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Letter to the Editor--December 1982

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Letter to the Editor

Two items in the September 1982 *Newsletter* deal with matters I should like to comment on: Philip F. Gura's review of the Thoreau *Journal*, Vol. I, in which he compares the editorial methods of that edition with those of the Emerson *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks (JMN)*; and Fredson Bowers' letter to the Editor, commenting on differences between the systems used to record manuscript alterations (or to present a genetic text) in the Emerson *JMN* and in Professor Bowers' editions of William James and others.

Professor Gura (p. 7) "compares the sheer economy and readability of the [Thoreau] volume to the ponderous and distracting editorial apparatus that overwhelms the . . . edition of Emerson's [*JMN*]," and remarks that in this matter, "Thoreau's friend Waldo has not fared well at the hands of his twentieth-century admirers." On the contrary, I would maintain that Emerson has fared just as well as Thoreau, if not better. The question can be stated as which method is preferable in editing a journal: clear-text or genetic? And my answer is that it depends on what kind of journal one is editing. Emerson used his journals as, among other things, a "savings bank" from which to draw phrases, aphorisms, quotations, stray thoughts, paragraphs, or longer passages for later use in a lecture, essay, or book. Sometimes he set them down just as they first occurred to him, but often revised and refined them in the process of writing them. In some cases he later transferred them to another journal volume, revising them more or less as he did so. Then when composing a lecture or essay, he brought together passages from various parts of the journals, rewrote and rearranged them, and wrote new passages to connect, amplify, or illustrate them. Further revision took place when he transformed a lecture into an essay or a chapter in a book.

Thus there were several stages of revision, only one of which normally occurred in the journals; but that stage is important and interesting as showing the first glimmerings and early development of many of the ideas more clearly stated in the lectures and published works. For this reason a genetic text, recording in one continuous version all the journal material — false starts, finger-wipings, corrections, rephrasings, and more substantial deletions, insertions, and rearrangements — seems to me the best way to reveal what Emerson was thinking and how he got it down on paper. That is what the editors of *JMN* have done. (Whether they chose the most efficient technique for doing it is a matter I shall come to later.)

While Thoreau used his journal for some of the same purposes as Emerson, he also made it — especially in the earlier volumes — a work-book in which he prepared successive drafts of long passages, sometimes whole chapters, of what later became parts of books like *A Week* and *Walden*. Typically he wrote such a passage first in ink, making only a few minor corrections as he went, and then later came back and revised it (usually in pencil) by extensive deletions and interlineations on the same page. He might write one or more further drafts in subsequent journal sections or volumes, or on separate sheets of paper, before arriving at the version to be submitted as printer's copy. The editors of Thoreau's *Journal* have therefore decided to print a clear-text edition that presents only the earliest draft (as corrected during original composition) of what he wrote, and to include in an appendix selected later alterations of passages that did *not* appear later in a published work. Intermediate drafts of essay or book passages that were composed by interlineation on journal pages are not printed in this edition, presumably because it would have been too confusing

(or prohibitively expensive) to include them, either in a genetic text or in appendices to a clear-text edition. It is hoped that they will be published eventually in some form — perhaps a parallel-text edition — for the benefit of Thoreau scholars.

Whether or not a genetic text is feasible or desirable for publication of certain manuscript materials, it is at least necessary to have a method for recording manuscript alterations; and such a method can also be used in genetic-text editions. There are two basic systems now in general use in editions that I am familiar with: the one employed in *JMN* (and in the Lemay-Zall edition of Franklin's *Autobiography*, as explained in Joel Myerson's review of that volume in the May 1982 *Newsletter*), and the one developed by Fredson Bowers (also explained in Myerson's review, and clarified by Professor Bowers in his September letter mentioned above). I consider both systems good. Joel Myerson suggested to me (in conversation) that the Bowers method may be more efficient for use with documents that are extensively revised or that contain multiple layers of revision; but I am not convinced that this is so. In those volumes of Emerson's *Collected Works* (of which I am textual editor) for which there are extant manuscripts — e.g., *Representative Men* and parts of *Conduct of Life* — we will print a clear-text, but will show all manuscript alterations (except corrections of minor slips and errors) in appendices, using the *JMN* method. We do so partly because this system is more familiar to most Emersonians, having been used not only in *JMN* but also in the textual notes to the *Early Lectures*, and prospectively in the *Later Lectures* as well — both of which, like the *Collected Works*, are clear-text editions. We also use it because we find it just as simple, clear, and easy to follow as Professor Bowers' system, and perhaps more economical of space.

Contrary to Professor Gura's characterization of the *JMN* format as "ponderous and distracting," or Lewis Mumford's as "barbed wire," it is based almost entirely on the use of two symbols: the < angle brackets > for deletions and the ↑ arrows ↓ for insertions, since practically all authorial alterations are one or the other. (Transpositions and other changes in word-order can generally be shown in the same way, but may occasionally have to be explained in a textual note.) Insertions within deletions, deletions within insertions, and other such variations are expressed by the same symbols. To reconstruct the original version, in most cases one merely reads through the text in order, ignoring everything printed between ↑ arrows ↓; to arrive at the final version, one does the same thing but ignores everything printed between < two angle brackets >. This is easy to do after a little practice, and it is almost equally simple to pick out and analyze successive layers of revision. A minor variation in the placement of the second angle bracket (which, incidentally, was not done correctly by the printer of

Professor Myerson's *Newsletter* review) shows whether a correction was made directly *over* (i.e., in the same space as) the deleted material, or was made later on the same line or elsewhere on the page. As Professor Bowers points out (p. 9), it isn't really necessary to know whether the correction was made by finger-wiping or by writing over an undeleted word; the important question is whether it seems to have been made *currente calamo* or at some later time. The *JMN* system helps to answer that question. Nor does one need to know whether an insertion was made with or without a caret, between the lines or in the margin, or the like. A few supplementary notes will explain anything significant that is not made immediately clear by the brackets and arrows.

In short, I suggest that editors of revised manuscript materials consider both the Bowers system and the *JMN* system for recording alterations, and choose whichever one better suits their needs.

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