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INDICE

Saggi

Foro. *Ecdotica dell'errore. In onore di Michael Reeve*

Testi

Questioni

Rassegne

ANGLO-AMERICAN CRITICAL EDITING

CONCEPTS, TERMS AND METHODOLOGIES

PAUL EGGERT

This essay is a based on a paper, now slightly revised for print, given at an editorial conference held in Switzerland in early 2012 on the topic «International and Interdisciplinary Aspects of Scholarly Editing».[1] The session in which the paper was read was entitled «Crossing Philology's Cultural Boundaries»: «Starting from the problems arising from the attempt to translate the word "philology" and other terms related to textual scholarship in different languages, the key questions this panel will address are: Do the concepts and methods of textual criticism and scholarly editing translate unchanged? If not, is it the shift in languages or in cultural mind-sets that alters when we look at textual issues?» In private correspondence, the session's convener Peter Shillingsburg encouraged the paper-givers to seed discussion rather than attempt to be comprehensive or definitive. The following essay is offered in that spirit.

We encode our assumptions in language and even if those assumptions decay and fall away they can have different half-lives in different languages, either disappearing or being reinvented. *Wissenschaft* retains its currency

[1] A joint conference of the Arbeitsgemeinschaft für germanistische Edition, the European Society for Textual Scholarship, the Arbeitsgemeinschaft philosophischer Editionen, the Fachgruppe Freie Forschungsinstitute der Gesellschaft für Musikforschung, in Bern Switzerland in February 2012. I thank a number of scholars who were present on the day and whose subsequent discussion helped clarify some of the thinking expressed here, especially Hans Walter Gabler, Peter Shillingsburg and also my co-speakers on the same panel Kiyoko Myojo and Sukanta Chauduri. I also thank John Gouws and Peter Robinson for their comments. For an overview of Anglo-American editorial methodologies,

in German, *Wetenschap* in Dutch, *Vetenskap* in Swedish, and so on in other European languages; but these words do not, as many people assume, translate into English as *science* although they do translate, in more or less that form, into Italian, Spanish and French (*scienza*, *ciencia*, *sciences*). But there is no direct equivalent of *Wissenschaft* in English, although *systematic or rigorous enquiry* might be the closest approximation. So also in English there is no equivalent term to *Literaturwissenschaft*. And the term *philology* – the equivalent in English of *Philologie* or *philologische Wissenschaft* – fell into disrepute decades ago amongst anglophone literary critics when the humanities adopted a new cultural formation – although, because of the continuing Continental influence, the term survived in the names of some foreign-language departments and in the well known US journals *Modern Philology* and *Philological Quarterly*.

The anglophone postwar generation found the term *humanities* deeply attractive. I suspect that it helped answer the Existentialist anxieties of the time.[2] The term drove a wedge between philology and the exact sciences, dethroning the scientific pretensions of philology on the one hand and granting them perhaps too fully to the natural sciences on the other. The term *humanities* helped redeem the old pursuit of *belles lettres* in the universities and then institutionalise its more rigorous development, New Criticism or close reading, in English departments the world over. The humanities were understood to involve the close study of works (in any medium, from any period, in any culture) and their relevant contexts. Editors studied the variant texts of works, but their dealings with text were understood to be strictly preliminary to the more important engagement of the trained close reader with «the work itself».

The interpreter's own human presence in the face of the work being interpreted meant he or she was implicated in the interpretation. In literary criticism and art criticism the critic's sensitivity to tone and rhythm and colour and expression was prized. The partly creative expression of that response was redeemed as a form of academic enquiry because literary works were taken to be, ideally at least, organic, self-contained pseudo-objects.

In the 1970s and 1980s post-structuralist critique homed in on that implicatedness, exposing the power relations that cultural discourses

see the selection of essays in *Ecdotica 6 – Anglo-American Scholarly Editing, 1980-2005*, ed. Paul Eggert and Peter Shillingsburg, Roma, Carocci, 2010.

[2] For evidence, see Paul Eggert, *Biography of a Book: Henry Lawson's While the Billy Boils*, Sydney-State College, Sydney University Press-Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013, chap. 13.

had naturalised. That moment of high Theory has now passed, although its legacy remains influential on how we think.

The wedge between the humanities and the sciences has recently been called into question by the advent of humanities databases. Franco Moretti's so-called distant reading of literary phenomena, involving categorisation and quantification, has caused a stir. In a review of Moretti's two-volume study *The Novel* (2006) in *New Left Review* in 2008, John Frow objected that data mining in the humanities is not based on a gathering of neutral facts because the data is amassed in relation to categories (e.g. genres) that are taken to be stable but are themselves interpretations. Thus any objectifying pretensions that conclusions based upon data mining may have will be compromised by the nature of the data.[3]

I have been involved for many years in the building of a bibliographic database of Australian Literature called AustLit.[4] Now with over 750,000 work records and 150,000 agent records, it is beginning to spark quantitative analysis rather than just being a convenient place to which one goes for bibliographic information. The first book based upon its data, and challenging many longheld literary-historical beliefs, appeared in 2012.[5] However, the data are not natural phenomena: data do not come down a telescope to us in a digital form suitable for data-mining. Even the recording of the details of a title-page is an interpretative act, and the title-page itself was a historical development over time which served various ends. Similarly, publishing and thus the category *publisher* did not always mean, as categories, quite what they mean now. And this is before we get to the AustLit categories of work-forms (genres) and subject terms. We have had to add new genres. When we began in the mid-1980s, life-writing was still being conjured into existence as a genre, and travel writing was considered by some as too diffuse or not sufficiently literary to merit a generic label. Databases need data organised into categories, and the categories should be robust. Nevertheless, as time went by these two genres were added, thus demonstrating the irresistible conclusion that data are not objective even when analysed and then presented to us visually in the forms of graphs or trees. That does not mean that analysis of data will not reveal truths about the economic, demographic, or institutional «life» of literature. Frow acknowledges this but is tempted to minimise its importance. He says «[it] is, in the long run, only useful to

[3] John Frow, «Thinking the Novel», *New Left Review*, 49 (2008), pp. 137-145.

[4] At www.austlit.edu.au.

[5] Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers: Recalibrating the Literary Field*, London, Anthem, 2012.

the extent that it can open up for us something of the way readers engaged with the novel: how it helped shape their world of sense and emotion, how it spoke to them, how they interpreted and put to use the words they consumed».[6]

That fate strikes me as good enough, as giving us, at least, plenty to be getting on with. But it still leaves in position the sharp anglophone distinction between the humanities and the sciences. Scientists study natural or synthetic data, often massive amounts of it, to which the scientist stands in as impersonal a relation as possible. Of course, hypotheses involve leaps of the scientific imagination, but they must be tested, and the tests replicated, before there is agreement that knowledge has been advanced. Scientific method aims at eliminating any personal distortion of the evidence. In comparison, the humanities, bearing in mind Frow's objection, could not be described as «human sciences».

Scholarly editing derives much of its data from the technical routines of bibliography: description of the material carriers of texts and analysis of the resultant textual variation. For this reason editing has traditionally been seen as occupying the impersonal end of the spectrum of literary study, which is why it was taken to be only preliminary. Personal accounts of reading in the present occupied the other and more important, sometimes self-important, end of the spectrum, with literary history, and then, gradually over the postwar decades, biography and, more recently, book history bridging the gap between.

Nevertheless, until the early 1980s the *work* was seen as the object of everyone's attention, whatever their position on the spectrum. The literary theory movement bypassed this pseudo-objective concept of the work by putting the spotlight on the enabling conditions of meaning, on *text* (now understood in a more free-flowing way), and on *discourse*. Behind the post-structuralist approaches there remained an ongoing commitment to structuralist forms of explanation, reflected in the German editorial doctrines of text-as-system and of textual authorisation, doctrines that were gradually articulated in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Positioned as they were within the humanities spectrum, anglophone editors were and remain resistant to systematic definitions of text and even of textual authority, which, for them, displaced the older concept of textual authorisation. They see authority as deriving from the agents of texts, typically but not necessarily the author. Textual authority is attrib-

[6] Frow, «Thinking the Novel», cit., p. 140.

uted by the editor; it is not seen as an inherent quality of text. This is because published texts are typically of mixed authority: that is, most of the wording and punctuation has come ultimately from the author's pen, but sufficient of it has not as to create an editorial problem to fix. If the editor aims to establish an authorial text then a distinction between the two sources of authority will have to be made and means devised to eliminate one or the other from the reading text. Eclectic combination of text from the sources is the normal result if this goal is to be achieved.

The concept of authorisation, not textual authority, lies behind German historical-critical editions. It was a new definition or, to be more accurate, a sharpening of an old concept. Authorisation is understood to be intrinsic to text. This understanding flowed from the definition of text as semiotic system, borrowed from Prague structuralism. Change any one element of it and the system was no longer the same system. Where the system broke down *Textfehler* (text errors or failures) were the result; restoring the system to rights was the justification for emendations. But the edition was not allowed to become an eclectic combination of the texts of different documents since authorisation was understood as sequential not overlapping, as the author moved on from the creation or revision of one version to the next, authorising each one temporarily in turn.

None of the editors working in the German tradition of historical-critical editing whom I have asked about their commitment to this structuralist definition of text will put their hand on their heart and say they subscribe to it, though all are well aware of it. They may have been taught it but don't fully believe it. This is just as well given that underwriting an editorial methodology with a theory of textual semiotics that would inevitably fall victim to changing scholarly trends was never going to be a permanent solution. My German and Dutch editor-friends tell me that it is not the structuralist definition of text that makes them object to the eclectic combination of different source documents in Anglo-American editions. It is merely that such a method is too ahistorical for them to accept. They say that editors of such editions commit a scholarly offence against history by mixing up its witnesses.

I return to this objection below; but first I wish to pursue the question of why scholars working in the German tradition were attracted to a systematic definition of the object of their attention – text – in the first place. Despite the agnosticism of my German and Dutch friends the attraction, I discover, has not gone away. It seems to be taking a new form in Hans Walter Gabler's recent writings. Over the years, he has become more and more absorbed in textual genesis and has consequently wanted to theo-

rise its implications for our understanding of text. His melding some of the thinking behind German editing traditions with French *critique génétique*, while often writing in English, has been fascinating to watch.

Textual variability, whether within a manuscript or between carrying documents offers a bedrock, Gabler argues, that can be appealed to as being fundamental to the existence of texts, to what underwrites them. Variability is, he claims, endogenous to text whereas biographical appeals to authorial intention are exogenous. Such appeals grant the author the role of textual legislator and imply that the highest fate of works, at the hands of the scholarly editor, is to achieve the single text that the work was teleologically pre-ordained to achieve but, for one reason or another, never did during the author's lifetime. Furthermore, Gabler argues, Foucault's concept of the author-function can be reinscribed for text-critical discourse: Gabler does not mean the thrifty interpretative regime that Foucault was originally wanting to displace (typically, by means of a literary-critical appeal to authorial intention regulating the *explication de texte*). Rather, Gabler means a textual dimension – textual variation or variability – brought into material being by the author or other textual producers. Once *that* author-function is acknowledged theoretically as a textual condition, interpretation of the text ought not be constrained by consideration of the motives of those who brought it into being. Thus, intention to mean becomes, strictly speaking, exogenous to text.

Gabler's theorising is, I think, instinctively in line with his predecessors' commitment to text definition. The assumption held in common is, apparently, that if we can agree on an adequate definition of text then a robust editorial methodology may be built upon it. That will make the whole endeavour *wissenschaftlich* and therefore defensible. We will be professional philologists, not bumbling amateurs. Hans Zeller put it succinctly in 1971: what is to be «sought after», he said, is the «objectification of editing».[7]

I feel the attraction of the *wissenschaftlich* instinct, and one part of me admires its results and leaves me in awe of its practitioners; but at bottom I know I cannot embrace it. My approach is more instinctively in line with anglophone pragmatic traditions where one is instinctively inclined to be suspicious of theory's claims to know and define. If a new theoretical position does clarify the endeavour or clear the ground

[7] Hans Zeller, «Record and Interpretation: Analysis and Documentation as Goal and Method of Editing», in *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein and Gillian Pierce, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 54.

of misapprehension then the pragmatist gratefully comes along behind and picks up what scraps he can for adaptive reuse. The pragmatist's strength, on the other hand, is staying alert to how other people see the curious phenomenon that is under study. The good pragmatist is not tempted to rule out any aspects of the phenomenon as necessarily irrelevant. The pragmatist is curious about the points of view that those aspects may express or instance and wants to understand them. If, for the happy pragmatist, a theoretical position emerges from this endeavour then it will have fallen into place, more or less accidentally, felicitously, rather than having been consciously propelled into a definitional framework. And even with such a framework the pragmatist's outlook will remain fairly open.

This attitude explains why, in recent years, I have become attracted to reviving the idea of the work. Post-structuralist emphasis on text and discourse meant the idea went into a serious decline from about 1980. Suddenly for the cultural critic everything was a text and thus an instantiation of discourse, whether a newspaper advertisement, a travel book, a bus ticket, a film, a meal, a football match, a painting or a poem. So when the Oxford bibliographer Kathryn Sutherland wrote in 1996 of the work as a «manifestly relegated term» she was, rather shockingly I realised, right.[8] Of course, she was implying relegation within intellectual circles. In fact, the half-life of the term in ordinary and imprecise usage in English went on more or less unaffected.

Yet, for literary scholars, *the work* remains a useful notion. It is capacious. Over and apart from its traditional currency from the past, it can be seen as embracing the materials of text, the carrying documents with their *mise-en-page*, their illustrated dustjackets and so on, as well as their variant texts and the meanings that the readers' engagements with them in their materialised forms raise, liberate and release, differently over time. Finally, there are the accounts of those readings that then circulate as a consequence of the work's newly re-materialised existence. For a literary classic this process of publication and reader response will go on over decades or, in some cases, centuries. In the continuing dialectic between the documentary and textual dimensions in the act of reading the work's life unfolds. The concept of the work emerges thereby as a regulative idea, a space for all the activity, material and textual, carried

[8] Sutherland, «Looking and Knowing: Textual Encounters of a Postponed Kind», in *Beyond the Book: Theory, Culture and the Politics of Cyberspace*, ed. Warren Chernaik, Marilyn Deegan and Andrew Gibson, Oxford, Office for Humanities Communication, 1996, pp. 11-22 [p. 16].

out by writer, producers and readers in the name of the work. If one is to understand the work in this manner, as having a life unfolding over time, then the act of reading necessarily needs to be built into it.[9]

The scholarly editor is, by trade, usually most interested in the early phases of the life of the work. But even there, before first publication, the constitutive nature of reading cannot be ruled out. The writer was necessarily the first reader as he or she watched the text advance or retreat sentence by sentence, verse by verse. The amanuensis and the typesetter were also, in their dealings with the text, readers of it before they did anything else. This ongoing dynamic between document and text, as the text changes from fragments into completed version, is mediated by textual agents and takes place over time. By finding their grounding elsewhere, systematic definitions of text tend to lose touch with this empirically observable mediation, although Gabler's steps towards a new definition seem to be partially aimed at avoiding this fate.

The term *work* in English is both noun and verb: thus the literary work as a concept never loses touch with the hand that created it. This is why attributing intention feels natural to the anglophone editor. It is also what I think German editors are doing when they eliminate *Textfehler*, even though such emendation is supposedly justified as a failure in the text-as-system. Which editors can put their hand on their heart and say that a writer's intention to mean does not come into their adjudication of what is, or is not, a *Textfehler*? It is what we do when we realise something has gone wrong. A trained eye quickly spots the failure to inscribe the intended reading: the eyeskip, the transposition, the dittography.[10] And if intention is admitted here, in the working method that leads to emendation, then why not more generally? Why not in the very aim of the edition? Why revert to text-as-system?

Readers are textual agents too; they participate in the work over time. They are not, to use but redirect Gabler's term, exogenous to the *work*. Indeed, they are intrinsic to its functioning. This has an immediate consequence. If we build readers into the definition of the work then why should we hesitate to build readers into the purpose of the edition? If this case be granted, then scholarly editors – and not just the editors of pedagogic textbooks and general readers' editions – must surely

[9] I argue this case in *Securing the Past: Conservation in Art, Architecture and Literature*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, especially chaps. 9 and 10.

[10] Even a mere failure to italicise can render a text unreadable: see my discussion of the playscript of *Arabin* by J.R. McLaughlin in «Version – Agency – Intention: The Cross-fertilising of German and Anglo-American Editorial Traditions», *Variants*, 4 (2005), pp. 5-28.

acknowledge that their delegated authority to emend comes ultimately from the readers they serve and not assume, as Zeller did, that the objectification of editing is the rightful goal. While Anglo-American editors have traditionally expressed their aim in authorial-intentional terms to produce, say, «the text that the author wished to see published» or «the text of final authorial intention», their interventions are at the service of envisaged readers of the edition and of the derivative paperback printings that reproduce their reading texts without apparatus. This was the pragmatic reason for single reading texts. It was not a matter of theory: ultimately it reflected book-marketplace realities. A single reading text was seen, by the layman and by the literary critic, simply as a matter of common sense. The result was that the editorial role eclipsed the archival responsibility in the Anglo-American edition. It was assumed that readers most wanted to see achieved, as best it could be, the refining of an authorial text from the documentary evidence.

Thus the concept of textual authority tends to be author-centric in its rhetoric. This is reflected in the edition's working methods. But, as invoked by the editor, the claim needs also to be understood as reader-centric in the edition's production; the emendations were and are carried out for readers. The editor acts upon the textual evidence in the primary documents on behalf of readers. Whether the editor gets this delegation right is another and, of course, a pragmatic matter. Whether the editor, through biographical and textual essays and apparatus, will lead readers towards revealing but usually unconsidered evidence in the textual history of the work, is one criterion for judgement. I amongst others have made various criticisms over the years that pointed to certain failures of reporting, or modes of organising the reporting in the Anglo-American edition. Indeed, the whole editorial effort in relation to Australian literature referred to more fully below, may be considered, from one point of view, as an implicit critique of the tradition from which it sprang and against which it defined itself. Textual authority may be attributed by the editor to figures involved in production other than the author, or to collaborative authors, or to historical audiences. In his writings since the mid 1980s Peter Shillingsburg has made this insight progressively clearer.[11] Put another way, one may say that different kinds of edition variously enact different contracts with readers of them.

[11] See especially, Shillingsburg, *Scholarly Editing in the Computer Age*, 1984; 3rd edn., Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1996; *Resisting Texts: Authority and Submission in Constructions of Meaning*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1997; and

The implication of this reader-centric understanding of the editorial role is that an editorial orientation exclusively directed in its rationale at recording the historical evidence of the primary documents represents a turning away from the fundamental object of book production: to be read or used. The compilation of the much satirised *Variantenfriedhof* – if it truly is a graveyard apparatus, rather than a means of helping the phoenix of suppressed textuality to arise from the ashes – profits no-one. I do not necessarily exempt the Anglo-American edition from this charge either, only the case is so much clearer in the multivolume historical-critical edition with its heroic synoptic-apparatus presentations into which so much ingenuity and passion have been poured in order that the archival responsibility be discharged in book form. The coming of digital editions, which conceptually and operationally separate the editorial and archival functions, has brought this critique into higher relief than it has ever been.[12]

The instinct to record the cultural heritage, to concrete it into fully documented position in monumental editions, is very understandable in a nation that suffered such destruction in the latter parts of World War II. The longstanding respect for historical evidence, and the gradual development of methods of dealing with it, of reporting it accurately and economically, came down to the postwar generation from the prestigious German philological tradition of the nineteenth century. It also powerfully influenced modes of study in the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, and, if to a somewhat lesser extent, those of Italy, Spain and Russia. The objection was and is to mixing historical witness because of the dangers of subjectivity on the part of the interpreter of the evidence. This re-emerged with a sharpened definition in the working methods of the postwar historical-critical edition.

In his critique of the Anglo-American alternative tradition Gabler takes the rhetoric of authorial intention too literally when he characterises author-intentional editions as the fulfilment of a teleological aim of single-texted-ness.[13] To the extent that any Anglo-American editors understood their editions to be doing this they were, of course, engaged

From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

[12] My earlier view of the German historical-critical edition may be found in *Securing the Past*, pp. 203-212. My principal source in English has been the collection of translations *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein and Gillian Borland Pierce, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1995, which I reviewed as «The Shadow across the Text: New Bearings on German Editing», *TEXT: An Interdisciplinary Annual of Textual Studies*, 11 (1998), pp. 311-324.

[13] Hans Walter Gabler, «Beyond Author-Centricity in Scholarly Editing», *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 1 (2012), pp. 15-35.

in the quixotic pursuit of an unattainable ambition. But, for the reasons already given, to understand that tradition in these terms is to erect a textual logic to act as a counterpart equivalent to the German, when it did not exist as such at all. To inscribe one's objection on that systematic level is also to ignore many practical matters of the methodology applied: the subtleties of assessing variant readings, the techniques for discriminating between competing sources of authority in the same document and between documents, and, indeed, discriminating among printed versions, all of which may have been simultaneously authorised by the author for publication in different markets: in book form for the US market, the British market, and in magazine serialisations as well. Once one recognises this multiplicity of simultaneous authorisation and adds to it the mixed authority of each of the documents carrying the text, then one appreciates what it is that Anglo-American scholarly editions actually do. From the conflicting and overlapping textual evidence, they try to capture a reading text that will witness the most authorial form of the work, the culmination of a process of textual change, whether good or bad, over a limited period of time. In this, the editor's critical judgement must come into play. It is, after all, a humanities project. But this admission does not mean that what the editor considers to be the best or most felicitous reading will automatically be deemed to be the final one, as Zeller assumed when he objected to such editions in 1975.[14] In actual practice it is often the opposite. An author's unbeautiful textual eccentricities, once identified as such, are generally preserved.

The critical edition does not imply that other kinds of edition are not worth preparing *or* that the record of textual variation at the foot of its reading page or in tables at the back of the book is not worth consulting for its historical evidence. Merely it implies that other kinds of edition, with different aims, will have accepted a different delegation of textual authority from the readership addressed. That is all. It is not rocket science. Indeed, it is not science at all. But it is rigorous.

Finally, what have we done in Australia? The editing of Australian literature never went through a Greg-Bowers period. Only a tiny number of full-scale scholarly editions were published before the two series in which I was involved, the Colonial Texts Series and the Academy Editions of Australian Literature, came onto the scene from the late 1980s. By

[14] Zeller, «A New Approach to the Critical Constitution of Literary Texts», *Studies in Bibliography*, 28 (1975), pp. 231-264.

that time Anglo-American editorial methodology was being heavily critiqued. There were corresponding crises and readjustments going on in other disciplines at the same time: musicology, art history and archaeology are examples. Idealisms were being resigned and various materialisms embraced. That fact allowed us, in Australia, space to experiment editorially. The question that was at the forefront of my mind was what would make these editions useful to readers, what form of apparatus would best challenge readers to use it. How might we get readers out of their comfort zones by confronting them with evidence of textual instability, textual process – those at-first strange phenomena that we were adjusting ourselves to in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Another factor for us was the witness of book history, the study of which was entering a new phase just at that moment. Living on the periphery of a book trade dominated until fairly recently from London is to see works as rather more than aesthetic objects, as Anglo-American editions tend to treat them. They are also artefacts of that same book trade and their texts were, as we discovered, routinely distorted by it, especially in the colonial period until 1901. This was because professional royalty-paying book publishing was almost unknown in Australia until the 1890s. The population was too small to support it and too scattered until the coming of the railway systems in the 1880s. As a result, in the port-cities and towns, newspapers were the primary patrons of literature. To make use of textual apparatus to document that condition, and to provide the texts that the first Australian audiences read, struck us as a worthwhile endeavour.

So for these reasons, and for those given above about Anglo-American editions, I believe we should not think of editions as standing above the textual fray, as embalming a historical archive. Rather I prefer to see them as embodying, in a critically established reading text supported by apparatus, an argument about the history of the variant texts of the work. Because they embody an argument they cannot be definitive. Like every other printing, scholarly editions are carried out in the name of the work. They propel it further into the future, newly armed with information that will make it new, aesthetically new in the experience of reading, especially for those readers who thought they knew the work well. Editions should be rigorous, should in that sense be *wissentschaftlich*, but they remain, as I see it, pragmatic humanities undertakings not dependent upon a tightly theoretic definition of text.

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