method facing modern textual criticism was of a piece with the wider cultural and intellectual crisis they were already aware of. The book was therefore both radical and familiar. . . . Now in the nineties, the book speaks even more forcefully of its times, for (to mix my metaphors), the voice crying in the wilderness has moved to center stage. The publication of this book created a revolution, and this reprinting is a testimony to its precepts having been accepted as a necessary component of the contemporary textual debate.

—from D. C. Greetham's Foreword

This small but powerful book initiated a major shift in literary theory and method when it was first published in 1983. Starting from a critical inquiry into certain specialized issues in the practice of editing, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* gradually unfolds an argument for a general revaluation of the grounds of literary study as a whole.

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University Press of Virginia
Charlottesville and London
A Critique of
Modern Textual Criticism
A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism

Jerome J. McGann

University Press of Virginia

Charlottesville and London
In short, let us provoke them—and our readers, and ourselves—to thought, which is the purest of scholarly pleasures; and I address this exhortation perhaps more to myself than to anyone else.

E. Talbot Donaldson

I began this discussion in the hope of clearing my own mind as well as others’ on a rather obscure though not unimportant matter of editorial practice. I have done something to sort out my own ideas: others must judge for themselves. If they disagree, it is up to them to maintain some different point of view. My desire is rather to provoke discussion than to lay down the law.

W. W. Greg
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Foreword

When, some seven or eight years ago, I assigned this book as required reading in my graduate course on textual scholarship, I had no clear prediction of how it might be received by the audience of students, already familiar with the basic writings of Greg, Bowers, and Tanselle against which McGann’s book took aim. I certainly did not imagine that the requirement would result in a collaboratively composed calypso, sung in our final session to guitar and other less easily defined instruments, but there it was—a group of serious young doctoral students spiritedly singing the praises of “that man McGann,” who had spoken to them more effectively and more directly than the pundits of the textual establishment.

What can account for this response and for that laudatory calypso? The easy answer would be simply to assume that young minds are always impressed by radical reassessments of a traditional discipline, particularly if conducted in a passionate, giant-killing spirit; but while this explanation catches some of the attractions of the Critique, it does not sufficiently account for the specific content of McGann’s charge, and perhaps makes too much of the perspective from which the charge is made—the margins of the discipline. To be sure, McGann himself has encouraged that view of his “prophetic” status on the edges of the textual establishment, for he has continued to speak of his social theory of textual criticism as ranged against an entrenched orthodoxy of the “critical edition.”
But while the radical stance might have been appropriate in the early eighties, when critical editing of the Greg-Bowers dispensation was still the major means of textual production, when arguments about accidentals and substantives, final intentions and eclecticism, were still the main focus for editorial debate, when the author still stood solidly at the center of the entire textual enterprise, and when the professional institutions (most particularly the MLA’s Committee on Scholarly Editions) still endorsed copy-text theory and clear-text critical editing for works intended for publication. Since then, some of these conditions have changed, no doubt in part because of the Critique and what it represents. Thus, the latest version of the CSE’s Aims and Services of the Committee on Scholarly Editions (1992) does not write a brief for copy-text editing or eclecticism or final intentions (in fact, the very term “copy-text” is abandoned in recognition of the political and ideological associations it carries). Moreover, while intention and authorial presence are still important topics in textual debate (how could it be otherwise?), in the last decade there has been a shift in attention to those social, institutional, and collaborative models of creation and production emphasized by McGann.

The one activity seemingly most resistant to this paradigm shift has been the actual editing of texts. Indeed, one of the criticisms leveled by intentionalist critics against McGann has been that his theories do not result in different editorial procedures and do not produce different editions from those constructed in “critical” editions. Some have even charged that social textual criticism cannot produce editions effectively reflecting the principles of social construction. Leaving this claim aside for the moment, it is clear that there is always a chronological gap between the paradigm shift and its practical demonstration, and this gap may be larger in textual editing than in other fields, given the longevity of the multiple-volume editions that seem to characterize our field. After all, McGann’s own Byron edition was begun in a different era under a different dispensation and thus does not reflect his current theoretical persuasions. It may therefore be that we will have to wait for another decade before editorial practice can catch up with editorial theory.

That there now is an editorial theory (or theories), and that editing is no longer assumed to be merely an empirical procedure, ungrounded in ontological or epistemological attitudes and beliefs, is further evidence that conditions have changed since the publication of this book. Much of the success of the Critique has, I believe, been the result of McGann’s presenting the textual debate in the context of contemporary ideas on information theory and authoriality, together with his situating the Greg-Bowers school in the history of classical philology. This emphasis confronts directly the raw empiricism of the editorial manner and it is an emphasis that prospered significantly in the last few years. Such collections as Philip Cohen’s Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory, George Bornstein’s Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation and Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities, McGann’s own Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation, and the proceedings of the Texas conference New Directions in Textual Studies (usually with McGann as contributor to the collections) are direct testimony to editors and textual critics no longer being content with what McGann saw in the Critique as an “ignorance of large theoretical models and problems.” Even traditional bibliographical journals like Studies in Bibliography, Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America, and The Library have often published articles confronting these very theoretical models and problems (typically with liberal citation of McGann’s work, especially the Critique), and the journal Text I edit with my colleague W. Speed Hill now usually finds a
third or more of its contents concerned with theoretical matters. Even the practitioners of the old empiricism have written forcefully on theoretical concerns, as witness G. Thomas Tanselle’s “Textual Criticism and Deconstruction” and *Rationale of Textual Criticism*.

The influence of McGann and the *Critique* turns up in many areas where one would not look to find it. For example, while McGann’s work has been primarily in nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature (with the bulk of the extended examples in the *Critique* being drawn from these periods), his presence has been increasingly noted in my own field of medieval studies. In a volume on scholarly editing I have collected for MLA, the chapter on Middle English by A. S. G. Edwards uses McGann’s theory of social textual criticism as a means of explicating the conditions of the late medieval book trade and manuscript dissemination. And the long-standing argument over the editorial methods and results of Kane-Donaldson’s edition of *Piers Plowman* has recently been invigorated by an acknowledgment of the conflict between the “classical” thesis of the editors in their attempt to reconstruct a lost original and the status of the work as a “national scripture,” subject from its first manuscript appearances to continued scribal editorial revision and adjustment. And this argument is specifically linked to the distinctions McGann draws in the *Critique*. Even outside literature (especially music), McGann and the *Critique* have become an increasingly common reference and support for positions emphasizing the social construction of meaning in a work and the necessity for considering the author or composer’s intention as only one part of a continual collaborative process.

And so the *Critique* has been a remarkable success, and the margins of argument have become the center. There are some ironies in this success, for as my graduate students ac-nowledged by their calypso, an author (McGann), his text (the *Critique*), and the intention of that author in that text have become part of the continued debate. It has become common for McGann to have to insist, in conference and published article, that he did not intend in the *Critique* to unseat the author as source of authority and meaning, but rather to place the author in the historical continuum, and to attempt to overcome the Romantic ideology of the solitary originator. The ironies are delicious: a critic and editor of the Romantics having to disavow Romanticism, and social textual critic having to insist, “No, that is not what I meant at all.”

But McGann takes this active misconception of his work in good heart, as he would have to, given that the argument of the *Critique* depends so much upon a recognition of misconception as a (perhaps inevitable) part of the social construction of meaning—for textual critics and their works as much as for poets. Thus, his claims against Bowers and the ideology of final intentions are that Bowers actively misconstrued Greg’s copy-text theory to graft intention onto what was originally a highly contingent and relative analysis of the historical progression of texts. In Bloomian terms, Bowers thus committed a “strong misprision” on Greg’s work, just as (in poststructuralist terms) Greg had, I would contend, committed a classic act of deconstruction on the accepted textual principles of his day, by inverting the hierarchies of early and late, substance and accident, and center and surface.

There is a further irony in McGann’s account of the ideology of final intentions and the ideology of the originary moment of composition. If McGann is right in imputing this desire for origins to Romanticism’s fascination with solitary and unmediated creativity, acting unconnected to and almost in despite of the social nexus, it is a peculiar historical confluence that this obsession with the individual and the origin should come al-
most immediately after such hopes for the discovery of the urtext had been given up in the two areas of textual research with the longest and most distinguished editorial activity—biblical and classical studies. At the close of the eighteenth century, F. A. Wolf’s Prolegomena ad Homeronum (1795) acknowledged that the search for the author and intention of The Iliad could recover nothing but fragments without a single unifying authority, just as J. G. Eichhorn’s Introduction to the Old Testament (1780–83) had shown that the contradictory, historically diverse strata of the Hebrew Bible could not be resolvable into a consistent text. Lee Patterson has convincingly used the evidence of this falling away from the purifying, cleansing ethic of earlier philology as a means of pointing to the historicizing linear research of nineteenth-century Altertumswissenschaft as well as to the obdurate transcendentalism of high Romanticism, noting, for example, that the vernacular purview of Romanticism could assert itself even in the work of the archpriest of philology, Karl Lachmann, for when he edited the German national epic the Nibelungenlied he gave up the bibliographical restraint taught by the scientific principles of Altertumswissenschaft and strained for the very fons et origo that was, in the classical dispensation, now terra incognita.

I mention this difference between vernacular and classical editing because Lachmann and the classical method are central to McGann’s argument about the misprision committed by Bowers and the intentionalists. McGann insists that the intentionalists have adopted ("appropriated" is his word in one instance) the classical metaphor of cleansing the text of its corruptions as it passes into society and that they have similarly adopted the classical aim of restoring the original—against, as I have already mentioned, the evidence that the "national scriptures" of the modern period are not susceptible to this method, in part because we have what classicists, biblicists, and medi-
evalists lack, a direct access to the documentary remains of modern authors. In this division of the textual kingdom, the Critique obviously emphasizes the classical cleansing metaphor more than the philological reticence charted by Patterson. For example, the stemmatic method as formulated by Lachmann and refined by Maas reaches back only to the archetype, the earliest stage of transmission recoverable by recension on the evidence of the surviving documents. Beyond the archetype, which is not identifiable with author’s fair copy or with any document having a direct and chartable relationship to that fair copy, lies only mystery, shown graphically in Maas’s diagram of the Lachmann stemma, at the head of which (and leading down to the archetype) is a cross-hatched “railway line,” with an indeterminate number of stages—taking us where? We know not.

McGann’s musing of classical reticence is thus a necessary element in the Critique’s confrontation with modern, and modernist, eclectic editing. I say modernist because the clear-text pages of the final-intentions eclectic edition offer, in my view, an essentializing of the text—indeed, “the text itself,” divorced from the paraphernalia of apparatus, notes, variants, and hyphenation lists. And if there is one thing that the Critique insists upon, it is that there is no “text itself,” that the search for the single, unitary utterance characteristic of the modernist well-wrought urn is a chimera. Against modernist essentialism and the attempt to confine it to the neat text pages of the eclectic edition, McGann offers instead versions, historically mediated texts, texts in infinite regress from their moment of composition, materialist texts that achieve meaning only through the continued negotiation with the institutions of their reception and transmission.

All of this no doubt sounds familiar—even to textual critics. Nobody, not even the most cloistered Dryasdust, living
and working in the academy in the last decade can have avoided entirely talk of fractures and elisions, the instability of texts and the social construction of meaning. When the Critique was first published, the argument over instability and deferral had already raged widely among literary critics, but it had not yet infected the textual securities of scholarly editors. As the evidence already cited shows, critical interrogation of the theoretical assumptions of editing has now become commonplace. I can therefore begin to understand the enthusiasm of my students for this book. Already raised on a diet of structuralist and poststructuralist victuals, they regarded a course in bibliography and textual scholarship with some unease (at best). What the Critique achieved was to show these new students of the old philology that the crisis of faith and method facing modern textual criticism was of a piece with the wider cultural and intellectual crisis they were already aware of. The book was therefore both radical and familiar, and it was these twin qualities that, I now believe, so fascinated my students. Now in the nineties, the book speaks even more forcefully of its times, for (to mix my metaphors), the voice crying in the wilderness has moved to center stage. The publication of this book created a revolution, and this reprinting is a testimony to its precepts having been accepted as a necessary component of the contemporary textual debate.

There is, however, one issue I have not yet attended to: where, in the theoretical and disciplinary matrix it confronts, does the Critique really belong? We can easily see what it is against (an uncritical acceptance of authorial privilege, an emphasis on early rather than late states of text, the orthodoxy of final intentions and its grafting onto copy-text theory), but what is it for? And here we return to the question put aside earlier: is the scholarly editing of documents on McGannian principles feasible and what would such an edition look like?

In the Critique itself, McGann in part answers this question by his appeal to versions over synthetic, eclectic editions. And the versionist persuasion has been taken up by textual critics working in various periods (Hershel Parker, Derek Pearsall, Donald Reiman, Jack Stillinger, Gary Taylor, Steven Urkowitz, Michael Warren, to name just some of the more prominent). But versioning editions? Well, perhaps parallel-text editions (of, say, Wordsworth’s Prelude or Chaucer’s F and G versions of the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women) qualify as versionist editions, as might the Oxford Shakespeare’s decision to print two versions of King Lear rather than the eclectic, conflated text that had been the norm until then. But there is only one text of Hamlet in the Oxford Shakespeare, despite there being two (or three, depending on how you count them) documentary witnesses to that play. So when and where and under what auspices does versioning kick in, and when not? Is a documentary edition of one specific state of text, where multiple states exist, still versionist, or must one cover the entire history of the text?

And what is that history, anyway? In the days of intentionalist editing, the definition of primary documents was comparatively easy—any stage in the text’s transmission where the author could be shown to have had some direct or indirect influence. Thus, for the roughly 50 percent of Shakespeare’s plays published for the first time in the First Folio, this publication was, in the absence of foul papers or other manuscript remains, clearly primary. For the other 50 percent, for which earlier publication in quarto had occurred, the First Folio might still be a primary witness if (as in the case of King Lear and Hamlet) separate authority deriving from the author could be postulated to explain the wide textual variance, even if that separate authority, presumably working drafts of a revision, had disappeared. But for the intentionalist editor none of the
later Folios could be admitted as primary witnesses, for no later state of text demonstrably not deriving from an authorial document, missing or otherwise, could carry the authorial imprimatur. The principle is not dissimilar to the classical dismissal of *codices descriptes* (derived manuscripts) where their exemplars still existed, for the derived manuscripts had no authority that was not already present in the exemplar.

However, under the terms of social textual criticism this limited definition of authority will not suffice, for authority is no longer derived solely from the author but instead from the accumulated social history of the work in its various public postures. This means that a later, derived text, if it can be shown to have social and historical presence and influence, is also a primary text in the charting of that history of reception. In fact, McGann cites such an example, in his discussion of Caxton’s *Morte Darthur* versus the Winchester manuscript and Vinaver’s *Works of Sir Thomas Malory*, with Vinaver having rejected Caxton’s editorial role (the only one available until the twentieth-century discovery of the manuscript) in favor of the putative original authority invested in the manuscript.

Do such editions with such a widened definition of authority exist? Can they exist? In part, the variourum edition, in its charting of cumulative textual and critical responses, could be regarded as a vehicle for social textual criticism, and most variourums deliberately avoid constructing a new ideal text in favor of the more objective recording of response. Even the variourum cannot, however, meet McGann’s recent development of the social textual criticism of the *Critique* in his insistence that both the “bibliographical codes” (the typography, layout, paper, order, etc.) of a text and its “linguistic codes” (the words) contribute to its meaning, so that a work could have stable linguistic codes—unchanging words—and yet still change its cultural meaning through modulation of the biblio-
When I began thinking about this book in the mid-1970s, my immediate object was a critical exploration of the (then) dominant Anglo-American ideas about editorial method and theory of texts. Achieving that object, I felt, meant situating those ideas in a frame of reference that would highlight their peculiar historicity. So I began my work by studying the transmission histories—ancient as well as modern—of various classical, biblical, and medieval texts. As I plunged deeper into these comparative historical investigations, I began to glimpse the serious implications of my original project.

Consequently, when I began the actual writing of the book ten years ago my original purpose had undergone a slight but important shift. Two ideas became especially important for the argument I wanted to make: first, that literary interpretation is grounded in the historical study of material texts (whether or not the scholars are aware of this grounding, and whether or not their criticism makes self-conscious use of it); second, that a new imagination of literary studies might be usefully proposed by a vigorous critical reassessment of editorial and textual theory. Critique kept its focus trained on "modern textual criticism," but the book’s ultimate object had broadened considerably by 1982. I did not write it for editorial specialists alone. The issues were finally too general. Critique was written to help stimulate a reevaluation of the critical functions of editorial theory and textual criticism for scholars and critics at large.
That revaluation is now well advanced. Indeed, a survey of the past ten years' scholarship and criticism in textual studies reveals an astonishing array of important work in all areas of this diverse and fundamental field of inquiry. Most significant of all is the level of theoretical self-consciousness that appears in so much of this new work. Whereas textual theory had previously been the province and interest of a small group of scholars who generally confined themselves to technical and editorial questions, it is now one of the liveliest arenas of general critical studies. Theory, textual scholarship, and interpretation no longer operate in their separate but (unequal) worlds.

My own work was of course much influenced by these recent historical changes. For one thing, I came to see certain inadequacies in the present book during the course of the spirited critical debates it helped to promote. It is clear to me, for instance, that Critique's argument for a "social theory of texts" (as it has been called) introduced new problems for the (technical, editorial) issue of "authorial intentions" as well as for the (general, interpretive) issue of literary subjectivity. It is also clear to me that my polemical stance in Critique encouraged perhaps needless obscurities and misunderstandings—not least of all in relation to my own positions on key matters (for example, on how one assesses editorial procedures and options in particular cases). On the other hand, the critical debate has confirmed my general views about the relation of textual theory and literary interpretation, and about the necessity of grounding literary scholarship in a self-conscious study of material texts, their production and their distribution.

This reprint appears, from my point of view, at an opportune time—that is to say, immediately after the publication of my recent book The Textual Condition (1991). Much that lies implicit in the technical editorial arguments of Critique gets elaborated in The Textual Condition—often to an extent and along lines I had no idea, initially, of pursuing. In addition, the new book further extends the theoretical and interpretive implications of Critique's more specialized investigations.

Nonetheless, this book details the basic forms of critical thought that are at issue. Critique has, therefore, a kind of clarity and polemical simplicity that The Textual Condition necessarily lacks. I might have tried to revise Critique so as to take account of the critical discussions of the past ten years, and of the effect they have had on my own thinking. But my (published) work during this period, in particular The Textual Condition, has already spelled these matters out. Critique's interest now lies less in its technical and polemical arguments than in the historical focus it brings to the enduring problems of literary criticism. Critique is not a specialist handbook in need of revision, it is a small scholarly event that calls attention to cultural conditions and changes that remain important.

Literary criticism, a key cultural monitor, registers such conditions and changes, and literary criticism has recently undergone a slight but dramatic shift toward textual studies in the largest sense. As these studies have begun to reacquire a self-conscious historical grasp of their work, they have also begun to reassert their ancient claim to authority in the general field of literary scholarship and criticism. That claim was undermined, I believe, during the long period (approximately from Karl Lachmann to Fredson Bowers) when textual criticism made a religion of technical expertise and positive knowledge. Not, of course, that textual studies—or literary studies in general—can ever dispense with such expertise and knowledge. But critical method and even factive materials are historically located, and they comprise a process by which learning is continually being reapproached and reimagined.

The scholarly limitations of Critique therefore appear to me, in this historical hindsight, among its most significant
critical features. Various persons will perceive these limitations differently, and what may be judged limitations by some may appear as strengths—perhaps even as truths—to others. In addition, all such views lie open to further changes. Given the dynamic view of knowledge presupposed and (I hope) even executed by *Critique*, the particular character of the book as originally written seemed important to preserve: for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer.

J. J. M.

Acknowledgments

Several of my friends and colleagues have helped and encouraged me in these studies, and have sometimes offered criticisms which forced me to think more carefully about some of the problems involved. I want particularly to thank, in this regard, Edward Brown, Cecil Lang, Michael Murrin, Lee Patterson, Mac Pijman, G. Thomas Tanselle, and Barry Weller. Finally, I am deeply grateful for the trenchant critique to which Peter Blayney subjected this work in one of its earlier incarnations. My debts to other critics and scholars, many of whom I have never met except through their published works, are scattered throughout these pages, sometimes invisibly, sometimes in ways that are only too apparent.
Introduction

This book is not a primer on textual criticism, nor even an introduction to a new model for textual criticism. Of the former we have a number which are perfectly adequate, and a few which are excellent. As for the latter, though I think such a work is necessary, I do not see that anyone is ready yet to produce it. Too much innovative and exploratory work is being done at the moment in all the relevant fields; attempting a synthesis at this time would be, therefore, premature. Happily, the best available guides to textual criticism, for example the books by Pasquali and West, already occupy positions which are sufficiently advanced that they can serve as reliable points of departure for the new work that is needed. We do not rest content with these works now only because they approach the problems of textual criticism from a special and limited point of view.

These works, that is to say, deal with classical texts, where the methodological problems are usually very different from the ones which students of English vernacular scriptures have to face, most particularly in the modern periods; and my concern in this book is not with the works of antiquity. Good introductory guides to textual criticism in modern English language scriptures are not lacking, but none, in my view, takes account of certain fundamental critical problems of method and theory. In this respect they are all surpassed by
Pasquali and West, and even by Maas. Of course, there are good reasons for this deficiency, and I shall be touching on these matters in the course of this work. But one in particular must be mentioned here: that the inadequacies in our basic views about the Textual Criticism of modern works have only recently become so apparent as to be unavoidable.

Introductions to a field of study are produced when scholars can command a generic treatment of the material. At certain times, however, the field will be seen to have eluded, in various ways (some will seem trivial, some important), the basic working premises of the discipline. At such times the traditional introductory guides will necessarily seem, in different respects, problematic, and the field will suddenly erupt with new vigor and activity. This is knowledge fighting for its life, as it were. At such periods scholars do not produce reliable guides because they are too busy exploring the fault lines of what they already know and experimenting with new models and ideas.

Textual criticism of the modern literatures is clearly living through such a time. This is partly why the field is so interesting at this moment, and why it is being worked by so many interesting minds, some of them textual specialists, some of them scholars who have been drawn into the discussions by the gravity (if the pun be permitted) of the situation. This book is, therefore, an introduction of sorts, but not an introduction to textual criticism. For the general scholarly reader it is (or means to be) an introduction to the issues and problems which textual critics are now struggling with. For the textual scholar it is (or means to be) a critical summary of the key areas of debate. Textual criticism is in the process of reconceiving its discipline, and this book’s aim is to clarify those central issues which have emerged during the past ten years or so. For such is the period when the City came increasingly to discover that its normal services were subject to unusual disturbances and breakdown.

The problems first emerged in a general (and therefore an obviously serious) way as a debate over the aims and programs of the CEEA (the Center for Editions of American Authors, later called the Center for Scholarly Editions). The programmatic statement of aims and purposes issued by the CEEA in 1977 provoked a series of hostile rejoinders, and these in turn served to catalyze a wide range of critical comment which has by no means come to an end (though it has grown less heated and polemical, and much more seriously critical). Ultimately these discussions found a purchase in Shakespearean and Elizabethan studies, the area which has always been, for English scholars and for obvious reasons, the crucial one. The current swirl of interest around the text (or texts) of King Lear merely focuses the general debate now being engaged by Elizabethan and Shakespearean scholars.

Let me briefly summarize the issues in their general historical frame of reference. Samuel Johnson’s remarks on the texts of Shakespeare, quoted below (pp.16-17), epitomize the initial stage of the discussion. Eighteenth-century critics of Shakespeare have not fared well for their efforts to "methodize" the bard’s corpus, but those efforts were the fruit of a perception very like Johnson’s: the state of the Shakespearean texts seemed so evil and corrupt that rational means had to be found which could deal with the problems. Eighteenth-century "reason" is, however, the most idiosyncratic of phenomena, so that although Shakespeare’s works were laid under the authority of scholarly method, the methods were largely plural, personal, and (finally) unmethodical.

This situation prevailed until the emergence of the so-called New Bibliography, when the powerful and truly methodical approaches to textual criticism, developed in
classical and biblical studies through the nineteenth-century, were finally adapted to Shakespearean and Elizabethan scholarship. This scholarly line reached its apogee in the work of Fredson Bowers and his followers, who carried to a finished form certain lines of thought developed by the New Bibliographers. Central to these views was the concept of the eclectic text. According to this line of argument, when scholars set about editing works of the past—and in particular when they are dealing with works for which we do not have an author’s manuscript—they must develop methods for reconstituting the lost original document. Thus, from an examination of the two early and authoritative texts of King Lear, the 1608 Quarto and the 1623 Folio, the scholar will seek to deduce an "eclectic" text of the play that will be, presumably, closer to "what Shakespeare originally wrote" than either of the early printed texts.7

The scholarly methods for producing eclectic texts quickly spread to all fields and areas, including those—for example, American literature—where original holograph manuscripts have survived. Many of the debates which take place around the programs of the CEAA/CSE involve the problems such a procedure necessarily creates. When the controversies began to break out in Shakespearean studies, however, the critical methods which looked to produce eclectic texts, and to search out the author’s "lost original documents," were thrown into a state of general scholarly crisis. For if scholars were misguided in their assessments of the two original printed texts of King Lear—if, for example, these are not two relatively corrupted texts of a pure (but now lost) original, but two relatively reliable texts of two different versions of the play (as we now think)—then our general methods for dealing with such texts is called into serious question. Furthermore, since Shakespearean and Elizabethan studies constitute the central field in which our theories of textual criticism seek their ground, a crisis in that field involves a general crisis of the discipline.

This crisis is the subject I wish to explore here. Because Fredson Bowers is the scholar whose work brought the crisis to a head, his critical views will be a recurrent preoccupation of this study. He is the critic who brought to perfection, for editors of modern texts, the critical procedures we associate with the so-called Lachmann Method. How this came about, and what its results have been, are matters I shall want to take up in some detail. Almost equally important is the work of G. Thomas Tanselle, another imposing scholarly presence in the field. Tanselle’s importance for these questions derives from the role he has consciously and resolutely assumed ever since the first signs of crisis began to appear in the discipline. That is to say, Tanselle’s principal works have addressed themselves directly to the recent controversies and combatants. Tanselle has sought to moderate the conflicts and to salvage, by diplomatic accommodations, the basic methodologies handed down through the critical traditions. In the process he has played a number of useful roles, not the least of which—from my point of view—has been his ability to summarize and focus the central issues.

These conflicts and issues appear in their simplest and clearest forms when one encounters the following difference of opinion between leading textual authorities of our time.8

When an author’s manuscript is preserved, this has paramount authority, of course. Yet the fallacy is still maintained that since the first edition was proofread by the author, it must represent his final intentions and hence should be chosen as copy-text. Practical experience shows the contrary. . . . Thus the editor must choose the manuscript as his major authority, correcting
from the first edition only what are positive errors in the accidentals of the manuscript. (Fredson Bowers)

Which brings us back to the first edition and to the manuscript from which it was set. At first glance it might seem that the manuscript will be the obvious choice for copy-text. . . . But in most cases the editor will choose as copy-text an early printed edition, not the manuscript.

This is a satisfactory conclusion, since for many authors the actual writing of the manuscript . . . is a means of composition, not an end. (Philip Gaskell)

What separates these views may seem small enough, and perhaps it is true that only a pedant would or should be concerned about such matters. As so often happens, however, a close study of the meaning of this difference of opinion uncovers a series of fundamental questions which educators, students of culture, and teachers of literature are always concerned with. Imbedded in that small difference are large assumptions about the very nature of literary artifacts. In the event, I found myself in closer agreement with Gaskell than with Bowers; but what seemed to me more important, I found myself understanding better the issues and problems which were involved.

Of course, the difference between Bowers and Gaskell may be and often has been smoothed out when consensus statements are sought after. For example, in April 1977 the MLA’s Center for Scholarly Editions (CSE) prepared an "Introductory Statement" of editorial standards and guidelines for workers in the field. This statement included the following central paragraph.

A primary requirement for any responsible edition is that it include a statement identifying the document which supplies the copy-text—that is, the text which the editor is following as the basic text. When more than one text exists, a reasoned choice among them can be made only on the basis of a knowledge of their relationships with one another. The textual history of the material should therefore be presented in enough detail to allow the reader to follow the thinking that led the editor to a particular choice of copy-text and to particular evaluations of the relative authority of the other texts. It is frequently true that an author’s completed manuscript, or—when the manuscript does not survive—the earliest printed edition based on it, reflects the author’s intentions more fully than later editions or transcripts, in which printers’ or copyists’ corruptions are likely to have multiplied; in such cases, an editor producing a critical text would choose the early copy-text and would emend it to correct erroneous readings and to incorporate later variants that can be convincingly identified as genuine authorial revisions. But there are instances in which an author worked in such a way that a later text becomes a justifiable choice for copy-text; and there are situations in which an author can be said to have produced more than one "final" version of a work, any one or all of which an editor may decide to edit as separate entities. Each case must be examined independently in the light of all the available internal and external evidence; only then is an editor in a position to defend a specific choice of copy-text and to explain what categories of emendation (if any) are required. 9

There was a time when I would have found this statement unexceptionable, but the things which I have seen I now can see no more. In one sense, of course, the statement is admirable, for it elucidates the fact that editorial problems vary from case to case, and that decisions can only be made.
when all relevant factors are taken into account. My own work editing Byron’s poems proved the necessity of an ad hoc approach of this kind: the circumstances surrounding Byron’s different works changed so often that the textual issues likewise showed wide variations. Not until very late in my own work, on Byron in particular, but in textual theory and method generally, was I able to see why this statement troubled my mind. Implicit in it are ideas about the nature of literary production and textual authority which so emphasize the autonomy of the isolated author as to distort our theoretical grasp of the “mode of existence of a literary work of art” (a mode of existence which is fundamentally social rather than personal). These ideas are grounded in a Romantic conception of literary production, and they have a number of practical consequences for the way scholars are urged to edit texts and critics are urged to interpret them. The ideas are also widespread in our literary culture, and since they continue to go largely unexamined in the fundamental ways that seem to me necessary, they continue to operate at the level of ideology. I have tried in this book to lift these issues out of that realm of ideology and into the realm of criticism, where knowledge can be advanced.

Readers familiar with the subject of this book will recognize many of the particular arguments I will be advancing. I have in fact borrowed shamelessly from the work of many scholars far more acute and learned than I, and I hope my appropriation of their studies has been adequately acknowledged. My own contributions to the advancement of this learning are limited to the following material and procedural matters. First, some of the examples and case studies offered here will not have been seen before. Second, the book tries to develop a fully elaborated argument for a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority. Third, and perhaps most significantly, the analysis is approached from a historical point of view, and with a firm sense that the issues raised here are intimately related to all aspects of scholarship and literary study. This approach, which used to be commonplace among philologists and textual critics, has lately fallen into some disuse, and the discipline has suffered as a consequence. My own view is that the explanation of textual criticism—hence, our understanding of how to do it, now or at any point—must not be sought after in the method per se, but in the history of the development of the method. Our critical knowledge of texts is advanced when we take such a historical approach; the situation is no different when our object is to understand better the disciplines we use.

Of course, the issues which this book deals with are not ordinarily thought to concern anyone but editors, bibliographers, and that small band of angels called textual critics. In writing it, however, I have deliberately tried to make its discussions accessible to critics and scholars generally. As a consequence, I may have sometimes brought topics forward which textual specialists may think tedious or unnecessary. Some elementary matters are taken up at a length which may not seem useful to the textualist, and on several occasions I have taken up the same or related subjects from several different angles, so that the knowledgeable textual scholar may find some of the discussions repetitive. I have tried to be severe with myself on these issues, and I must now say that what remains here seems to me essential, both for the textual specialist and the general critic. Textual critics remain relatively innocent of the large theoretical issues and problems which have recently come to light, principally, it seems to me, for two reasons. First, they do not normally see the problems except in terms of some local set of issues. The people who are most practically interested in these issues are ordinarily
editors, and few editors are able to see their work and its attendant issues as part of a large and connected network of related issues and problems. Second, editors and even textual theorists of modern literatures have shown almost no interest in the general history of their discipline. As a result, the crisis facing the discipline is not normally seen within the context which would help to explain that crisis—or even make the crisis visible. I have therefore found it necessary to inquire after some familiar scholarly matters, but in contexts and relationships which even many textual specialists may not find so familiar.

Furthermore, the problems now facing editors and textual theorists of modern national scriptures expose a number of larger and more general problems, and these must concern all literary scholars and critics. This book is partly addressed to the general literary critic, as I have said, but that person equally lives and moves and has his being inside the most specialized editor or textual scholar. The issues raised in this book bear upon fundamental aspects of the theory of literature in general, including the theory of literary interpretation. Such matters form no part of these present discussions, however, nor should they do so. To take them up would only distract attention from my chief polemical conviction: that these issues in textual criticism and editorial theory are matters of general concern to the literary community.

Nevertheless, this book has been written with those larger issues very much in mind. We shall not begin to deal adequately with the problems currently facing editors and editorial theorists until we have reconceived the entire project of textual criticism for modern national scriptures. Certain shrewd literary critics have recently shown an interest in these larger matters—we hear much talk about "unstable texts," "unreliable texts," and textualité, and we often find interpretative essays playing ironically with those textual variants and textual versions which were normally of interest only to editors and textual critics (in the traditional sense). This generalized interest observable in the larger field of literary studies can only be welcomed, since it promises the possibility that the schism between textual and interpretive studies, opened so long ago, may begin to be healed. The dawn is red with that promise.

First, however, we shall have to undertake a number of imperative scholarly tasks. Two of the foremost, in my view, are the following. We need to become fully conscious of the history of scholarship (not merely the history of criticism) from the late eighteenth century to the present, including the history of classical and biblical scholarship. Second, we have to reimagine the central place which textual criticism occupies in literary studies. This book addresses itself to that second matter. The crisis in editorial theory, which is the particular focus of this work, must be explored first, since it is through that crisis that history has brought to our attention today the larger issues facing our discipline. This crisis finds its dialectical counterpart in certain areas of hermeneutics which currently preoccupy literary interpreters. But these latter subjects are already being explored by a variety of intelligent scholars, while the equally crucial, and deeply correspondent, crisis in editorial theory and practice has yet to receive a generic study. This book aims to open such a project. Its ultimate hope, and expectation, is that the crisis of two disciplines—in hermeneutics, on the one hand, and editorial method on the other—will not fail to bring about their destined appointment. When this happens, we may find that we have discovered again the ground of a comprehensive Textual Criticism—that philologia perennis known to certain great scholarly minds in the past, and that was renamed,
not so very long ago, *Alterthumswissenschaft*.

Finally, although I am aware that this book takes up the most fugitive and cloistered of subjects, I have all along felt it to be an important topic as well, despite its specialized and perhaps even Lilliputian character. The subject and its demands have therefore chastened my mind considerably, and left me with fewer illusions about what we do when we study literary works. The book has its origins in the deepest sort of ignorance, when I hardly understood the true extent of my own ignorance. In the event, I read for the first time some of the works of Eichhorn, Herder, Humboldt, and Wolf, older scholars and critics who restored some perspective to my understanding of contemporary criticism, and whose astonishing grasp of textual studies has been continually before my eyes, not so much for what they knew as for their respect for knowledge itself, and for the humility which, as a consequence, marks all their work that I have read. In short, I have tried to write this little book in the spirit of a remark like the following by F. A. Wolf:

I have truly done all that lay within my powers. . . . But this is a task worthy of many people’s labors—of people who advance along different scholarly roads, and particularly of those who can measure the strength of human genius in poetry against the standard of their own genius, and who have an artistic judgment founded upon a knowledge of ancient literature: the Klopstocks, the Wielands, the Vosses.

Feci quidem et ipse utrumque pro virili parte . . . ; sed haec complurium et diversa via ingredientium studiis digna cura est, in primis eorum, qui vim humani ingenii
1. Modern Textual Criticism:
A Schematic History

All current textual critics, whether they work on Homer, Langland, Shakespeare, or a Romantic poet like Byron, agree that to produce a critical edition entails an assessment of the history of the text's transmission with the purpose of exposing and eliminating errors. Ultimately, the object in view is the same in each case: to establish a text which, in the now universally accepted formulation, most nearly represents the author's original (or final) intentions.\textsuperscript{13}

This critical commonplace has emerged gradually during the past two hundred years or so. It is a principle which assumes, quite correctly, that all acts of information transmission produce various sorts of corruption from the original material. Classical scholarship, which eventually produced the determinate breakthrough known as the Lachmann Method, established the basic rationale for the general procedures.\textsuperscript{14} Lacking the author's original documents, possessing only a more or less extensive set of later manuscripts, the classical editor developed procedures for tracing the internal history of these late manuscripts. The aim was to work out textual errors by revealing the history of their emergence. Ultimately, the method sought to "clear the text" of its corruptions and, thereby, to produce (or approximate)—by subtraction, as it were—the lost original document, the "authoritative text."

These methods were soon applied to national scriptures of various kinds. In England, the New Bibliography centered
its work in Shakespeare, where the problems which the Lachmann Method was fashioned to deal with were in certain important respects quite similar. Samuel Johnson's famous lament over the state of the Shakespearean texts contains a neat formulation of the problem.

The business of him that republished an ancient book is, to correct what is corrupt, and to explain what is obscure. To have a text corrupt in many places, and in many doubtful, is, among the authors that have written since the use of types, almost peculiar to Shakespeare. Most writers, by publishing their own works, prevent all various readings, and preclude all conjectural criticism. Books indeed are sometimes published after the death of him who produced them, but they are better secured from corruptions than these unfortunate compositions. They subsist in a single copy, written or revised by the author; and the faults of the printed volume can be only faults of one descent.

But of the works of Shakespeare the condition has been far different: he sold them, not to be printed, but to be played. They were immediately copied for the actors, and multiplied by transcript after transcript, vitiated by the blunders of the penman, or changed by the affectation of the player; perhaps enlarged to introduce a jest, or mutilated to shorten the representation; and printed at last without the concurrence of the author, without the consent of the proprietor, from compilations made by chance or by stealth out of the separate parts written for the theatre: and thus thrust into the world surreptitiously and hastily, they suffered another depravation from the ignorance and negligence of the printers, as every man who knows the state of the press in that age will readily conceive.

It is not easy for invention to bring together so many causes concurring to vitiate a text. No other author ever gave up his works to fortune and time with so little care: no books could be left in hands so likely to injure them, as plays frequently acted, yet continued in manuscript: no other transcribers were likely to be so little qualified for their task as those who copied for the stage, at a time when the lower ranks of the people were universally illiterate: no other editions were made from fragments so minutely broken, and so fortuitously reunited; and in no other age was the art of printing in such unskilful hands.

The state of the Shakespearean texts corresponded to the state of the classical and biblical texts in this respect: in each case the authorized documents were missing, so that critical editors were faced with the problem of sorting through the mediated texts which developed subsequently, in the scribal process which preserved, disseminated, and reproduced the lost original works. Of course, the Shakespearean problem differed from the classical problem in two important ways. First, the process of reproducing Shakespeare's lost original documents was typographical rather than scribal. Second, unlike the classical texts, the lost Shakespearean documents were not radically separated in time from their subsequent process of preservation and reproduction. Stemmatics is a complex problem in classical scholarship, whereas in Shakespearean studies it is normally a relatively straightforward matter: the textual history in the latter case is, as we now say, monogenous, whereas in the former it is polygenous.

These differentials necessitated some adjustments of the Lachmann Method by Shakespearean scholars. Pollard, McKerrow, and Greg were prominent initiators of these reformulations, and their activities in the field established the
direction of the twentieth century's textual criticism of Shakespeare. More than that, however, they exerted a powerful influence upon the textual criticism of all periods of our national scriptures. The influence has been most noticeable in the textual criticism of Restoration and eighteenth-century literature, and, more recently, of various nineteenth-century authors, both English and American. Indeed, these nineteenth-century instances have emerged as the focal point of most current problems with the theory of textual criticism.

In his celebrated essay "Some Principles for Scholarly Editions of Nineteenth-Century American Authors" Fredson Bowers took the case of Hawthorne to lay down some rules for editing novels like The Blithedale Romance. This work is typical of the vast majority of works written and published in the modern periods: that is to say, it is a work for which we have the author's original manuscript. Thus, the classical problem which originally established the terms of modern textual criticism—the absence of the authoritative text—no longer pertains. Indeed, that fundamental and complex problem in classical studies—to find and remove textual contaminations—normally subsides in these cases to a secondary, if sometimes complex, operational task. Stemmatics and its related problems of emendation loom over the editors of classical as well as most medieval texts because the processes of textual transmission have been severely ruptured by time and circumstance.

Texts produced and reproduced in the earlier sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—pre-eminently Shakespeare's texts—raise special issues and problems, some of which I shall glance at in the following pages. My chief interest, however, lies with the texts produced and reproduced in the later modern (that is, the post-seventeenth-century) periods, for these texts have served to focus discussion of the theory of final intentions. Specifically, the theoretical interests of textual critics working largely in the modern periods have shifted from the field of stemmatics to the problems of copy-text.

This shift witnesses the profound influence which the earlier work of Fredson Bowers had upon the field of textual criticism. Bowers advanced a theory of final intentions in order to solve certain editorial problems which are typical of works typographically produced in the later modern periods. This theory was based upon a reading and interpretation of W. W. Greg's important essay "The Rationale of Copy-Text," where the main interest lies with Shakespeare and works produced in the early modern periods.

Bowers's altered focus upon the later modern periods, and particularly upon American books, has meant that he typically deals with works for which we have one or more of the author's pre-publication texts. These subjects lead him to the following argument, which I now quote in full.

When an author's manuscript is preserved, this has paramount authority, of course. Yet the fallacy is still maintained that since the first edition was proofread by the author, it must represent his final intentions and hence should be chosen as copy-text. Practical experience shows the contrary. When one collates the manuscript of The House of Seven Gables against the first printed edition, one finds an average of ten to fifteen differences per page between the manuscript and the print, many of them consistent alterations from the manuscript system of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and word-division. It would be ridiculous to argue that Hawthorne made approximately three to four thousand small changes in proof, and then wrote the manuscript of The Blithedale Romance according to the same system as the manuscript of the Seven Gables, a system that he had rejected in proof.
A close study of the several thousand variants in *Seven Gables* demonstrates that almost every one can be attributed to the printer. That Hawthorne passed them in proof is indisputable, but that they differ from what he wrote in the manuscript and manifestly preferred is also indisputable. Thus the editor must choose the manuscript as his major authority, correcting from the first edition only what are positive errors in the accidentals of the manuscript.20

Here, though the textual problems are far removed from those faced by Lachmann, the influence of the classical approach is clear. Printing-house punctuation—the editorial intervention by a publisher or his agents between the author's manuscript and the published text—is regarded as a corruption of the authoritative text. It makes no difference, in Bowers's view, that the author oversaw and accepted this editorial intervention. As Bowers says a bit later in the essay,

One is foolish to prefer a printing-house style. This distinction is not theory, but fact. Hawthorne's punctuation, for example, is much more meaningful in respect to emphasis and to delicate matters of parenthesis and subordination than is the printing-house style in which *Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* appeared. In each book, the real flavor of Hawthorne, cumulatively developing in several thousand small distinctions, can be found only in the manuscript.21

This "theory of a critical edition"22 is now widely accepted, and it indeed represents a reasonable approach to the choice of copy-text, especially when one reflects upon the historical development of the discipline. Bowers dismisses the chief alternative approach, "that since the first edition was proofread by the author, it must represent his final intentions and hence should be chosen as copy-text." This idea is a "fallacy . . . still maintained" in the teeth of what to Bowers seems manifest: that editorial intervention at the point of initial publication represents a process of deviation from the authoritative original, in fact, a process of corruption.

Bowers's views, then, continue to show the influence of the textual criticism developed in the field of classical studies. Hawthorne's early publisher, his editors, his printers are, for Bowers, entirely comparable to those older scribes who sought to preserve and transmit the classical texts, but who introduced, in the process, various contaminations. The business of the classical critic is to find and remove those corruptions, and the business of the critic of Hawthorne's texts is seen in the same way: to find and remove the corruptions and, by critical subtraction, to restore the sincerity of the authoritative text.23

This approach continues to dominate the current theory of textual criticism, though it has of course been challenged from various quarters, particularly by critics who work in the modern periods. The distinguished textual critic G. Thomas Tanselle recently surveyed, and rebutted, the chief lines of attack in an important essay. But the opposition has not been silenced, and Tanselle himself indicated certain key fault lines in the Bowers view.24

A vigorous line of dissent from Bowers has been carried by James Thorpe and Philip Gaskell, though Donald Pizer and others have raised some important objections of their own.25 Tanselle's rebuttal of these dissenting lines is impressive partly because of Tanselle's personal tact, and partly because he is defending a position whose strength lies in its logical coherence and self-consistency. Again and again Tanselle parries the opponents of Bowers by pointing to the irrelevance of the objections for the dominant theory, or to
the theoretical and methodological contradictions which appear in the arguments and positions of the dissenting critics. Such contradictions proliferate, it is clear, at least partly because the dissenting positions are not founded upon a carefully articulated theoretical structure. As we shall see later, the contradictions are also the result of the compromised nature of the dissenting views, which have not been able to divorce themselves from certain key aspects of the views they are attacking. This, too, as we shall also see, represents failure of theory.26

Up to now I have been discussing this critical dialogue at a rather high level of abstraction, principally in order to expose the general shape of the critical debate, rather than the precise areas of conflict. We will need to keep the larger view in mind, since it is my contention that the dissenting line, though lacking the theoretical rigor of the Bowers position, preserves the latter in a state of crisis by raising over and over again vexing practical problems which the Bowers line cannot easily deal with. In other words, the dissenting line involves alternative theoretical grounds which it has not yet articulated self-consciously in the way that Bowers has done.

2. Modern Textual Criticism: The Central Problems

Let us begin the discussion again, this time at a more analytic level. Present-day textual criticism, as we have seen, is the descendant of the earlier historical critics of biblical and classical texts, among whom Lachmann is by common consent the most notable. Out of this early work in classical philology emerged two of the three principal areas of current interest: the theory of the critical edition, and the theory of the copy-text. The second of these has been a special preoccupation of those inheritors of the Lachmann Method, the New Bibliographers. When the latter began to concern themselves with textual problems of the more modern periods, they opened up the third area in which debate is now frequently joined: the problem (or the theory) of final authorial intentions. We will consider each of these matters in turn. These discussions will eventually force us to consider a fourth subject, the theory of the nonspecialist or modernized edition. Largely a neglected concern of modern textual criticism, the topic will prove a crucial one for sorting out the problems which current textual theory has discovered for itself.

The Theory of the Critical Edition

The attempt by classical philologists to recover, or approximate by historical reconstruction, the lost original works of ancient authors produced a "theory of the critical edition." The chief device for constructing such an edition was then,
and still is, the systematic collation of all the relevant texts of the work in question. Out of the collation emerges an analytic picture of the work’s historical passage, and, as a natural consequence, the critical opportunity of removing the errors consequent upon such a passage.

The production of this collation entails as well the development of a textual stemma, that is, a summary analysis of the historical relations of the various specific texts of the work in question. The stemma is an especially important tool for an editor when he is choosing his copy-text, which is in a "general sense" an "early text of a work which an editor [selects] as the basis of his own." The copy-text, in fact, permits the critic to sort out and arrange the collations. In a properly critical edition, the editor will produce a critical text which is based upon the copy-text but into which has been introduced a series of emendations and corrections. These changes are designed to bring the critical text into as close an approximation as possible with the author’s no longer extant work. A textual apparatus accompanies the critical text, and this contains as complete a record as is possible of the textual variants which have emerged from the collation of the documents. It is this apparatus which displays the "history" of the text.

**The Theory of Copy-text**

The above general theory of the critical edition is now accepted, with minor variations and modifications, by all textual critics and critical editors. But the special problems of editing Shakespeare and other English authors of the early-modern periods led Greg to develop a "rationale of copy-text," which is explicitly designed to deal mainly with problems raised by certain national scriptures produced in the early modern typographical periods. As Greg put the matter:

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If I am right in the view that I am about to put forward, the classical theory of the "best" or "most authoritative" manuscript, whether it be held in a reasonable or in an obviously fallacious form, has really nothing to do with the English theory of "copy-text" at all. The New Bibliography was interested in considering more closely how a critic was to choose, among the possible options, one specific text which would serve him as his base text or copy-text. On what grounds should one make such a choice, what was a coherent theory of copy-text? Greg’s interest in this question led him to produce his famous essay.

According to Greg, in the context of a monogenous textual stemma—that is, in the situation which one frequently encounters in a bibliographical context, but only rarely in a scribal one—textual critics can and should approach the problem of copy-text in a systematic way. Greg followed "the modern editorial practice [of choosing] whatever extant text may be supposed to represent most nearly what the author wrote and to follow it with the least possible alteration." But Greg went on to make his famous distinction between accidentals and substantives in order to set up a rationale for the use of the copy-text:

Since, then, it is only on grounds of expediency, and in consequence either of philological ignorance or of linguistic circumstances, that we select a particular original as our copy-text, I suggest that it is only in the matter of accidentals that we are bound (within reason) to follow it, and that in respect of substantive readings we have exactly the same liberty (and obligation) of choice as has a classical editor, or as we should have were it a modernized text that we were preparing.
Greg arrives at this formulation because he wants to define a standard of authority between early texts and later revised texts (including those which carry genuine authorial revisions). That standard lies in the so-called accidentals, which will be, in the earliest monogenous textual forms, necessarily closest to "the author’s original in so far as the general form of the text is concerned." Because this is the case, the critic’s copy-text must be that text in the monogenous series which is historically closest to the author’s lost original, for to displace it in favor of a reprint, whether authoritatively revised or not, means receding at least one step further from the general form of the author's original.

The true theory is, I contend, that the copy-text should govern (generally) in the matter of accidentals, but that the choice between substantive readings belongs to the general theory of textual criticism and lies altogether beyond the narrow principle of the copy-text. Thus it may happen that in a critical edition the text rightly chosen as copy may not by any means be the one that supplies most substantive readings in cases of variation. The failure to make this distinction and to apply this principle has naturally led to too close and too general a reliance upon the text chosen as basis for an edition, and there has arisen what may be called the tyranny of the copy-text, a tyranny that has, in my opinion, vitiated much of the best editorial work of the past generation.31

This famous passage represents what Greg earlier called "the English theory of copy-text," which Greg correctly recognized as the consequence of the developing work of the New Bibliographers. McKerrow supplied Greg with his initial formulation of the theory, but Greg's view was that McKerrow "relapsed into heresy" out of a fear of "conceding too much to eclecticism." The true "English theory" of copy-text means to draw a distinction between a text's substantive and its accidentals, and to argue that whereas the critic should choose "the earliest 'good' print as copy-text" and should follow that in its accidentals, he should be prepared to deviate from the copy-text in the matter of substantive readings.32

Greg's argument, we must observe, leaves aside altogether the question of "the choice between substantive readings," nor does it address directly the question of textual "versions," as they are now called. When "there is more than one substantive text of comparable authority," or as we should say when there is more than one version, Greg owns that the choice between them will be an arbitrary and expedient matter. Greg's purpose here is to free the editor from the tyranny of a copy-text, "to uphold his liberty of judgement" and discretion when decisions have to be made: "In the case of rival substantive editions the choice between substantive variants is...generally independent of copy-text."33

At this point we should recall that Greg's rationale makes no appeal to any concept of author's intentions (whether original or final). When editing a work, as Tanselle has observed, "It is not necessary to have a copy-text at all in the strict sense of the term which Greg develops."34 The term can be used in a general sense to refer to the editor's chosen base text or version, of course, but in Greg's determination copy-text is a device for helping an editor choose between "indifferent readings." Tanselle elucidates the theory of copy-text economically.

Generally speaking, an editor has less to go on when judging variants in punctuation and spelling than when judging variants in wording, and for that reason the text chosen as copy-text often supplies most of the punctuation and spelling for the critical text. But the editor is
free, of course, to make rational decisions regarding spelling and punctuation when the evidence permits; conversely, variants in wording can sometimes seem indifferent, and the impasse is resolved by adopting the copy-text reading. . . . [A] copy-text is simply the text most likely to provide an authorial reading . . . at points of variation where one cannot otherwise reach a decision.\textsuperscript{35}

This seems to me an accurate translation of Greg's position. As we shall see, however—and as the passages I quoted from Bowers show—whereas Greg never sought to interpret his rationale in terms of authorial intentions, this is precisely what Bowers would later propose. As a consequence, the theory of authorial intentions was formulated not merely as an explanation of the rationale of copy-text, but as a rule which would be asked to govern both the choice of the copy-text and the choice of the textual version as well.

\textbf{The Problem (and Theory) of Final Intentions}

Greg's theory of copy-text was developed to deal primarily with certain problems in Elizabethan bibliography, though it obviously has a general bearing on scribal texts as well. The theory grew from Greg's awareness that when texts were produced in typographical forms in the early modern periods, their orthography—what Greg called "the general form of the text"—was subject to frequent and odd changes (so-called modernizations) as the work passed through the hands of the printers and publishers. In an unpublished essay which takes up this matter, Peter Blayney explains the situation lucidly:

If the fourth paragraph of "The Rationale" is read with uniform attention it becomes quite clear that there is one overriding reason why the author's (usually lost) manuscript is held up as the final authority for accidents. Quite simply, before the eighteenth century no other possible "standard" for accidents exists.

Before 1650, while "house style" varied from printing house to printing house and from compositor to compositor, rapidly changing "fashions" in orthography can be seen affecting the whole of the London printing trade. . . . Greg never put it in so many words, but was well aware that all the compositors of the First Folio (and their contemporaries) scattered punctuation and capitals around in a profusion seldom matched even in the 18th century. In this respect they all differed from all the compositors who set Shakespeare's Quartos. . . . The point is that one can legitimately define a hefty percentage of the seemingly arbitrary changes that distinguish (say) a 1605 reprint from its 1595 copy as modernizations. And it was modernization that Greg was trying to minimize.\textsuperscript{36}

Greg himself refers to these matters only by implication, or obliquely—as in the following passage: "The thesis I am arguing is that the historical circumstances of the English language make it necessary to adopt in formal matters the guidance of some particular early text."\textsuperscript{37} The "historical circumstances of the English language" and its processes of transmission led Greg to formulate his rationale for the editing of early modern texts. Subsequent editors and theorists have gone on to apply Greg's rationale to works of later periods when, in Blayney's words, "there was such a thing as 'standard' orthography."

Under these new textual circumstances, new problems have emerged, the most pressing of which has come to seem the problem of the author's final intentions. Greg's theory can be made to deal reasonably well with such problems in circumstances where the author's original text is not preserved.
But in more recent periods, and especially in those which saw
the emergence of modern textual criticism itself, authorial
texts abound: draft copies, corrected drafts, fair copies (holograph,
or amanuensis copies with or without autograph
corrections for the press), proofs (uncorrected or corrected,
sometimes by the author, sometimes by his editors). In these
circumstances, a theory of final intentions has emerged out of
the Lachmann-Greg tradition which has received its most elo-
quent formulation in the work of Fredson Bowers, whose
normative statements on the matter I have already quoted.

I must point out, in passing, that in so far as Greg con-
cerned himself with the problem of author’s intentions at all,
his position was typically discretionary: "authority is never
absolute, but only relative," he observed when he was begin-
ning to attack "the tyranny of the copy-text." 38 Of course,
Greg can speak of "the author’s original text," and he has in
fact endorsed the following editorial principle: "It is . . . the
the modern editorial practise to choose whatever extant text
may be supposed to represent most nearly what the author
wrote and to follow it with the least possible alteration." 39
Nevertheless, when he laid aside the problem of textual ver-
sions in his theory of copy-text, he was implicitly laying aside
the problem of authorial intentions as well. The locus of his
concern was a period when such problems did not rise up
with the urgency or in the forms which Bowers and others
have encountered.

Bowers’s appeals to Greg and the previous traditions of
textual criticism represent an effort to support Bowers’s theory
of authorial intentions by an appeal to Greg’s rationale for
editing early modern texts. But special problems appear when
textual critics seek to apply Greg’s rationale to texts, espe-
cially modern ones, which come down to us in forms that
trace back to preserved original manuscripts and other
pre-publication documents. 40 Bowers’s position—that an edi-
tor must choose, other things being equal, the earliest in the
surviving series of completed texts—is based upon the idea
that the original in such a series will be closest to the author’s
final intentions, will be least contaminated by nonauthorial
interventions—in particular, by nonauthoritative forms in the
so-called accidentals.

Critics have repeatedly attacked this position on the
matter of the accidentals, and have argued, in various ways,
that the formal features of the authorial manuscripts—even
printer’s copy manuscripts—do not necessarily lie closest to
the author’s final intentions. In many cases—Gaskell and
Thorpe give a number of typical ones—the first printed edi-
tion seems to exert at least as strong a claim to author’s final
intentions as the author’s manuscript; and various particular
cases have been raised to show that other textual cons-
stitutions—corrected proofs, later revised editions, and so
forth—might reasonably claim to represent, in formal as well
as in substantive matters, the author’s final intentions.

Tanselle has vigorously rebutted these positions—more
on that matter in a moment—but what he and most of the
parties to the debate have thus far failed to emphasize is that
the problems being raised are historically peculiar to cir-
cumstances where critics and editors have inherited an unpre-
cedented amount of early textual material and related docu-
mentation. Under such conditions the critic is often able to
follow the process of literary production through all its prin-
cipal stages, and from the vantage of all the principal persons
engaged in the process. Byron’s poetry abounds in illustrative
examples, but his case is merely prototypical. Nevertheless, a
critic facing the massive textual documentation for a work
like The Giaour—multiple manuscripts, multiple corrected
and uncorrected proofs, a trial edition, a whole series of early
editions at least three of which are known to have been proofed and revised by Byron—finds it difficult to accept the idea that one of these texts, and presumably an early manuscript, represents the author’s final intentions. The case typifies what Hans Zeller has recently suggested: that texts frequently exist in several versions no one of which can be said to constitute itself the “final” one.  

Zeller has in mind famous cases like The Prelude, the special problems of which are sometimes handled in special critical formats, such as the facing-page edition. But the example of The Giaour—or Childe Harold, or Don Juan, or any number of Byron’s other works—raises the problem of multiple versions beyond the capacity of a facing-page compromise. If, as Tanselle says, “the aim of the editor is to establish the text as the author wished to have it presented to the public,” the case of Byron’s works can stand as an exemplary one for a host of others: that is, many works exist of which it can be said that their authors demonstrated a number of different wishes and intentions about what text they wanted to be presented to the public, and that these differences reflect accommodations to changed circumstances, and sometimes to changed publics.

Donald Pizer recently brought a similar objection to the Bowers theory of final intentions. Tanselle’s answer to Pizer needs to be quoted here because it helps to illuminate the special character of the crisis facing the current theory of final intentions. Pizer argues that a modern critical editor may want to choose as copy-text a first edition rather than some prepublishing text in those cases where author, publisher, and house editor worked closely in the production of the work. Tanselle counters Pizer in this way.

What appears in a prepublishing form of a text is normally a better representation of the author’s habits than what appears in a first printing, and the text of a fair-copy manuscript or typescript reflects the author’s intention, whether or not it turns out to be his final intention in every respect. It is true, as Pizer says, that choosing “an early copy-text encourages a frame of mind which requires later variants to ‘prove themselves’ as authorial rather than as editorial or printer’s variants”; but such would seem to be the safest course in most instances, since the author’s responsibility for a later reading—especially in accidentals—is normally less certain than his responsibility for an early one. Of course, such editorial caution may occasionally produce a text reflecting “an author’s discarded rather than final intentions,” but at least it reflects his, rather than someone else’s, intentions. The editor’s critical judgment—his literary taste exercised in the light of his intimate knowledge of the author and all known relevant external evidence—must finally determine the case; and there is nothing in Greg’s theory to prevent him, on this basis, from deciding that the later variants have indeed “proved themselves.” If, however, he starts from the assumption that the author and the publisher’s editor are creative collaborators, he will, to be sure, produce an unmodernized text—in the sense that it reflects the author’s period—but it may be far from the text which the author wished (finally, or at any other time).

First, a practical point. It is true that an editor making Pizer’s choice may produce a text which is “far from the text which the author wished” to have presented to the public. True—but, by the same token, an editor making Tanselle’s or Bowers’s choice is equally liable to the danger of producing a text which the author would never have wanted the public to see. The latter is an especially clear and present danger when one chooses to edit some prepublishing version of a work,
for obvious reasons. In each case a danger exists which must
be met by the acuteness and skill of the individual editor,
for—in any case—the best of imaginable strategies will col-
lapse if the tactics are blundered. Certainly the Bowers theory
of final intentions will be no protection under the cir-
cumstances detailed by Pizer. Such circumstances, needless to
say, are common in the more modern periods—indeed, they
are the rule.

The second point to be made goes to the issue of "intentions"
generally. Following Bowers, Tanselle argues that if
their "editorial caution" is open to the danger of choosing
less-than-final intentions, "at least" it will capture the author's
rather than someone else's intentions. One must note, simply
in passing, that the authorial intentions marked in prepub-
lication manuscripts will often represent in only the most tenta-
tive way what an author wished to have presented to the
public, certainly in the matter of accidentals, and often of sub-
stantives as well. But this ambiguity in the concept of
author's intention conceals an even more crucial problem in
the Bowers's theory of final intentions. Once again it is a his-
torically specific problem and appears in circumstances where
the textual critic has in his possession, at the outset of his
work, the early authoritative (prepublication) documents.

Tanselle's belief that the theory of copy-text will ensure
an edition that "reflects [the author's], rather than some-
one else's, intentions" assumes that any editorial intervention at
the work's point of origin constitutes a contamination of the
authoritative text. But Pizer, like Thorpe, Gaskell, and others,
has shown what everyone recognizes to be the historical facts:
the production of books, in the later modern periods espe-
cially, sometimes involves a close working relationship
between the author and various editorial and publishing pro-
fessionals associated with the institutions which serve to

transmit literary works to the public. To regard the work
done by such institutions as a contamination of authorized
material is to equate the editorial work done by an author's
original publishing institutions and the (historically belated)
editorial work done by the scribes of ancient texts. The origi-
nal theory of the critical edition was developed to find and
remove the contaminations inadvertently produced by those
textual transmitters, and Greg's rationale represented a special
variation on that theory, one designed to take account of the
peculiar typographical conditions which prevailed before the
eighteenth century. But the theory of final intentions, though
a corollary derivative from the initial theory of the critical
text and its special variant, has been asked to perform the
same function under conditions which are structurally far
different.

The scholarly consequences of this hegemonic use of the
theory of final intentions are far reaching, and they extend
ultimately to the way we read and comprehend literary
works, and not merely to how we edit their texts. More
immediately, the consequence has been to retard the develop-
ment of the theory of textual criticism. Important critics and
theorists continue to maintain the dominance of Bowers's
theories even when the empirical evidence demonstrates,
from many different quarters, that those theories are not ade-
quate under certain circumstances. It is certainly true, as Tan-
selle has argued, that these theories are the most powerful and
coherent that we currently possess; indeed, their continuing
power resides in their coherence and methodological consis-
tency, as Tanselle has also argued. Still, the empirical chal-
lenges to the theory raised by various learned voices argue
that serious problems underlie the theory of final intentions
when it is applied to a certain large class of (typically)
modern works. But the fact that these challenges have
remained largely empirical in character testifies as well to the absence of any substantial theoretic critique.

3. The Ideology of Final Intentions

Such a critique will only become possible when we are able to see more clearly the ideology which supports the concept of final intentions. We begin by returning briefly to a passage in Greg's famous essay where he summarizes his position.

The thesis I am arguing is that the historical circumstances of the English language make it necessary to adopt in formal matters the guidance of some particular early text. If the several extant texts of a work form an ancestral series, the earliest will naturally be selected since this will not only come nearest to the author's original in accidentals, but also (revision apart) most faithfully preserve the correct readings where substantive variants are in question.45

This statement shows the special circumstances which Greg's theory was constructed to meet. When he speaks of several texts that "form an ancestral series," the monogenous pattern of Shakespearean texts—as opposed to the problems facing the editors of polygenous texts, such as Chaucer's—shows through very clearly. Furthermore, when Greg speaks of "author's original" we encounter a formulation which his inheritors—for present purposes, we will instance Bowers—will consistently revise and depart from. Bowers's summary of Greg's position is interesting in this context.
Chapter Three

Greg distinguished between the authority of the substantives and of the forms, or accidentals, assumed by these substantives. If only the first edition, set from manuscript, has authority, as being the closest in each of these two respects to the author’s lost manuscript, then both authorities are combined in one edition. On the other hand, a revised edition may alter the authority of some of the substantives; but the transmission of the author’s accidentals through the hands, and mind, of still another compositor destroys the authority of these features of the first edition, set from manuscript.46

This passage comes near the beginning of Bowers’s famous essay which we quoted from earlier. One notices here that he does not speak of either “original” or “final” intentions. He does not choose either term, in this place, because he is in the midst of a demonstration which will lead him beyond Greg’s formulation (“author’s original”) to his own special variation upon it. Thus, when Bowers does finally come to apply Greg’s theory to the editing of modern American authors, where prepublication textual states are commonly extant, he argues the theory of final intentions, as we have seen. In fact, he and others are brought to use this term “final intentions” precisely when the editorial problem shifts from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century. In Bowers’s essay on seventeenth-century editing problems—for example, in his “Current Theories of Copy-Text, With an Illustration from Dryden,”—the concept of final intentions never appears.47 It manifestly has no relevance.

The theory of final intentions is an effort to deal systematically with a recurrent problem faced by the editors of certain sorts of texts. However, because the theory emerged through the Lachmann-Greg tradition of critical editing, it preserved certain features of earlier textual theories which were irrelevant to the new sets of problems. The theory of final intentions aims to provide a rule for the choice of a text under circumstances where several apparently fully authoritative texts exist. In Greg’s terms, the theory attempts to provide a rationale not merely for emendation and correction procedures, but for choosing between “particular substantive editions” as well.48 The theory develops because Greg’s copytext of rule—“the earliest” or first edition—becomes a “later” text when the ancestral series is invaded by still earlier, prepublication forms. In such a situation Bowers, Tanselle, and the many inheritors of Greg continue to follow his line of reasoning, and argue that the author’s manuscript—because it is earliest in the ancestral series of monogenous texts—assumes the highest authority when the issue of copytext is being met. We have already heard Bowers speak to this point. Tanselle’s statement on the matter is interesting not because he follows Bowers, but because his argument takes the same form of thought, and clearly shows the continuing influence of Greg.

Greg’s rationale, pointing out the usual deterioration of a text (particularly its accidentals) from one manuscript or edition to another, leads the editor back to the fair-copy manuscript or the earliest extant text which follows it.49

Tanselle concludes in a way that is typical of his critical style, which is generally more cautious and less dismissive than Bowers’s: “in the absence of additional evidence, the author’s manuscript should be taken as a safer guide than the printed text to his intentions regarding accidentals.”50 But Tanselle’s formulation, like Bowers’s, betrays an innovative reading of Greg’s famous essay. Tanselle and Bowers both speak of
author's intentions when they discuss the rationale of copy-text, whereas Greg's essay never dealt with the problem of authorial intentions at all.

The rationale behind this extension of Greg's theory is not difficult to see. Faced with situations where an editor has to decide between numerous authoritative documents, between numerous textual versions whether in monogenous or polygenous forms, the editor cannot lay aside, as Greg had laid aside, the problem of the choice of a text at every level. Bowers faced this issue squarely, and he appropriated Greg's analysis of early modern typographical problems in order to formulate and argue for a theory of authorial intentions.

Now underlying all such formulations, but particularly those which erect a theory of final intentions out of the theory of copy-text, the concept of the autonomy of the creative artist can be seen to be assumed. Textual critics who had to deal with ancient writings, and especially with classical and biblical authors, came to see through their philological studies how these authors and their works had been isolated from the present by the very process—textual transmission—which delivered them over to the present. The ancient works were alienated from the present not so much in their distance from us as in the interruption of our view caused by the corrupting process of transmission. To be put in touch with these authors and their works, the historical method proposed not an elimination of the distance but a clearing of the view: take away the textual contaminants, remove the interfering scribal and typographical presence, and the autonomous original will appear before us.

This desire to bring into view what has been obscured by historical processes—to repair the wrecks of history by using a historical method—moved into a new and very different phase with the interventionist interpreters of Greg's rationale.

Having learned the lesson that authors who wish to make contact with an audience are fated, by laws of information theory, to have their messages more or less seriously garbled in the process, textual critics proposed to place the reader in an unmediated contact with the author. This project is of course manifestly impossible, a Heisenbergian dilemma, since some form of mediation is always occurring, not least in the editions produced by critical editors of various persuasions. Nevertheless, though everyone today recognizes this inherent limitation on all acts of communication, the idea persists in textual studies that a regression to authorial manuscripts will by itself serve to reduce textual contamination.

Two points must be made. In the first place, such a regression will not necessarily reduce contamination, but it will necessarily situate it differently. Furthermore, if printed forms follow manuscripts in the ancestral series, and if they are thereby fated to introduce fresh contamination in the process of transmission, they equally acquire the potential for decontamination, as the very project of textual criticism demonstrates. Author's works are typically clearer and more accessible when they appear in print. Besides, when an author is himself involved in the printing of his manuscript—when he proofs and edits—then the printed form will necessarily represent what might be called his final intentions, or "the text as the author wished to have it presented to the public." This position has been frequently maintained in actual practice, though Bowers heaps contempt upon it. It underlies Gaskell's untheorized rule that "in most cases the editor will choose as copy-text an early printed edition, not the manuscript."

But a second point must be made that is even more fundamental, for it approaches the theory of final intentions via an exposure of its ideological assumptions. Gaskell and
Thorpe are prominent among those who argue, as Tanselle puts it, "that the author’s intention encompasses the activities which take place in the step from manuscript (or typescript) to print and that the intention is not ‘final’ until the text conforms to the standards which will make it publishable."52 Unlike Bowers, Tanselle feels the force of this argument, but he rejects it in the end because—as he argues elsewhere—"an author’s manuscript stands a better chance of reflecting his wishes in accidentals than does a printed text."53

One may note in passing that an author’s intentions toward his manuscript may be quite different—have special aims and reflect special circumstances—from his intentions toward his published text. Each may represent what Zeller has called a "different version." But this is by the way. What needs to be emphasized is Tanselle’s idea that in matters of textual publication the author must be considered an autonomous authority. In this view, the textual critic is urged to produce an edition which most nearly reflects the author’s autonomously generated text, and the critical editor will seek this goal even if that text is not one which the author published or could have had published.

This is a theory of textual criticism founded in a Romantic ideology of the relations between an author, his works, his institutional affiliations, and his audience. It stands in the sharpest contrast with the theory implicit in the following statement by James Thorpe.

Various forces are always at work thwarting or modifying the author’s intentions. The process of preparing the work for dissemination to a public (whether that process leads to publication in printed form or production in the theatre or preparation of scribal copies) puts the work in the hands of persons who are professionals in the execution of the process. Similarly, the effort to recover a work of the past puts it in the hands of professionals known as textual critics, or editors. In all of these cases, the process must be adapted to the work at hand, and the work to the process. Sometimes through misunderstanding and sometimes through an effort to improve the work, these professionals substitute their own intentions for those of the author, who is frequently ignorant of their craft. Sometimes the author objects and sometimes not, sometimes he is pleased, sometimes he acquiesces, and sometimes he does not notice what has happened. The work of art is thus always tending toward a collaborative status, and the task of the textual critic is always to recover and preserve its integrity at that point where the authorial intentions seem to have been fulfilled.54

One must add to this—to keep the factual record clear—that authors sometimes positively seek the collaboration of publishers and their house editors in establishing the verbal format of their works. Byron is an exemplary instance of this case. Indeed, not only did Byron ask his press editor—chiefly William Gifford—for help in the final stages of revision, he even accepted the textual interventions of his chief amanuensis, Mary Shelley. When she copied works like Canto 3 of Childe Harold and the various cantos of Don Juan, she would regularly introduce alterations—mostly minor—into her copy. When Byron corrected this copy he would sometimes accept her changes and sometimes return to the original reading. Such instances of "collaboration" abound in all periods of literary production, as everyone recognizes, and I shall return to the Mary Shelley-Byron case a bit later.

But the collaboration of the author with the institutions of publishing is an activity which cannot be adequately understood if we focus merely on the textual evidence of such cooperative processes. Because literary works are
fundamentally social rather than personal or psychological products, they do not even acquire an artistic form of being until their engagement with an audience has been determined. In order to secure such an engagement, literary works must be produced within some appropriate set of social institutions, even if it should involve but a small coterie of amateurs. Blake perfectly exemplifies this fact about the nature of literary work precisely because he tried to produce his own work in deliberate defiance of his period’s normal avenues of publication. Blake retreated to a method of literary production which antedated even the patronage system of the eighteenth century. And as for the commercial system of his own day, this was an institution from which Blake early sought to gain his independence. His project is implicit in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,* and explicit in his 1793 "Prospectus."55

TO THE PUBLIC  October 10, 1793
The Labours of the Artist, the Poet, the Musician, have been proverbially attended by poverty and obscurity; this was never the fault of the Public, but was owing to a neglect of means to propagate such works as have wholly absorbed the Man of Genius. Even Milton and Shakespeare could not publish their own works.

This difficulty has been obviated by the Author of the following productions now presented to the Public; who has invented a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any before discovered, while it produces works at less than one fourth of the expense.

If a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet is a phenomenon worthy of public attention, provided that it exceeds in elegance all former methods, the Author is sure of his reward.

The Ideology of Final Intentions

* * *

The following are the Subjects of the several Works now published and on Sale at Mr. Blake's, No. 13, Hercules Buildings, Lambeth.

* * *

No Subscriptions for the numerous great works now in hand are asked, for none are wanted; but the Author will produce his works, and offer them to sale at a fair price.

Later—and specifically when he came under the influence of William Hayley—Blake swerved from his early radical project and sought to have his works published and distributed in the normal fashion.

The Profits arising from Publications are immense & I now have it in my power to commence publication with many very formidable works, which I have finish’d & ready. A Book price half a guinea may be got out at the Expense of Ten pounds & its almost certain profits are 500 G. I am only sorry that I did not know the methods of publishing years ago, & this is one of the numerous benefits I have obtain’d by coming here, for I should never have known the nature of Publication unless I had known H. & his connexions & his method of managing. It now would be folly to venture publishing.

New Vanities, or rather new pleasures, occupy my thoughts. New profits seem to arise before me so tempting that I have already involved myself in engagements that preclude all possibility of promising any thing. I have, however, the satisfaction to inform you that I have Myself begun to print an account of my various Inventions in Art, for which I have procured a Publisher.56
Blake's interest in working with, rather than apart from, the publishing institution of his period was actively pursued between 1803-8, but in the end withered because of the special character of his works. His letter to Dawson Turner of 9 June 1818 reflects his decision, in the final period of his life, to accept what was a fatality imposed upon him from the start, and by the very nature of his artistic productions.

Sir,
I send you a List of the different Works you have done me the honour to enquire after—unprofitable enough to me, tho' Expensive to the Buyer. Those I Printed for Mr Humphry are a selection from the different Books of such as could be Printed without the Writing, tho' to the Loss of some of the things. For they when Printed perfect accompany Poetical Personifications & Acts, without which Poems they never could have been Executed.

s.  d.
America . . . 18 Prints folio .......... 5  5  0
Europe . . . 17 do. folio ............. 5  5  0
Visions & . . . 8 do. folio ........... 3  3  0
Thel. . . . 6 do. Quarto ............. 2  2  0
Songs of Innocence 28 do. Octavo ..... 3  3  0
Songs of Experience 26 do. Octavo ..... 3  3  0
Urizen . . . 28 Prints Quarto.......... 5  5  0
Milton . . . 50 do. Quarto............. 10 10 0
12 Large Prints, Size of Each about 2 feet by 1 & 1/2,
    Historical & Poetical
    Printed in Colours . . Each .......... 5  5  0

These last 12 prints are unaccompanied by any writing. The few I have Printed & Sold are sufficient to have gained me great reputation as an Artist, which was the chief thing Intended. But I have never been able to produce a Sufficient number for a general Sale by means of a regular Publisher. It is therefore necessary to me that any Person wishing to have any or all of them should send me their Order to Print them on the above terms, & I will take care that they shall be done at least as well as any I have yet Produced.57

When Blake assumed the roles of author, editor, illustrator, publisher, printer, and distributor, he was plainly aspiring to become a literary institution unto himself. Unfortunately, he could not also assume the role of one crucial component of that institution as it existed in his period: the reviewer. As a consequence, his work reached only a small circle of his contemporaries. Also, his productive processes were such that he could not mass produce his works, so that his fame, his full appreciation and influence, had to await his death, and the intervention of a number of important persons who never even knew him. The mechanical reproduction of his rare original works was a final, splendid insult to the equally splendid principles of a genius. Had that insult never been delivered, Blake would have been no more than one of those who "bare of laurel . . . live, dream, and die."

When Keats wrote those words in order to distinguish between the poet and the inarticulate visionary (see "The Fall of Hyperion," lines 1-18), he meant to show that imaginative power needs a medium of communication. In social circumstances, and especially in the modern periods of mechanical reproduction, Keats's "fine spell of words" is a metaphor only, for words do not by themselves constitute a system of communication. Keats's "warm scribe my hand," on which he rested his hopes for fame, is equally a metaphor in such an
age, since the authority for the value of literary productions does not rest in the author's hands alone. Authority is a social nexus, not a personal possession; and if the authority for specific literary works is initiated anew for each new work by some specific artist, its initiation takes place in a necessary and integral historical environment of great complexity. Most immediately—and this is what concerns us here—it takes place within the conventions and enabling limits that are accepted by the prevailing institutions of literary production—conventions and limits which exist for the purpose of generating and supporting literary production. In all periods those institutions adapt to the special needs of individuals, including the needs of authors (some of whom are more comfortable with the institutions than others). But whatever special arrangements are made, the essential fact remains: literary works are not produced without arrangements of some sort.

One final remark on the authority assumed by the institutions of literary production. When we observe literary works from the special and narrowed focus of the textual critic, we tend to think that this issue of authority involves only people like author, amanuensis, publisher, editor, printer. Because of this special focus, textual critics conceive problems like "final intention" in the terms we have been observing, that is, as if the production of literary works—and hence the problem of the authority for various problematical readings—were a struggle between the pen of the author, the pencil of the editor, and the mechanized tools of the printer. But let us reflect for a moment on the case of Tennyson. This was a poet who frequently revised his work on the basis of the responses he received from a small circle of friends (at the trial proof stage) as well as from reviewers and the larger audience (at the publication stage). On whose authority were the changes made in the 1832 Poems, or in The Princess, or in Maud? Clearly, to ask such a question is to misconceive the nature of the problem, for the changes do not spring from a single fons et origo.
4. A Modern Instance: Editing Byron

A commonplace idea used to prevail that Byron—in the words of Paul Elmer More—"was perfectly reckless" about the accidentals of his poetry, so that the contemporary published works "represent the taste of Murray's advisers rather than that of the poet."58 An editor following the Bowers tradition might take this comment as a license to return to Byron's manuscripts for the copy-texts in a critical edition, since these "at least . . . reflect his, rather than someone else's, intentions."59 Being of a different school, however, More took the following line: "Since the old punctuation did not at all emanate from the poet, . . . no scruple has been felt in altering it as far as was desired." More's decision to modernize is not a fault, since he was not producing a critical edition; nor is that decision my principal interest at the moment. Rather, what strikes one is the peculiar area of agreement between More's position and that of Bowers: both assume that authority in these matters should lie with the author, whether he assumed that authority or not, and whether or not the conditions of authorship even permitted the assumption of such an autonomy. In fact, however, an author's work possesses autonomy only when it remains an unheard melody. As soon as it begins its passage to publication it undergoes a series of interventions which some textual critics see as a process of contamination, but which may equally well be seen as a process of training the poem for its appearances in the world.
This training, or contamination, begins with the author’s first revisions and editorial corrections, and it continues through the proof stage, the publication, and the subsequent reprints both during and after the poet’s lifetime. Many persons besides the author are engaged in these events, and the entire process constitutes the life of an important social institution at the center of which is the literary work itself (the “work” being a series of specific “texts,” a series of specific acts of production, and the entire process which both of these series constitute). For the textual critic, all phases and aspects of these matters are relevant.40

In Byron’s case, certain elements in this complex network assume particular importance for the textual critic. Throughout his life Byron sought editorial help with his poetry, so that people like R. C. Dallas, J. C. Hobhouse, Thomas Moore, his publisher John Murray, and Murray’s chief editor William Gifford all exerted a significant impact upon Byron’s literary work. Perhaps even more interesting is the influence of Mary Shelley on so much of Byron’s work written after he left England in 1816.61 She was one among a number of people who served as Byron’s amanuenses at various periods of his life. She was one of the most important ones, however, not merely because she made the press copies for many of Byron’s most important works, but also because she sometimes altered Byron’s drafts. The changes she introduced into her fair copies were both substantive and accidental, and in the end many of them appeared in the original editions. Byron was of course well aware of her interventions: he sometimes corrected back to his initial readings, he sometimes accepted her readings, and occasionally he produced a new reading altogether.

My interest in these matters is not so much in the final editorial decisions which one would have to make about these different readings, nor even in the reasons for such eventual choices. Rather, I want to draw attention to the structure of the situation which such a procedure reveals. Here certain relations are prevailing between author and copyist which are not purely mechanical. Furthermore, both author and copyist understand and operate within the accepted terms of the relationship: Byron and Mary Shelley continued to work in this way from 1816 until he left Italy for Greece in 1823. Indeed, their relationship is nothing less than a paradigm which operates through all periods of Byron’s literary career, and with all persons in his literary world who had a hand in publishing his poetry.

Furthermore, all the historical evidence suggests that this is the structure which normally prevails between authors and the literary institutions within which they operate. From the (mostly) anonymous scribes of the Middle Ages to the famous cases of the twentieth century—Maxwell Perkins, for example, or The Autobiography of Malcolm X—authors and their literary agents (or employers) have collaborated to varying degrees in the transmission of literary works. Sometimes these relationships operate smoothly, sometimes the author will struggle against every sort of intervention, and between these two extremes falls every sort of variation. Nevertheless, as soon as a person begins writing for publication, he or she becomes an author, and this means—by (historical) definition—to have entered the world of all those who belong to the literary institution. Blake’s decision to seek complete freedom from that institution, though futile, is nonetheless an important limiting case, for it sharply underscores the determining authority of the institution. Indeed, Blake’s personal freedom from that social authority has become valuable to us, and to society at large, only when the institution found it possible, after Blake’s death, to acquire greater authority over his
works, and thereby to save them from oblivion.

When we speak of the working relations which exist between author and publishing institutions, we obviously do not mean to suggest that final authority for literary works rests with institutional persons other than the author. Authors are traditionally protective of their works when they deliver them over to the persons who must publish them. Chaucer's famous injunction to his scribe and the copyright laws have much in common. Such authorial concerns are a necessary function of the set of relations which prevail in literary production. The point to be emphasized, however, is that those relations of production do not sanction a theory of textual criticism based upon the concept of the autonomy of the author. "Final authority" for literary works rests neither with the author nor with his affiliated institution; it resides in the actual structure of the agreements which these two cooperating authorities reach in specific cases.

5. Final Intentions and Textual Versions

Because of the special historical circumstances under which textual criticism has developed, the crucial problem facing the editor of modern texts has come to involve a determination of final intentions, as we have seen. This problem has to be solved because its solution enables the editor who works under the prevailing rules to decide upon a copy-text for his critical edition. According to the Gaskell-Thorpe line of reasoning, the first edition will normally be chosen as copy-text because it lies closest to "the text as the author wanted it to be read." But the Bowers position is that the author's manuscript is a higher authority—is closer to the author's final intentions—since it does not contain any of the contaminations produced during the work's passage through the press.

These rival positions share the view that the rule of final intentions will govern the choice of copy-text. My argument here is that such decisions need not finally depend upon any concept of author's intentions at all. Greg does not employ such a concept in his rationale at least partly because he understood so well the social and historical circumstances under which Shakespeare's texts were produced. Because the concept of author's intentions does not find a clear and unambiguous purchase in the reality of those productive circumstances, it cannot be used as the ultimate measure for determining editorial decisions.
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When editors are dealing with later works, however, decisions about copy-text have increasingly come to involve determinations about authorial intentions. This situation has evolved in response to the received textual materials on the one hand, and on the other to the literary conditions which came to prevail in the more recent periods. This we have already observed. In the recent evolution of the theory of intentions, however, the concept has come to be used not merely as a determinant (and it should only be one among several such determinants in any case) of copy-text, but as a guide to the choice of which version of a text we choose to work from. This guide is invoked for works produced in the later modern periods because of the mass of documentary evidence which frequently presents itself to the critic. But sorting through this material with the aid of a concept like authorial intentions frequently only adds confusion to the analysis. Furthermore, it is a concept whose theoretical assumptions tend to obscure the very nature of the problems an editor has to deal with. The concept can be confusing because it hypothesizes two related phenomena which do not and cannot exist: an autonomous author, and an ideal ("finally intended") text. I have already gone into the problems involved in the concept of the autonomous author. Let me turn now to the second matter.

The idea of a finally intended text corresponds to the "lost original" which the textual critics of classical works sought to reconstruct by recension. Both are "ideal texts"—that is to say, they do not exist in fact—but in each case the critics use this ideal text heuristically, as a focussing device for studying the extant documents. Both classical and modern editors work toward their ideal text by a process of recension that aims to approximate the Ideal as closely as possible. Both are termini ad quem which, though not strictly reachable, enable the critic to isolate and remove accumulated error.

For the critic of modern texts, the classical model upon which his own procedures are based frequently does not suit the materials he is studying, and has often served, in the end, to confuse his procedures. Because this textual critic actually possesses the "lost originals" which the classical critic is forced to hypothesize, his concept of an ideal text reveals itself to be—paradoxically—a pure abstraction, whereas the classical critic’s ideal text remains, if "lost," historically actual. Modern editors who possess a large body of prepublication materials therefore stand in an entirely different relation to the editorial situation than do their classical counterparts.

The classical editor’s copy-text (in McKerrow’s "general sense") is chosen following an analysis of the reconstructed stemma. Copy-text serves the editor as a means of arranging his apparatus and of adjudicating textual cruxes when reason and learning fail. In short, it helps to isolate possible corruptions when the documentation cannot positively decide the issue. But the editor of modern texts does not typically work in the sort of darkness that surrounds the classical editor, or the editors of an author like Langland. In such cases, the problem of textual corruption is of an order of magnitude so vastly different from the problem as it appears in modern texts that it amounts to an entirely different sort of problem. Critics who actually use the classical model for editing modern works, then, set themselves to the wheel of an error-removing process which has no proper application to the documents and circumstances, and which, as a result, tends to obscure from view the special character of their editorial problems. For the editor of late modern works especially, the first and crucial problem is not how to discover corruptions, but how to distinguish and finally choose between textual versions. Stemmatics is a straightforward matter here since the
"ancestral series" is relatively unmarked by terrible gaps, obscurities, and ambiguous relations. The wide range of published and prepublished textual forms which the modern editor has at his disposal corresponds to various sorts of "intention" conceived by the author alone, or by the author working in concert with the literary institution of his time and place. Under these conditions, the critical editor is not normally seeking an author's final intentions, since he does not need such an ideal text in the same way and for the same reasons that the editor of classical texts does. On the contrary, the editor of modern texts is typically concerned to distinguish the type and character of actual, achieved, and largely uncorrupted textual forms. Hans Zeller's concept of textual versions is an effort to come to grips with this special fact about modern texts, and to offer a means of marking out the distinctive features of the several versions of a particular work.

A parenthetical remark in Gaskell's discussion of "textual bibliography" calls attention to the same problem.

It is an anomaly of bibliographical scholarship today that, while much effort is expended on the textual bibliography of nineteenth-century books of which the early texts differ from each other only in minor and frequently trivial ways, books of which we have texts in several widely different forms are either avoided by editors or edited in a single version. This may be because the methods evolved for the textual bibliography of Shakespeare, where minor variation is seldom trivial, can be applied to the first class of book but not to the second.67

Gaskell is certainly right when he says that a model from Shakespearean studies has been allowed to obscure some of the central problems in the textual criticism of modern works.

Indeed, fresh advances in the theory of textual criticism have been slow to come because we have failed to grasp the special sorts of problem raised by such works.

Another example from Byron may prove useful. The Giaour, as I noted earlier, descends to us in a complex number of prepublication and published forms. In this respect it is typical of the extant documentation for Byron's earlier works. The most important of these are the holograph draft (344 lines), the fair copy (375 lines), the trial proof (453 lines), the first edition (684 lines), second edition (816 lines), third edition, first issue (950 lines) and second issue (1,014 lines), fourth edition (1,048 lines), fifth edition (1,215 lines), and seventh edition (1,334 lines). Among these early published texts Byron corrected press for the first, third, fifth, and seventh editions. The work passed through fourteen editions between 1813 and 1815, and the system of accidentals established in the first edition was completely overhauled in the third, fifth, seventh, and thirteenth editions.

According to received theory (and Gaskell agrees with Bowers in this matter), copy-text will be decided on a judgment about Byron's final intentions toward his work's accidentals. But the facts plainly demonstrate that the very concept of final intentions has only a minor relevance in this situation. One might argue that an eclectic text should be constructed on the basis of the first edition, with the later additions and revisions incorporated from the subsequent editions or manuscripts. But the result of such a process would be a text marked throughout by "accidental" distractions—variations in styles of punctuation and capitalization which result from different and competing accidental systems (the early editions tend to a rhetorical style of punctuation, where the later grow increasingly syntactical and tightly organized).
The purely textual facts in this case conceal—or rather encode—the story of a complex set of developing relationships between Byron, John Murray and his publishing agents, and Byron's readers of 1812-15. Threading through the story are various arbitrary elements and events, some of which we know a great deal about, some of which we do not. Various typesetters were used to set the poem and its many additions, and various people proofed it at different times. The poem's readers and reviewers were another important influence upon the work's development and process of accretion. For that matter, why Byron ceased adding new passages to the poem after the seventh edition is by no means apparent, anymore than we can now see clearly why Byron did not proof the second or the fourth (or even the thirteenth) edition when he took the trouble about the others. Furthermore, while the extant documentation for this work is massive, we do not know how carefully Byron proofed the later editions, although it is clear that he proofed more than simply the new additions to each of the new printings.

In general, the poem's early composition, publication, and reception histories testify to the development of a work whose accidentals, and sometimes even whose substantives, were introduced into the work by a poet unusually responsive to his immediate literary environment. From the outset Byron accepts the general terms of the publishing institution of his day— that is, the division of labor against which Blake had been so vigorously revolting. Beyond this, he maintains and he delegates authority, gives it away (willingly or passively), and sometimes reassumes it again, in whole or in part. Byron of course always remains the poem's "author," but the critical concept of textual authority is not one which can be easily superimposed upon his autonomous historical self. Furthermore, the critical concepts of authorial intentions and final intentions lose their precision and neat applicability under the conditions which I have been summarizing. Several sorts of purpose and intention impinge on the poem, and Byron's textual intentions occasionally disappear under the pressure of other people's. As regards the poem's substance, "final intentions" seems to be a relatively determinate matter (it is not always so), but as regards the poem's accidentals one can reasonably doubt that Byron ever had any final intentions, or whether his intentions were determinate at any point in the process of the poem's production. In a case of this kind, Greg is a better guide to an editorial practice than is Bowers.

The situation illustrates what Zeller had in mind when he spoke of works existing in different versions. Although I have presented The Giaour as an example of a problem in copy-text rather than a problem of versions, the structure of the situation which generates the editorial problem is the same as that which Zeller has called attention to. His proposal is that the editor must analyze textual variations not in an atomic and seriatim fashion, but systemically, since each work—each text of a work—"consists not of its elements but of the relationships between them." Such relationships appear to the critic as purely textual formations, whereas in fact the textual relationships are only the signs of others, and will be understood only in terms of those underlying relationships. When texts are "established" in the process of literary production, they typically emerge not in simple ancestral series, but in lateral divergence patterns. As these various texts are descriptively distinguished, the critic's task will not normally be to choose version and copy-text on the basis of final intentions. In making his judgment the critic will obviously take authorial intentions into account, but only because those intentions help to illuminate the contours of the generic
structural patterns and relationships which define the several constitutions of a particular work. The received textual forms reflect the achieved results of an actual literary production; typically, the forms represent divergent patterns of varying purposes and intentions rather than an ancestral series in which we are trying to track down the author’s final intentions.

Were we dealing with psychological rather than social phenomena, we could properly say that the forms reflect authorial intentions. But a textual history is a psychic history only because it is first a social history. This is not a metaphysical fact about literary works, but one which is functionally related to and determined by the purposes of literary works, on the one hand, and the programs which seek to study them on the other. The stories one may extract from a textual history are sometimes psychological stories, as we may particularly observe in the case of authorial manuscripts. But even there, especially in the fair copy manuscripts, the stories reflect social interactions and purposes, and as soon as we begin to study the proofs and the editions the psychological focus begins to recede into a subplot. We enter the world of textual versions where intentions are plainly shifting and changing under the pressure of various people and circumstances.

The early textual history of *The Giaour*, as outlined above, does not tell a story of textual contamination then. Of course, textual contaminations occur frequently throughout that early productive process, and another history would be able to tell the story of such contaminations. But the history as given above is primarily a schematic outline of the factors affecting the development of the earliest versions of *The Giaour*. It reveals the systematic transformation which all literary works undergo in their production. Those transformations—what I have called above the "achieved results" of an actual productive process—involve the translation of an initially psychological phenomenon (the "creative process") into a social one (the literary work).