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# THE POLITICS OF EDITING

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## Contents

◆ Introduction

# Textual Editing, the Writing of Literature, and Literary History

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The essays that constitute this volume of Hispanic Issues are by recognized specialists who have had considerable experience in editing and interpreting Hispanic texts. The Afterword was written by a scholar outside the immediate field of Hispanism who nevertheless brings to his reflections an appreciation and knowledge of our field, a thorough command of the discipline of literary studies, and extensive work in Renaissance studies and contemporary critical theory. The reader will notice that several essays deal with issues concerning the editing of Spanish masterpieces or national monuments (the *Poem of the Cid, Conde Lucanor,* Garcilaso's poetry, *Lazarillo,* the Spanish *Comedia*), while others focus on areas heretofore neglected: the editing of texts written by nineteenth-century women and the problem of anthologizing twentieth-century women poets of Latin America. A common thread in these essays is an awareness of editing as an interpretative practice framed by the circumstances of the editor who mediates between the authority of the "author" or "text," the exigencies of the various institutions of literary production, and the horizons of expectation or, in some cases, even the requirements of readers of those texts.

In recent years it has become abundantly clear that traditional theories of textual criticism no longer retain the certainty that they once enjoyed. Perhaps nowhere have those theories been explored and questioned more poignantly than in the writings of Jerome McGann, who summarizes brilliantly the history of textual theory while developing arguments for "a socialized concept of authorship and textual authority" (*Critique* 8). McGann analyzes problems of modern textual theory, the copy text, authorial intentions, critical editions, etc., from a historical point of view, fully aware of the long-standing schism that has existed "between textual and interpretative studies" (11).

Broadly speaking, it may be said that modern textual criticism has been grounded in the ideology of the "authoritative text," i.e., the one representing the author's original intentions. Such a text will have been cleansed of the errors and corruptions that might have tainted the original document in the process of its transmission. Of course, the privileging of the original word as a vehicle for the transmission of meaning was part of the humanist philosophy of language. In Spain, people such as Antonio de Nebrija and Fray Luis de León, among others, are examples of the humanists' interest in the power of language to move individuals and States (in Nebrija's case) into action. That interest manifested itself in an intense desire to study the written word: to learn how it functioned and what it meant as a "concrete experience in the past." In short, humanist philological exegesis, which centered on the authority of the original word, approached the establishment of a text by means of grammatical and rhetorical erudition as opposed to the prevalent scholastic view of language, which was essentially ahistorical and "established meaning through traditional logical discussion" (Zamora 15–17).

When we deal with modern textual editing, and specifically with the ideology of the "authoritative text" and original intentions, we are talking about an ideology that can be said to have emerged largely with classical scholarship in the early nineteenth century, when such scholarship began to rationalize editorial procedures in what became known as the Lachmann method (McGann, *Critique* 15). This method presupposed that one could go back to a single exemplar, cleansed of errata, which Lachmann referred to as an archetype (Pasquali 15). In the Anglo-Saxon world the Lachmann

procedures were refined and adapted to modern texts by Fredson Bowers (McGann, *Critique* 5), whose impact on the discipline has been, and continues to be, substantial.

In the case of Spain, the practice of textual editing since the turn of the century has had a somewhat different orientation. One thinks of the extraordinary legacy of the methodological syncretism effected by the great philologists who worked out of the famous Center for Historical Studies (El Centro de Estudios Históricos), among them Ramón Menéndez Pidal and Américo Castro. For these scholars, for others like them, and for their disciples it was not simply a question of returning a text to a pristine state but, just as important, it was a matter of understanding the text historically. Editing a text—according to Castro (1924)—"means understanding it and interpreting it. . . . Philology is essentially a historical science, consisting of lending the greatest possible meaning to the written monuments, and reconstructing the states of civilization that lie inert in the pages of the texts." The debt owed to these pioneers by contemporary editors and critics of Spanish classical texts is substantial, even if theoretical contradictions remain between the search for pristine original texts and critical exegesis—which, after all, implies an editor's ideological positioning within and toward the text (see Evangelina Rodríguez in this volume).

One of McGann's main lines of argumentation is that the methods of editing and interpreting ancient, classical, and early modern texts are not always productive or appropriate to "modern national scriptures," especially on the matter of authorial intentions. Thus, he says,

> the textual-critical theories which dominate our approaches to early-modern and modern works have failed to define properly either a) the status and nature of "the text," or b) the corresponding obligations which the critical editor has toward his work. My view is that editors cannot follow the guidance of a rule of final authorial intentions in determining the texts they will print because final authorial intention is a deeply problematic concept. Though this is evidently the case in relation to works produced in very early periods, the concept is especially treacherous in relation to more recent works because it seems so clear and simple at the level of theory and method. (*Critique* 67–68)

If one agrees with the notion that a "fully authoritative text" must have been "socially produced," then one must also go along with the idea that "the critical standard for what constitutes authoritativeness cannot rest with the author and his intentions alone" (75). Thus, simply identifying individual author and work is not sufficient; one must also consider the dialectical relationship between "the historically located individual and the historically developing institutions of literary production" (80). Within this scenario, the location of authority becomes problematic since it could well reach "beyond the author" to undergo "dispersal and alteration from a number of directions" (84): multiple authors, ghostwriters, nonscriptural level of authority, authors' habits of composition and revision (85–87), and so on. In the final analysis, examples abound to sustain McGann's conclusion that, in dealing with modern texts, a critical editor "must be prepared to accept an initial (and insurmountable) limit: that a definitive text, like the author's final intentions, may not exist, may never have existed, and may never exist at any future time" (90).

While it is reasonable to assume that this argument may be more generally appropriate to modern texts, it can also be carried to certain texts of early national scriptures. An example is Spain's famous epic, the *Poem of the Cid*, which has come down to us in a single manuscript that was probably transcribed from an oral performance. In his essay for this volume, Colin Smith reviews the editorial fortunes of the *Poema* as it emerges from the shadow of the "nationalistic" construction of Ramón Menéndez Pidal, who as early as 1908–1911 had seen the Castilian epic—in its surviving text "of 1140"—as a largely autochthonous artifact, a position that he was to underscore again in 1961 when he saw the text of 1140 "as a reworking of an original composed about 1105—that is, within a few years of the death of the Cid of history in 1099." Smith surmises that Menéndez Pidal's "unspoken intention was to bring the *Poema* to within the period of the prime version of the *Chanson de Roland*, usually considered to belong to the years of the First Crusade," thus eliminating any major linkage between the two poems and reinforcing the notion of the Castilian epic's autochthonous emergence.

Menéndez Pidal's editorial construction of the *Poema*—a remarkable, scholarly tour de force by a major philologist to be sure— was