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1983

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Scott, Patrick, "Textual Criticism and Composition Research" (1983). *Documentary Editing: Journal of the Association for Documentary Editing (1979-2011)*. 182.

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Textual Criticism and Composition Research

PATRICK SCOTT

It's a commonplace among textual bibliographers that the questions they ask and answer apply across many different disciplines. As Fredson Bowers long ago argued, "No matter what the field of study, the basis lies in the analysis of the records in printed or in manuscript form."¹ Not just in high literature, but in history, philosophy, and the history of science, modern bibliographical editing is widely recognized as indispensable. Yet in bibliography's, and Professor Bowers', own traditional fiefdom, the English graduate program, one area has been almost totally neglected. Whereas twenty-five years ago, it was students of modern literature, especially the novel, who needed persuading that good texts matter, nowadays the relevance of traditional textual scholarship is more likely to be questioned by colleagues and graduate students from the mushrooming subspecialty of composition studies. Bruce Harkness has not yet, so far as I know, given us a modernized apologia, "Bibliography and the Rhetorical Fallacy." What examples can the textual bibliographer offer to meet this new generation of questioning?

One might start, where bibliographers have always started, with the plain fact, and curious fascination, of textual variance. A favorite book for modern compositionists to hate is the supposedly immutable *Harbrace College Handbook*, first published in 1941 and now in its ninth edition. The framework of the book, the numbered sections (though not the lettered subsections), has indeed remained remarkably constant, but much else has changed in the last forty years. Revisions to the exercises reflect, or perhaps over-reflect, recent American social and educational history, as sentences like "This high school has sent more than a hundred of its graduates to Harvard during the past twenty years" are dropped, and others are introduced, such as "During the first period last Monday . . ., we freshmen enjoyed discussing various aspects of civil disobedience."² Moreover, the text itself has not been sacrosanct. Compare, for instance, these four successive versions of what is now subsection 19e (there was no exactly equivalent entry in the first edition):

- (i) *Illiteracies* (also called *vulgarisms*) are the crude expressions of uneducated people (2nd ed., 1946, p. 192; 3rd ed., 1951, p. 201; 4th ed., 1956, p. 204).
- (ii) *Illiteracies* are the *substandard* expressions of uneducated people (5th ed., 1962, p. 206).
- (iii) *Illiteracies* are the *nonstandard* expressions of uneducated people (6th ed., 1967, p. 198).
- (iv) Words and expressions labeled by dictionaries as *Nonstandard* or *Illiterate* should be avoided in most writing and speaking (7th ed., 1972, pp. 201-202; 8th ed., 1977, p. 186; 9th ed., 1982, p. 222).

Behind such variants lies a significant shift of linguistic attitude, and a composition scholar who quotes from the *Harbrace*, even if only for purposes of vilification, clearly needs to know from which *Harbrace* she or he is quoting, and at what date the quoted passage was first introduced or finally excised. This general revision pattern (a stable framework, with substantial changes to specific sections) is probably typical of modern pedagogic texts, and recent complaints about the conservatism of the bestselling textbooks are correspondingly overstated:³ Robert Connors has compared the seven editions of another long-running bestseller, McCrimmon's *Writing with a Purpose*, first published in 1950, and has discovered, not the textual stability he had expected, but a fascinating interplay of stasis and change. He concludes that such basic textual investigation can be an important corrective to the "narrow presentism" of much composition scholarship.⁴

Much more obviously important, however, is textual study of historical rhetorics. A lot of the bibliographical groundwork has been done, especially for the Renaissance period,⁵ and many texts are available in modern reprints, but there seems little sign that modern rhetoricians generally recognize the textual difficulties of the historical field. Let's begin at the beginning, with the very first English rhetoric, Leonard Coxe's *The Art or Crafte of Rhetoryke*: the second edition came out in 1532, but we don't really know the date of the first edition, we have no edition

more recent than 1899, and there appear to be no modern bibliographical studies whatever.⁶ Or consider a slightly later, and much more popular, book, Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* (1553): the only modern edition is still G. H. Mair's in 1909, which bore the title *Wilson's Arte of Rhetorique, 1560*, but in fact reprinted the 1585 reprint with minor corrections from 1560 and 1567. Modern photo offset and microform versions of 1553 and its successors are now of course available, but the only specific study of Wilson's text since Mair has been unaccountably omitted from the recent secondary bibliography on historical rhetoric.⁷ Experts can usually find their way through such problems—I've been very impressed by the texts W. S. Howell, for instance, chooses for quotation in his histories of rhetoric—, but students new to such a field need to have their bibliographical wits about them.

For later periods, the situation is probably much worse, because much of the basic research has never been done, even in article-form, and the very availability of photo offset reprints acts as a deterrent to new editorial projects. One might well appropriate from the novel to rhetoric Bruce Harkness' complaint about editors who put "a fancy introduction on a poor text."⁸ The most frequently-cited series of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rhetorical texts is the Southern Illinois "Landmarks" series, which provides useful critical introductions and secondary bibliographies, but sometimes chooses for reproduction late and derivative reprints, rather than authoritative early texts. The Blair, Priestley, and Whately volumes make sensible choices, but George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, first published in Edinburgh in 1776, is reproduced from William Tegg's London edition of 1850.⁹ Similarly, Thomas De Quincey's essay on rhetoric, which was originally written as a review for *Blackwood's*, is reproduced in the Southern Illinois edition direct from David Masson's 1889 reprint of De Quincey's revision in the 1850s.¹⁰ This has the advantage of giving the student Masson's helpful explanatory notes, but is textually indefensible. Even if we ignore accidentals (should "rhetoric" modestly take a lower-case *r*, as in the periodical version, or should it get the abstract splendour of capitalization, as in Masson?), the late text loses some of the swashbuckling flavour of the original: for instance, where the later De Quincey merely regretted that the vacuum in modern English grammar had been filled by a "stranger," Lindley Murray, the 1828 text roundly denounces Murray's efforts as the work of an "imbecile Yankee" (p. 906).¹¹ Nor are these Southern Illinois editors alone in their textual innocence. One standard teaching anthology reprints Campbell from the 1850 text in the Southern Illinois series, Blair from a Philadelphia edition of 1862, and Whately from a Boston, Massachusetts,

edition of 1855.¹²

The examples so far have been concerned with questions of textual authority, but in rhetoric, as in literary studies, one soon gets involved in fascinating questions about a text's genesis, evolution, and revision. Two further examples from nineteenth-century rhetoricians will demonstrate just how significant this under-explored material can be, and how it is still possible to make new discoveries in the field. Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric*, important for its ideas about the psychological "burden of proof" argumentation, first appeared in an authorized book-edition in 1828, and went through six further editions by 1846, all but two with substantial extra material.¹³ But the first book-version had been preceded by two previous stages in the evolution of Whately's theory. In the early 1820s, Whately had drafted, and circulated among his students and friends, a manuscript entitled "Method of Composition"; a copy of this earliest version survived among John Henry Newman's papers, at the Birmingham Oratory, and was published, for the first time, as recently as 1978.¹⁴ Then, in the mid-1820s, Whately published essentially the first draft of his book as the "Rhetoric" article in the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*. Since the encyclopaedia was issued in undated, out-of-sequence, parts, scholars have hazarded very various dates for Whately's article.¹⁵ With the discovery of the "Method" manuscript, we now have a firm *terminus a quo* of 1822, and a casual mention in the new Newman letters edition that an Oxford undergraduate had been assigned to read Whately's rhetoric gives us a firm *terminus ad quem* of December 1826.¹⁶ Three paragraphs in this encyclopaedia version, omitted for book publication, attack Jeremy Bentham's *Book of Fallacies* ("it is a matter of regret that the powers of such a mind as that of Mr. Bentham, should be to so great a degree wasted . . . The work, however, may be read safely, and, perhaps, not without advantage, by those who have sufficient interest in the subject to encounter the obscurity of the style").¹⁷ These paragraphs provide an interesting clue to Whately's political motivation, and it seems a pity that the reprint couldn't have given them in a textual appendix, because the encyclopaedia isn't available outside major research libraries. But even in the successive revisions of the book-text there are still new things to be found. The general pattern of Whately's revisions or rather expansions has long been known,¹⁸ but quite recently Michael Sproule has analyzed in detail the changes Whately made just in the famous section on the burden of proof, and so has been able, through textual study, to resolve a long-standing dispute over the legal and psychological aspects of Whately's theory.¹⁹ Sproule's reasonably-scaled and carefully-targetted textual investigation could be a

model for future work on authors where full-scale re-editing is uneconomic.

My second example from nineteenth-century rhetoric will be briefer, for on Alexander Bain there has been as yet almost no bibliographical investigation. Bain has a place in the demonology of modern composition for two distinct villainies—his systematization of the expository paragraph (and the topic sentence), and his classification of composition into the four forms or modes (narration, description, exposition, and argumentation or persuasion). The indictment is based on his textbook, *English Composition and Rhetoric*, first published in London in 1866.²⁰ Bain himself, in his *Autobiography*, described how the textbook was written, and his account suggests some profitable lines for future bibliographical enquiry.²¹ In particular, Bain reveals that his 1866 book was based on privately-printed materials he prepared for his Aberdeen rhetoric course in 1860-1861, and that those in turn were taken from the article he had written, as early as 1849, for *Chambers's Information for the People*, a popular Scottish encyclopaedia. This earliest version differs significantly from the later textbook in that it classifies composition into three groups by aim (as communication, persuasion, and literary art), before subdividing the first group by mode (into narration, description, and exposition). In the encyclopaedia version, also, Bain explicitly discusses the chief modern complaint against him, the way in which, in actual writing, the modes often overlap.²² I don't know yet how all these bits and pieces fit together—my hunch is that Bain was a better rhetorical theorist in his early writings, before he had adapted his ideas to the needs of an Aberdeen lecture-class—but quite clearly we need some basic bibliographical investigation before we can even date one of the most influential concepts in composition textbooks for a hundred years.

So far, my argument will have seemed very one-sided, all about what compositionists might learn from textual bibliographers. But there is one area where there may be reciprocal benefits. While there have been distinguished exceptions, textual editors of the last thirty years have generally been better at recording textual variants than at interpreting them; we put all our cards on the table face up, but often leave it to the literary-critical clairvoyants to do the divination. There have been very few attempts to study systematically what a full textual collation can tell us about the process of composition and rewriting, line by line and word by word. Though many compositionists have steered away from literary source-materials as being untypical of ordinary writing-patterns, the current interest in the process of revision has encouraged the development of very interesting taxonomies for manuscript alterations.²³ These new taxonomies seem to be

reproducing the long-running bibliographical debate over the substantives/accidentals distinction, and parallel some recent textual theorists in their emphasis on authorial intention in classifying revision. Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, for instance, distinguish between “revisions that affect the meaning of the text and those that do not,” and wisely note that “such separation is not always easy.”²⁴ The same authors introduce an interesting distinction between micro-structural and macrostructural text-changes, which illuminates the difficulty editors have in developing a textual apparatus for texts with large-scale rewriting. There ought to be, one would think, at least some ground for fruitful dialogue about such questions.

Twenty-five years ago, a bibliographical sermon of this kind made its case primarily in negative terms, by lambasting the sins of those poor New Critics who based their ingenious interpretations on a defective text. I believe that such a primary emphasis on textual authority and textual error unnecessarily soured general professional attitudes to textual investigation. This time around, we should do better, I think, to emphasize the positive fascinations of textual study and exact historical scholarship. I don't expect the NEH to fund a Center for Editions of Rhetorical Authors, and I don't expect new editions of any but the most major historical rhetoric texts, but I would hope that both bibliographical and composition journals would begin to make space for serious bibliographical studies on the texts that are currently attracting increased attention. I would hope also that the new professionalization of composition scholars would lead to a wider awareness of textual matters, and that those responsible for the growing number of graduate programs in composition would recognize the continuing need for students to receive adequate bibliographical training. As Richard Altick has written, in another context, “few of us may dedicate our lives to the patient unravelling of the knotty textual history of a work; all of us, however, have an inescapable obligation to base our scholarly and critical activity upon the most authentic text that is available.”²⁵ For many graduate students in any field of English, textual bibliography is a service discipline, not their main concern, but it is a discipline nearly all will need to know about once they begin serious research.

¹Fredson Bowers, “Bibliography and the University,” *University of Pennsylvania Library Chronicle*, 15 (1949): 37; quoted by G. Thomas Tanselle in *SB*, 31 (1978): 55.

²John C. Hodges et al., *Harbrace College Handbook*, 4th ed., 1956, p. 103; 7th ed., 1972, p. 261. I wish to thank Paul Nockleby of HBJ, who checked for me the first and third editions.

³Cf., e.g., Donald Stewart, “The Assault on Tradition,” *College Composition and Communication*, 29 (May 1978): 171-176.

⁴Robert J. Connors, "Current-Traditional Rhetoric: Thirty Years of *Writing with a Purpose*," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 11 (Fall 1981): 208-221. For a more sceptical view, emphasizing teacher resistance to textbook revision, cf. Arn and Charlene Tibbetts, "Can Composition Textbooks Use Composition Research?" *College English*, 44 (December 1982): 855-858; and cf. also "Simon O'Toole," *Confessions of an American Scholar* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1970), pp. 52-53.

⁵See especially R. C. Alston, *A Bibliography of the English Language from the Invention of Printing to the Year 1800* (Leeds: Arnold, 1965-1972; rev. ed. 1974), esp. vol. 6 on rhetorics; James J. Murphy, *Renaissance Rhetoric: A Short Title Catalogue* (New York: Garland, 1981); Winifred Horner, ed., *Historical Rhetoric: An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Sources in English* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1980); James A. Berlin, "A Bibliography of Rhetoric in England and America in the Nineteenth Century: the Primary Sources," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 11 (Summer 1981): 193-203. See also Patrick Scott and Bruce Castner, *Selected Reference Sources in Rhetoric and Composition* (Columbia, S.C.: Department of English, University of South Carolina, 1982), section A.

⁶Alston gives the tentative date of ca. 1525?, *S.T.C.* gives 1524, *B.M.C.* gives 1529, and Frederic I. Carpenter, who edited a reprint of the second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899), argues for 1530: see also Carpenter, "Leonard Cox and the First English Rhetoric," *Modern Language Notes*, 13 (1898): 292-294, and Jessie C. Garner, *An Apology for Failure: Erroneous Statements in Two Tudor Vernacular Rhetorics* (M. A. thesis, University of South Carolina, 1981), p. 33n10; Garner's thesis includes an interesting argument about religious-political influences on reprinting and textual variants in Coxe and also in Richard Sherry's *Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* (1550; rev. ed., 1555).

⁷Russell H. Wagner, "The Text and Editions of Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique*," *Modern Language Notes*, 44 (1929): 421-428, not in Horner, pp. 120 or 178-179. One reprint of 1553 (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1969) has no textual apparatus, and the other, edited by R. H. Bowers (Gainesville, Fla.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1962), though it mentions the question of textual authority (briefly, on p. x), gives no reference to the Wagner article.

⁸Bruce Harkness, "Bibliography and the Novelistic Fallacy," *Studies in Bibliography*, 12 (1959): 59-73 (p. 73).

⁹George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963); sadly, Bitzer had made a detailed textual study of the various Campbell editions—he provides (pp. xxxii-xxxv) a list of over 90 substantive errors in the text he reprints (excluding "numerous insignificant variations"), and he also lists (pp. xxxv-xxxvi) corrections and additions Campbell made to the 1776 text, first incorporated in the posthumous 3rd edition of 1808.

¹⁰"Elements of Rhetoric," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 24 (December 1828): 885-908; Thomas De Quincey, *Selected Essays on Rhetoric*, ed. Frederick Burwick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967).

¹¹A special case is the Southern Illinois volume of Adam Smith's *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1971); this simply reproduced without re-editing John M. Lothian's then-standard edition, a modernized transcription and synthesis of a student's class-notes (1963). Lothian has now been superseded by the Glasgow collected edition.

¹²James L. Golden, Goodwin F. Berquist, and William E. Coleman, eds., *The Rhetoric of Western Thought* (Dubuque, Ia: Kendall/Hunt, 1976), pp. 95-104, 62-79, and 106-110. The standard teaching anthology of Enlightenment rhetoric follows Southern Illinois in reprinting the London 1850 text of Campbell, but strikes out independently by setting aside Southern Illinois' Blair text (the first edition, London, 1783), preferring to reprint Blair from a one-volume Philadelphia edition which the editors coyly identify only by mentioning "at least thirty-seven reprintings" between 1784 and 1853, without ever saying which of the thirty-seven they used as copytext; James L. Golden and Edward P. J. Corbett, eds., *The Rhetoric of Blair, Campbell, and Whately* (N.Y.: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. vii; these editors silently omitted authorial footnotes and replaced Latin illustrative quotations in the text with translations.

¹³Richard Whately, *Elements of Rhetoric*, ed. Douglas Ehninger (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1963); Ehninger quite reasonably chooses to reproduce the fullest text, the Seventh Edition (1846). Berlin (as in n. 5 above) gives the first book-edition as "Dublin: Murray, 1827," but this must be an unauthorized reprint of the *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana* article.

¹⁴Ray E. McKerrow, "Method of Composition: Whately's Earliest Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 11 (Winter 1978): 43-58.

¹⁵Wilbur S. Howell, *Eighteenth-Century British Logic and Rhetoric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 700n5 and 707n31, discusses the difficulty, and concludes only that it was published "in the middle 1820s"; Parrish (as below, p. 71) considered 1829 the first certain date, but estimated 1822-1825; Ehninger (p. xvii) gives no date; Stewart (in Horner, n.5 above, p. 237) dates it 1822, but gives no evidence.

¹⁶Letter of Thomas Mozley, in Ian Ker and Thomas Gornall, eds., *Letters and Diaries of John Henry Newman*, vol. I . . . 1807 to 1826 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 306n.

¹⁷Richard Whately, "Rhetoric," chap. II, sect. 7, in *Encyclopaedia Metropolitana*, ed. Edward Smedley (London: Baldwin and Craddock, 1829), 1: 265-266.

¹⁸W. M. Parrish, "Whately and his Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 15 (1929): esp. 71-73 (on "The Growth of the Rhetoric").

¹⁹J. Michael Sproule, "The Psychological Burden of

Proof: On the Evolutionary Development of Richard Whately's Theory of Presumption," *Communication Monographs*, 43 (1976): 115-129, esp. 117-122.

²⁰Alexander Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric: A Manual* (London: Longmans, Green, 1866); I have examined also the second British edition (Longmans, 1869), and though it has been reset, it shows only occasional minor stylistic revisions. Donald Stewart (in Horner, *Historical Rhetoric*, p. 232) worries that the copyright page of the copy he examined had the date 1867, but that was a first American edition, not the British one, and copyright might not have been entered immediately. James Berlin (as in n.5 above, p. 193) lists the American first (New York: D. Appleton, 1866) as being "revised," but there seems no reason to assume that Bain himself made revisions for the American market, or that the American edition was authorized by him. The only substantial revision by Bain himself seems to be the two-volume enlarged edition (London: Longmans, 1887-1888).

²¹Alexander Bain, *Autobiography* (London, New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green, 1904), pp. 276-279, and (on the revision) pp. 386-390; there is a useful checklist of Bain's writings (including periodical articles) on pp. 425-436. For a useful survey of Bain's career, see Paul C. Rodgers, "Alexander Bain and the Rise of the Organic Paragraph," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 51 (December 1965): 399-408. Andrea Lunsford (University of British Columbia) is currently preparing "an edition of some of the work of Alexander Bain."

²²Alexander Bain, "Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres," in William and Robert Chambers, eds., *Chambers's Information for the People*, 5th edition (London and Edinburgh: Chambers, 1875), 2: 737-752 (1st edition, Edinburgh, 1849, 2: 689-704; Berlin, p. 193); the copy I examined was presented

by Bain as a prize to an Aberdeen student in 1878. No earlier editions have yet been available to me, but there is no indication in Bain's *Autobiography* that he revised the article. For a modern perspective on Bain's classification, cf. Robert J. Connors, "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse," *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (December 1981): 444-455.

²³See, e.g., Gabriel M. Della-Piana, "Research Strategies for the Study of Revision Processes in Writing Poetry," in *Research on Composing*, ed. Charles R. Cooper and Lee Odell (Urbana, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1978), pp. 105-134; Nancy Sommers, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers," *College Composition and Communication*, 31 (December 1980): 378-388; and Lester Faigley and Stephen Witte, "Analyzing Revision," *College Composition and Communication*, 32 (December 1981): 400-414. An earlier, but still influential, taxonomy of revision, based on literary materials, was developed by Wallace Hildick, in his *Word for Word: A Study of Authors' Alterations, with Exercises* (London: Faber and Faber, 1965), pp. 13-40. The relevance of literary-textual materials to composition studies is briefly pointed out in Janet Emig, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders* (Urbana, Ill.: N.C.T.E., 1971), pp. 8-15, and cf. the historical survey of revision patterns by Karen Hodges, in *Revising: New Essays for Teachers of Writing*, ed. Ronald A. Sudol (Urbana: N.C.T.E., 1982), pp. 24-42.

²⁴Faigley and Witte, p. 401; cf. Donald Murray, "Internal Revision: a Process of Discovery," in *Research on Composing* (as in n.23), pp. 85-103.

²⁵Richard D. Altick, *The Art of Literary Research*, 3rd ed., revised John J. Fenstermaker (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 77.