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ARCHIVE, TEXT, SCREEN: REMEDIATIONS OF MODERNIST MANUSCRIPTS

MARK BYRON

The recent history of textual scholarship and critical editing has seen considerable change and development, due in large part to the expanding range of theories and techniques in scholarly editing, and the rapid evolution of digital projects in the field. Over the last three decades, scholarly editing of literary texts has developed a strong focus on the construction of digital manuscript editions: from such landmark and pioneering projects as the *William Blake Archive*, the *Rossetti Archive*, and the *Walt Whitman Archive*, to the more recent launch of the *Jane Austen Fiction Manuscripts* and other digital facsimile editions.¹ As a subset of modernist digital editions, the digital manuscript edition also foregrounds a number of specific issues, not least the status of this object within textual scholarship, the role of empirical research in literary studies, and the value of expanding the range of authored texts into the so-called “grey canon” of research notebooks, letters, directorial working notes, and annotations. Further questions centre upon what might be gained, or lost, by reading and studying a digital manuscript as opposed to codex facsimiles, or even compared with consulting the original documents housed within the literary archive. What effect does digitisation have on the perceived aura of an artwork, and on the understanding of the role of authorship and authority? How do these issues

¹ See: *The William Blake Archive*, ed. M. Eaves, R.N. Essick, and J. Viscomi, at <http://www.blakearchive.org>; *The Walt Whitman Archive*, ed. E. Folsom and Kenneth M. Price, at <http://www.whitmanarchive.org>; *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, ed. J.J. McGann, at <http://www.rossettiarchive.org>; and *Jane Austen's Fiction Manuscripts: A Digital Edition*, ed. K. Sutherland (2010), at <http://www.janeausten.ac.uk>. Each archive was accessed on 15 September 2014.

intersect with recent discourses of materialist modernism, book history, curation, as well as the conceptual triangulation of work, text and document? Does a curated digital object qualify as an “edition”, and if so, what are the grounds for such status? This essay will seek to open up some of these questions, using as a focal point the digital manuscript edition-in-progress of Samuel Beckett’s *Watt*, a part of the *Beckett Digital Manuscript Project*. Some of the editorial and hermeneutic challenges of that project offer cause for extended meditation on the definitions and purposes of scholarly editing and the various strategies one might employ to achieve them. Finally, this essay explores the question of whether there is anything peculiar to modernist manuscripts that may usefully shape the working concepts and definitions of textual scholars and critical editors working with them.

The Modern Digital Manuscript Edition in Concept and Practice

The *Watt* digital manuscript edition aims to represent the large, unruly manuscript of Beckett’s novel *Watt*, both in photographic reproduction and in a transcription that can be mined and manipulated in various ways.² The edition provides photographic reproductions of the six manuscript notebooks, loose leaves, and partial typescript, all housed in the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. These materials might be said to be “curated” in the digital edition, but they are also “edited” in fundamental ways, by virtue of the various modes of markup, arrangement, record of relational properties, and critical commentary in the edition itself, which is accompanied by a monograph providing a history of composition, detailed

² The photographic representation of each manuscript page can be viewed in thumbnail, regular page size, and with a magnified scroll-over that produces a high-resolution image for readers’ inspection. Segments of the transcription may be called up when viewing the regular sized page images, allowing for a comparison between transcription and (photographically reproduced) manuscript page. The transcription is marked up to allow for various bibliographic and codicological features to be shown, including the writing implement and ink colour, multiple layers of erasure, the placement of additions (above, below, or beside the line in question), inserted text from verso to recto pages, and relations between text and nearby doodles where these are deemed to exist. *The Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project* has published two modules at the time of writing: the first includes *Stirrings Still / Soubresauts* and *Comment dire / what is the word*; the second module is that of *L’innomable / The Unnamable*. Twenty-six modules in all are planned: *Watt* is scheduled to appear in 2016. See <http://www.beckettarchive.org>.

codicological account of the materials, and a rationale for the digital edition. The novel was composed in 1941-45 but only published, in a heavily compromised edition, in 1953. Beckett began working on the draft on 3 February, the day after James Joyce's first posthumous birthday memorial, and just at the time when Beckett's Resistance cell, Gloria SMH, was being infiltrated and betrayed in Paris. In May of 1941, he fled Paris a few hours before German soldiers arrived at his apartment door, and he spent the rest of the war in the town of Roussillon, in the French Vaucluse, trying all the time to return to Ireland through Spain. The six manuscript notebooks embody complex, agonistic text composition, replete with internal contradictions, manifold *aporiae*, revisions and recyclings of text material, and the abundant doodles which make the manuscript perhaps the most famous of all of Beckett's compositional achievements. The digital manuscript edition aims to provide the truest digital representation of the manuscript, with its accompanying transcription, editorial rationale, scholarly apparatus, and commentary. There are obvious practical difficulties in transcribing and marking up this material – the words and images are encoded using an augmented version of the Text Encoding Initiative TEI5 – which demand all kinds of editorial decisions at every point in the process of representation. But equally, the pressure such a manuscript applies to conventional text models, when considered in combination with the published texts of *Watt*, also provides an opportunity to consider what a modern manuscript edition might be, and what it might aim to do.

Marta Werner deftly accounts for the ambiguous materiality of the modern manuscript: «In many ways the 'modern manuscript' seems to point to an object that exists in an in-between space: while it has shed the adamant materiality of its medieval predecessor ... it has not yet metamorphosed into the immaterial traces common to post-print culture». ³ The *Watt* manuscript performs a challenge to novelistic and literary form in its aesthetic agonistics, and in its extremely turbulent, aporetic relation to its published versions. The direct impact of biographical and historical circumstance is also plain: whilst the function and "presence" of the author is clear enough, any sense of agency is heavily compromised in all sorts of ways (material postwar compromises regarding paper shortages, the unknown phase of revision embodied in the lost typescript from which the first published text was

³ M.L. Werner, «Reportless Places': Facing the Modern Manuscript», *Textual Cultures* 6.2 (2011), pp. 60-83: 61.

set, and so on). In their intensive patterns of repetition and recycling, the notebooks possess that tendency in modern manuscripts towards variation, what Paul Zumthor calls «*mouvance*».⁴ Instead of variation introduced by scribal error or eccentricity, the modern manuscript is at variance with itself, and makes demands of its editor not so much to eradicate error but to account for authorial change. Edward Vanhoutte has written on the “critical complications” inhering in modern manuscripts, providing a checklist uncannily applicable to the *Watt* manuscript:

- the difficulty of determining the beginning and end of the “text”
- the cognate problem of tracing its internal composition trajectory
- accounting for the prevalence of scriptorial pauses or lacunae
- the proliferation of non-verbal elements such as doodles relating to composition process
- and the “explosion” of the page in composition⁵

These radically provisional features are typical of a significant subset of modernist manuscripts – Beckett’s *Watt*, Robert Walser’s *Mikrogramme / Microscripts*, the poetry of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* – although of course these phenomena are by no means confined to twentieth century literary manuscripts. The indexical and iconic value of draft manuscript documents might be asserted of writers such as Emily Dickinson, Gustave Flaubert or Herman Melville as much as of Beckett, Walser or Paul Valéry. The definitions and relative values of draft and fair copy come into focus here. As Hans Gabler states, the fair copy is witness to a text able to be transposed successfully from one document to another, whilst the draft remains open to possibility, risk, experiment, and errancy.⁶ The modern manuscript draft then becomes viable as a working text model. Marta

⁴ P. Zumthor, *Toward a Medieval Poetics*, trans. Ph. Bennett, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1992.

⁵ E. Vanhoutte, «Putting Time Back in Manuscripts: Textual Study and Text Encoding, with Examples from Modern Manuscripts», 2002, at <http://www.edwardvanhoutte.org/pub/2002/allc02abstr.htm>. Werner quotes Vanhoutte in her essay at p. 62. This list also appears in Vanhoutte’s essay, «Prose Fiction and Modern Manuscripts: Limitations and Possibilities of text-encoding for electronic editions», in J. Unsworth, K. O’Brien O’Keefe, and L. Burnard, eds., *Electronic Textual Editing*, New York, Modern Language Association of America, 2006, pp. 161-180.

⁶ H.W. Gabler, «The Primacy of the Document in Editing», *Ecdotica*, 4 (2007), pp. 197-207: 198.

Werner draws on Benedetto Croce's insight into the changing nature of the literary draft in the nineteenth century, where instead of functioning like a reflecting glass into the mind of the writer, it instead

reveals only the illusion of genesis, the part of the creative process that has been inscribed on paper. It is a fallen document, a fragment of the intellectual, abstract, ideal genesis of the work that remains forever beyond understanding.⁷

To abandon the concept of the manuscript as mirror of an actual or imagined authorial mind makes manifest its temporal dimension:⁸ that is, the process of writing through time, which now registers in a positive fashion in the multiple and contradictory decisions across the manuscript space, showing evidence of changing rates and modes of composition, from the frenetic to the frustratingly static, and from the associative to the schematic.

Document, Text, Work in the Modernist Digital Manuscript Edition

These preliminary statements concerning the modern manuscript and its relation to digital manuscript editions make clear that some fundamental concepts in textual editing require careful consideration. Recent debate over the relative values and definitions of “document”, “text” and “work” is instructive in this context: the dossier of articles appearing in *Ecdotica* 10 (2013), curated by Barbara Bordalejo and including essays by her, Peter Robinson, Hans Walter Gabler, Paul Eggert and Peter Shillingsburg, are of particular importance, and will feature prominently in the discussion below. This recent debate might be framed in terms of the wider challenges to editorial theory and method over the last three decades, as Hans Walter Gabler has stated:

An editorial methodology is today in demand to give new responses to the changed perceptions – of which beginnings are already to be seen, for instance, both in medieval studies in their development of a «new philology», or, say, in modernist studies with manuscript editions, meanwhile dominantly digital, answering to the methodological stance of genetic criticism (*critique génétique*).⁹

⁷ Werner, «‘Reportless Places’: Facing the Modern Manuscript», *Textual Cultures*, 6.2 (2011), p. 63.

⁸ L. Hay, «Does ‘Text’ Exist?», *Studies in Bibliography*, 41 (1988), pp. 64-76: 75.

⁹ H.W. Gabler, «Editing Text - Editing Work», *Ecdotica*, 10 (2013), pp. 42-50: 48.

These more recent trends in scholarly editing recognise the fundamental variability of texts as a defining concept from which to develop viable editorial models, which runs somewhat counter to the conventional historical narrative (at least in Anglo-American editorial theory and practice) by which editors attempted to stabilise texts from apparently external forces of change (errors in transmission, errata in published texts, etc.).¹⁰ All things being equal, however, the aim of textual scholarship persists in the production of coherent editions of works: these might consist of a reading text and apparatus, or else a “purposeful” multiple, fragmented, or radial set of literary documents.¹¹

It is generally accepted that any edition worthy of the name must be supported by a consistent and explicit editorial rationale. Manuscript editions must also mediate their source materials in meaningful ways, beyond the mere fact of facsimile reproduction. The expansion of editorial options in the digital age has not diminished the importance of establishing «a clear understanding of relationships among the texts of surviving documents».¹² However the revolutionary potential for preservation and distribution of documents (or more properly, their digital representations) new capabilities in digital editions raises some critical issues for the basic terms of textual scholarship. For Shillingsburg, there is a crucial distinction to be made in digital textual editing, concerning: «questions about the desirability, methods, and place of editions, defined as the results of ‘textual criticism and editorial scholarship’ to present an edited text of the work, as opposed to the results of ‘bibliographical, collecting, and representational scholarship’ to present vir-

¹⁰ Gabler, «Editing Text - Editing Work», cit., p. 44.

¹¹ *Purposeful*: not simply “editions” in which documents are reproduced with minimal mediation, such as straightforward facsimile editions, but rather products of bibliographic, editorial and critical judgement. Such editions include manuscript editions in which transcription choices demonstrate the exercise of such judgements, and which may include such scholarly apparatus as commentary, editorial rationale, and various forms of “metadata” concerning the document’s inscriptions. The dimension of reception enjoys increasing visibility, especially in digital editions, whereby matters of temporality dilate to the reading present, and matters of documentary variability must account for an ever-changing receptive audience. Obviously these terms are far from settled in theory and in practice: as Shillingsburg and others have argued, there are dangers in conflating archival and editorial impulses, or bibliography and the sociology of texts. See P. Shillingsburg, «Literary Documents, Texts, and Works Represented Digitally», *Ecdotica*, 10 (2013), pp. 76-93.

¹² Shillingsburg, «Literary Documents, Texts, and Works Represented Digitally», cit., p. 77.

tual surrogates for the archival record of documents».¹³ Digital manuscript editions comprise a zone of convergence between these impulses, although there must be clear principles governing the editorial mediation of documents and their representation, and those principles must be clearly stated and testable against the objects of the edition itself.

Whether or not a manuscript edition properly comprises a scholarly edition hinges upon the treatment and mediation of the documentary materials supporting it, as well as the way in which the terms document, text and work are understood. For Gabler, the dangers of treating the document merely as a transmitter of texts include the potential relegation of the document following its editorial treatment. This bears direct consequences for diplomatic editing and the creation of facsimile editions: «the marginalizing of the facsimile edition seems to me to be a symptom of the marginalizing, or even, as it were, erasure of the original document in traditional editing, or at the very least of its downgrading to the auxiliary role of text carrier».¹⁴ The alternative viewpoint claims that documents can in fact be edited in themselves, rather than texts edited from them. In support of this claim, Gabler invokes the approach of *critique génétique* and its focus on the temporal coming-into-being of the manuscript, even despite the fact that such apparatus as sigla and footnoting tends to divest the manuscript of its temporality.¹⁵ The shift from codex to digital editions provides obvious opportunities to emphasise certain iconic and indexical features of manuscript pages:

Where the electronic medium increasingly develops its potential is in the facilities it offers for enriching the editorial discourse around the manuscript images – a discourse which we then also immediately recognise as functionally derivative of, or in other ways dependent on, the digital images initially uploaded into the electronic medium.¹⁶

In this space the text is a function of the document: expressed in the mode of transcription deployed in the edition (parallel image-transcription visualisation, rollover transcription functions, and so on). The “iconographic” qualities of the document can be made evident in high quality digital facsimile reproduction (such as the rollover magnifier function in the BDMP), and its “indexical” qualities also given exten-

¹³ Ivi, pp. 85-86.

¹⁴ Gabler, «The Primacy of the Document in Editing», cit., p. 198.

¹⁵ Ivi, p. 200.

¹⁶ Ivi, p. 202.

sive representation (the state of the physical document may provide evidence regarding the material conditions of composition, ancillary material may indicate the immediate social and material contexts in which composition occurred, etc.). Gabler claims that the act of transcription itself, whereby a text is lifted and reinscribed, necessarily entails an editorial act, even if the mode of transcription aims to minimise traces of mediation, such as in cases of diplomatic transcription.

The ease with which magnification functions can be incorporated into digital editions provides an obvious benefit to the reader, aiding a document's legibility in ways that may be superior, in certain instances, to viewing the original documents themselves. Gabler detects a conceptual benefit in bringing together the iconic and hermeneutic dimensions of codicology:

Just seeing the screen effect of the magnifying glass over the image suggests sufficiently the potential of the electronic medium to convey the close interdependence of visualising and reading the document [... and where] the interpenetration of image and text becomes truly essential to the editorial mediation of the document.¹⁷

Gabler's emphasis on compositional process expresses an attitude towards documents and texts cognate with that of *critique génétique*, but also stems from the long-standing German editorial practices of the historical-critical edition (*historisch-kritische Ausgabe*), in which the entire transmission history of a text is brought to bear on its establishment in an edition. More specifically, the German editorial tradition takes palimpsests or fragmentary and often extrinsic raw material into the editorial purview: an edition might even be built around a set of working drafts in the *Handschriftenedition*, in which the various layerings and topographical contours of writing may be given the fullest expression, spatially as well as temporally.¹⁸ Gabler places great confidence in the possibilities that this editorial perspective might bring to the project of uniting textual criticism and hermeneutic practices – a confidence well

¹⁷ Ivi, p. 205.

¹⁸ See H.W. Gabler, «Introduction: Textual Criticism and Theory in Modern German Editing», in H.W. Gabler, G. Bornstein and G. Borland Pierce, eds., *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, pp. 1-16. Gabler outlines a model in which an actual document can anchor a telescoping «series of virtual sub-documents», giving a unifying coherence to the historical development of the documentary record: see Gabler, «The Primacy of the Document in Editing», cit., p. 206.

placed when combined with an awareness that such a project will be fulfilled in compelling editions that entail hermeneutic practices in their editorial rationales, and that produce reading practices cognizant of this harmony. Digital manuscript editions provide fertile grounds for such aspirations.

The production of a digital manuscript edition brings its own inflections to these concerns. There is debate over whether a digital manuscript edition actually qualifies as an edition, and if it does, by virtue of which criteria. Such an edition might be seen as an edition of documents and also at least a partial edition of a work – that is, a work that also incorporates published texts in most instances – but the nature of its texts requires careful consideration. As a partial edition of a work, the relation between the facsimile reproductions, transcriptions, editorial apparatus (commentaries, treatment of the linguistic matter, statement of rationale, and so on) and the work's publication history demands careful analysis. Genetic editorial approaches to manuscript editions are peculiarly conducive in articulating the historical dimension of the documentary record, as well as the synchronic presentation of documentary variance. Matters of reception enter in here too, as the different stages of a work's transmission will entail and enable different kinds of hermeneutic strategies on the part of readers and scholars, as well as editors, and the concept of reception becomes accordingly complex and manifold.¹⁹ The term “work” is conventionally used to describe the aesthetic production entailing different documents, manuscript texts, and (most often) published texts. In the context of modernist digital manuscript editions, «work» becomes an imprecise concept, and in particular cases may gesture to an aesthetic project that is radically contingent or perhaps even formally uncompletable. In the case of the *Watt* digital manuscript edition, the partial work is not a mere «phalanx of particulars» (as Beckett's *Murphy* would have it) gathered within a nominalist framework, but a material set of documents, digitally mediated to produce a network of unique textual material which critically articulates phases of revision, deletion, and recycling. This edition does not replace a critical edition of the “work” of *Watt*, which must include the

¹⁹ Elena Pierazzo describes the «documentary digital edition» as a «new type of editorial object ... recording ... as many features of the original document as are considered meaningful by the editors, displayed in all the ways the editors consider useful for the readers, including all the tools necessary to achieve such a purpose». See E. Pierazzo, «A Rationale of Digital Documentary Editions», *Literary and Linguistic Computing*, 26 (2011) pp. 463-477: 472.

published texts of that novel in addition to relevant matters of its production and reception, but it can serve as an essential preliminary to such an edition.²⁰

The concept of the “work” then requires careful rethinking in this environment, whereby physical documents are raised into digital facsimile reproductions, texts are distributed across documents and printed books, and may present themselves as incoherent objects, and the work is provisionally conceived as a manifold and non-identical thing. Peter Robinson states that the digital medium is uniquely well placed to facilitate this change of focus: «rather than accepting that the digital revolution is accelerating the disappearance of the concept of the work from textual scholarship, we need to return the concept of the “work” in the digital age to the centre of what we do».²¹ Robinson is critical of editorial rationales that displace the concept of the “work” from their scholarly frameworks: Elena Pierazzo’s rationale of «digital documentary editions», notably the *Jane Austen’s Fiction Manuscripts project* with which she is involved, suffers from this exclusive focus, and Robinson also finds Gabler’s intensive focus on the *minutiae* of documents to be at the expense of a fully articulated notion of the “work”, which is relegated to the discourse exogenous to the establishment of the edited objects.²² However a provisional concept of the “work” can be expressed in manuscript editions as a “partial object” emergent in the documents assembled, transcribed and edited within the edition’s environment. This does not displace the “work” as conventionally understood, but acts as a preliminary means by which to approach it. In the case of modernist manuscripts, the combination of digital presentation platforms with genetic and historical-critical approaches to the documents hold the best hope of making sense of their diversity, internal contradictions, and dispersed relations to complex publication *stemmae*.

Paul Eggert sees in Gabler’s approach a potentially rigid boundary between evidence of textual change, endogenous to the editorial proj-

²⁰ Digital manuscript editions obviously do not replace critical editions of published texts. For an articulation of the dangers of the manuscript edition as panacea, cf.: «The document-centered perspective, as championed by Gabler and Elena Pierazzo, in digital editing is so pervasive that it has led some editors to exalt the document as if editing not only begins with the document, but ends with it too», in B. Bordalejo, «The Texts We See and the Works We Imagine: The Shift of Focus of Textual Scholarship in the Digital Age», *Ecdotica*, 10 (2013), pp. 64-76: 73.

²¹ P. Robinson, «The Concept of the Work in the Digital Age», *Ecdotica*, 10 (2013), pp. 13-42: 14.

²² Robinson, «The Concept of the Work in the Digital Age», p. 26.

ect, and exogenous discourses of authorial agency, readerly and scholarly reception, and other dimensions of textual immanence. Eggert defines the work «not as an object but as a regulative concept that embraces the endless iterations of the text-document dialectic, a dialectic that inevitably involves the workings of agency and takes place over time».²³ This formulation dispels the autonomy of the “editor’s text” for which Gabler argues, and reconceives it as an extended argument about a work, addressed to a learned audience thus enjoined to evaluate the argument on its scholarly merits. The “partial work” of the modernist manuscript edition establishes the ground for the concept of the “work”, which will take specific form (or remain unformable) in individual cases: the condition of variance is endemic to this relation between the manuscript edition and the edition of the “work”. Eggert introduces the notion of «work-genesis», which, via C.S. Peirce’s semiotics, allows for pragmatic account of work-activity in reading as well as writing and editing. Readers «are involved in the repeated coming-into-being of the work, even though documentary testament to their activity is only rarely laid down in the form of *marginalia* or commentary of one kind or another».²⁴ This augmentation of the concept of the “work” into the “work-space” accommodates, in a pragmatic as well as a formal sense, the provisional, contingent relation of documents, texts and works. This is particularly conducive to thinking of the digital manuscript edition as a special case, whereby readers negotiate necessarily unformed material to construct a potential work-genesis or possible work. The structure of the digital edition also allows for potential commentary and *marginalia* to be included following an initial editorial phase, provided by readers, the editor, or both.²⁵

²³ P. Eggert, «What We Edit, and how We Edit; or, why not to Ring-Fence the Text», *Ecdotica*, 10 (2013), pp. 50-63: 53.

²⁴ Eggert, «What We Edit, and how We Edit; or, why not to Ring-Fence the Text», cit., p. 57. See also Chapter 10, «The editorial gaze and the nature of the work», in Paul Eggert, *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 214-240.

²⁵ Although Eggert formulates the «work-genesis» within a pragmatic paradigm, its ability to account for discourses shaping the emergence and reception of the work establishes a dialogue with sociological models of text, particularly the two classic articulations: J.J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1983; and D.F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and Sociology of Texts* (The Panizzi Lectures, 1985), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. Joseph Grigely has also productively considered the work as a process of composition and in context of its history. See J. Grigely, «The Textual Event», in Ph. G. Cohen, ed., *Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 1991), pp. 167-194.

Mouvance and Variance in the Modern Digital Manuscript Edition

The modern digital manuscript edition is an identifiable, and burgeoning, species within the genus of modern literary scholarship. It remains to consider two major lines of thinking to their point of convergence: one the one hand, to investigate what is at stake in a modern manuscript edition, firstly on its own terms, and then as a first step in establishing how manuscript material might be deployed in full editions of literary works; and on the other hand, to evaluate the ways modern literary documents are able to be represented in digital archives, as a significant step in thinking through digital editions. This digital focus also implies a series of related questions concerning the adaptability of specific examples of textual unruliness to digital architecture and display, and the means by which to evaluate and display them as representations of aesthetic and formal experimentation on the part of their authors. The modern digital manuscript edition is grounded in the notion that the work – the “partial work” – is not separable from its documents: «The extant documents, the documents we reconstruct, the relations we uncover among the documents and all involved in their creation, transmission and reception, and the acts of communication we extract from them, are the work».²⁶ In order to begin this process of thinking through the modern digital manuscript, the following experiment imagines the modernist manuscript within the frame of the medieval manuscript. This convergence creates the zone in which to learn more about their historical, tropological, and codicological similarities and divergences. This thought-experiment is governed by Peter Shillingsburg’s statement: «for development of tools, methods, designs and capabilities for digital archives and digital editions to be sophisticated, durable, and worthy of the advanced scholarship of textual investigation and representation, they must be undertaken in cognizance of the complexity of the textual condition».²⁷ It begins to think through how modernist textual scholars might bring the formidable work of digital textual scholarship in medieval studies into the working space of modern literary manuscripts, and perhaps even to resolve some of the more intransigent conceptual and formal problems these manuscripts assert. Of course these insights will

²⁶ Robinson, «The Concept of the Work in the Digital Age», cit., p. 41.

²⁷ Shillingsburg, «Literary Documents, Texts, and Works Represented Digitally», cit., p. 84.

be familiar to medievalists and early modernists, but there may be much to be gained for modernist scholars and editors in drawing on traditions and innovations not within their immediate purview.

What might digital editions of medieval manuscripts have to do with scholarly work on modern, or even modernist, literary manuscripts? Richard Trachsler has observed that the shift to the modern manuscript draft has stimulated the evolution of text models,²⁸ particularly those that discern modern iterations of the classical and medieval concept of *varia lectio*,²⁹ inflected with a new emphasis on the manuscript as *avant-texte* material:

Whoever has examined a page of Flaubert's drafts can easily appraise the fascination any Flaubert scholar feels when looking into the abyss of overwritten, erased, underscored, crossed out, and rewritten words. It is clear also that one is tempted, when leaning over the precipice of creativity, to try to make sense out of these mountains of pages, to consider that there is a starting point and ending to this creative process.³⁰

The manuscript is the starting point for classicists and medievalists, distinct from how scholars of modern literature may perceive its function: «modern drafts are seen as leading up to some kind of achievement wanted at some moment by the author, whereas medieval manuscripts lead away from it; they lead to something new».³¹ For Trachsler, this difference leads to the distinction between medievalist attempts to

²⁸ One of several pertinent examples is that articulated in J. Bryant, *The Fluid Text: A Theory of Revision and Editing for Book and Screen*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2002.

²⁹ The *varia lectio* appear in the apparatus at bottom of page, or else in synoptic redactions: «This is where the analogy between modern and pre-Gutenberg manuscripts ends: the apparatus of the *varia lectio* will, of course, in both cases introduce a diachronic dimension into the synchronic presentation of the text, but the apparatus will be concerned – as far as modern literature is concerned – with periods prior to the publication of the 'authorized version', whereas the apparatus of editions of classical and medieval works gives an idea of what happened to the text once it went into circulation. It is like looking into a mirror reflecting in the first case the past, and in the second the future of the text left by the author». R. Trachsler, «How to Do Things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism», *Textual Cultures*, 1.1 (Spring 2006), pp. 5-28: 13.

³⁰ Trachsler, «How to Do Things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism», cit., p. 8.

³¹ Trachsler, «How to Do Things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism», p. 10.

construct a text from extant copies, none of which might coincide with the author's (which itself might be partly or completely obscured), and attempts by modern scholars to reconstruct the *avant-texte*, which then opens up the text to multiple readings of an *opus in fieri* or work-in-progress.³² This gets very much to the point of the modern manuscript edition, especially with regard to the flexibilities afforded by digital representation:

It is ... a fact that an edition does not replace the manuscript. It will do both more and less than the original document and thus serve the reader better or worse according to his field of interest. ... It is clear that all depends on the nature of the manuscript, the kind of text it contains, and the scope of the work one intends to accomplish with the edition.³³

The diachronic dimension embodied in the critical apparatus of a medieval manuscript edition indicates what happened to the manuscripts once it passed into circulation; whereas for a modern edition the critical apparatus concerns the life of the work both before it reaches an authorised form in publication, and its career in publication. The instability and self-contradiction of the modernist "work", dispersed across its manuscripts and published texts, might be captured in the concept of *mouvance* (a term which arose in the shift away from stemmatic analysis in French medieval studies in the 1970s): «The notion, as revealed by the term, implies that the medieval text moves, that it is essentially unstable, and transforms itself in all kinds of directions in a movement which is no longer linear and cannot be thought of as a tree».³⁴ Subsequent shifts of emphasis to the legitimacy of every variant – where the text, rather than existing nowhere, as in *mouvance*, exists everywhere – reifies the text process into a series of stages:

The vibrating halo around the text freezes and can be analyzed as a sequence of different – independent – moments. That is where the main benefit of the approach lies: it opens the view onto every single manuscript, it reminds us that each of them is a response to a specific historical situation and thus deserves to be examined as a witness of that precise moment.³⁵

³² See L. Jenny, «Genetic Criticism and Its Myths», in *Drafts*, ed. M. Contat, D. Hollier and J. Neefs [= *Yale French Studies*, 89 (1996)], pp. 9-25.

³³ Traschler, «How to Do Things with Manuscripts: From Humanist Practice to Recent Textual Criticism», cit., pp. 11-12.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 19.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 20.

These notions of *mouvance* and *variance* can be applied to a range of modern manuscripts, such as the drafts and sketches of Paul Valéry, who famously attributed to them a greater aesthetic worth than their published counterparts. In the case of Beckett's *Watt*, the published text constantly sends the reader back to the manuscript (or at least to the idea of the manuscript): the many "sphinxes" and non sequiturs in the published novel possess typographic counterparts in ellipses, narrative fragmentation, and in the infamous Addenda items at the novel's entropic conclusion (fittingly, a false dawn at the railway station).

The thought-experiment in which Beckett's manuscripts are considered, momentarily, within a medieval frame, yields surprising insights. Of course the manuscript's authorship is not contested, but authorial agency is certainly heavily contingent in its halting gression and periodic seizures, visibly and semantically apparent on nearly every page of the first three notebooks. The manuscript can be thought to embody a kind of scribal variation pointing into the future, engendering a range of possible and actual texts of which several are historical and bibliographical facts, but which do not mitigate against thinking of others latent in the manuscript material. The editorial gaze might occupy itself in this work-site in making sense of these radiating texts – possible and actual – where modern textual criticism usually works on the reverse assumption of known, actual published works. Taking this experiment through its stages, one might consider a number of alignments between Beckett's manuscripts and common features in medieval textuality. The constraints of knowledge concerning many medieval writers take the historically contingent form of a text composed in conditions of deep estrangement (Beckett's double-exile, in France, in hiding as a member of the Resistance). Whilst the manuscript does eventuate in a number of print publications, it is without an extant fair copy or setting typescript: all print versions depart more or less radically from the manuscript, which itself is internally turbulent, contradictory, and multiple. The role of the editor is not necessarily to "undo" the forms of printed editions to better "reflect" the manuscript, but to see them as compromised by historical circumstance (wartime, paper shortage, serial rejection from publishers) as well as by decisions made by author and perhaps other actors in radically reshaping the form of the narrative. The manuscript is a manifold in itself, and a wellspring for various potential texts, of which published versions only represent a portion: the textual field radiates a multitude of possibilities, of which we have small cluster. This of course is not to equalise imagined texts with actual ones – modern print culture asserts them as bibliographical facts, as part of literary his-

tory – but rather to suspend these considerations when thinking through the manuscript as a field of literary work and as a repository for future literary production. Finally, a definitive change from late classical textuality to early medieval textuality came about in the invention of the line-commentary and other annotative codifications: «The greatest opportunity ... for an innovation of scholarly editing as criticism through electronic editions may ultimately lie in the field of the commentary».³⁶

Conclusion

A complete stepwise illustration of Beckett's "medieval" manuscript is yet to be composed, yet the iconic page in his distinctive document yields strong affinities with the medieval page, and even with the illuminated manuscript (to which the *Watt* manuscripts are often compared). This kind of thought experiment would not necessarily work for all modernist manuscripts. But it seems clear that *Watt* presents an alluring case, and perhaps that is the point: some modernist manuscripts fall far outside the conceptual frame of most modern editorial theories and methods. Rather than being considered examples of the *opus in fieri* and simply leaving it at that, by imagining them as potential fields for the production of manifold texts, including their actual bibliographical manifestations, a window might open onto the altered status of manuscript, "final" text, and the inner relations of the literary work – partial, fragmented and dispersed – across a range of objects and across a temporal process. The digital representation of such manuscripts is clearly an optimal way of representing the multiple and non-linear relation of documents, and of capturing the inner paradoxes of any one document. Medieval literary studies can provide some very helpful guiding lights in thinking through the digital modernist manuscript edition – evident in the founding, in 2012, of *Digital Philology: A Journal of Medieval Cultures*, which explores, among other subjects, the power and range of digital editorial methods. The modernist manuscript edition, in both digital media and traditional form, remains an entity demanding further critical and theoretical definition. In the case of Beckett's novel *Watt*, it contains multiple worlds awaiting exploration, to be mapped and measured, but also entailing new atmospheres to be absorbed and exotic ecologies to be studied.

³⁶ H.W. Gabler, «Theorizing the Digital Scholarly Edition», *Literature Compass*, 7/2 (2010), pp. 43-56: 53.

blemi, dibattuti nello scambio tra Dante e Giovanni, della laurea poetica, del rapporto tra latino e volgare, dell'esercizio della cultura costituiscono così lo sfondo per un confronto polemico ma non del tutto unilaterale, se è vero che nella polemica volontà dantesca di rispondere alla prima epistola oraziana del maestro bolognese con un'egloga virgiliana e di dimostrare, con precisi echi verbali e lessicali, di poter competere alla pari con la coeva cultura preumanistica si debbono rintracciare le premesse alla rinascita di un genere destinato a un'immensa fortuna nei secoli successivi.

Non sono, quelle sinora percorse, che alcune delle fila tematiche che sorreggono l'impianto di questi commenti. Molte altre se ne sarebbero potute individuare, a riprova della straordinaria ricchezza e importanza di quest'iniziativa editoriale, che si spera di aver, almeno in parte, messo qui in luce. Tuttavia, come già dicevo, il miglior modo per valutare un commento è, alla fin fine, quello di usarlo quotidianamente. Ciò non toglie, però, che anche a una prima lettura di questo volume i commenti ivi raccolti lascino ampiamente presagire la loro futura importanza per gli studi danteschi.

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