

## The First Five English Editions of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species*

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When Morse Peckham's variorum edition of *The Origin of Species* was published on the one-hundredth anniversary of the work's original publication, it was hailed in textual circles as an innovative and practical way to present a highly complex textual history.<sup>1</sup> It was not a "critical edition" in the sense then understood of a scholarly edition producing an eclectically determined "best" text. But its editor was well aware of the then prevailing notion that "real scholarly editions" were "critically edited."<sup>2</sup> Peckham differentiated his edition from critical editions by calling his work a variorum edition — it just put the sequence of historical variant texts in order conveniently in one volume — and by arguing that the historical texts in the first five editions constituted a de facto scholarly critical edition with Darwin as his own scholarly editor. His thinking was that the first five editions of *On the Origin of Species Through Natural Selection* were printed from essentially the same setting of type, i.e., the type left standing was, for each new edition, merely revised in places where Darwin requested changes.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he thought that they were five printings of one edition — not five different editions.

He was wrong.

The short version of this essay's conclusion is: with the exception of the inner form of gathering X and all of gathering Y of the 1860 edition, each new edition of Darwin's *Origin* from 1860 through 1869 was a completely reset new edition even though many of the lines begin and end with the same word and have no textual variants.

<sup>1</sup> *The Origin of Species, A Variorum Text* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959).

<sup>2</sup> Peckham was recruited a few years later (1966) to the English Department at the University of South Carolina, which had become the headquarters of the Modern Language Association's Center for Editions of American Authors. Peckham's most relevant publication on textual studies is "Reflections on the Foundations of Modern Textual Editing," *Proof* 1 (1971): 122-55. *Proof* was edited and published at the University of South Carolina.

<sup>3</sup> All five editions were published in London by John Murray: 1859, 1860, 1861, 1866, and 1869. See Appendix A for formats and page counts.