

Version — Agency — Intention

The Cross-Fertilising of German and Anglo-American Editorial Traditions

Paul Eggert

I

Scholarly editors have traditionally treated texts as ideal: that is, as existing independently of the materials on which they happen to have been recorded. This observation applies differentially to the German and Anglo-American traditions. As its methodology and theory was gradually developed after World War II, the German historical-critical approach came to put all its stress on historical versions, selecting one version to serve as the reading text, and recording the others in an ingenious form of non-lemmatised apparatus. Much effort was put into theorising versions. The *historisch-kritisch Edition* represented a marriage of the synchronic and the diachronic dimensions of text that a combination of philological method and Prague Structuralism had sensitised editors to look for and to record. The problem seemed to be solved. But the book, as carrier of text, fell out of the editorial purview.

In the Anglo-American tradition, things went in a different direction. Type-facsimile or photo-facsimile editions were supposed to take care of the work's documentary status, which was secondary and of merely bibliographical interest; but editorial mediation of one kind or another would be required if the text of the work itself was to be made available to readers in a new act of publication. The work, in *being* a work, had an ontological status that justified this editorial extraction of text not just from its material embodiments but from its historical versions as well. The accompanying imperative — that a *single* text had to be prepared for a new readership — pushed, by the 1960s, towards a seemingly unstoppable conclusion: that the text so established should rest on the editor's judgement of final authorial intention. Variant readings from rejected versions would be recorded in the apparatus criticus; but versions were not alternative versions, they were rejected versions. All the historical