

## FREDSON BOWERS

---

### *Some Principles for Scholarly Editions of Nineteenth-Century American Authors*

FREDSON BOWERS offers both a call to action and a guide to duty. Drawing particularly upon his experience with the Hawthorne Centenary Edition, Bowers argues that because "commonly esteemed editions" of classic American writers are untrustworthy, new editors of these texts must take care to "bring to their task the careful effort that has been established as necessary for English Renaissance texts." Only then will the editing of such texts "become a respectable occupation at long last and not a piece of back work for the paperbacks." Bowers also outlines the exact procedures necessary to establish a critical text and describes the elements of an apparatus that will enable the reader to understand what the editor has done and why. By and large these procedures and desiderata have been adopted by the Modern Language Association's Center for Editions of American Authors and incorporated into its Statement of Editorial Principles . . . (New York, 1967).

THE FIRST PROBLEM that faces any editor of a text from the nineteenth century, or earlier, is whether to modernize. For nineteenth-century American books there is only one answer: no gain results from modernizing, and much is lost that is characteristic of the author. One may safely say that nothing in the spelling, punctu-

---

Reprinted from *Studies in Bibliography*, XVII (1964), 223-28, with the permission of the author and the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia.

ation, capitalization, word-division, or paragraphing of nineteenth-century books is likely to cause a presentday reader any difficulty, whereas an attempt at modernization is certain to destroy a number of the values of the original. Every reason exists to preserve these classic texts in as close a form as possible to the authors' intentions, to the extent that the surviving documents for each individual work permit of such reconstruction. Indeed, one may flatly assert that any text that is modernized can never pretend to be scholarly, no matter at what audience it is aimed.

The second problem is whether to edit the text critically or to content oneself with a reprint of some single document. Again, an argument cannot really exist in favor of a mere reprint, no matter how neatly such a procedure enables an editor to dodge his basic responsibility. It is probably safe to say that no nineteenth-century text of any length exists that is not in need of some correction, and possibly even of revisory emendation. Once an editor tinkers in any way with his original, he has entered upon the province of critical editing; and he had better go the whole way and be consistent than dip his big toe in the water and then draw back in alarm lest he suddenly find himself out of his depth.

The first step in critical editing is the so-called establishment of the text. The first step in *this* process is the determination of the exact forms of the early documents in which the text is preserved and of the facts about their relationship to one another. That is, the early editions within an author's lifetime, and within a sufficient time after his death to give the opportunity for testamentary documents to be produced, must be collated and the authoritative editions isolated. An authoritative edition is one set directly from manuscript, or a later edition that contains corrections or revisions that proceeded from the author. Authority divides itself between the words as meaningful units (i.e., the substantives) and the accidentals, that is, the forms that the words take in respect to spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and division. In this question the theory of copy-text proposed by Sir Walter Greg rules supreme. Greg distinguished between the authority of the substantives and of the forms, or accidentals, assumed by these substantives. If only the first edition, set from manuscript, has authority, as being the closest

in each of these two respects to the author's lost manuscript, then both authorities are combined in one edition. On the other hand, a revised edition may alter the authority of some of the substantives; but the transmission of the author's accidentals through the hands, and mind, of still another compositor destroys the authority of these features of the first edition, set from manuscript. An eclectic text must be constructed which combines the superior authority of most of the words in the revised edition with the superior authority of the forms of words in the first edition.

The determination of authority is not always easy in a later edition. For example, in Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* three editions (i.e., three different typesettings) were made during his lifetime. In the second edition, set and printed in 1850 within two months of the first, 226 pages were completely reset, but 96 pages were printed from the standing type of the first edition. In the 226 pages of the resetting occur 62 variants from the first edition, of which three are corrections of first-edition typographical errors and four are typographical errors in the second edition. Twelve different words (i.e., variant substantive readings) appear in these pages, and there are 43 changes in spelling, capitalization, and word-division.

Of more import, in the 96 pages of standing type, someone ordered eight variants, of which three are spelling, four are punctuation, and one is division. Here if anywhere the author's intentions would be visible if he had ordered these changes in standing type; but an editor will find no clearcut authority in the changes, and indeed some evidence that at least two of them go contrary to Hawthorne's observed characteristics. Once these variants are rejected as non-authorial, therefore, the conclusion must be drawn that Hawthorne did not supervise the production of the second edition and hence no revisions can be accepted from the reset type-pages, although a few corrections will prove useful.

Nor does the third edition, the last in Hawthorne's lifetime, yield any readings other than a continuation of corruption, and some necessary but obvious correction. None of the 37 additional alterations in the words seems to have any chance of being an authorial revision, and most are clearly errors.

In these circumstances, the editor is forced back to the first

edition as the sole authority. But the question then arises, what is the specific authority of each page of this first edition, for it is possible for copies to vary because of changes made during the course of printing. Mechanical collation on the Hinman Machine of eight copies of *The Scarlet Letter* discloses four differences in readings, but all of these seem to have resulted from type being loosened during the course of printing so that the progression is from correctness to error. However, unless an editor had established the correct readings where these errors exist, he would wrongly have imputed the errors to the first edition; and it is possible that he might have emended differently from the original reading. For example, because an exclamation point dropped out very early in the printing of page 228, no edition before the Centenary recovered this original authoritative punctuation, for all editors were content to follow the second-edition comma that the later compositor inserted when he came to the blank space in his copy.

The collation of multiple copies reveals other possibilities for variation. In *The Scarlet Letter*, interestingly enough, economy of printing led the printer of the first edition to typeset the last two text pages in duplicate. Fortunately no differences appear in these two settings, but the possibility of variation is always present. For example, the new Preface to the second edition was also set in duplicate, and here one typesetting has a comma that appears to be authoritative, whereas the other omits it. An editor who neglected to collate a number of copies might have reprinted arbitrarily from the wrong typesetting and thus, even though in a small matter, have departed from Hawthorne's intention.

Even if the first edition were printed from plates, machine collation is necessary to discover concealed printings within the so-called first edition, for the possibility exists that plates may be altered between impressions. For example, the Ticknor and Field cost books list four printings from plates in 1851 of *The House of the Seven Gables*, and one printing in 1852. Since no copy of an 1852 printing has turned up, it seems clear that one of the unidentified 1851 printings represents the fifth impression with a title-page date unchanged. No book collector or librarian has the least idea which printing his precious first-edition copy represents, but

the Hinman Machine discloses the order by combining the evidence of type batter with the evidence for resetting of damaged plates as well as various mendings. It is pure luck that these extensive plate repairs were carried out without producing any changes in the text to baffle the non-bibliographical editor, and it is clear that Hawthorne (if he saw any errors) ordered no revisions between these printings.

But not all changes made in plates from printing to printing are so respectful of the text. For instance, the third edition of *The Scarlet Letter* was printed from plates in 1850 and these plates remained in use at least as late as 1886. In the course of the various repairs made in this interval, five different words got altered so that the text of the final printings from these plates differs from that of the initial printings in this respect as well as in dozens and dozens of punctuation marks worn off or quite altered by batter. These changes have no authority, but it is clear that Hawthorne himself made some alterations in the plates for one of the later printings of *The Marble Faun*, revisions of which an editor must take account if he knows about them.

When an author's manuscript is preserved, this has paramount authority, of course. Yet the fallacy is still maintained that since the first edition was proofread by the author, it must represent his final intentions and hence should be chosen as copy-text. Practical experience shows the contrary. When one collates the manuscript of *The House of the Seven Gables* against the first printed edition, one finds an average of ten to fifteen differences per page between the manuscript and the print, many of them consistent alterations from the manuscript system of punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and word-division. It would be ridiculous to argue that Hawthorne made approximately three to four thousand small changes in proof, and then wrote the manuscript of *The Blithedale Romance* according to the same system as the manuscript of the *Seven Gables*, a system that he had rejected in proof.

A close study of the several thousand variants in *Seven Gables* demonstrates that almost every one can be attributed to the printer. That Hawthorne passed them in proof is indisputable, but that they differ from what he wrote in the manuscript and manifestly pre-

ferred is also indisputable. Thus the editor must choose the manuscript as his major authority, correcting from the first edition only what are positive errors in the accidentals of the manuscript.

However, when words differ in the print from the manuscripts, as they do a certain number of times, the question of authority arises. Any difference in words can arise only by reason of printer's error that Hawthorne did not catch in proof, or by reason of changes that Hawthorne himself made in the lost proof-sheets. Each variant, thus, becomes an editorial responsibility, to be adjudicated on the evidence available. In *The Blithedale Romance* Hawthorne can be assigned twenty-four of the verbal proof-changes between manuscript and first edition. The printer is responsible, fairly clearly, for the remaining seven of the thirty-one differences in wording.

Here we encounter the theory of a critical edition. Obviously, an editor cannot simply reprint the manuscript, for he must substitute for its readings any words that he believes Hawthorne changed in proof. Once more, if one argues why not reprint the first edition and be done with it—then two questions of evidence are pertinent. First, in reprinting the first edition of *The Blithedale Romance*, one would be attributing to Hawthorne seven words that are actually printer's errors. Secondly, if an author's habits of expression go beyond words and into the forms that these take, together with the punctuation that helps to shape the relationships of these words, then one is foolish to prefer a printing-house style to the author's style. This distinction is not theory, but fact. Hawthorne's punctuation, for example, is much more meaningful in respect to emphasis and to delicate matters of parenthesis and subordination than is the printing-house style in which *Seven Gables* and *The Blithedale Romance* appeared. In each book, the real flavor of Hawthorne, cumulatively developing in several thousand small distinctions, can be found only in the manuscript.

Sometimes the Greg formula that authors' substantive revisions in later editions must always be followed, when identified, but that the best authority for the accidentals remains the edition set directly from manuscript, produces some complexity, and the result will agree in a number of details with no preserved document, even

though it will represent the nearest approximation in every respect of the author's final intentions. An eclectic editor must be prepared for any eventuality.

Granted that an editor has established a critical text that will stand up under the most searching investigation of scholarship, then what will scholars want from his apparatus? First, a list of the internal variants in the first and in any other authoritative edition as revealed by the collation of a number of copies of each, preferably on the Hinman Machine. Secondly, a complete list of all editorial changes in the selected copy-text. These changes comprise corrections and revisions admitted from later editions as well as the editor's own alterations. For the sake of the record, the editor should list the earliest edition from which he draws any alteration. Textual notes should discuss briefly any arguable emendations, or failure to emend.

The next item is the Historical Collation. This should contain all the substantive alterations from the established edited text found in a group of significant later editions. An edition is to be defined as any new typesetting. Obviously, any edition within the author's lifetime may be significant and must be collated. Thereafter the editor's discretion may enter. Usually it is important to select editions that have been influential in the formation of the text, or that have been commonly used by critics. For instance, the decision was made by the Centenary editors of Hawthorne to confine the Historical Collation largely to the Boston collected editions published in the Ticknor and Field line to Houghton Mifflin, as well as any separate editions published within the author's lifetime. For *The Scarlet Letter*, therefore, the Centenary Edition records the readings from the second edition of 1850, the third edition of 1850, the Little Classics edition of 1875, the Riverside of 1883, and ends with the Autograph of 1900. Included always are the first English editions in case any authoritative changes were made in the copy sent abroad, and usually any modern edition that has been freshly edited in fact instead of in theory.

To insure accuracy, the sets of plates are taken as representing the various editions, and the earliest and latest printings from each edition-set of plates have been collated on the Hinman Machine

and their variants recorded in the Centenary apparatus. All printings from plates within the author's lifetime have also been collated whenever variants appeared between the first and last impressions of any set of plates instituted before his death.

Although this Historical Collation is chiefly a record of the corruption of the text, it serves as a useful object lesson in the untrustworthy nature of various commonly esteemed editions. More important, however, this list insures that all cards are on the table. If any collated edition has authority not recognized by the editor, the critic will find the record of its variants and all the evidence on which, throughout, the editor made up his mind about the details of the text.

When a manuscript is preserved, an important separate list will contain a record of all the rejected readings and revisions during the process of inscription. Moreover, the variants in any preserved proof-sheets should be recorded with the same scrupulousness and for the same critical purpose.

So far as I know, a problem that no editor has faced concerns the word-division whenever a compound in the copy-text is divided at the end of one line and the start of the next. The exact form of all such compounds must be settled so that the edited text will contain that one that is characteristic of the author. Since editorial judgment is sometimes involved in this process, a list of such divided possible compounds should be provided. Correspondingly, the modern printer will divide a number of compounds so that a reader will not always know the exact form in the original. A second section of the compound list should note the copy-text reading in all such cases.

The amount of collating and checking in such an edition as has been outlined is very heavy indeed; but only this editorial process scrupulously carried out will produce editions of American classics that will stand the test of time and, heaven willing, need never be edited again from the ground up. When scholars editing American literature will bring to their task the careful effort that has been established as necessary for English Renaissance texts, say, then the editing of American texts will become a respectable occupation at long last, and not a piece of hack work for the paperbacks.