

Changing Structure, Changing Meaning Multiple Versions of Modern Poetry Collections as an Editorial Problem

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In the second half of the twentieth century the theory and practice of modern textual scholarship have been discussed and described at great length. Although there always was disagreement on many important and less important details, for a long time the main goals and methods were clear and generally accepted. A scholarly edition was based on a meticulous evaluation of all the extant and relevant documents and consisted of two basic parts: a reading text of the work or the works and an apparatus. In this combination of one text and apparatus, modern scholarly editing showed and still shows its origin: the classical philology. And this goes for the two major traditions in modern editing alike. Both, the German and Anglo-American tradition, are indebted to the theory and practice of classical philology.

In the period I have mentioned, the German editors defined and refined their concept of the so-called *historical-critical edition* as the major goal of scholarly editing.¹ Such an edition include the complete documentation of one or all the works of an author: all the extant versions of the work are presented in chronological order and in their historical form. Since the presentation of the genesis of the text and of its history in print is the main part of the edition, great efforts were made to develop new models for the apparatus. In practice, the synoptic apparatus was accepted as the most ideal. No doubt, this had to do with the fact that many German projects were editions of poetry. The synopsis is especially suitable for an edition of poetry because it simultaneously presents two essential aspects of the genesis: the unity of each individual version

¹ Cf. *Texte und Varianten: Probleme ihrer Edition und Interpretation*, (eds.) Gunter Martens und Hans Zeller (München: C.H. Beck'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1971); *Text und Edition: Positionen und Perspektiven*, (eds.) Rüdiger Nutt-Kofoth, Bodo Plachta, H.T.M. van Vliet und Hermann Zwerschina (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2000); Bodo Plachta, *Editionswissenschaft: Eine Einführung in Methode und Praxis der Edition neuerer Texte* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam jun., 1997).

— the synchronous or ‘horizontal’ relationship — and the coherence of the changes per text fragment — the diachronous or ‘vertical’ relationship.² In most of the German historical critical editions the apparatus can be studied independently from the reading text of the work, which is presented in a separate volume. The reading text is based on only one of the extant authorised versions of the work, in most cases on the first publication of it.

On the other side of the ocean, Fredson Bowers, and later Thomas Tanselle, promoted the copy-text theory, which for several decades would dominate the Anglo-American editing practice. Here too, scholarly editions have a text and an apparatus. But contrary to the German tradition, Anglo-American editors gave priority to the critical text. This ‘ideal’ text should in all its details represent the last intentions of the author. Therefore it is not based on only one of the extant versions, but it is an eclectic text which combines the accidentals of one version with the substantives from other, later versions if they represent the last intention of the author. It is obvious that the Anglo-American approach leaves more room for interpretation and personal judgement by the editor than the German one. Some would for this reason only immediately condemn the Anglo-American approach as heretical and dangerous. However, with all the differences the two major traditions shared the basic principle of *one* critical text, representing the work or the works. Indeed, there are editions of texts in multiple versions, but they are the exceptions to the rule.

Nowadays, the landscape of scholarly editing has changed dramatically. In America, the copy-text theory no longer dominates editing practice. Instead of one dominating theory there are now different views on the goals of editing.³ And these views have led to different editions. Since 1981, there has been, thanks to the Society for Textual Scholarship, a vivid discussion on the concepts of editing and on editing problems. The most fundamental change however is giving up the ideal of

² H.T.M. van Vliet, “The Introduction of Emily Dickinson in Holland and the Goals of Editing,” *TEXT, An Interdisciplinary Annual of Textual Studies*, 15 (2002), 211-236, especially 226-232.

³ Cf. Peter L. Shillingsburg, “Anglo-amerikanische Editions-wissenschaft: Ein knapper Überblick,” *Text und Edition* (see note 1), 143-164.