4 The Singularities of Books and Reading

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BIBLIOGRAPHY AND BOOK HISTORY

The Singularities of Books and Reading

The Canterbury Male Regle, taken on its own terms rather than as a pale reflection of Hoccleve's "original," is a complete and coherent poem with its own priorities…[and should be read] as an extracted lyric with its own independent life, one that is informed by its manuscript and cultural contexts.

— Peter Brown, "Hoccleve in Canterbury"[1]

Nous ne savons pas, dit Bouvard, ce qui se passe dans notre ménage, et nous prétendons découvrir quels étaient les cheveux et les amours du duc d'Angoulême.

— Flaubert, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*

The following chapter concerns a number of familiar bibliographical entities: editorial versions, compilations or tract volumes, annotated works. These are the forms whereby books (the abstract repeatable things produced in editions) become transformed into or considered in terms of book-copies (singular, material entities with individualized histories), and the text (that abstract repeatable entity available to multiple readers) becomes a singular reader's experience of it. The generalities and universality that should be eliminated by focusing on the singular object are then smuggled back into the conversation: the

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1   Peter Brown, "Hoccleve in Canterbury," in *New Directions In Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2014), 408–11, on Hoccleve's *Male Regle* in Huntington Library, HM MS 111.

singular object serves as a model for our understanding of other singular objects.

The popularity in scholarship of the material book has consequences. We can certainly understand the phrase "material books" without the qualifying "copies," but the phrase "material book" is misleading. Such a phrase ought to refer to a unique object: an individual book-copy. Yet scholars speak of this in a different manner, as if the phrase were "material Book" (whatever that might mean). Although I can disparage the portentous upper-case B and all its real and illusory implications, I recognize that the comforting notion of The Book allows for generalization, and that some form of generalization, even specious, is crucial to scholarly communication. Without it, the singularity of that book-object leads to the singularity of the scholarly utterance, and with that, scholarly contributions become scholarly performance, that is to say, art and art perhaps in the worst sense.

I will treat the books and our purported experience of them here as products of the same intellectual or scholarly act; in each case, the concepts or the objects that respond to them create what might be a secondary singular. We see an object in history; we abstract it (in all senses) by considering it on a linguistic or conceptual level; in other words, we make our singular object and our singular experience with it communicable. But our attempts to generate this abstract communicable entity act paradoxically to recover the level of singularity our very act of communication once seemed to destroy. We end, in our scholarly sophistications and machinations, with the same singular experience we began with, all the while seeming to follow D.F. McKenzie's appealing, but finally vacuous formulation: all printers, and by extension all their books and texts, are "alike in being different."[2]

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2   D.F. McKenzie, "Printers of the Mind: Some Notes on Bibliographical Theories and Printing-House Practices," *Studies in Bibliography* 22 (1969): 1–75, at 63 (often reprinted), and my critique "Bibliographers of the Mind," in *Blind Impressions: Methods and Mythologies in Book History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 58–72.

Books and Book-Copies

We cannot hold a book, whether Shakespeare's First Folio, the Gutenberg Bible, or the first edition of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. We cannot see it, or experience any of those dilettantish smells and textures that only older book historians and scholars were permitted to mention, as they conflated the object they held or beheld with the abstract book of their histories. We can only imagine that "thing" referred to, say, in an STC entry, or in any entry written according to the principles of descriptive bibliography.[3] It is an abstraction produced in our reconstruction of history, or in some sense what actually produces history and the objects of history. A writer, a printer — these people imagine what books are. A distributer, bookseller, scholar — these continue this fiction. As bibliographers (the role most readers of this chapter will likely adopt), most of our arguments are about such abstractions, that is to say, books and their descriptions, not the raw material we take as a given.

What we hold and see is a book-copy, a material object that can only become a book when we place it in history, whether the real history of the past we study or the future history, when, say, a printer imagines that book exemplified on booksellers' shelves: it is one of a group, a series, a collection, repeatable (or so we imagine), exemplary of that series or group and interchangeable with any other member of this series. We speak of a book or its literary analogue, the text, which others can experience simultaneously; what we hold and experience, by contrast, remains singular.

There is something unsettling and even irritating about this state of affairs; the thing we study (the book) seems inaccessible to us, but paradoxically accessible to anyone, at any time.[4] I have no more claim on a bibliographical description in the English

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3   In theory, but not in practice, such descriptions are not copy-specific, but refer to an abstract "ideal copy"; see Fredson Bowers, *Principles of Bibliographical Description* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 113–17.

4   Cf. the notion of "accessibility" of David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 4: "literature exists,

Short-Title Catalogue (ESTC) or even the images of a book in Early English Books Online (EEBO) than any other scholar, graduate student, or even undergraduate enrolled in a university that subscribes to these databases.

So I pick up that book-copy and try to imagine something else that will lend my own experience some privilege or advantage over other scholars. Another series, one that exists both in and apart from the material world. History. Use. Sales and losses. There are so many features of this thing I hold that place it within history. The binding, never part of the book until at least the eighteenth century. Stamps on the binding. Damage to the binding, never exactly repeatable. Even the paper might be unique, distinct from that in any other copy of the same book. The smell of the library that houses it. My own fingerprints on the pages. Ownership marks. The history of provenance, which connects only tentatively with other histories (other book-copies in the owner's library, shelf-marks, a rebinding plan). And finally the annotations and defacements I find in that book, personal, unique, redolent of history, it seems, but as I will show here, perhaps not. This copy exists in history, yet when someone else examines this unique copy, it will be something else.

Text: Preliminary Definitions

The literary equivalent of what I call a "book" is a "text"; books are distinguished from material book-copies in the same way texts are distinguished from their material variants. I realize this is a simple and restricted definition of the word text. I pose it here and I have relied on it in the past because I am wary of the way slippage in this term allows us to extend in a dubious and self-serving way our grand hermeneutical discussions: our metaphors congeal into objective realities — sub-texts, textuality, the web and woof of history.

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in any useful sense only and always in its materializations;…only as texts are realized materially are they accessible."

My definition is based on the notion or verbal construction "literary text." A text so-defined is something that is perfectly repeatable and reproducible on whatever we consider a standard keyboard to be.[5] It has nothing to do with what that text implies, how it is constructed, what it can be linked to, what it means, what we can make it mean, and who makes it mean that. I am not disparaging the value of these things; I am only trying to find a language that will enable me to discuss them more clearly.

What you see in a book is ink on paper. What you see on a computer screen are marks produced by however marks are produced on it. Those are concrete material things and form book-copies or their equivalent. Because they exist in the real world, they are unstable, varying in temperature, humidity, positioning, ownership, cycled though the digestive systems of insects, dismembered, repaired. A text, by contrast, is an abstraction in the same way a book is. It is repeatable and replaceable. Considered as texts, those varying marks on the computer screen or in the book are at least potentially the same. A text is not lost because its material support is destroyed. And this last sentence as a text is the same whether seen by me on my screen or by you in a printed book. We can construct or repeat the text on a keyboard, even if some of those keyboards may be imaginary. And that text will be the same no matter what keyboard it is constructed on, or what font is chosen, or how the whole thing is laid out on a page or screen, or further, how many errors we make in each singular attempt to type it out.

This is a narrow definition of text. In literary-critical history, the word seemed to undergo a transformation about the time I was entering graduate school in the mid-seventies: perhaps it was recovering its etymological sense, which then complicated what was the bland metaphorical one. Textus — textile. Something woven. It gathered in another early medieval use: Textus

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5   See the once common distinction work/text, whereby "work" is the abstract verbal construct that is realized imperfectly through its variant texts or versions, e.g., in Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poétique médiévale* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 70–75.

= the Bible, both the word of God and something of crucial importance and something to be interpreted; a hermeneutical object rather than this abstract product of mere repetition; something worthy of the scholar's attention rather than something produced by the scholar's attention. It could also be mystified by other terms such as Benjamin's *aura,* an association that would expand the scope of each of these.

There is thus a reluctance among us to give up all this for a more restrictive definition. We are unwilling also to give up the flexibility we find in words such as book, a flexibility that has been particularly exploited in French scholarship: nothing in English has quite matched the dizzying leaps of logic and subject matter enabled by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin's use of "livre," "le livre," and "Le Livre" in their *L'Apparition du Livre* of 1958, although the phrase "The Book" in the proper solemn contexts occasionally comes close.[6] The new emphasis on materiality in bibliography leads to a denigration of what is opposed to it: Kastan's disparaging comments on the notion of a non-material entity in book history, where "ideal" is conflated with our nostalgia for "real presence" of Shakespeare.[7] What we communicate are not these materialities: what we communicate are ideas.

We can or do argue then that because something can be a literary text, therefore it *is* a literary text. Texts are things that "can be interpreted," and things that "are able to be interpreted" are "to be interpreted" pure and simple. Thus Brown's statement quoted at the head of this chapter, and Randall McLeod's even stronger dictum on the version of *King Lear* embodied in a text implied by the two quartos:

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6   See Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre* (Paris, 1958), trans. David Gerard, *The Coming of the Book: The Impact of Printing 1450–1800,* eds. Geoffrey Nowell Smith and David Wooton (London: Verso, 1976), and my critique in *The Myth of Print Culture: Essays on Evidence, Textuality, and Bibliographical Method* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 21–31.

7   Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book,* 121, 124.

The aim will be simply to detect whether, when we stand aside from editorial guidance, we find coherently differentiable aesthetic characteristics in Q and F.

The extent to which we can bears an inverse relationship to the confidence we should owe the theory that Q is merely a corruption of X.[8]

If such claims were accepted — that what can conceivably be interpreted ought to be interpreted — and if everything we and other scholars saw and experienced were equally interesting and compelling, as in the last few decades it sometimes is claimed to be,[9] there would be hardly a reason to study the past at all, since any banalities (even our own) would do as well.

Annotations as Text

Gabriel Harvey's annotations have been the subject of scholarship since the 1940s and were give a boost in 1990 with a now classic article by Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, subtitled "How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy." With articles such as this one, the responses of real historical readers came back to the critical foreground, joining those contemporary readers of the first reader-response theory of I.A. Richards (the actual responses, right or wrong, of his students), and supplanting those often imaginary readers created in the days of reader-response criticism.[10]

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8   Randall Mcleod, "*Gon*. No more, the text is foolish," in *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of King Lear,* eds. Gary Taylor and Michael Warren (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 157.

9   Roger Chartier, *The Author's Hand and the Printer's Mind,* trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), 152: "At the end of the twentieth century, when the obsessive theme of the infinite polysemy of texts invaded literary criticism, it led to interpreting every anomaly as the expression of a subtle intention, a voluntary error or a note of parody intended by the author."

10 Lisa Jardine and Anthony Grafton, "'Studied for Action': How Gabriel Harvey Read his Livy," *Past and Present* 129, no. 1 (1990): 30–78; Harold Wilson,

There are of course thousands of books and manuscripts with such annotations readily available in rare book library shelves, and even on our own shelves. For the most part, these have not yet been organized or analyzed in any significant way, and until recently, such annotations could only be studied by readers with convenient home addresses or on research grants to major collections.[11] Because of this limited access, the chances of scholars stumbling upon or focusing on the marginalia of the same book-copy in numbers sufficient to make critical discussion possible were small, and there has thus been little opportunity to construct a counter-argument to any but the most popular of articles bearing on these matters (in the case of Jardine and Grafton, such arguments have been made).[12] All is changing with the digitization of major collections: annotations are as readily available to scholars as texts once were (at least, to those whose home institutions subscribe to these databases); conferences are dedicated to them;[13] and critical discussion will flow, at

"Gabriel Harvey's Method of Annotating his Books," *Harvard Library Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (1948): 344–68. I.A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London: Kegan Paul, 1924).

11 Robert Alston, *Books with Manuscript: A Short Title Catalogue of Books with Manuscript Notes in the British Library* (London: British Library, 1994); Annotated Books Online: A Digital Archive of Early Modern Annotation, www.annotatedbooksonline.com; Carl Grindley, "Reading Piers Plowman C-Text Annotations: Notes toward the Classification of Printed and Written Marginalia in Texts from the British Isles, 1300–1641," in T*he Medieval Professional Reader at Work: Evidence from Manuscripts of Chaucer, Langland, Kempe, and Gower,* eds. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton and Maidie Hilmo (Victoria: University of Victoria, 2001), 77–91; Megan Cook, "How Francis Thynne Read His Chaucer," *Journal of the Early Book Society for the Study of Manuscripts and Printing History* 15 (2012): 215–44; and William H. Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

12 Chris Stamatakis, "'With diligent studie, but sportingly': How Gabriel Harvey Read His Castiglione," *Journal of the Northern Renaissance* 5 (2013), http://www.northernrenaissance.org/with-diligent-studie-but-sportingly-how-gabriel-harvey-read-his-castiglione/.

13 Such as the Early Annotated Books in California Special Collections: An Exploratory Symposium, William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, Los Angeles, December 12, 2014.

least if some sort of canon could be established or determined: not *those* annotations, which are trivial, but *these*.[14]

With this newfound interest have come assertions that there is something uniquely modern or even postmodern about both the interest and the phenomenon: Chartier, for example, suggests that texts created materially by their authors are rare before the eighteenth century.[15] Yet even this simple statement depends on what we mean by "authorial" and whether the text of the marginalia we find in any particular book can be called "authored" — that is, whether it is produced by or copied by its scribe. It also somewhat mischievously defines away all contrary evidence in the invocation of "exceptionality." There seems little that is new or characteristically modern, in any sense of that word, about the composition of marginalia considered as the creation of the purely authorial text; and the notion of the marginal gloss overtaking the generating text is a well-worn and often parodied medieval cliché.[16] The question nonetheless remains as to whether the text of the marginalia or the new composite text formed of text and gloss are legitimate and interesting objects of study in a social sense, that is, not only interesting to me or to you, but rather to a community of readers.

Enthusiasts of print culture have argued that printing changed the earlier relation of gloss/text found in manuscripts or at least our view of that relationship. The printed text, now replicable, could be subject to different treatments, with the same text supporting different annotations. It would thus more

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14　H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), on the notion of "value" of annotations; Jackson concedes the study makes "no claim to being exhaustive or representative or even statistically significant" (6).

15　"Before the mid-eighteenth century, authorial manuscripts are rare and were preserved for exceptional reasons" (Chartier, *Author's Hand,* 74). I am not sure how seriously Chartier intends this claim, since there are numerous medieval authors (e.g., Bede and Aquinas) whose hands have been identified, and the statement is almost meaningless in regard to anonymous texts.

16　Chaucer's "Nun's Priest's Tale" provides hundreds of lines of amusing and aimless commentary on Chaunticleer's simple dream.
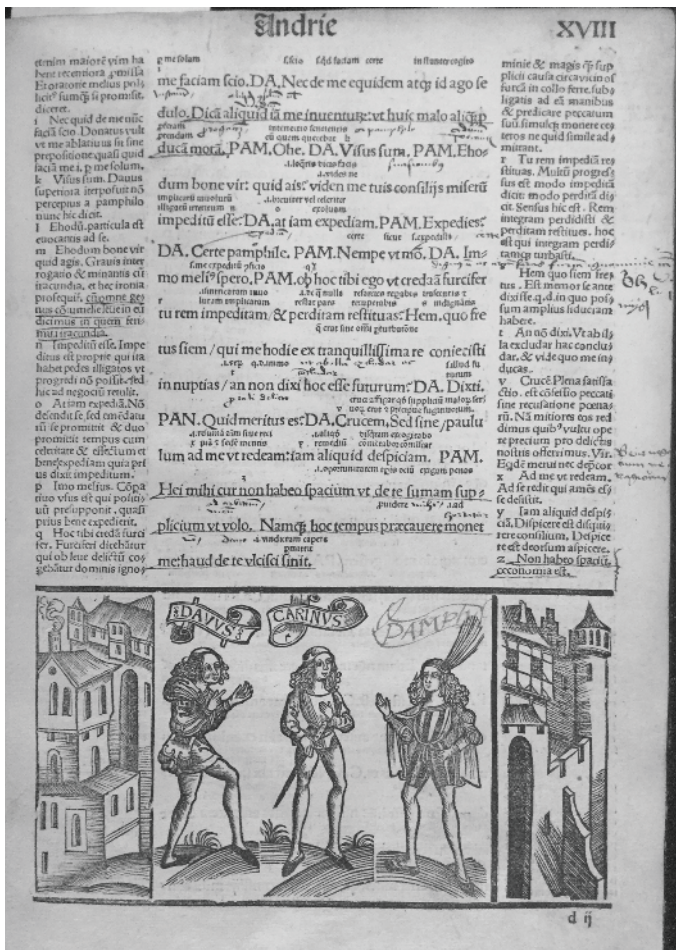
Figure 5. Gruninger Terence (1499) with hand-written interlinear commentary.

clearly embody something like textual reception than would a unique manuscript. The printed text, particularly one with what bibliophiles used to call "ample" margins, foresaw and demanded readers' particularized and singular annotations, which would be instantly distinguished from the text through the distinction print/scribe in a way that earlier annotations were not. Print changed everything, enforcing a split between printed, replicable text and unique, hand-written gloss even in the means of producing each. Such assertions may be true. But as is the case with many other appealing theses, I would rather argue against these than for them. In this copy of Gruninger's fifteenth-century Terence, the annotating student merely continues what is already begun in the printed text.

Such criticism, whether it involves historical readers such as Gabriel Harvey or contemporary ones, both real and imaginary, is based on singularity. That singularity can be generalized, if, say, we describe what authors were doing by allegorizing our own reactions to this literature: annotations and individual reactions constitute evidence, and they are thus valid indexes of features that could be or were once variously attributed to the author or to the personified text. But routine articles (that is, those not by Stanley Fish or Michael Riffaterre) often paid only lip service to the notion of universality when discussing marginalia or hardly dealt with it at all: the value was in the singular performance, not in communicable content, and there was little difference between such a performance and an article on "the structural integrity of this overlooked poem" from two decades earlier. Students and colleagues often admire these, not because they learn anything from them or about their own responses to literature, but rather because they see something that they dream of doing themselves.[17]

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17 In 1986, Mark Schoenfeld, then a graduate student, reviewing a book by one of my former colleagues astutely noted: "Every graduate student should read this book; it will prove to them that anything can be published."

The Singular Reader

Kevin Sharpe's *Reading Revolutions* came out in 2001.[18] What followed this intimidating title were 600 pages not evidencing a revolution, but rather documenting what appeared to be ordinary annotations of a book by a William Drake (likely few of Sharpe's civilian readers had ever heard of him). On the face of it, Drake's annotations seemed to prove what most of us knew: (1) readers mark in books they own; (2) it's not always clear what they are annotating or why; and (3) some are more interesting than others. The very unsystematic and non-committal nature of these annotations could be used to support any conclusion one would like to form: in Sharpe's case, political ones.

Sharpe's study was not a critique: there was no one making a case that needed to be considered in depth, nor anyone claiming, for example, that William Drake did not annotate his books, or that Renaissance readers did not write marginalia or think about books they read. Sharpe's book was rather what medieval writers would have called a "Meditation," or what late nineteenth-century authors might have called an "Essay." It was a manifestation of its subject, where the gloss (Sharpe's) overwhelms the rather banal text (Drake's) serving as its origin. The revolution this book marks is one contemporary with Sharpe — a revolutionary way in which scholars could discover, define, and canonize texts.

The study of annotations in and of itself has long been a staple of bibliography, cataloguing, and librarianship. "Marks in Books" (the phrase is from Roger Stoddard) can tell you how books were corrected at press, who gave what book to whom, how much a book cost, who bound it, who sold it, or where it sat on early library shelves.[19] These are the standard details earlier

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18 Kevin Sharpe, *Reading Revolutions: The Politics of Reading in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001). See, also, Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, eds., *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

19 See Roger E. Stoddard, *Marks in Books* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) and David Pearson, *Provenance Research in Book History* (New

found only in bibliographical notes or library catalogues; most professional literary scholars in the past would find them pedestrian. You can tell, for example, *what* Gabriel Harvey did while reading Livy: he wrote notes. But this does not tell you *how* Harvey read his Livy. You cannot determine what early readers thought important simply by looking at what they marked up in their books. Nor, until you begin to survey many book-copies like this one, can you tell whether Harvey's actions are generalizable — that is, whether what other readers did was in any way comparable to what Harvey did. Readers and even printers have a tendency to see significance where there very well may be none.[20]

I consider my own library. Nearly all of my ordinary scholarly books contain annotations of some kind. If they are books I read early in my career, or books I read late and was going to review, that marginalia consists largely of full sentences. I can summarize or dismiss an entire chapter, my notes tell me, with a single statement. I can condense an entire book by repeating what I mark throughout as "thesis" or sometimes "evidence." The indignant question marks tell me what I can cite, evincing exasperation or melodramatic despair at the current state of scholarship.

Yet these annotations — the text I create out of my personal copy of the book — say absolutely nothing that is not better expressed in my published note or review; that note or review may

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Castle: Oak Knoll, 1998).

20 See Claire R. Kinney, "Thomas Speght's Renaissance Chaucer and the Solaas of Sentence in *Troilus and Criseyde,*" in *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance,* ed. Theresa M. Krier (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), 66–86, on the manicules or pointing fists in the 1602 Chaucer. Cf. my "Fists and Filiations in Chaucer Folios (1532–1602)" (1991); rpt. *Out of Sorts: On Typography and Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 105–17, demonstrating that these in fact originated as purely decorative printing marks, with no meaning whatsoever. A similar point is made by Peter Stallybrass and Roger Chartier, "Reading and Authorship: The Circulation of Shakespeare (1590–1619)," in *A Concise Companion to Shakespeare and the Text,* ed. Andrew Murphy (London: Blackwell, 2007), 49–52.

be coherent, my hand-written notes are not. Comparing both, you could argue that they chart how I reduced a complex book to incoherent notes and transformed those into a coherent albeit oversimplified review. But everyone knows that already and no one believes a review or citation gives a fair picture of a book. It is a re-statement, a re-use, a falsification, condensation — many words will do. Tracing its origins tells us nothing we want to know or need to know.

I have a student copy of Xenophon's *Anabasis* signed by my father when he was an undergraduate in the mid-1930s, and if you ever want to take up Greek, I highly recommend this edition. My father was the second owner; I am the third. There are pencilled annotations throughout Xenophon's first two books, with occasional elaborate notes on rules governing verb forms. There are also pencilled annotations on every verb and verb-form in the text. Looking over these today, I realize that I am looking at my own annotations when I (miraculously) had a one-year job in which I had to teach this text. Behind those notes are those of my father, and past those are the notes of the anonymous previous owner. The only thing these notes evidence is that both were much better Greek scholars as undergraduates than I was as a professor. Did I ever seriously doubt this?

Composite Texts and Modern Readers

For medievalists and book historians, the key terms in this area were defined in a series of studies by A.I. Doyle and M.B. Parkes on the notion of *compilatio,* and by Paul Needham on composite volumes, variously defined as *Sammelbände,* tract volumes, pamphlet volumes, or miscellanies. Doyle and Parkes were concerned with independent and autonomous texts (books) bound together in a single book-copy; Needham was concerned initially with printed fragments bound in as binding material in other books. Each considered the resultant composite volume as an historical entity, reflecting the literary practices of a particular period (medieval texts, early printed texts). Many studies have

followed up on these notions, among them, two book-length studies that expanded the definitions in order to consider and interpret these works within their histories of reception. Jeffrey Todd Knight deals with books that are ready-made in history, deliberately combining autonomous literary texts; Arthur Bahr extends the notion of composite volumes or texts to include those compiled not only in history, but also in the attention of the modern reader. When I was asked to review one of these, I realized I was reproducing unconsciously the same scholarly method (a form of *petitio principii*) I would end up critiquing in both.[21]

Bahr's book selects topics that at first glance seem wildly diverse: the writer/compiler Andrew Horn (a civil servant), London (both justified by Ralph Hanna's *London Literature* of 2005),[22] the Auchinleck MS and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (perennial subjects of English medievalists), and the Trentham MS of Gower. What is interesting about all these subjects is the simple fact of their association: they are all compilations in some sense, although not in the historical sense defined by Doyle and Parkes, and they can thus be imagined to belong to the same genre. Bahr thus does with his own subjects what he claims the

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21 Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); my review, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 16 (2014): 279–83; Jeffrey Todd Knight, *Bound to Read: Compilations, Collections and the Making of Renaissance Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013); A.I. Doyle and M.B. Parkes, "The Production of Copies of the Canterbury Tales and the Confessio Amantis in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts and Libraries: Essays Presented to N.R. Ker,* eds. M.B. Parkes and A.G. Watson, 163–210 (London: Scolar Press, 1978); M.P. Parkes, "The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book," in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to R.W. Hunt,* eds. J.J.G. Alexander and M.T. Gibson, 115–41 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976). Paul Needham, *The Printer and the Pardoner* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1986). See also, among many studies, Alexandra Gillespie, *Print Culture and the Medieval Author: Chaucer, Lydgate, and Their Books, 1473–1557* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

22 Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

compilers do with theirs; he combines them in a singular object that is interpretable. This genre is not confined to history, since it is of our own making: "a compilation as I define it relies on the perspective of its readers, who must ultimately determine whether to interpret its given assemblage of texts in compilational terms."[23] The only difference between his own text and his object texts is that the conventions of the genre in which Bahr works require a direct statement of the principle of coherence. Bahr explicitly performs the genre he is studying:

> This, then is my definition of a compilation: the assemblage of multiple discrete works into a larger structure whose formal interplay of textual and material parts makes available some version of those literary effects described above… metaphorical potentialities [and] resistance to paraphrase…. How those historical vectors inform and complicate the formal arrangements that together compose the visible compilation, I argue, constitutes both a potential source of aesthetic resonance and an invitation to literary analysis.[24]

Our reaction to these things, whose association is of our own creation, is finally what matters: "[our] delight in what I have called the literary can be found, and care for it nurtured, in the many ways in which codicological form and textual content create and complicate one another in particular medieval manuscripts."[25] These statements are all incontestable — some because they are vague, others because they are completely personal and singular. It is useless to argue about what causes delight.

I cannot read the pencilled details on a marginal diagram an early reader drew of Xenophon's line of battle. Apparently, in 1935, schoolboys were more interested in military formations than we are.

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23 Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages,* 11. So, also ibid., 247: a compilation is marked by "broad, structural, and thematic connections."

24 Ibid., 10–11.

25 Ibid., 257.

Knight's *Bound to Read* can be seen as an historicized version of the approach in Bahr. The construction of a compilation is not arbitrary, nor something unique to modern readers. Rather, our modern fascination with them is a legitimate reflection of something that existed within the period we are examining:

> [My] premise is the observation…that books have not always existed in discrete, self-enclosed units…. the printed work was relatively malleable and experimental….Every bound volume was a unique, customized assemblage.

> [I] will argue first that books in early print culture were relatively open-ended…and second that the attendant practices of compiling and collecting came to have an important structural impact on the production of Renaissance literature.[26]

The familiar villain here is that *bête noir* of modern studies in book history and so-called "print culture" — fixity. Such "fixity" (always disparaged) is placed in opposition to whatever one is studying, whether that is a period, or rather a group of scholars.[27] Books, as we moderns understand them, are not books as understood by all scholars and even bibliographers of the past. They provide new contexts for individual scholars to develop or perform readings, for example, the *Sammelband* containing *Venus and Adonis* at the Huntington Library (HM MS 59000–59002): "Read against this already composite text, the Shakespearean portion of the volume — *Venus and Adonis* in particular — takes on a particular tone."[28] What this tone is, and who

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26 Knight, *Bound to Read,* 4–5, 9.

27 See, e.g., Adrian Johns, Introduction, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 1–47. For a recent case study of how such marginalia imply a "repurposing" of texts, see Laura Estill, "The Urge to Organize Early Modern Miscellanies: Reading Cotgrave's *The English Treasury of Wit and Language,*" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 112, no. 1 (2018): 27–73.

28 Knight, *Bound to Read,* 74.

has access to it is not clear; nor does it seem that anyone could argue against its existence.

These two books take the same general type of subject matter: objects of concern that no longer obey the bounds of those neatly categorized objects we used to call literary texts or catalogued books. For Bahr, recontextualization is equivalent to rereading. And in this critical climate, there is no appreciable difference between the civil servant Horn, a manuscript of Gower we likely don't know at all, and one of the most canonical works in English literature:

> This book…contends that we can productively bring comparable interpretive strategies to bear on the formal characteristics of both physical manuscripts and literary works.

> I define compilation, not as an objective quality…but rather as a mode of perceiving such forms so as to disclose an interpretably meaningful arrangement….[29]

For Knight, those interpretive readings seem to be demanded by the materials we are looking at. We are thus privileged over early readers who wrongly projected their own prejudices onto their literary materials (the notion of the integral text); we rightly project our own.

My father's notes claim that the verb in Xenophon is a form of the verb "to send," not "to be." I pencil in (or once pencilled in) my gratitude, by adding that it is a second aorist.

Conclusion

The texts we once naively read (in all senses) were never stable, and we were perhaps uneasy with our tentative assumptions that they were. There were things like the order of tales in the *Can-*

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29 Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages,* 1, 3.

terbury Tales that were bothersome. Even the "fixing" of *Piers Plowman* in three states by Skeat in his edition of 1869 did not contain its fluidity, and soon, another form, the so-called Z version, appeared.[30] The more one studied any of these texts — *Piers Plowman,* the *Canterbury Tales,* the versions of *The Song of Roland* — the less that mouvance or fluidity seemed accidental, and the more it seemed essential; it was what finally made whatever we called "the text" untranscribable. All the once-standard groups and sequences of the *Canterbury Tales* (Kittredge's Marriage Group, for example) — these were mirages: real, as mirages go, but nothing that could be shared with anyone not suffering the same delusion. How could there be a Marriage Group in the *Canterbury Tales* when we knew so little of what marriage might have entailed or whether that had anything to do with what we call by the same name today?

This is the critical atmosphere into which Doyle and Parkes's article was inserted. The groups and fragments conventionally defined and discussed in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales gave way to groupings that were less ideational than material and codicological: the ones defined in the late-nineteenth century by Henry Bradshaw and quietly canonized in twentieth-century editions as A–I, or I–X.[31] Any of these intellectual or codicological groupings (the *Canterbury Tales* fragments, Hammond's Oxford group of manuscripts, Kittredge's thematic groups) provide us with fresh associations.

The term *compilatio* also makes intelligible a number of formerly neglected and often recalcitrant objects. It has the advantage of seeming to connect one branch of study (in humanistic context, the relatively "hard" fields of codicology, paleography, manuscript study) with another one (the "softer" field of literary criticism and appreciation). And it does so at a time when the

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30 Now available, incorporating many of the problems of parallel-text editions in A.V.C. Schmidt, ed., *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z versions,* 4 vols. (London: Longman, 1995–2008).

31 Henry Bradshaw, "The Skeleton of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales: An Attempt to the Distinguish the Several Fragments of the Work as Left by the Author" (1868), in *Collected Papers,* 102–48 (Cambridge: University Press, 1889).

rejection of familiar literary criticism in favor of so-called material culture seemed almost complete.[32]

I certainly am not the only scholar who went through a period of imagining that my career could consist largely of performing "readings" of canonical texts. Either I would read each text according to a particular critical school or method, or I would read one of them according to ten different schools or methods.[33] In the 1960s, there seemed an unlimited supply of material: "The Structure of X," an analysis of what was once thought a minor or failed work, now revealed as subtly or brilliantly coherent and exemplifying all the intellectual virtues defined by textbooks on criticism.

Doubtless these compilations, or what Knight terms assemblages, exist and are worth studying. Yet what forty years ago might have been termed perfect examples of Levi-Strauss's "bricolage" (interesting structures that just happened to come into being) are now provided with an imagined coherence or what might have once been described with the now-old-fashioned notion of intention. With our discovery of compilations and assemblages, we refresh our field of study with new legitimate objects of concern. We don't have to read the same old texts in different ways, because we can now mix and match even canonical texts to produce entirely new texts. There is now something new to do, or something apparently new: something that needs doing, something that is do-able, and something that must be done.

Legendum legendum est.

There is of course plenty a scholar can do who becomes absorbed in these compilations, miscellanies, tract volumes, or anything else that forces its way into the margins of a literary

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32 Armando Petrucci, "From the Unitary book to the Miscellany" (1986), and "Reading in the Middle Ages" (1984), in *Writers and Readers in Medieval Italy: Studies in the History of Written Culture,* ed. and trans. Charles M. Radding, 1–18 and 132–44 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

33 For an example, see Peter W. Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading The Nun's Priest's Tale* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010). See also, the often mind-numbing contributions in the MLA "Approaches to Teaching…" series.

text (annotations, contemporary politics, ideology, and so on). You can put them in some kind of array: if you look at a number of printed *Sammelbände,* for example, and even do a cursory examination of their histories when these are known or somehow accessible, you can easily categorize them into various types: authorial, readerly, or simply arbitrary. Each is unique, but each also resembles certain members of this group more than it resembles others.[34] Books and texts might be associated by genre, by title, by author, or by size. And by creating such an array, you can avoid saying at least a few uninformed things about them. You can avoid confusing an authorial compilation with an arbitrary one. You can avoid assuming that the texts bound together in a bindery ever were read together, interpreted together, or imagined to be a unit by anyone other than a modern librarian looking for a place to shelve it. You cannot know what your book-copy is, but you can place it on some sort of scale with others that at least gives you a place to begin. You can do the same with annotations: if you look at enough of them, you might be able to form a continuum or scale, in which various types could be defined: schoolboy annotations, scholarly, vetting for a printing press, childish markings, pointless doodling, critical.

In the early 1990s, R. Allen Schoaf, in a study that seems almost quaint today, invented what he called "juxtology."[35] Shoaf,

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34 Joseph A. Dane, *What Is a Book? The Study of Early Printed Books* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame press, 2012), 171–78.

35 R. Allen Shoaf, "'For there is figures in all things': Juxtology in Shakespeare, Spenser, and Milton," in *The Work of Dissimilitude in Renaissance Literature: Essays from the Sixth Citadel Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Studies,* eds. David G. Allen and Robert White, 266–85 (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1992), http://www.rallenshoaf.net/6.html (2013):

I coined the word juxtology in the 1980s and published my first essay on the topic in the late '

80s in a collection edited by Jonathan Culler on puns. The term was immediately useful to me in my teaching for conversations not only about books like Joyce's Ulysses but also about the poetry of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton. Over the past two decades, as I have read and taught this poetry and continued to write about it, I have become increasingly persuaded that the term and its implications are very useful for interpreting late Medieval and Renaissance English poetry. Here are writers who not

unlike the scholars here, did not care particularly what period these works came from since the thing he was studying was invariably and legitimately himself. Nor did he waste much time trying to justify his selections. Shoaf's self, interesting as it may be, remains irreducibly singular and nearly inaccessible. There is no arguing about what he might see in his juxtaposed texts, just as there is no arguing over what Bahr calls the delight produced by a particular set of texts or objects that he or history places together. We may, in accordance with the prevailing critical climate, privilege a material object, but that only increases the basic problem we have introduced: the singular object is not communicable, at least, not in a scholarly sense, nor is our particular experience with that object anything that can become the object of scholarly or critical discussion. What we communicate and what forms communities of scholars are those abstractions known as ideas, vague as they may be.

Marginal comment on "ouk acharista": "Lit.: 'not ungraciously' — ironically — prettily enough."

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only juxtapose, they also make of juxtaposition an epistemology, as, for example, in Chaucer's "by his contrary is everything declared." And in my book *Shakespeare's Theater of Likeness,* I demonstrate how Shakespeare uses this utterly simple but also utterly indispensable word, *like,* to dramatize the crisis of self-knowledge and self-coincidence, in which, to paraphrase Catherine in *Henry V,* if we "do not know what is 'like me'," we do not know who we are. Just so, today, in one of the most revolutionary discoveries of brain science yet, we have learned that there are mirror neurons by means of which we feel what others feel and therefore how to feel each of us himself or herself — as if we had found the neural basis of ancient homeopathy.