Access

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Abstract

Digital editions have some distinct features that are not present in digital libraries. Therefore it is somewhat worrisome that there are far more digital libraries than digital editions. This essay argues that the reason for this is not only a pressure towards all-inclusiveness but also the fact that scholarly editions are addressing both scholars and common readers, each of them having their own expectations of what a digital edition should actually offer. The essay suggests that we should get away from the idea of access to data as the principal merit of the edition and suggests a model of criticism instead, meaning that editors should represent their work as providing critical points of view on the texts they are offering, with their actual contents thrown in.

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This essay was written in 1997. It has not been significantly updated but reflects that particular moment in the debate on electronic text.

1 Digital Editions and Digital Libraries

One way we can sum up the goal of the scholarly editions we create is to use the term 'access': we want to give people access to particular textual materials and to particular understandings of those materials. Because computers facilitate new ways of providing such access, they have become of central importance in what we do. But although nearly every editorial project is now built on computer processing, there are not all that many electronic editions coming out. The electronic texts that are being published almost all reprint books without making analyses of their texts. Or, to use a different set of terms, we have a lot of digital libraries, but not many digital editions. Both approaches are important, but digital editions have distinctive features that are not present in digital libraries, and their scarcity is worrisome.

By 'digital edition' I mean a scholarly edition published in electronic form. As a scholarly edition, it must provide more than just a good digital reproduction of some piece of text; it tries to survey all relevant sources for a particular work, and to make an attempt to understand the bibliographic situation beyond the obvious (and perhaps misleading) facts of the text. That analysis might be directed to establishing a new text, or just to improving our understanding of the various texts we have already. It almost always needs to be based on more than just the immediate verbal or visual information in the texts: it might draw on studies of the physical embodiments of the texts, of the textual information itself, or of historical records. To give an example: it is one thing to reprint the text of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and it is another to emend errors in the play's text, or to make an argument about its authorship. These last two activities depend on argument that goes beyond the facts preserved in the original publication. It is a perfectly respectable thing to provide an accurate transcription or photographic reproduction of one copy of a book, and in many cases those tasks require a considerable amount of scholarly expertise and judgment, but the potential achievements of these tasks are different from those that are possible in a scholarly edition.

A 'digital library', as the term is used in the world today, and as I will use it, does not involve any

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analysis; it is devoted to reproducing existing books, but not to any critical or bibliographical analysis. Our new digital libraries—like the ones that are sold by companies like Chadwyck-Healey, or those being operated out of universities, such as the various projects at the University of Michigan and the University of Virginia—are digital continuations of the microfilm tradition, and they have strengths and weaknesses similar to those of the great microfilm series created since the 1930s, such as the STC and Wing series from University Microfilms. Those series have often been based on existing compilations or catalogues, and so have had a sound scholarly basis; and they have made those existing resources more valuable by improving access to the primary sources. At the same time, the economic basis of these projects requires that they do things quickly and inexpensively, and inevitably there are errors. The STC microfilm series once represented an 1810 type-facsimile as a copy of a book published two centuries earlier, for example (see the note on item 774 in the revised STC).[1] Such errors are easier to correct in a digital library than in a print or microfilm publication; but it is still the case that these digital libraries are based on an approach that involves reproducing a lot of information and not analyzing it very much. The standard at which they aim is accurate reproduction of correctly identified items, and not thorough study. Most of the work involved can be done by programmers, typists, and clerks with no special expertise in the subject area, and it has proven successful and feasible for commercial organizations to produce such microfilm series and digital libraries with advice from, but not the extensive involvement of, scholars.

My distinction, then, can be made in a practical way: the digital library can be created by workers who have no special knowledge of the material, and indeed may not know the language it is written in; given proper instructions, photographic reproduction and sometimes even transcription may be done by such workers. In terms of the ends of each approach, we can see the difference as that between a focus on data and a focus on understanding, or between breadth and depth. Both approaches are important, but of course for our purposes as textual scholars digital editions are more interesting. And the difference in the present fortunes of these two approaches therefore deserves some thought. There is a vast amount of digital-library work; even at the level of individual activity, leaving aside the large projects I have alluded to, there are lots of people putting texts on the Web and not too many doing it in a way that reflects much knowledge of editing. For, in the popular mind, the distinction I have made between digital libraries and digital editions does not exist, and that is because a knowledge of the existence of the second type, or of scholarly editing in general as a distinct practice, is not very common in the popular mind. (And, for reasons I will be getting to in a moment, when I say 'popular' I am including in that category most people in most humanities departments in the world of higher education.) There are ways in which digital editions are especially advantageous, beyond the advantages they provide in a digital library; and yet we do not see many of these editions appearing (though I will be looking at some exceptions). People working on digital editions are also (one observes) in many cases rather pessimistic these days about the whole thing, whereas digital libraries seem to be booming. And not too many people really think that the dearth of digital editions is a problem; and that is a problem.

Why are things like this? One reason is practical: creating digital editions is expensive, technically difficult, and time-consuming, just as was the case with scholarly editions published on paper. But this is a dispiriting subject, so I am not going to discuss it. The aspect of the question that interests me more is this: what is it about the situation that tends to encourage the digital library (or access to data) and discourages the digital edition (or access to understanding)? I do not feel that the generally greater expense and difficulty of creating the digital edition compared to paper editions is a complete explanation; the digital-library world is noteworthy for apparently attracting a good deal of money from somewhere, and certainly many of these projects are of remarkable size. There are, I think, some problems with the nature of what we do as editors, and with what people think we do as editors, and with what people think they want us to do.

2 The Problem of the Two Audiences

One source of our problems is in our tradition of how we do editions, so I am going to devote part of my space to print editions. And because the series of conferences in Toronto for which this essay was originally written has a tradition of ranging across times, places, and subjects a lot more broadly than most discussions of editing do, I should stress that this discussion focuses on how we have edited English-language texts over the last 50 years or so—so that 'we' refers to people who have been doing that particular kind of work. Much of my analysis may not apply to people working on other languages, or on very different sorts of texts, because editing is an activity that can become almost unrecognizable when it is carried on in fields just a short distance from your own.

We have a major problem as editors of English-language texts, which I am going to call the problem of the two audiences. When we create editions, we are thinking about readers in two disciplines: readers who are editors, and readers who are not editors but who study English-language literature. And we prefer not to think that the front of the book is for common readers and the back of the book is for the editors. We all want our readers to look not only at the texts we have established but also at our textual commentaries and notes; we do not want those parts to be treated as being just for other editors. But scholars in any field are inclined to address, first of all, other scholars of the same type: literary critics write for literary critics, historians for historians, and so on. They usually assume a knowledge of the field as background—because it is not always easy to articulate the assumptions about evidence and argumentation that are current in one's field, it can require a lot of space, and it is often socially inappropriate. When you address the other members of a community, you do sometimes stress shared beliefs as a way of sustaining that community, but you also cannot list every belief, or mention them every time. Readers hardly expect every essay in literary criticism to begin with an argument about the nature and value of literary criticism. Or, in this essay, if I had to explain the whole background to questions about editing that I raise, I did never get past the introduction.

And English-language editing in the period I am speaking of has unquestionably advanced farther than ever before towards being a discipline quite distinct from other forms of literary study, while still retaining the need to speak to a popular audience. This is why when I say 'the popular audience' or 'the common reader' I am referring to a class that includes many scholars; if they have not had any involvement or interest in editing, they are outside the audience of editors, and belong only to the other audience. And while editors are generally aware that they are addressing both editors and common readers—that their editions are works of popularization as well as pure scholarly communications—it is not actually easy to keep this in mind or to put it into practice. Making editions that work for both editors and for the popular audience will always be tricky, and moving into the digital world does not really make it much easier. The problem is more than just that of being interdisciplinary, as editing is, since there are many interdisciplinary fields that wind up turning into nearly independent disciplines, without retaining the obligation to speak to outsiders in the ordinary course of work. The field of 'literature and science' is like this, for example: there is a society organized around this field of study, there are conferences, journals, standard approaches, eminent leaders and rising stars, and so forth, and it is quite possible for a scholar to work mainly within that world and not worry very much about opinion in the rest of the scholarly world. But a scholarly editor is still always expected to serve a larger community that may not—and, at present, usually does not—take any great interest in the discipline of editing. The situation is quite like the tense relationship between certain parts of the humanities-computing world and the humanities at large: that of producers and a bigger class they are expected to serve. Service is not a function that is held in high regard by humanities scholars; it is useful and necessary but not well rewarded.

There has been some discussion of this problem, notably Peter Shillingsburg's discussion of how editorial apparatus has (in English-language editing

over the past 50 years) often not focused on the information that matters to readers: it has tended to focus on the activity of the editor rather than on the shaping of the text by those involved in its original creation and dissemination. That is, many editions have offered access to the wrong thing.[2] My discussion is both more mundane and more generalized, and proceeds by way of a look at some features of a few print editions. The two-audience problem is not going to go away with digital editions, so having some idea of this historic problem with editions will be useful to us; and, while I have noticed some of these problems in digital editions, most of those editions are still works in progress, and I feel it is more appropriate to discuss editions whose creators have had plenty of time to reflect on their work and modify their approach if necessary. And although I am going to do a lot of complaining about print editions, let me stress that I have chosen only to talk about very good editions; it is easy to find flawed work in any field of scholarship, but what is interesting are the lingering flaws in the best work, not the masses of flaws in the bad stuff. I am also quite aware that the practical problem of limited space has been a factor influencing some of the failings I am going to discuss: so that editors may often have wanted to do otherwise, and they likely anticipated my views in many cases, but were not given the extra pages they needed. As we will see, though, there are problems that wide-open spaces can solve, and problems that they do not have much to do with; keeping our popular readership in mind is not really easier in the digital world.

3 Understanding the Apparatus

Let me begin with elementary practical problems and later move on to some deeper questions.

In English-language editing, the most obvious problems that the popular audience has with editions stem from the apparatus, and such problems frequently have the undesirable effect of leading readers to ignore the apparatus or consider it too hard to use. I am referring to things at a lower intellectual level than the questions of selection and arrangement that Peter Shillingsburg focused on; I mean things like finding the apparatus and figuring out what it is supposed to be doing, which is necessary before you can come to any conclusion about whether the information matters to you or not. A body of writing that touches on these problems already exists: many reviews of editions talk about practical difficulties with using them, and Donald Reiman's *Romantic Texts and Contexts* collects several good ones.[3] And there is a rather disturbing article by Joseph Dane, on a study he made that involved collecting press-variant information from a large number of editions of Renaissance plays: he found that he could not use the information from a few of these because the information was not well presented or just did not make any sense.[4] That says something about the problem any ordinary reader potentially faces: Dane's work is moderately difficult analytical bibliography, devoted to clarifying our picture of part of the early printing process; how well could we expect general readers to cope?

One way of exploring this question is to consider what some editions have done to explain their workings to their readers. Here is an investigation that produces some odd results: in their apparatus, a great many editions use a square bracket to separate the reading displayed in the text from other readings found in various sources; but how many of them actually explain this usage? (Or, for that matter, any of the other usages the square bracket is put to: it may separate the correct from the incorrect, the earlier from the later, the modernized from the unmodernized, the reading of one authoritative document from that of another, or the reading of the text from an explanation of the reading, among other things.) If you look at editions of Renaissance plays, you will find very few that provide any explanation of this symbol; it is simply assumed that you know what it means. (Major current series that print no explanation, and that have plenty of space to accommodate it because they only publish one play in each volume, include the Revels Plays, the New Mermaids, the New Cambridge Shakespeare, and the Oxford Shakespeare.) But if you look at editions of American literature published within the last 50 years, it usually *is* explained—where it is used at all, since a number of such editions (the Northwestern–Newberry edition of Melville, for example)

use a tabular layout for apparatus that avoids the need for such a symbol altogether. The reason, I believe, is that editions of Renaissance plays assume a tradition of editorial presentation which goes back quite some time, and which is therefore—at least for an editor—so much of an implicit assumption that it does not often occur to anyone to explain it. But the boom in critical editing of American literature was conducted in opposition to traditional editorial treatments of those works, so editors were more likely to think that some explanations were needed. Even Renaissance editors, when they do introduce conscious innovations in apparatus, will typically take the trouble to explain it; this is the practice, for example, of Fredson Bowers in his edition of Dekker's works.[5]

The Dekker edition is also interesting because it does more than just provide definitions of the meaning of various symbols: it prints a few examples and then provides prose explanations of what they mean. This may seem like an obvious thing to do, if you want people to read and understand your apparatus, but it is actually quite rare.[6] Several other editions (of the random sample I have gone back to look at) are outstanding in this respect. Edward Connery Lathem's edition of Robert Frost's poems in 1969 did include examples, as did David Womersley's edition of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in 1994: both were trade publications whose expected audience was not solely academic.[7] Peter Robinson's edition on CD-ROM of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* provides good examples in its introductory matter, and also provides explanations of what you are looking at whenever you get a display of variants of any kind.[8] And the Pennsylvania edition of Dreiser's works, of which Neda M. Westlake is the general editor and James L. W. West III is the textual editor, clearly has a deliberate policy of explaining its apparatus with examples. This even happens in the edition of Dreiser's *American Diaries*, in which the only apparatus present is a very short list of minor emendations to the manuscript, and the only notation to explain is the unambiguous use of the square bracket to mean 'emended from'.[9]

What you find in a lot of editions that do explain their symbols fully, but without examples, is a table showing their meaning, or a few paragraphs that run very quickly through that material without going into the intention behind the approach used. The feeling one often gets from these approaches, especially the second one, is that of fine print: of something that provides a legalistic accounting of details about what is going on that you are not really expected to read or be able to follow, and that is also not really going to be very new or striking, but instead is a terse summary of the usual arrangement. Examples of this approach would include the William James and F. Scott Fitzgerald editions. This way of doing things has the merit of many editions of the last few decades more generally: the merit that the relevant facts and editorial procedures are much more fully documented than was common before. It has the disadvantage of making the editorial work appear to not be the reader's business, whereas what the Dreiser edition does is more like an invitation to look at the texts along with the editor.

4 The Implicit Boundaries Respected by Editions

But let us look beyond this question, about the way readers are addressed by the textual discussions in editions, to the implicit attitude towards works conveyed by the larger question of the content of the editorial material, and the impression readers might get from that material of what the editors think about the work. Consider the selection of things that an edition does, and that are discussed in its apparatus. The nature of this selection is usually very strongly influenced by traditions and theories of editing, but since the common reader is not typically aware of those, is outside the discipline of editing, he or she may be quite puzzled. An example that is worth looking at is the edition of John Dewey's works, of which Jo Ann Boydston was the general editor; one reason for this choice is Boydston's observation a few years back, when this edition was nearly completed, that nobody seemed to make use of its apparatus.[10]

Dewey in his writing often quotes from other books. We editors all recognize the importance,

when writers quote, of tracking down their sources and comparing the texts, and as this is a good edition it does that and reports the results in a special section of the apparatus. In a great many cases the editors were able to check these quotations in books from Dewey's own library. But now here is what I think may look strange to some readers. Dewey sometimes quotes accurately and sometimes he does not. When he quotes accurately, there is of course no need to tell the reader what the text as it appeared in his source was. So the Dewey edition only has notes on the source and text of a quotation in those cases where Dewey quoted inaccurately. In other words, the editors know where all the quotations came from, but they only *tell* the reader in some cases. For example, Dewey has an essay about Emerson that contains twenty-five quotations, but only eight get identified in the apparatus.[11] Now, I do not think it is hard to imagine that a lot of readers would find it useful to know the sources of the quotations, and that this *partial* identification of those sources is likely to be frustrating and baffling to such readers. It is easy to recognize why the Dewey edition is like this. It is respecting very strictly a boundary between textual work and the other kinds of things you could provide in an edition—in this case, the boundary between establishing a text and writing an explanatory commentary; it is following in the footsteps of Bowers's Dekker edition, which contained no critical introductions or explanatory notes; and it is trying to save space.[12] The Dewey edition, at least, did have critical and historical introductions in most volumes, and about halfway through the edition they began to add some modest explanatory notes. But the boundary which is so important to the design of this edition, especially in its earlier years, is one that exists only within the discipline of textual scholarship. To philosophers, educators, literary critics, almost any of the people who might be reading this edition because of their interest in Dewey, that boundary does not exist. There is no reason for them to expect or imagine this kind of restriction of scope, and the inclination would be to regard explanatory notes as generally more useful than textual discussions. Instead of perceiving the boundary, such readers will more likely read the apparatus as expressing what the editors think about the texts as *works*, and will be rather puzzled to find almost no discussion of philosophy, education, and so on. And the natural conclusion would be that the editors do not know or care about those things, only about matters such as line-end hyphenation: because, you would think, if they did care about the content of these works they would be writing about them.

It is important more generally to think about the question of how we present our interests and our work: I have spoken about the problem of understanding unexplained symbols, or forbidding explanations, or peculiar-looking selections of information, but there are even simpler sorts of problems for the common reader. Editions often fail to state rather crucial things about what they are up to: the Bowers Dekker, and the Oxford Shakespeare (in its single-volume edition of 1986), both failed to explain important things about the intended scope of the publication, and some readers were puzzled because they did not know about the plan to publish separate volumes of explanatory notes (in the Dekker case) or of textual apparatus (in the Shakespeare case). The front matter is fairly important in an edition, but it is also something you usually do last, and may have little control over, since it is at this point that the publishers take over the production. That may also explain some cases in which things are done that obviously make a bad impression. There is a fine edition of a novel by William Dean Howells, *The Quality of Mercy*, that has a section of explanatory notes that must have caused readers other than myself to laugh out loud upon seeing it: the text of this novel that is several hundred pages long is followed, in the Indiana edition, by an opening that contains a single explanatory note, two lines long, under the heading 'Note to the Text', facing a blank page.[13] Paul Skinner's edition of Ford Madox Ford's *No Enemy* also has a single explanatory note, but since it is printed as a footnote to the text it does not stand out in the same way.[14] (Electronic publications are even more prone to such problems, because they are often not created for display on fixed screen sizes but are formatted dynamically, and so the actual display any reader gets of a

particular section of the publication is not likely to have been checked over by anyone.)

5 The Editor's Interests in the Text

The examples I have given illustrate cases of success within the discipline of scholarly editing and failure as popularization. All of these cases admit of improvement: the discipline does not prohibit explanatory or critical commentaries, after all. But I do not believe it is always possible to resolve the conflicting demands of the two readerships; the point I wish to make is not merely that in electronic editions we need to keep these two audiences in mind and avoid some of the infelicities of earlier editions, but that there are certain impasses that we cannot avoid. This is particularly evident when we confront the problem of showing the relationship among multiple versions of a text. I think we would agree that the ideal common reader for our editions would take a great interest in all versions, would be eager to compare them and think about their relationships and so forth. However, the demands of writing in the discipline push in an opposite direction, towards conveying the message that we as textual critics already know all about the nature and relationships of the texts, and that there is no need for our readers to get involved in those questions.

Let me return to the Dreiser edition for an illustration. You may have heard about controversies regarding the *Sister Carrie* volume, turning on whether an edition of this novel should be based on the manuscript or on later typescripts or the first edition. There are articulate partisans of both the manuscript and the first edition. Now, here is how James West begins his discussion of the issue in his edition:

> The selection of copy-text for *Sister Carrie* is simple. Dreiser's manuscript of the novel automatically becomes the base text for this edition. No other choice is possible: the typescript was corrupted by Anna Mallon's typists and was revised and cut by Sara Dreiser and Arthur Henry. The first printing was further flawed by editorial interference and censoring by Doubleday, Page and Company. Only the manuscript preserves the original text of *Sister Carrie*, the text that was most nearly under Dreiser's complete control.[15]

The selection of copy-text is simple; it is *automatic*. The other texts are corrupt or flawed or censored. All of this conveys a pretty strong message that the case is quite settled and you do not want to waste time with those bad texts. West goes on to talk about the need to work with them for various reasons, but this opening impression is still going to be pretty powerful. To sum it up: the case sounds very certain, and would seem to actively discourage a reader's further investigation of the matter.

People have talked about this problem before, but typically within the framework of the old controversy about whether bibliography is a science; there is an excellent discussion of the bibliographer's mantle of science in Laurie Maguire's book *Shakespearean Suspect Texts*.[16] However, James West is not a scholar who talks about science a lot or who in my observation tries to claim a scientific authority for his work; there is certainly none of that in this particular book. And the passage above is different from many in textual introductions because it does not use much technical language: it is reasonably accessible to general readers. Here is what I think is going on, and why this is quite a difficult problem to handle: the passage is strongly worded because West has strong feelings about Dreiser's novel and the text he believes is superior. The idea many ordinary readers may have of editing is like the man in the street's idea of scholarship: that it is dry and passionless; but we all know that passions can run high in our field, and that passion is an important driving force behind the work that gets done. And consequently a textual scholar studying a particular work is simply very likely to develop strong feelings about the textual questions, and, no less than the literary critic, the historian, the linguist, or the physicist, will express these views using the means of persuasion available within the discipline's rhetorical tradition. But the effect of such an expression on those outside the field may be rather different. A textual scholar reading the account of *Sister Carrie* knows that of course all the witnesses mentioned are important, and that

the question of copy-text actually is a question; the common reader does not have the right kind of background knowledge and so does not realize any of this.

It is not feasible to say, do not be rhetorical, do not just argue your position but talk about them all. This is equivalent to saying that editing is not a scholarly or intellectual endeavor, but is just the transmission of certain data—and even if that were so, we will find that data itself involves difficult issues.

6 The Problems with Data

One approach to dealing with multiple audiences is to provide a different edition to each audience, varying the nature of the textual discussions and apparatus, rather than trying to make one work for all. We have seen some of this in the world of editing, but it has generally been done by lopping off the apparatus and giving what remains to the general reader. This is not satisfactory except from a bleakly practical standpoint, since it only reinforces the idea that the stuff at the back of the book does not really matter too much. If we want all readers to pursue an interest in the textual situation, and if we want to facilitate their access to our understanding of that situation, this is the wrong way to go about it.

This is also an approach that was unfortunate because it encouraged the idea that editions were there to provide access to data. And data is strange stuff; or, at any rate, the ideas that people develop about data are strange. If we shift our attention now to readers, and consider their feelings about data, we can understand better some of the pressures impelling us towards the digital library, and making it more difficult for us to interest readers in the things that are distinctive about our digital editions. If you look at some of the feelings that are common about the World Wide Web and about digital libraries, you find (to summarize broadly) that two sentiments come up a great deal: people want everything, and they also want nothing (or almost nothing).

People want everything: it is an oddly common belief that *everything* is there on the Web somewhere, that it includes all important data of every kind; and a modified form of this belief that is also common is that everything *ought* to be on the Web. In the realm of scholarly editing, you frequently see this kind of thinking also: if you ask what an edition ought to include, and suggest that it might or might not include this or that version or work or document, you will not hear too many people asking that it be left out. There is a pressure towards all-inclusiveness. Note how many digital-edition projects have words like 'collected' or 'complete' in their titles, when, after all, for a new and experimental activity something on a smaller scale might seem like a better idea. (It was not always like this: Roger Laufer, one of the very first people to work on a digital edition, chose to edit one small book, the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld.[17]) But even the current digital-edition projects are small when set against the projects that the desire for data impels us toward. The problem with data that the desire to have everything points to is that there is no intrinsic limitation to any project founded on data collection; many editorial projects fall back on the figure of the author and of the author's intentionally literary works as their guide and limit, but this is not, after all, the only way to study literature, and one argument we make for editions—that the kind of understanding we develop can have importance beyond the particular texts we edit—works against the idea that we can be really complete (if that is what we want) while still limiting ourselves to the one author. In particular, the study of the history of the book, in covering the earlier years of movable type, has produced a great deal of work that is focused on particular printers rather than on authors; the amount and breadth of this kind of work diminishes as you look at later periods, but it remains a productive way of looking at the field, and is only one of the many other frameworks that might be used for the study of written works. The great dream of Peter Shillingsburg for an all-encompassing digital collection of everything Victorian (see his essay elsewhere in this issue) is a beautiful illustration of the possibilities in this line of thinking.

The desire to have everything is often phrased in practical and sensible terms, and to some extent these are not illusory qualities: why would you

restrict your access to data when you might need some of it someday? But it opens up a limitless prospect, and it becomes a mania if not checked (as it usually is) by some background sense of the actual limits of your interests. This desire for everything and its excesses are not recent phenomena; Roger Chartier, in studying plans for ideal libraries and ideal library collections in the era of print, noticed it even in works of the 1500s:

> The various meanings given to the term for a library thus clearly show one of the major tensions that inhabited the literate of the early modern age and caused them anxiety. A universal library (or at least universal in one order of knowledge) could not be other than fictive, reduced to the dimensions of a catalogue, a nomenclature, or a survey. Conversely, any library that is actually installed in a specific place and that is made up of real works available for consultation and reading, no matter how rich it might be, gives only a truncated image of all accumulable knowledge. The irreducible gap between ideally exhaustive inventories and necessarily incomplete collections was experienced with intense frustration. It led to extravagant ventures assembling—in spirit, if not in reality—all possible books, all discoverable titles, all works ever written.[18]

And he describes people who compiled catalogues for ideal libraries that included imaginary works—the extreme of the 'all possible books' tendency.[19] What is different in the digital world is that some of the practical barriers to the actual collection of such an ideal library are diminished; you can get access to a great deal more, but a consequence is that even huge collections seem less impressive than they ought to be. The strangely common, and infuriating, response of many people to some huge collections is still 'Is that all there is?'.

But Chartier also described another impulse common in the early catalogues he studied, and that was an urge to set books in order, to convert the randomness of the mass of published works into something organized. We can see that impulse, too, in the present day: another thing that bothers people about the Web, and about scholarly editions, is that there is too much extraneous information. It is in this sense that people want nothing: out of the vast bulk of data, they only want to hear about the tiny part that is important to them right now. This reaction goes back even farther than the era of print: writing has bothered people, in a tradition going all the way back to Plato, because it fails to respond to us, and just keeps saying the same thing whether or not that is appropriate or useful. With time we have learned to ignore this discomfort in most situations, but it still crops up, as in the annoyance that readers frequently express at annotation they find excessive, or at the interest scholars take in documents that other people find uninteresting. Computers seem to offer the possibility of bodies of data that really would be filtered to match our interests; but of course the interaction they can offer is really quite limited, and so we still wind up being disappointed. And the desire for nothing also molds scholarly projects: it is one of the forces that pushes us towards projects with a traditional shape, such as the collected works of one or another author, rather than projects that expand outwards along other lines—because the familiarity of such a traditional shape helps defuse complaints of excess. That is another reason for the appeal of the digital library: the expectations we bring from our use of earlier libraries, which always contain a great many books we know we will never consult, put us in an appropriate frame of mind for understanding what we see in many digital collections.

But in the end, if given a choice between everything and nothing, most people settle for everything. The worries about missing something win out over the unhappiness about the irrelevant.

7 The Need for a Different Model

As scholarly editors, we cannot generate the imposing masses of data that digital libraries collect; the case for our work must rest on something more than volume and totality. But getting away from the idea of access to data as the principal merit of what we are doing is difficult if we do not have some

other model for our activity. What other models might we entertain?

One approach that has already resulted in valuable work involves shifting the focus from the data to ways of filtering it, so as to put readers in the position not of asking for more but rather of finding ways to get just what they want. This shift in focus moves the attention to an activity for readers: to an emphasis on particular operations that are available, rather than the simple promise of getting information. And the development of approaches to filtering is something you can often do more effectively and usefully with a small corpus than with huge quantities of data, because the method can be more precisely tailored to the nature of the collection; that also means that it can address the usual problem with searching large collections—the tendency of searches to turn up a lot of irrelevant items as well as those that fit. One good example of this kind of filtering may be found in the William Blake Archive, developed at the University of Virginia, which includes a wonderful index to images created by Blake and reproduced in the archive.[20] You can, for example, look at the set of all the images that include either a hammer, a plinth, or streams of gore; the full set of things that are indexed is a huge list of objects, animals, plants, human figures, and details of those figures (such as postures and gestures). Nobody doing this for images in general, rather than for one artist's work, is going to do it in a way so responsive to the motifs of any individual artist's work; and it is in any case not the sort of work that we see as part of digital-library projects. In order to make the initial case for devoting time and money to this sort of indexing, which is not an automatic process, it is still necessary to overcome the focus on data—though there are clearly valuable results to show from such indexing, so the case is readily made. But there is also the problem that our work as editors in creating and communicating an understanding of the material is still seen as extraneous on this model.

There is another model that I consider very important, and that eventually should become prominent, though it is technologically rather difficult right now. This is the model of interactive, collaborative work on texts that has been built up during several decades of research in the hypertext world.[21] In this model, you no longer have the sharp division between producers and consumers of information, which is the way the World Wide Web wound up working (though it is not the way it was designed), and which we tend to wind up imagining as a stream of data flowing in one direction; an interactive and collaborative edition would instead be open to incorporating work from everyone who is interested in contributing. There are naturally going to be difficulties in learning how to do this best, since, for example, you do probably want to keep collaborators from altering the text of your transcriptions of witnesses unless they know what they are doing. Getting a system like this to work on a global scale mainly requires better software; it is unfortunately one of those possibilities that we are well equipped to think about and implement, but not well enough funded in most cases to try. (One current source of information about these questions from a technical point of view is the web site for the IETF working group on World Wide Web Distributed Authoring and Versioning at http://www.ics.uci.edu/~ejw/authoring/.) And beyond that it requires changes in the way people think about their work: collaboration remains an unusual way of working in most humanities fields, and one often regarded with some suspicion.

These are important approaches but they have to do more with changing our ways of thinking about collections of texts—about our relationship to them, and how we create and work with them—than with really thinking about textual matters; indeed, these are approaches that do not have a clear requirement for a basis in sound texts.

8 The Model of Criticism

Another model that is worth considering, to get us around the limitations of the access model, is the model of criticism. That is, instead of saying that we are here as editors to give readers access to texts, we might instead represent what we do as providing critical points of view on those texts, with their actual contents thrown in.

Of course, I am aware that critical work is often seen as nearly antithetical to editorial work.

The problem of the two audiences that I have described is in its social dimension quite familiar, in the way that two largely distinct groups of people seem to have been engaged in editing and in criticism in recent decades. And the world of criticism does emit some discussion of textual scholarship now and then, but all too often the message is that editors ought to be more like critics, without any real thought about how that change would affect the activity of editing except by entirely replacing it with criticism. There may, of course, be very good reasons to try and keep criticism and textual scholarship separate: Jerome McGann made a strong argument in 'The Monks and the Giants' that our ideas of the relationship between the two fields ought to be different, that textual scholarship ought to be thought of as fundamental to interpretation, rather than as preliminary; but he did not suggest that we ought to abolish the distinction.[22]

Still, as I argued earlier in this essay, it is not the case that what an edition does is merely informational; there are points being made that might as well be called critical, even in the 'textual' parts. There are really only these observable differences between current editorial and critical practice, and even these are only general tendencies rather than strict rules:

- *In an edition, there is more space devoted to what is already known.*
  Many facts about the nature and verbal contents of the witnesses must be included, for example, no matter how often they have been published before.
- *An edition offers a practical realization of some of its ideas about the establisment or presentation of the text.*
  A critical (or textual) essay can discuss how a work ought to be edited, but actually doing an edition often reveals unanticipated problems or choices.
- *Critical writing is more inclined to make claims about the interpretive significance of the approach being taken.*
  Editions typically make a case for their *editorial* approach, but there is continuing nervousness about what role interpretations of the text ought to play in editorial work.
- *Accuracy about facts does not matter as much in criticism.*
  Observation reveals this to be true, even though in principle it should not be.

A briefer statement of these points might be: editions focus on facts and criticism focuses on arguments, but facts and arguments are a part of both forms. We should not mimic the occasionally cavalier treatment of facts in criticism, but giving more prominence to our arguments would serve to make it clearer that we *are* making arguments, and would give us a better opportunity to make the case for the importance of our understanding of texts.

Critical projects also have inherent limits to their scope, and so keeping a project from growing endlessly is much easier if particular critical goals are articulated, rather than the generalized goal of providing data for any reasonable critical approach. An infinite number of facts is available for inclusion; a critical project involves a focusing of attention on certain kinds of things. And this approach also represents an improvement in how criticism is done: criticism has been hampered by print as much as editing has, since there is no reason not to include the work you are talking about in a critical publication, except that in print it would be expensive.[23]

This shift of focus may appear to abandon one of our great advantages, that of being able to promise direct access to the author, or at least to certain works of the author. But the effect of the rise of digital libraries is to diminish the value of that function: either it appears that the data is available already, because the difference between what we have to offer and what a digital library offers is not widely understood, or it leads to demands for more data rather than more understanding.

9 Examples in Current Practice

There are existing editions in various forms that have shifted their focus already, and that suggest productive directions for new electronic editions. Here are three varieties:

- *The archive based on critical aims.*
  Among the existing editorial projects that present themselves more as archives rather than as

conventional editions, there are some that have specific critical aims in view and not just the accumulation of a particular body of material. Two well-known projects of this sort are those focused on Chaucer and on Dante Gabriel Rossetti.[24] It would be possible to describe these just in terms of access: both have as one large component the publication of images and transcriptions of all the primary sources for the works in question. Leaving aside other aspects of the projects that go in different directions, though, there is in both cases an explicit intention not to assemble evidence and let others make of it what they will, but instead to work towards particular understandings of the authors—though they are understandings that are quite different in the two cases. The Chaucer edition seeks to establish the facts about the textual transmission of *The Canterbury Tales* with an eye towards establishing a new edited text of the work; the Rossetti edition is instead concerned to establish the importance of the separate manifestations of Rossetti's work and not make the usual moves towards reducing the number of texts and versions.

- *The illustrated essay*.
  If you are not obliged to compress your discussion, then an account of text production can be very interesting. This is one of the lessons of the Toronto school of bibliographical writing that includes such writers as Randy McLeod, Random Cloud, and Random Clod; even apart from their new thinking about texts, their writing is important because it contains descriptions of text-production processes that are far more effective and accessible than most other accounts in existence.[25] There are other examples available that illustrate the value of fuller accounts. I have mentioned the problem that West's edition of *Sister Carrie* has, in that its textual discussion gives a good impression of West's position but not so good an idea, for the common reader, of the nature of the materials; even in the best textual discussions this tends to happen, because they have the oddly abstract quality that can result from long prose descriptions of mechanical operations. But a few years after his edition West published another account of the composition and publishing history of *Sister Carrie*, in a book called *A Sister Carrie Portfolio*, which recounts the textual history of the novel at length and with many pictures, to show samples from the text at every stage and illustrating what all the different agents involved were doing.[26] You need the edition for the text and for notes on the textual details, but this portfolio is actually better if you want an overview or general impression of the textual history, because it can give you a much more concrete idea of what happened than prose can. The account still follows West's view of events, though this seems to me inescapable; but it is much easier to disagree with the argument in this form, since the nature of the sources is so much more clear.
- *The analytical display*.
  The attitude to complex apparatus in English-language editing has often been negative, since the attacks on it from Lewis Mumford in 1968 and Philip Gaskell in 1978.[27] But if a complex apparatus is just one aspect of an edition, and not the only way of getting at some of the texts, then the picture is different. J. C. C. Mays's edition in print form of Coleridge's poems is an example of one possible approach: his edition offers both a Variorum Text that shows readings from all relevant documents in an in-line presentation, and a Reading Text that prints one or two versions of each poem selected from among the numerous possibilities.[28] This takes a lot of space: six volumes for what a conventional presentation could easily fit into one; but the variorum text is designed to support a study of Coleridge's work in revising his poems, something that conventional apparatus does not support well. This edition is not simple to use, but a presentation of a complex textual situation cannot be simple. And there is still a reading text, so that it is possible to read versions of the poems without the mediation of the edition's variorum presentation.

These projects illustrate some of the possibilities for digital editions that can justify their existence in

a form distinct from that of digital libraries. The effort and expense required to create digital editions will be hard to justify if they do not have some point to make that is quite specific to the texts involved; the argument of simple comprehensiveness is perilous because digital-library approaches can always generate more *data*. But the edition that includes the relevant body of information and also offers specialized ways of studying it can give scholars and readers an experience worth having.

Notes

1 See also **Williams, W. P. and Baker, W.** (2001). *Caveat Lector*. English Books 1475–1700 and the Electronic Age. *Analytical and Enumerative Bibliography*, NS **12.1**: 1–29, for a discussion of problems with more recent compilations.

2 See, in particular, chapter 10 of **Shillingsburg, P. L.** (1996). *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 3rd edn. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

3 **Reiman, D. H.** (1987). *Romantic Texts and Contexts*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

4 **Dane, J. A.** (1996) Perfect order and perfected order: the evidence from press-variants of early seventeenth-century quartos. *PBSA*, **90**: 272–320.

5 **Dekker, T.** (1953−61). *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*. Bowers, F. (ed.), 4 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6 As Lester E. Barber observed, Bowers's later edition of Marlowe no longer troubled to explain the apparatus in this way, and indeed referred readers to a separate publication rather than explaining it at all. See **Barber, L. E.** (1974). A recent edition of Marlowe. *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama*, **17**: 17–24.

7 **Frost, R.** (1969). *The Poetry of Robert Frost*. E. C. Lathem (ed.). New York: Holt; **Gibbon, E.** (1994). *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Womersley, D. (ed.), 3 vols. London: Penguin.

8 **Chaucer, G.** (1996). *The Wife of Bath's Prologue on CD-ROM*. Robinson, P. (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

9 **Dreiser, T.** (1982). *American Diaries. 1902–1926*. Riggio, T. P. (ed.), West, J. L. W. III (textual ed.), Westlake, N. M. (general ed.). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 453. Unfortunately, a similar example in the Pennsylvania edition of *An Amateur Laborer* has an error: the page and line number given in the quoted example are different from those in the explanation of the example [*An Amateur Laborer* (1983), Dowell, R. W. (ed.), West, J. L. W. III (textual ed.), Westlake, N. M. (general ed.). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, p. 201]. I used this book rather than *American Diaries* as my example when presenting this paper in Toronto in 1997, but did not notice the error; Randall McLeod and Peter Shillingsburg pointed it out to me.

10 **Boydston, J. A.** (1991). In praise of apparatus. *TEXT*, **5**: 9.

11 **Dewey, J.** (1997). Emerson—The Philosopher of Democracy. In Boydston, J. A. (ed.), *The Middle Works, 1899–1924: Vol. 3, 1903–06*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 184–92.

12 For more on why the Dekker edition took that form, and a selection of comments from reviewers of the edition, see **Tanselle, G. T.** (1993). The life and work of Fredson Bowers. *Studies in Bibliography*, **46**: 51–3.

13 **Howells, W. D.** (1979). *The Quality of Mercy*. James P. Elliott and Nordloh, D. J. (ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

14 **Ford, F. M.** (2002). *No Enemy*. Paul Skinner (ed.). Manchester: Carcanet.

15 **Dreiser, T.** (1981). *Sister Carrie*. Berkey, J. C. and Winters, A. M. (historical eds), West, J. L. W. III (textual ed.), Westlake, N. M. (general ed.). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 577–8.

16 **Maguire, L. E.** (1996). *Shakespearean Suspect Texts: The 'Bad' Quartos and Their Contexts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

17 See **Laufer, R.** (1988) Édition critique synoptique sur écran: l'exemple des *Maximes* de La Rochefoucauld. In Catach, N. (ed.), *Les éditions critiques: Problèmes techniques et éditoriaux. Actes de la Table ronde internationale de 1984*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, pp. 115–25.

18 **Chartier, R.** (1994). Libraries without walls. In Cochrane, L. G. (trans.), *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 88.

19 Chartier, 74, 86.

20 **Blake, W.** (1996–). *The William Blake Archive*. In Eaves, M., Essick, R. and Viscomi, J. (eds), Kirschenbaum, M. G. (technical ed.). http://www.blakearchive.org (accessed 28 November 1997).

21 See **Nelson, T. H.** (1992). *Literary Machines: The Report on, and of, Project Xanadu Concerning Word Processing, Electronic Publishing, Hypertext, Thinkertoys, Tomorrow's Intellectual Revolution, and*

Certain Other Topics Including Knowledge, Education and Freedom, 93.1 edn. Sausalito, CA: Mindful Press; **Bolter, J. D.** (1991). *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Landow, G. (1992). *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press; and **Nielsen, J.** (1995). *Multimedia and Hypertext: the Internet and Beyond*. Boston: AP Professional.

22 **McGann, J. J.** (ed.) (1985). The Monks and the Giants: Textual and Bibliographical Studies and the Interpretation of Literary Works. In *Textual Criticism and Literary Interpretation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 180–99.

23 David Greetham has pointed out a further practical reason to stress the critical dimension of scholarly editing: in the current state of copyright law in the United States, legal protection of an editor's work is more certain if it is presented as interpretive work rather than as the accurate compilation of textual facts. See **Greetham, D.** (1996). The telephone directory and Dr. Seuss: scholarly editing after *Feist versus rural telephone*. *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, **29**: 53–74.

24 **Chaucer.** *Wife of Bath's Prologue on CD-ROM*. Robinson (ed.); **Rossetti, D. G.** (2000–). *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Hypermedia Research Archive*. McGann, J. J. (ed.). http://www.rossettiarchive.org/ (accessed 9 April 2002).

25 **Clod, R.** (1991). Information upon Information. *TEXT*, **5**: 241–81; **Cloud, R.** (1994). FIAT *f*LUX. In McLeod, R. (ed.), *Crisis in Editing: Texts of the English Renaissance: Papers given at the twenty-fourth annual Conference on Editorial Problems. University of Toronto, 4–5 November 1988*. New York: AMS Press, pp. 61–172.

26 **West, J. L. W. III.** (1985). *A Sister Carrie Portfolio*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia.

27 **Mumford, L.** (1973). Emerson's Journals. In *Interpretations and Forecasts: 1922–1972*. New York: Harcourt, pp. 103–09; originally published as 'Emerson behind Barbed Wire,' *New York Review of Books* (18 January 1968), pp. 3–5; **Gaskell, P.** (1978). *From Writer to Reader: Studies in Editorial Method*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

28 **Coleridge, S. T.** (2001). *Poetical Works*. Mays, J. C. C. (ed.), 6 vols. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.