icant and valued materials, as arbiters and guarantors of standards. That is as it has always been within the world of editing, and that is as it should be. But within the community, readers may feel a greater sense of participation in what they read, and may feel that where they have something of value to contribute, they may do so. This is not how it has been in the past, but in the new digital world we may able to make this, too, as it should be.

PETER SHILLINGSBURG

Reflections on editing and the web

My fuller consideration of scholarly editing for the web is published in *From Gutenberg to Google: Electronic Representations of Literary Texts* (2006)[1]. But here are a few points I believe are worth pondering as readers or users of electronic editions of literary texts. I should begin by acknowledging that for most of my own leisure reading and informational reading I behave as most people do, selecting my materials from convenient sources without too much regard for the sources or authenticity of the texts. But the history of scholarship tells us that, when one is reading carefully for the purpose of responding to the text in a formal and informed way, a casual approach to texts can defeat our aims.

It is in the double light of casual and serious reading that I focus attention on a few assumptions that many people, even academics, make about literary works and some considerations that might enlighten them

The first assumption is that any copy of a work will do. Indeed, as already acknowledged, we frequently act on this assumption-at least in part because we are not aware of the potential pitfalls for any particular text and we know that investigating such potentials will take longer than is warranted by the kind of interest we bring to the work. We know that works are frequently inaccurate because we recognise typographical errors, but we trust our ability to guess at the correct reading. In short, we cope with the reality of the common condition of texts in books, and we transfer this willingness to risk textual error to the texts we find on the web. It is not just the convenience of easy access to

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[1] See also «Verso una teoria degli atti di scrittura (Towards at Theory of Script Acts)», *Ecdotica*, 2 (2005), pp. 60-79 [translated by Domenico Fiormonte].

unreliable texts, but the fact that web texts are searchable in ways that print texts are not that leads us to use texts for whose accuracy we are unable to vouch.

Perhaps more important than the fact that texts commonly have errors is the fact that texts both in print and on the web usually fail to reveal that they represent a work that has been revised and they frequently fail to indicate which variant form of a work is being represented.

Another frequent assumption is also partially true: that cheap editions are better than expensive ones because I can have my own copy, mark the margins, fold the corners, highlight, make bold or underline. Furthermore, we think, the cheaper the texts, the more texts we can have. And if they are free, we can have as many as we like. All of this is true and is qualified only by the considerations mentioned in relation to the first assumption. We will have texts that "will do" but we are not sure just what they will do or what they are good for. Although it is true that it is better to have any copy than to have no copy, if the text in hand is not accurate, not complete, not accurately described or labelled, then it is possible, indeed probable, that critical labors based upon it will be misguided. Are inaccurate texts better than no text?

Perhaps both of these first assumptions are related to the assumption that everything one needs in order to understand a work is in the text itself. Texts of poems or novels are often treated as self-contained, complete aesthetic objects turned loose from their originating authors and contexts. And certainly many successful experiences of texts treated hermetically support this view. However, material textuality and speech act theory (and script act theory) indicate that every text is understood in relation to the "things that go without saying". The same sentence can mean different things depending on Who says it, Where it is said, To whom it is said, and When it is said. Different copies with the same words can seem to mean different things because what at one time went without saying may now no longer go without saying. Difference in time and locale may affect what is taken for granted. And so, to engage seriously with a text almost necessarily requires engagement with the text's author, publisher, audience and social-economic-political setting. For that kind of engagement, just any text will not suffice. Ninety-nine percent of texts on the web fail to provide a basis for this kind of engagement.

Yet another common assumption is that small textual differences don't make significant critical differences. This notion has more to do with wishful thinking than logical thought. Small textual differences can create different words. Authors frequently make subtle use of lan-

guage which can be compromised by small errors. Just quoting Malcolm Lowry's poem, "Strange Type" will help any reader call to mind many instances of this fact.

> I wrote: in the dark cavern of our birth.
> The printer had it tavern, which seems better:
> But herein lies the subject of our mirth,
> Since on the next page death appears as dearth.
> So it may be that God's word was distraction,
> Which to our strange type appears destruction,
> Which is bitter[2].

Sometimes people think or sense that the lexical is the only aspect of texts that matters. Put another way, it is thought that what a text looks like does not matter; it is what a text says that counts. And the consequence of this is that most web-available texts retain nothing of the appearance of their sources and can be displayed in a number of webpage arrangements, as it suits the reader or as the accidents of monitor and software select. Many people consider this flexibility and mark of ownership to be an asset. But books reveal much by what they look like, so that the convenience of web availability is purchased at a sharp "information price". All the poetry in an anthology looks alike, and so students know that what they are reading is poetry. But that is not where any of the poems started and frequently new poetry looks so different that we don't even know that it is poetry. In an anthology and on the web that unfamiliar look is taken away.

When the work one does with a text is important, the following suggestions seem in order to me:

1. Prefer digital images of source texts over transcripts.
2. Insist on source text dates – dates of composition and publication, and dates of electronic creation.
3. Insist on knowing what the source texts was.
4. Ask how the transcription was proofread.
5. Ask for supporting information about the things that went without saying for the author and original audience.

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[2] Last line thus in *Selected Poems*, ed. by Earle Birney, but as *Which is better* in the scholar's edition, *The Collected Poetry of Malcolm Lowry*, ed. by Kathleen Scherf (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 1995), as reported by Brad Leithauser («Notions of Freedom», *The New York Review of Books*, 43, 3 [1996], p. 34).

What I would have on the web if I had what I wanted:

A full-scale electronic scholarly edition should allow the user to answer quickly and easily questions about the work that might affect how it is used.

A. The Documents

1. What are the important historical documentary forms of this work?
2. Can I choose a specific historical document as my reading text?
3. Can I choose a critically edited form of the work as my reading text?
4. Can I see photographic images of any of these forms of the text?
5. As I read any text can I pause at any time to see what the other forms of the text say or look like at that point? I.e., are the differences mapped and linked?
6. As I read any text can I be alerted to the existence of major variant forms? or all variant forms?
7. Can I alter any given reading text to represent my own emended version of it?
8. Can I read descriptions of the provenance of each document?
9. Can I access the editor's informed opinion about the relative merits or salient features of each documentary version?

B. The Methodology

10. Can I read the editor's rationale for choosing a historical text as the basis for an edited version and can I find an explanation of the principles for the editor's emendations? Are all emendations noted in some way?
11. Is there an account of the composition, revision, and publication of the work?
12. Is there discussion presented for the consequences of choosing one reading text over another?
13. When variants are being shown, is there editorial commentary available about them?
14. Are ancillary documents such as illustrations, contextual works, letters, personal documents, or news items available either in explanatory annotations or in full text form?
15. How was accuracy in transcription assured?

C. The Contexts

16. Are there bibliographies, letters, biographies, and histories relevant to the composition or the subject of this work or guides to the author's reading?
17. Are there guides to existing interpretive works – from original reviews to recent scholarship and criticism?
18. Are there adaptations in print, film, or other media, abridgments, or censored versions that might be of interest?

D. The Uses

19. Is there a tutorial showing the full capabilities of the electronic edition? A guide for beginners?
20. Are there ways I can do the electronic equivalent of dog-earing, underlining, making marginal notes, cross-referencing, logging quotations for future use? Can I write an essay in the site with links to its parts as full-text documentation and sourcing?
21. What other things can I do with this edition?