A Brief History of Textual Scholarship
This lecture

- Brief history of textual scholarship
- A. E. Housman's critique
- Editing as history
- Varieties of editorial practice
Brief History: Classical texts; Textus receptus

- Peisistratus (560–527 BCE) orders the 'official' text of Homer. The primary challenge was to build a coherent text from myriad versions spoken by the rhapsodes. This could be a viable beginning of textual criticism, i.e., being aware of variance and attending to authenticity and authority (whatever those terms mean). (Discuss!)
- Lycurgus (c. 390–324 BCE) arranges for single texts of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides to be deposited into Athenian archives.
- The history of textual editing is a history of arguments about the meaning of terms such as authenticity and authority. It is also a record of humans grappling with the contingencies of cultural imagination, tradition, and artifacts.
- What is the textus receptus? When mistakes in a received (published) edition prevail: E.g., Falstaff "babbl'd o' green fields" (Shakespeare, Henry V); "soiled fish of the sea" (Melville, White-Jacket).
Brief History: Copying, Collation, Bibliography

- **Library of Alexandria:** Any manuscripts declared would then be copied and deposited in libraries. Their copies were only labeled differently if they had differences. Sometimes the copies were returned and the originals kept in Alexandria.

- **The birth of collation as an editorial practice; and dealing with analogy versus anomaly:** The Alexandrians sought to emend texts that had corruptions. Their practice was idealistic: the best text is not based on any actual document but rather a new document that seeks to bring out the best readings from all the extant texts.

- **Pergamum,** the other civic rival to Alexandria, switched to using parchment (animal skin) after Alexandria banished papyrus exports during a trade conflict. Generally, the Pergamanian scholars accepted the necessity of corruption and sought to identify the "best text" based on a careful examination of all surviving witnesses.

- **Texts from neither of these epochs survive, but citations of them exist in medieval scholias.**

- **Descriptive Bibliography.** Callimachus (c. 305–240 BCE) created the first record of Greek manuscripts, *Pinakes* (Tablets).
Brief History: Commentary and Biblical scholarship

- Late classical era: the birth of textual commentaries (Servius Honoratus on Virgil, for example), including quotes of important works and other cultural and historical information that have been otherwise lost. Hugh Cayless offers a good primer on Servius, as well as some thoughts on digital editing, on his blog.
- Biblical scholarship: problems of vocalisation, accentuation, and word-division in consonantal Hebrew.
- Jerome's Vulgate, commissioned by Pope Damascus I in the late 4th century CE, was the first Latin Bible that was based on surviving witnesses (~8000 manuscripts!).
- Medieval period saw a period of conservation, copying mostly religious works and trying to reconcile them, as much as possible, with classical (pagan) works.
- The Caroline Reformation led to a standardised script that made various European national scripts consistent—a significant portion of surviving manuscripts of classical literature is the result of copies made in monasteries with Carolingian script.
- Meanwhile, Constantinople's holdings of Greek manuscripts were crucial to Italian humanists' serious return to Greek study in the late fourteenth–early fifteenth century.
Brief History: Enter the scribes

- Copying work transferred from the hands of monks to those of professional scribes, often in universities.
- Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), acting as papal secretary, found manuscripts all over Europe of prominent classical thinkers. Bracciolini even invented a new humanist script that was far more clear and readable than the prevailing textura (i.e., gothic) script of the day.
- Lorenzo Valla (1407–57), the great debunker of forgeries: the Donation of Constantine and the letters of Seneca and St. Paul, e.g. He also sought to emend Jerome's Vulgate.
- Politian derived the method of eliminatio codicum descriptorum, the removal of "descriptive" or derived copies as witnesses to an authentic version. This led to the method (very much in use to this day) of stemma codicum, the "family tree" of textual versions.
Stemmatics

(From: https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/4742.1-textual-criticism-as-applied-to-biblical-and-classical-texts)
Brief History: Philology

Philology (*OED*):

1. Love of learning and literature; the branch of knowledge that deals with the historical, linguistic, interpretative, and critical aspects of literature; literary or classical scholarship. Now chiefly U.S.

3. The branch of knowledge that deals with the structure, historical development, and relationships of languages or language families; the historical study of the phonology and morphology of languages; historical linguistics. See also comparative philology at comparative adj. 1b.
19th-century philology: Lachmann v. Bédier method

- Karl Lachmann (1793–1851) identified and evaluated bibliographic sources with a critical awareness. The goal is generally ‘reconstruction’. His 1850 edition of Lucretius claimed that the three extant manuscripts descended from a single archetype. Later witnesses have more errors. Interestingly, Lachmann’s Nibelungenlied edition involved more speculation.

- Joseph Bédier (1864–1938) doubted the binary nature of stemmatics. He proposed the ‘best-text’ theory, which called for a lightly emended version of the best version of the text (“witness”).

- Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1753–1824) and his monumental claim that there was no possibility to find or reconstruct the original or best text in biblical texts, because of all of the layers of copying and linguistic shifts (Einleitung in das Alte Testament, 1780–83).

- Friedrich August Wolf (1759–1824) similarly argued in his Prolegomena ad Homerum (1795) that it would be impossible to recover Homeric texts.
A. E. Housman’s Critique: ‘Application of Thought to Textual Criticism’

- Where do science and art meet? "Textual criticism is a science, and, since it comprises recension and emendation, it is also an art."
- A matter of reason and common sense, but also not "an exact science at all ... fluid and variable ... neither mystery nor mathematics"... It deals with human frailties---errors.
- Editorial problems should be treated as individuals: "must be regarded as possibly unique."
- Learning principles from instances: "P]ublic opinion is now aware that textual criticism, however repulsive, is nevertheless indispensable, and editors find that some presence of dealing with the subject is obligatory; and in these circumstances they apply, not thought, but words, to textual criticism. They get rules by rote without grasping the realities of which those rules are merely emblems, and recite them on inappropriate occasions instead of seriously thinking out each problem it arises."
A. E. Housman’s Critique

- Editors should "look all facts in the face" and avoid sectarianism of thought: "This I cite as a specimen of the things which people may say if they do not think about the meaning of what they are saying, and especially as an example of the danger of dealing in generalisations. The best way to treat such pretentious inanities is to transfer them from the sphere of textual criticism, where the difference between truth and falsehood or between sense and nonsense is little regarded and seldom even perceived, into some sphere where men are obliged to use concrete and sensuous terms, which force them, however reluctantly, to think."

- What does he mean by sincerity of a manuscript? "When you call a MS. sincere you instantly engage on its behalf the moral sympathy of the thoughtless ... Our concern is not with the eternal destiny of the scribe, but with the temporal utility of the MS.; and a MS. is useful or the reverse in proportion to the amount of truth which it discloses or conceals, no matter what may be the causes of the disclosure or concealment."
A. E. Housman’s Critique

- Sincerity and recension; the importance of building: "[E]ven the traditional rules must of course be tested by comparison with the witness of the MSS... if we build structures on our trust we are no critics."

- A paradox: "The MSS. are the material upon which we base our rule, and then, when we have got our rule, we turn round upon the MSS. and say that the rule, based upon them, convicts them of error. We are thus working in a circle, that is a fact which there is no denying; but, as Lachmann says, the task of the critic is just this, to tread that circle deftly and warily"

- "To be a textual critic requires aptitude for thinking and willingness to think; and though it also requires other things, those things are supplements and cannot be substitutes. Knowledge is good, method is good, but one thing beyond all others is necessary; and that is to have a head, not a pumpkin, on your shoulders and brains, not pudding, in your head."
The Copy Text and Beyond

- R. B. McKerrow coined the phrase ‘copy-text’ in his 1904 edition of Thomas Nashe.
- A copy-text is just the version that forms the base text of the edition (the text you will copy for the edition), and it is expected to be emended.
- Fredson Bowers took the idea further: the copy-text is the one that comes closest to the author’s final intentions (manuscript is best, next-best is proof sheets, then first edition, and so on).
- Jerome McGann, *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*: focus not on final intentions but on ‘social processes’ of composition and publication.
- D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*: bibliographic codes. The meaning of a text is determined by its physical manifestations.
Varieties of Editorial Experience

- Editing is a form of preservation (copying), but it is also a product of analysis.
- It is an act of historical scholarship which requires an answer to this question: "What role do judgment and evaluation play in reconstructing the past?" (G. Thomas Tanselle 1994).
- Texts of documents v. text of works.
- Editing is also mediation. The editor intervenes in two basic ways:
  1. Modernisation through emendations
  2. Publish original text either
     i. diplomatically (as precisely as possible), or
     ii. critically (creating a new text text from multiple authorities or ‘witnesses’).
Learn More


Gaskell, Philip. A New Introduction to Bibliography (Oak Knoll, 1995).

Greetham, D. C. Textual Scholarship: An Introduction (Garland, 1994).


Pierazzo, Elena. Digital Scholarly Editing (Ashgate, 2015).

Group Exercise: How would you edit this text?

Shakespeare, Sonnet 18

(Sonnets 1609)
How would you edit this text?

Henslowe’s Diary (1592)

Check out originals at your own peril:

https://www.henslowe-alleyn.org.uk/essays/henslowediary.html
How would you edit this text?

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd* (unfinished, c. 1886–1891)
How would you edit this text?

Letter from Paul Bowles to William Burroughs, subject to Burroughs-Gysin Cut-up method (1962)