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The Semiotics of Bibliography
Abstract

D.F. McKenzie's concept of the sociology of texts is an exploration of the network of relationships revealed by analytical bibliography and leads to book history as an understanding of the socio-economic materials and industries indexed by individual manuscripts or books. The meanings of the bibliographic elements of a document are historical and point to networks that will help us understand how texts were created, replicated disseminated, and understood in the past. The sociology of texts is not, however, a prescription for editorial work because, among other problems, every new edition indexes a new sociology of texts and cannot replicate or act as surrogate indexing the sociology of any source text. McKenzie understood that fully and edited Congreve as an eclectic text fulfilling authorial intentions. So-called social editing is neither documentary nor sociological, and any appeals to a sociology of texts in support of social text editing is illogical, though social texts may be desirable. There are many orientations to text leading to different ways to edit for different purposes; we need to understand both the rationales for and the consequences of each approach.

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The Semiotics of Bibliography¹

In the booklet based on his Panizzi Lectures, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts*, D. F. McKenzie takes to task W. W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, Ross Atkinson, and G. Thomas Tanselle for defining “bibliography” as a collection of scientific investigations divorced from the symbolic or semiotic meanings of the objects they examined and described.² McKenzie accounts briefly (and weakly) for why these bibliographers were anxious to isolate analytical bibliography from the critical uses of bibliographical information by comparing Greg’s and Bowers’s efforts and their times with the efforts of New Criticism to develop self-sufficiency (7). He concludes that their views of bibliography are inadequate to explain what bibliographers do or should be doing, and accuses them of creating a notion about bibliography that renders their work increasingly irrelevant. “Rare book rooms will simply become rarer,” he remarked with more wit than logic (4).

We need first to understand why Greg and company were anxious to define the branches of bibliography so strictly and then to ask why McKenzie was so anxious to limit the interests of these scholars to the confines of those precise definitions. That McKenzie was misrepresenting these earlier scholars is made patently clear by his own conclusion about the definitions--a clarity he seemed not to see. Citing Atkinson, McKenzie pointed out that, in C. S. Pierce's terminology, the definitions he quoted from Greg and others restricted attention to the “iconic” representation of printed material. He conceded that analytical bibliography rises to an “indexical” function, but noted that this attention to “meaning” is confined to the indications that can be found in physical books about their modes of production. From this analysis of the definitions McKenzie concluded, “If textual bibliography were merely iconic, it could produce only facsimiles of different versions.” Anyone familiar with the work of Greg, but more particularly of Bowers and Tanselle, knows that it was never confined to the production of facsimiles and that they spent precious little time producing them, though both showed a keen interest in facsimiles--particularly in the inadequacy of facsimiles as representations of original texts.³

So, why did Greg and other mid-century bibliographers worry about the methodology and focus of bibliography and seek to define its various branches so strictly? To answer this question we must look to bibliography before R. B. McKerrow and Greg-- bibliography as practiced in the previous generation by book collectors such as T. J. Wise

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²McKenzie, “The Book as an Expressive Form,” first Panizzi lecture (1985) in *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: British Library, 1986), 1-2.

³See in particular Fredson Bowers’s “The Problem of the Variant Forme in a Facsimile Edition” *Library*, (1952) 7: 262-272; and “The Yale Folio Facsimile and Scholarship” *Modern Philology*, (53), 1955, 50-57; and G. Thomas Tanselle’s “Reproductions and Scholarship” *Studies in Bibliography*, (1989) 42: 25-54.

and Buxton Foreman, and scholar-critics such as Frederic George Kenyon, Geoffrey Keynes, George Saintsbury, and George Lyman Kittridge. Contrast the 1890--1920s generation with their successors, John Carter, Graham Pollard, Simon Nowell-Smith, Dover Wilson, Michael Sadleir, and McKerrow and Greg, and one sees immediately why that younger generation needed to establish something like a scientific basis for their work in order to counter the impressionistic and often sloppy use of bibliography to promote *a priori* religious convictions or aesthetic dogmas and to enhance financial interest in dodgy rare book productions.

Nowell-Smith captures the problem faced by the post 1920s generation of bibliographers in his 1969 reminiscence of his youth at the opening of an address to the Bibliographical Society.⁴ As an undergraduate Nowell-Smith wrote an essay titled "A plea for standardized bibliography," which was, he said, remarkable primarily for "the rebuffs it evoked". One *éminence grise*, Herbert Garland, "rejected my plea on the ground that bibliography was being 'increasingly recognized as a part of the critical apparatus of literary editorship and criticism', and that 'therefore' any 'limitation of method' tending to make it 'a mere technical code among certain specialists' was to be discouraged." Nowell-Smith then recalled Geoffrey Keynes's opinion, "I have never concerned myself with the bibliography of the period discussed by Mr. Nowell-Smith, and am never likely to. . . . Bibliography is a pastime, *not* a formal science, so I am afraid I find myself in fundamental disagreement with Mr. Nowell-Smith."

McKenzie's objections to what he describes as the narrow, technical, scientific definitions proposed by Greg and company before the mid-Century seem, at first blush, to be cut from the same cloth as Garland's and Keynes's. The arguments of scholars for whom bibliography was not a mere pastime or a mere handmaiden to criticism stand with as much force against McKenzie's opening salvo as they did against Garland and Keynes.

But, now why did McKenzie find it convenient or perhaps necessary to confine the scholarship of the generation preceding his own to so ludicrously narrow a view? He must have known Nowell-Smith's account; he surely knew McKerrow, Greg and Bowers's battles to establish standards in a world of casual bibliography where bibliographical observations were often marshaled as proof texts in the service of pet critical views. And McKenzie knew that Bowers's own scholarship, though based on strict adherence to the rules of bibliographical evidence, was always used to expand a critical assessment of the semantic and semiotic meanings of historical bibliography for an understanding of literary works.⁵ He also knew that McKerrow's *An Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford 1927) which had served as a textbook in bibliography from 1927 through the 1970s and beyond, had as its subtitle: *For Literary Students*. McKerrow's view of bibliography for literary students was not dislodged by Philip Gaskell's *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford, 1972) which, justly, did not have that subtitle. So, why must McKenzie disparage the views of bibliography put forth by Greg and Bowers, before offering his very useful expansion of those definitions in ways that have been so influential in the adjacent fields of scholarly editing and book history--neither of which was considered, either before his lectures or afterward, to be, strictly speaking, bibliography?

⁴ Nowell-Smith, "T. J. Wise as Bibliographer" *The Library* (1969) s5-XXIV[2]: 129-141.

⁵ See for example his, *Textual and Literary Criticism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1959).

One answer might be that the so-called scientific focus of bibliography did in fact narrow the attention of scholars who, believing that their primary purpose was to study an author, frequently isolated and more or less repudiated the work of non-authors in the production system. McKenzie's broadened view brought more people to scholarly attention. McKenzie's examination of Greg's definition of bibliography makes room for other definitions that point to the uses of bibliography as well as to the purview or subject matter of bibliography. In fact McKenzie's move is a strong indication of the success that bibliographers had had in the mid century, both in bringing rigor to bibliographical investigations and using the results to justify a major cultural phenomenon: their work had produced public support for scholarly editing. McKenzie, in claiming that: "I am also convinced, however, that the premise informing Greg's classic statement, and therefore this refinement of it, is no longer adequate as a definition of what bibliography is and does" (2), prepares for his argument that bibliography, considered in a socio-historical context, stimulates and underpins the superstructure of knowledge that explains not only what was said and thought historically but how it was said, distributed, maintained, understood, and preserved. McKenzie, in the lectures as a whole, does more than anyone ever had to convince us that in any aspect of intellectual history, the answer to the question, "where did that come from" always follows a trail ending in a document beyond which it is impossible to go empirically, and that the meaning of documents lies not only in the significance of lexical texts but in the iconic significance of documents and in the socio-economic contexts indexed by the material object.

So, while McKenzie's opening salvo appears to be an attack on bibliography as practiced in the immediate past, the lectures as a whole justify the "scientific" and iconic attention that had been paid to documents by showing that the foundation of knowledge and the transmission of knowledge is bibliographical. It would seem to me, then, that the rhetorical force of McKenzie's opening salvo on the narrowness of the bibliography of the past was a mistake. It is unfortunately a common mistake made by scholars with new insights that, in the enthusiasm of initial discovery, can lead them to think that the new view is contrary to, rather than supplementary to, prevailing wisdom. Thus, when McKenzie writes that, "the vital interests of most of those known to me as bibliographers are no longer fully served by description, or even by editing, but by the historical study of the making and the use of books and other documents" (3), he is shifting his attention from a narrow understanding of the rules and methods of analytical and descriptive bibliography to the genuine broader interests of the bibliographers who have followed those rules and methods, and he is acknowledging that their real interests outstrip the objectives of accurate description. Thus, he is not in fact enlarging the definition of bibliography so much as he is saying that the human beings who wear bibliographical hats in their roles as bibliographers are also interested in the fields that are affected and illuminated by the investigations of bibliography, and it is this larger interest that is the main topic of his lectures on Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts. Greg, Bowers and Tanselle were also readers, critics, and (at least the latter two) teachers of literature who were interested in the interpretive consequences of textual scholarship. But their rejection of a previous generation's sometimes sloppy use of impressionistic bibliography and their establishment of the discipline of bibliography as a precise, almost scientific, form of inquiry made them insist on the priority of those disciplinary claims. It did not, as McKenzie seems to suggest, cause them to reject or fail to develop their interest in the

critical applications of bibliography. One measure of that commitment was, in fact, the application of bibliography in the construction of critical editions--editions that had to incorporate critical judgment about the significance of bibliographical evidence without confusing the exercise of criticism with the duties of bibliographical investigation.

There remains a significant problem with the prevailing editorial wisdom of what is nowadays often referred to as the Greg, Bowers, Tanselle school of editing--or, with less justice, copy-text editing. It is a problem when seen from McKenzie's point of view, and I will address it in a moment.

An idea I want to work toward, by telling this story, is that, perhaps because we are human rather than because we are bibliographers, textual critics, scholarly editors or book historians, we rather too often make the mistake of devaluing rather sweepingly what our predecessors have done simply because they did not see what we, who are actually standing on their shoulders, are able to see.

It is true that when the army of editors responsible for the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA) applied the fruits of their bibliographical research in the service of scholarly editing, they did not see in the bibliographical evidence what McKenzie has taught us to see. They did, however, see full well that a study of printing-house histories and practices, of paper making and distribution, of both the visual and chemical properties of book-making materials, and of the politics and economics, no less than the machinery, of book production was all-important for understanding what happened in the processes that transformed a manuscript text into a distributable, salable product. But they used this knowledge, by and large, in the service of authorial preferences and practices for the literary work, and identified and evaluated the work of other participants in the production process according to how well it served the purposes that their studies associated with the author.

McKenzie's insight into the sociology of texts required a different agenda, one might say a more democratic agenda, one that recognized not only the fact that each material text indexed a network of social, economic and political forces, industries and purposes, but that this network of human interaction was interesting in its own right, deserving of our attention and respect. One of the early consequences of this shift in agenda was to see that bibliography and scholarly editing had, in the recent past, been used in an elitist and exclusionary manner privileging what in the 1970s and 1980s were more and more frequently referred to as dead white males.

Following publication of McKenzie's lectures, there was something of a scramble to distance the purposes of scholarly editing from elitist rhetoric and the goals associated with that recent past in bibliography and textual studies. It was helpful that in those days there was a growing awareness, too, of the principles of Historical/Critical editing as practiced in Europe, where bibliographically and editorially, the primary function of the scholar was to identify, order, and reveal the historical record of textual existence--and not to edit texts so that they would more perfectly represent the national cultural heritage or the desires of solitary geniuses. And, far more positively and in keeping with the main arguments of McKenzie's lectures, was the development of book history as a cultural investigation of the interactions and influences of industries and practices that affected the production of books.

But the mistake in sweeping away the bad old methods to make way for the new is

that it often has the unintended consequence of sweeping the good with it. I believe we have been reluctant to see or acknowledge how we have been guilty. The new prevailing argument went something like this: If we were to acknowledge and respect the network of humans involved in book production, it seemed logical to think that editing a work to reflect an author's intentions, excluding the participation of production personnel, was an act of disrespect for the production team. In addition, it is argued, emendation always creates a text that had not existed before (the favorite pejorative locutions are: neither flesh nor fowl nor ever seen on land or sea) and, therefore, emended texts misrepresent historical documents, substituting a modern editor's judgment for the historical facts.

One thing that seems to have dropped from sight is that by the logic of the sociology of texts and of the semiotics of bibliography, *any* reprint, even an accurate one with no emendations, is a new social act in a new sociological network producing new material (i.e., bibliographical) forms with new associations and meanings of their own. McKenzie knew that full well, writing, nearly twenty years later, in "The Past is Prologue" not only that

Once we accept the premise that the forms themselves encode the history of their production, it follows that to abstract what we're told is their 'verbal information content' by transferring it to another medium is to contradict the very assumption that the artefact is the product of a distinctive complex of materials, labour, and mentality,
but that

any simulation (including re-presentation in a database--a copy of a copy) is an impoverishment, a theft of evidence, a denial of more exact and immediate visual and tactile ways of knowing, a destruction of their quiddity as collaborative products under the varying historical conditions of their successive realisations.⁶
Upon reflection, I submit that *the sociology of texts has no editorial consequence*. If the sociology of texts is to be the guiding beacon, then editing must stop altogether, because it is the whole material product, not just the lexical text, that indexes (points to) the forces that created it. Only the first edition indexes the forces that created it; only the second edition indexes its sociology. The scholarly edition, regardless of its editorial principles, indexes only the forces that produced it, not those that produced the source texts upon which it is based.

McKenzie's insights do nothing for scholarly editing. They do not even do anything for bibliography itself, except to broaden the range of materials upon which we might wish to exercise the tools and methods of bibliography. McKenzie's insights were not about editing or even about bibliography itself; but they were enormously important in bringing together bibliography and sociology in the new field of book history. He explained to us how meaning is affected not only by the words from a page but by the page and the material form of the page, and, furthermore, not only of the author, but of those working in the production industries required in the making of books.

An editor, however, cannot apply the principles of sociology to editing. He or she may choose the Historical/Critical principles of collecting, recording, and revealing the texts as found in all historical documents representing a work; rejecting all but

⁶“‘What’s Past Is Prologue’: The Bibliographical Society and History of the Book” (1993); rpt. in Peter D. McDonald and Michael F. Suarez, S. J., eds, *Making Meaning: ‘Printers of the Mind’ and Other Essays* (Amherst: U Mass. P, 2002), p. 271.

the emendation of demonstrable errors and choosing to do that, perhaps, only in footnotes. But that is not sociology. Historical/Critical editing emerges from a respect for documents, not respect for production personnel, and not from the sociology of texts. Such an editor can (and should) provide introductions detailing the fruits of bibliographical and genetic and book historical investigations that analyze and explore the sociologies of the source texts. But scholarly editions do not reflect the principles or the insights of the sociology of texts, because the sociology of texts has no principles for editing or reproducing texts.

The flight from intentionalist editing in our time is conceptually and logically unrelated to McKenzie's insights, which instead support good material archives of all editions and printings of a work and strong analytical bibliography and book historical narratives based upon them. Comprehensive digital archives accompanied by explorations of the network of composition and book production are also justifiable on the back of McKenzie's insights. But the rejection of intentionalist editing has nothing to do with McKenzie's arguments about books as expressive forms. In fact authorially oriented new editions are not in conflict with any of McKenzie's observations or conclusions.

McKenzie makes this point explicitly in the Foreword, written when the Panizzi lectures of the year before were published in 1986, noting without objection that "Definitive editions have come to seem an impossible ideal in face of so much evidence of authorial revision and, therefore, of textual instability. . . . the variety of authorized forms has opened up editorial choice in new ways, even to the point of creating, through conflation, quite new versions thought more appropriate to the needs of newly defined markets" (x). Furthermore, his edition of Congreve is eclectic, pursuing the author's intentions by selecting readings and formatting aspects from several editions to emend his copy-text.⁷ He first acknowledges that "respect for historical form and content applies equally to the different textual structure of an *œuvre*" and that "lifting each item from the soil of its first growth . . . replants them in new relationships" (xviii). This is a fundamental fact about the sociology of texts. But it does not dominate McKenzie's editorial procedure. Perhaps it influenced the careful exploration of the pros and cons of choosing a quarto or collected works edition as a starting point, but it did not prevent him from considering what the editor would have to do in each case to bring the chosen text into conformity with the author's intentions. He selected the 1710 *Works* as copy-text, but adopted the format of the 1719-20 edition for speech prefixes. He surveyed the options for emending, concluding that "[t]he smaller compromise is to consider each reading on its merits and, if it seems to be justified in the interests of the play, to restore the earlier one" (xxix). In describing his edition, McKenzie says "The text too is inescapably eclectic, 'critical' in the literal sense that its readings are chosen from a variety of witnesses besides the copy text" (xxxv).

Nevertheless, a school of editing, claiming (illogically, I'm afraid) to be based on McKenzie's insights, requires that editors eschew emendation, except for the correction of demonstrable errors, because to emend disrespects the social dynamics of the sociology of texts. It is curious to note the strangle hold this view currently exercises over discussions of editorial theory and the expectations it has inspired in some academic

⁷ *The Works of William Congreve*, edited in three volumes by D. F. McKenzie, prepared for publication by C. Y. Ferdinand (Oxford University Press, 2011).

publishers who will no longer contemplate non-social scholarly editions. The weakness of the so-called social editorial procedure is simple to expose.

Since every extant textual form of a work had a sociology of production, it follows that any text can be chosen as the copy-text for an edition, including the MS or any posthumous edition. The consequence of the decision to make a new edition is, however, that a new sociology of texts supplants the one indexed by the copy-text that was chosen. McKenzie began as a bibliographer examining the physical object that is a document (MS or print) and found in it the work of several industries that were economically interdependent. He saw that exploring those dependencies could lead to a fuller understanding of book production and the people involved in the various trades required by books. The result is a view in which documents and bibliography become the center of a range of historical investigations, spreading far beyond single-minded concerns for what an author did or wanted. However, this broadened interest fails to provide support for any editorial theory or practice because every editorial act enacts a new sociological event with new materials, new industries, new personnel, new readers, new outcomes that supplant the material witness or (C. S. Piercian) index to the sociology of the period when the document in question (the copy-text) was created. It is impossible to *edit* according to sociological principles because even the mere act of reprinting (even in facsimile) displaces all the original sociological conditions on behalf of new ones.

A social editor has to undertake mental slight of hand to separate the *lexical* text from the material text, perhaps not realizing that in that initial act the logic of the sociology of text is already violated. The sociological significance is vested in, and indexed by, the whole *material* text--the tangible product of the confluence of forces at work at the time—not by the lexical text alone. Faithfully reproducing the lexical text in a new material form with a totally new sociology of text, the would-be social editor believes something important has been preserved because no emendations were introduced. That is true from a historical/critical editorial point of view; it is not true from a sociological point of view.

There may be a more sympathetic way to describe social editorial decisions by saying that it is *not* a sociology of texts as described by McKenzie but, rather, the democratic and social reasoning sometimes associated with McGann, reflecting Marxist literary principles, that elevates the agency of production personnel to an equal claim with the author on the attention of editors and readers. In this view, the social editor pays homage to the persons, actions and intentions of publishers, compositors, and other production persons whose right to influence the text is now on an equal footing with the person, actions, and intentions of the author who can be said to have been demoted to the role of just another one of the folks involved in creating a saleable commodity. It does not seem to make any difference if the motives for this decision involve a democratic respect for all production personnel or the socialist belief in the determining power of capitalism; the result is a refusal to emend or to prioritize the work of some over that of others in the process. Attempts to find in the sociology of texts support for this social approach are unconvincing.

Apparently failing to note that McKenzie's argument is focused on bibliography and its implications for understanding the past in a broad spectrum of questions and evidence, the social school invokes his work in support of a different cause, an editorial

one.⁸ McKenzie's insights might have brought attention to the fact that Greg, Bowers and Tanselle valued the work of an author more than they valued the work of production personnel, without whose ministrations their authored texts would remain in MS (except for Blake), but that had never been a secret. From a social point of view, however, the editorial practices of Greg and company are elitist and exclusionary. Seeing the author as just one of many involved in the production of reading materials, social editorial theory and practice focuses on the collaborative development of the text of a work. Because this view results in the wholesale acceptance of historical texts as integrated historical entities, it has seemed to some to also be a rejection of intentionalist editing. In fact, however, it merely elevated the intentions of composers, publisher's editors, censors and everyone else to an equal level with authorial intentions. This is democratic and social, but it is not "historical/sociological". And the result is that the modern reader of a social edition is restricted to reading the literary work in a form that captures a rigid lexical text from a historical document, repackaged and, thus, indexing a totally new sociology of text mixed with a modern social collaboration. Appeals to the so-called bibliographic code are irrelevant to the results of *social editing* because all bibliographic codes are erased and supplanted by new ones in a new edition.

My personal reaction to these arguments is to say I wear multiple disciplinary hats: as a *bibliographer*, I want to identify and collect and describe as precisely as possible all the relevant documents for a work. As a *book historian* I want to understand each of those documents as the focal point of a network of industries and the persons who ran them and who produced the books. As an *archivist*, I want to create both material archives and virtual archives that are anchored in images of historically extant documents and that are supported, first, by accurate transcriptions, second, by ways to identify and display textual variation, third, by explanations of the textual variation, and, fourth, by expansive narrative accounts of book history. As an *editor*, I want the right to identify the agents of textual change that I value and the moments in the trajectory of textual development that I find interesting. I want then to produce a new reading text that benefits from the knowledge represented by the bibliography, the textual criticism, the book history and the virtual archive's analysis and display of textual variation. And I wish to extend that right to other editors who prefer other ways of arranging the evidence and of extracting possible texts. The purpose of editing is not to replicate the past. That cannot be done even with facsimiles. Editing is for the purpose of foregrounding some aspect of the many aspects that are buried in the mass of variant texts of a work. It is possible that a given historical text already foregrounds the aspects that a modern editor would like also to foreground, in which case replicating that historical text, albeit in new clothing, makes sense. But it is also possible that an aspect of the text has been obscured by historical production processes and can be rescued from the variant mass only by strong critical analysis and emendation. Editing must have the option to produce such texts as well. The freedom I am advocating will lead to some new, previously unavailable, forms of the text that will have great appeal because of the scholarship and critical judgment

⁸ J. J. McGann's arguments in *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1983) predate McKenzie's Panizzi Lectures of 1985, but McGann has subsequently found support for his views in McKenzie's work, as has Jack Stillinger, particularly in *Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

that produced them. It will also lead to some eccentric, poorly prepared abominable editions. It will NOT lead to supplanting any other edition, and it will NOT lead to the text that everyone should read and rely upon to the exclusion of all others. But then, neither will any other editorial procedure.

It is not necessary, when we have new insights, to kill off our fathers and reject their work. Authors had intentions. Evidence survives to indicate that those intentions were sometimes thwarted in production and showing also that authors are sometimes influenced to accept changes or make new changes. Adjusting the results of historical book production is not conducted at the expense of history or of documents or of production personnel, who, like most people, were very likely doing the best they could with what they had for reasons they believed to be adequate. It is just that the surviving documents for any given work do not necessarily represent all the forms of a work that we might be interested in.

Texts emended in order to privilege one or a few agents of textual change over others should also be created—not because they are correct or more perfect texts, but because they foreground important aspects of the work that were obscured in previous productions. Most, if not all, historical documents reflect interventions and contain errors and sophistications introduced by persons with the *power* but not the *authority* to change the text. New texts, correcting errors and privileging the work of one or more agents over the work of others should be attempted. Once such an edition is created, it takes its place in the archive of possible texts, and we can value it for filling, or deride it for failing to fill, a perceived gap in the textual development of a work. If it is a scholarly edition, it will report not only on the history of the lexical texts and describe the material forms those texts have taken, but also describe the sociology of those texts—all without losing sight of the defamiliarization inevitable in the newly constructed edition.

McKenzie removed much of the sting of his criticism of older bibliographers when he remarked that if he were to

describe what we severally do as bibliographers, we should note, rather, that it is the only discipline which has consistently studied the composition, formal design, and transmission of texts by writers, printers, and publishers; their distribution through different communities by wholesalers, retailers, and teachers; their collection and classification by librarians; their meaning for, and – I must add – their creative regeneration by, readers. However we define it, no part of that series of human and institutional interactions is alien to bibliography as we have, traditionally, practiced it. (4)

This actually describes what Bowers and Tanselle did as scholar-teachers. In the end, McKenzie's fundamental message is about the connections between bibliography and the wider interests of historical bibliography, broadly defined; he wanted to acknowledge that social and interpretive concerns were part of bibliographical studies. Unfortunately, to do that, he chose as a strategy first to disparage a strict definition of the discipline of bibliography and those who espoused it. There was a time when the term philology was broad enough to cover everything that McKenzie is asking us to pay attention to. I believe, the primary importance of McKenzie's work may be that it poured the light of fresh thinking on a field that had, in the hands of some practitioners, become ossified--not

because of the thinking of its leading lights, but because of its mechanical application in the hands of followers.

If this story is a bit of an allegory, perhaps it points to two potential flaws that bibliography, scholarly editing, book collecting, and book history have been known to exhibit. Book collectors who single-mindedly pursue first printings in first states as established by points, without regard to the social, economic, or intellectual significances of textual or bibliographical variation, might be faulted for not applying thought to their interests; and book historians intent on describing the number of books or newspapers found in colonial, urban, or working men's libraries might forget that the significance of their findings can go beyond the mere discovery of factual data. Scholarly editors rigorously recording variant substantives and accidentals and following what they take to be the one true method of preparing an edition, might be faulted for giving a wrong impression of what they have achieved. One could start a series of lectures by enumerating examples of scholars who did, or appear to have done, their work with blinkers on.

But in the end it might be those with a cavalier attitude toward the accumulation of accurate facts or who are so enamored of the big picture that conclusions and generalizations seem more important than facts, that do the most damage to the cause of progress in knowledge. One can almost trust the work of the mechanical sloggers in the field, but one must mount careful argument and correct errors to counter generalizations extrapolated from too small a sample, or the conclusion based on selected bits of bibliographical evidence, or the argument carried on the wings of rhetorical finesse.

As I look back on my own work in bibliography and scholarly editing, it seems to have a theme. It is that every choice has a consequence. Every decision to focus attention on some aspect of the history of books and texts entails a commitment to an array of consequences that slights other focuses and consequences. If one chooses to think that the text of a work is inevitably tied to the physical manifestation of that work, it follows that one cannot edit that work eclectically. If one chooses to think of every text in every manifestation as having been either detrimentally or beneficially altered (or both beneficially and detrimentally altered) in the production process, then one must choose either the responsibility of editing eclectically or to not be an editor but instead be an archivist. The point is that scholarly editing entails understanding the consequences of every choice, and for that there is no single set of rules that will help anyone to edit the right way. Housman was right to insist on the application of thought to textual criticism. But I fear he promoted rather than mitigated the human tendency to denigrate as wrongheaded or inadequate the standard practices in a field to which one wishes to contribute a new idea. Error and wrongheadedness exist, of course, but not everyone who sees things differently has a melon for a head or yogurt for brains.

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