Introduction by Wim Van Mierlo

Textual scholarship has been characterized by change. Just a few decades ago there was a belief in bibliographical authority and editorial control; the transmission of a text was regarded as a continuous process of corruption; the editor’s task was to (re)construct an ‘ideal’ text; a desire for origins motivated practically all textual work. By current consensus the emphasis is now rather on creation, production, process, collaboration; on the material manifestations of a work; on multiple rather than single versions. At the same time, the importance of reception and book history is increasingly being recognized, and their vocabulary and methodology now commonly informs debates about editorial matters.

Yet can one really speak of a paradigm shift in textual scholarship? What, if any, continuity exists in the methodological, conceptual and theoretical underpinnings of the discipline? Or should one rather speak of discontinuity and a diversification or fragmentation of methods and frameworks? These questions form the background for the current volume of Variants, which brings together a selection of the papers, revised and updated, from the Third International Conference of the European Society for Textual Scholarship on “Textual Scholarship and the Material Book: Comparative Approaches” held at the Institute of English Studies, University of London in 2006.[[1]](#footnote-1) The point of departure for the conference was difference and how it appeared to be endemic in the discipline. One only needs to think of such opposite approaches and notions as eclectic editing versus electronic editing; versioning versus *Variantenkritik*; final authorial intention versus the sociology of the text; historical philology versus *critique génétique*; bibliography versus the history of the book. Considering these differences, however, was not intended as an occasion to bemoan a far-reaching state of methodological confusion and intellectual fragmentation, but to create an opportunity to consider how difference can in fact be stimulating for the future development of textual studies. With this in mind I defined a number of key aims, which still apply to the essays in this volume: to assume a disciplinary division from which to foster the debate about disciplinary common ground; to ask textual scholars to think materially; to encourage comparative investigation of what cross-currents had been developed between the various sub-disciplines dealing with the study of texts and books.

The disciplinary division between textual scholarship and the material book is one whose origins lie a good while back, though the issue is perhaps at the moment again more acute as result of recent developments in book-related humanities research. In the Anglo-American sphere of textual editing in the tradition of W.W. Greg, textual criticism was rooted in bibliography. The basic rationale was that you selected a copy-text and then emended the text after collating all the variants; a most important and difficult step was to precede these procedures, however, and that was to determine which copy-text best represented the author’s intention. Bibliography was the tool that provided the evidence and the certainty. Yet even before doubts arose about the universal applicability of the Rationale of Copy-Text, scholars who tended to emphasize the word *criticism* in textual criticism expressed a distaste for the objectivist propensity of traditional bibliography, which prompted an eloquent defence of “pure” bibliography from Fredson Bowers against the accusation that analytical bibliography was merely an end in itself, having no “ultimate application” and on the whole using a technique and vocabulary that was too esoteric and incomprehensible to the literary scholar.[[2]](#footnote-2) While for Bowers analytical bibliography must pursue “a total comprehension of the maximum physical facts” to achieve “a definitive physical description of the book”, the textual critic must continue to select those bits of information that are relevant to the editorial problems at hand or ignore this evidence at his own peril.[[3]](#footnote-3) Bibliography is thus not the “usurper” of “legitimate criticism”, but “the necessary foundation” on which “textual criticism must be based”.[[4]](#footnote-4) Nor is bibliography merely the handmaiden to editing. Rather, Bowers places bibliography higher than editing when he says that “textual criticism cannot controvert accurate bibliography in its findings”, but he is very much aware that both methods essentially operate independently from each other, though they must “join” when confronted with “certain problems of texts”.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Today textual scholarship and the history of the book seem to have entered into a different kind of relationship. With both having roots in historical bibliography, their sense of commonality has changed. This is certainly borne out anecdotally. At a closing, round-table session during the 2005 Society for Textual Scholarship conference, a voice from the floor, responding to the soul-searching exercise that the Society was performing about its own mission and future, contrasted with just a hint of jealousy the success of the History of the Book to the apparent lack of direction in textual scholarship. STS’s decision to relaunch *TEXT* as *Textual Cultures*, though, marked a new turn towards theory in Anglo-American scholarship, perhaps the second such turn in the past few decades. The first happened with the creation of the Society in 1979, which gave rise to (or was inspired by) the gradual breaking away from editing in the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle tradition under the impetus of Jerome McGann’s *The Textual Condition* and other writings and collections such as *Representing Modernist Texts: Editing as Interpretation*, edited by George Bornstein, which had very much a hermeneutic emphasis.[[6]](#footnote-6) The strong interdisciplinary focus of STS has certainly contributed to the second shift from “hermeneutics” towards “discourse” and “ideology” that underlies the notion of “textual culture”. Significantly, the opening article in the issue of TEXT that marks the transition “From *TEXT* to *Textual Cultures*” (as the volume is sub-titled) talks about editions as seeking “not to correct the differences” between variant readings “but to study them”, and it describes the role of the editor as “seeking to provide the material inscriptions and transmission history” of texts.[[7]](#footnote-7) The study of the “material inscriptions” of “material philology” is more directly reminiscent of a Derridean and post-Derridean rhetoric than anything before, though equally it points (or points back) to bibliography as well and the work of D. F. McKenzie.[[8]](#footnote-8) At a different time and a different conference, a book historian similarly prompted by a remark on the success of book history, said to me quietly in an aside: “It is always interesting to see how non-book historians seem to know what book history is, whereas book historians don’t”. The occasion at the University of Stirling in early 2007 was also a consideration of “New Developments in Textual Cultures”. What was implied in his remark was that book history, still a fairly new point on the academic spectrum, experienced as much uncertainty about its rationales and was as much a broad church of different practices and approaches as textual scholarship. Despite the impression created by the major multi-volume projects outlining national histories of the book, book history operates under a wide range of sub-heads (the history of the book trade, publishing history, the history of printing, print culture, typography, the mediaeval book, the electronic book, the history of reading, reception history, the history of libraries, and so on) that are practiced in a variety of academic departments (history, English, library sciences, media studies). Not a homogenous field, indeed.

Still, if textual scholarship and the history of book share the same scientific object—the book as a physical entity produced in a particular time, space and socio-cultural context—the borders between them are not clearly defined, and each looks at that object from different perspectives. Book historians do not tend to look at the individual book, but move beyond it to books in the plural, to the Book as an abstract concept even, “to produce a continuous, unified historical perspective”.[[9]](#footnote-9) Robert Darnton’s well-known diagram of the Communication Circuit Model in “What Is the History of Books?”, famous for its holistic representation of book culture, bears out that the history of the book is outward looking, gyrating from author to reader, occupying ever-widening circles from the local to the global.[[10]](#footnote-10) (A book historian such as William St Clair can even express regret that much book historical and textual research occupies itself with endless case studies, but never engages with the big picture.) Textual scholars, by contrast, look at individual exemplars of the book and at the printed words therein contained. Much more concerned with hermeneutics (at least a hermeneutics based on semantics and tropological structures rather than other semiotic systems), and the idea that textual editing should serve literary criticism, they concentrate almost exclusively on literature and belletrie (whereas for book historians any genre of book is of almost equal interest). They also have at times tended in their attempt to reconstruct a “pure” text to consider the text a-historically.[[11]](#footnote-11)

The purpose of the present volume, then, is not to prop up disciplinary boundaries, but to join them together, see where they might cross. While one’s choice between “bibliography” or “book history” may well “depend on disciplinary preferences”, there has certainly been much stimulating cross-disciplinary thinking as well.[[12]](#footnote-12) Just like textual scholarship, book historical topics have a “hermeneutic use”, though not one simply limited to the linguistic codes, as knowledge about the “material processes that [shape] the construction and reception” of books induce to read the book differently.[[13]](#footnote-13) Ian Willison, interested in “textual cultures” and the way books functioned in the spreading of ideas, locally and globally, recognizes that textual scholarship, and textual editing in particular, functions within a broader intellectual context in what he calls “the social embedding of learning”.[[14]](#footnote-14) Willison, moreover, as a book historian concerned with the relationship between authorship and publishing, takes the view that “phases in the history of the book” might very well illuminate particular editorial problems at a certain time. As a strong advocate of the bibliographical work of D.F. McKenzie, he argues that legitimating texts cannot only be a matter of the private intentions of the author, but must include social practice and the collaboration—desired or not—between author, publisher and printer.[[15]](#footnote-15) Roger Chartier, too, invokes McKenzie’s work on typography and page layout as having a significant effect on the reception of a text’s “register of reference and its mode of interpretation”. For Chartier, these material variations of the book are significant in that the text does not exist “in and of itself ” but depends “upon the forms in which it reaches its readers”, which makes sense when he is interested in exploring what books and other genres of printed matter circulated in which social areas.[[16]](#footnote-16)

McKenzie’s seminal Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts has for some time now been taken up by textual scholars in Britain and the United States who have increasingly paid attention to non-textual, physical attributes and aspects of the book. It was not, therefore, just theory that effected change in textual practice, but also a reinvigoration and rediscovery of historical and bibliographical practices, a point reiterated by Paul Eggert. For Eggert, the abandonment of textual criticism’s preoccupation with the restitution of the “ideal form” of the work implied that textual scholars had a renewed interest, coming at it with a different pair of eyes, in “how the engines of textuality actually worked”, this time looking not only at the complex internal mechanics under the bonnet, but taking a good look as well at the “bodywork of the textual vehicle”, the trim, paintwork and all. His interest in what he cal s the “bibliographical life” of the text, nonetheless, raises the question of how the editor should at all be concerned with the information about production and reception of the book.[[17]](#footnote-17) Peter Shillingsburg, similarly, speaks of bibliographical codes as “the ‘body language’ of books”, observing that insofar as editors have already included non-verbal and non-textual elements in their editions, this information is usually relegated to far-away places in the critical edition.[[18]](#footnote-18) Eggert’s answer about the difficult convergence of book history with textual editing persuasively hinges on the notion of “agency”, as he reminds us that the constitution of a text is not the author’s alone, but involves many other agencies as well, such as publishers, typesetters, marketeers, and even readers (a point taken up and developed by John Gouws below).[[19]](#footnote-19) The idea of *Textual Scholarship and the Material Book*, then, is to look further for common ground from which to continue the debate from a largely comparative approach. We want to look at, not at what divides us, but what unites us as philologists, editors, librarians, collectors, and readers of books and printed materials in any historical period.

As is customary for the Society, the essays in this volume look as much to the future, to new ideas and developments in textual studies, as to the traditions of the past, across the various national regions and historical periods from the classics to the twenty-first century; the idea is not to investigate the past for its own sake, but to explore the circumstances and conditions that continue to bring change in a discipline that is perhaps now more versatile and dynamic than ever. Textual scholarship, then, is taken in the widest possible sense to include not only textual editing, but any form of scholarship that looks at the materiality of text, of writing, of reading, and of the book; at the composition, production, dissemination, and consumption of literary and other verbal and non-verbal texts; at the interaction between texts and books, the physical objects (manuscript, codex, electronic text, even the sound recording, which is mentioned by David Atkinson and Paulius Subačius) and the signs they contain.

The issues I have highlighted above are not merely dealt with in the essays so as to construct new theoretical frameworks or revisit old ones; rather they inform new and existing practices, models and methodologies. The section on “Perspectives” demonstrates quite clearly that theoretical questions are not treated in a vacuum. John Gouws’ question in the opening essay “Why text happens” goes right to the heart of the matter by confronting “theory-driven” approaches of literary and textual critics head on. His take, however, is not to reiterate polemically a traditional position *against* theory. His initial question encompasses, indirectly, a whole array of other important questions—theoretical and practical: Are philological/textual approaches defunct? Why does intentionality (still) count? Is textual scholarship stuck in a humanist tradition? And how has the responsibility of the editor changed towards the text s/he is editing, towards its author, and towards its audiences? Gouws’ answer lies in a re-investigation of the notion of “agency” in what, in the end, may very well be an argument for theory in his search for a “systematic and coherent understanding both to undergird and enable the empirical claims” so frequently made by textual scholars. In the following article, Rüdiger Nutt-Kofoth offers from a German perspective an overview of and reflection on terminology used in textual studies, its origins and meanings, its appropriateness, and its theoretical and critical implications for the work that we do. Dirk Van Hulle, next, contributes the first of three articles on Samuel Beckett (an indication of how Beckett studies are emerging at the forefront of author-based textual studies). While looking concretely at Beckett’s revisionist strategies across various “carriers” of the text (print publication and theatre production) during the composition process and between languages in the act of self-translation, Van Hulle identifies some interesting textual problems with which an editor might be confronted. The perspective that Beckett’s writing offers invites us to reconsider the theoretical as well as practical implications of intentionality as a concept. Van Hulle’s conclusion—that an author’s intentions tend to change over time—seems a rather obvious one, yet this is not so: it required a long and in-depth engagement with Beckett’s manuscripts and the convoluted development of his texts to reach this point.

Such considerations emphasize once again the continuing importance of investigating the documentary evidence alongside methodology and practice. The following section on “Practices” does just that, beginning with Jim Mays’ personal and engaging reflections on a life-time career of editing S.T. Coleridge and W. B. Yeats. Bodo Plachta considers some practices in German publishing and the relationship of a range of writers and playwrights (Schiller, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Kafka, Brecht, Thomas Mann) with their publishers and the interest these authors took in the material design of their books. His survey of the varying circumstances that informed the “aesthetics of production” and determined the look of the book as it was published, Plachta also inevitably turns to the question of censorship. In what is rather a fascinating story, Plachta demonstrates how the format of the book could be used to bypass the censors or to make political points. Plachta’s main point is, however, an important one: despite the emphasis the German *historisch-kritische Ausgabe* puts on historical evidence, information about layout, design, typography and so on are treated with much reservation by editors. In some respects, Chris Ackerley’s contribution on editing Beckett’s *Watt* reverses the arguments put forward by some of the other authors in this volume: as his brief is not a critical edition of Beckett’s novel, but a trade edition which wants to present itself as textual y aware, Ackerley must adopt (as he readily admits) a conservative view; there is no room in his edition for complex collations or elaborate paralipomena. Yet his editorial practice, which considers the problem of “obvious error” and “intrinsic error” in Beckett and the convoluted publication history of his texts, is not situated outside the publication and reception history of Beckett’s work. While critical editions so often bring about a historical break with the recognized format and its implications for reading of an author’s work, Ackerley’s edition is not intended to depart wholly from familiar horizons of expectation. If Beckett had, in some instances, to conform to his publisher’s house style, though he thereby inevitably changed his mind about what his text should be, so must at times his editor.

The section on Traditions further reflects on editorial and textual practices, but this time with a sense of the time and place from which these practices originated. The essays in this part of the volume are as much about textual scholarship as they are about textual cultures. David Atkinson begins with the near-impossible question: How do you edit a “text” for which you have no source, no text, no transmission apart from oral recitation? His contribution on editing popular ballads, like the one by Paulius V. Subačius that follows it, is an investigation of how “orality” was moulded into the medium of print. Subačius’s investigations into the classic Lithuanian poem *Anykšciu šilelis* (*The Forest of Anykšciai*) by Antanas Baranauskas straddles the border between folklore and national epic as he considers the “disembodied” forms of the poem’s publication in almanacks, anthologies, text books, and collected works, as well as oral renditions. The stability of form is also what concerns Wendy J. Phillips-Rodriguez in her treatment of the transmission of a classical epic. She enters a well-argued plea against seeing textual corruption and contamination as textual degeneracy in her discussion of the *Mahabharata* tradition, the greatest epic from the Indian subcontinent; rather she defends the value of each textual witness that is unique to the manuscripts and discusses some of the implications of this book-historical view for stemmatics. Mariken Teeuwen elucidates the textual culture of the late-antique scholarly tradition represented by Martianus Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, a ninth-century tract on the seven liberal arts, and the “transmission” and layout of its intersecting, marginal learning. Mark Nixon closes this section and the sequence on Beckett with an overview of the Irish author’s struggle to break into print. Despite an emerging tradition in modernist publishing in the 1930s, concerns about commercial risk rather than taste apparently motivated publishers not to take on Beckett. Nixon, quoting extensively from archives and readers’ reports, gives an interesting snapshot of the inner workings of publishing in Britain and the United States.

The final section, Crossings, completes the cross-over from text to book to textual culture that this volume has set in motion by looking at some wide-ranging effects of text and book. One “effect” a book has on its culture is the spin-offs it creates. Film and theatre adaptations as well as sequels and parodies are well-known examples; less well known is the usurpation of the literary work in popular culture. Anyone who visited Dublin during the Bloomsday Centenary celebrations in 2004 knows how advertisers used Joyce’s famous novel to promote their products. But where Denny’s sausages (on their poster a caricatural Joyce at his breakfast table was prompted to answer the question “Will I have more?” with “I said Yes, I will yes”) do make their appearance in chapter four of Ulysses, R.J. Smith’s Mushroom ketchup or J.N. Birch’s bicycles do not appear in George Eliot. Simon Frost’s considerations of books and consumer culture in relation to George Eliot’s writing makes for a fascinating (and entertaining) study of the “material reception” of the writer’s work. Susan Kovacs takes on board elements from modern communication and information theory to look at literary textuality and paratextual conventions in book printing in order to question the “engrained ‘essentialist’ tradition in textual scholarship” that puts text and author at the centre; her aim is not simply to decentre these in favour of book and reader considered in their social context, but to retain a linguistic, discursive approach that help us understand how paratexts “deploy — or give voice to — social and cultural practices”. Rita Marquilhas describes the CARDS Project at the University of Lisbon,which tries to recover the conventions of ephemeral, non-literary, personal writings in Portugal from the seventeenth to the eighteenth century, an enterprise that requires the combined efforts of social and cultural historians, linguists and textual scholars. Clara Rowland, finally, closes the volume with an analysis of the “postmodern” play with book form and design in the work of Portuguese writer Guimaraes Rosa and his radical experimentation with paratext and the effects this has on interpretation.

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1. I am most grateful to my co-conveners, Mike Edwards, Warwick Gould and Dirk Van Hulle for their assistance and support in organizing the conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fredson Bowers, “Bibliography, Pure Bibliography, and Literary Studies”, in *Essays in Bibliography, Text, and Editing* (Charlottesville: Published for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia by the University Press of Virginia, 1975), 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bowers, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Fredson Bowers, “Some Relations of Bibliography to Editorial Problems”, in *Essays in Bibliography, Text, and Editing* (Charlottesville: Published for the Bibliographical Society of the University of Virginia by the University Press of Virginia, 1975), 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bowers, “Some Relations”, 18 and 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In his inaugural Presidential Address at STS, G. Thomas Tanselle argued that the word “criticism” in textual criticism suggested “the important role that individual judgment plays in the process of evaluating authority”, “Presidential Address: Society for Textual Scholarship”, *TEXT* 1 (1984): 1-10. In itself, this was not a new position, but it was definitely made with new vigour and it made the positivists just look a little bit more old-fashioned. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Meg Roland, “‘More Old Texts’: A Theory of Parallel Texts”, in *From TEXT to Textual Cultures*, ed. Edward M. Burns, W. Speed Hill and H. Wayne Storey, *TEXT* 17 (2005): 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Roland, using parallel-text editions as her example, explicitly advocates “an approach to texts rooted in post-structuralist theory” (26). McKenzie, too, frequently speaks of “the indexical sign and symbolic meaning” as applied to texts and other forms of print and verbal communication; indeed, further applying a semiotic discourse derived from de Saussure, he identifies “enumerative, descriptive, and textual bibliography” as constituting “a class of three referential signs”, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 9-10, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ian Willison, The History of the Book as a Field of Study within the Humanities”, SASSpace, http://sas-space.sas.ac.uk/dspace/bitstream/10065/8/3/July.pdf 17 (accessed 19 September 2008), 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Robert Darnton, “What Is the History of Books”, in *The Book History Reader*, eds. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (London: Routledge, 2002), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Elsewhere I have argued that Hans Walter Gabler’s fundamental critical edition of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* paradoxically tries to undo history by reverting the processes that led to textual error in the reconstruction of the text from the bottom up in the synoptic text, see Wim Van Mierlo, “Reading Joyce in and out of the Archive”, in *Joyce Studies Annual* 2002, ed. Thomas F. Staley (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002). 32-63. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ann R. Hawkins, “Introduction: Towards a Pedagogy of Bibliography”, in *Teaching Bibliography, Textual Criticism, and Book History*, ed. Ann R. Hawkins (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ian Gadd, “From Printing Type to BlackboardTM : Teaching the History of the Early Modern Book to Literary Undergraduates in a ‘New’ UK University”, in *Teaching Bibliography, Textual Criticism, and Book History*, ed. Ann R. Hawkins (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2006), 66-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Willison, 14. Borrowing Jerome McGann’s terminology, Willison posits that the “textual condition” in textual culture “is constituted—mediated—by the materiality of the various modes of textuality spread through space (East and South as well as West of Suez) and time”, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ian Willison, “Editorial Theory and Practice and the History of the Book”, in *New Directions in Textual Studies*, ed. Dave Oliphant and Robin Bradford (Austin: Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas, 1990), 112-13. In defending McKenzie’s position, Willison refers to G. Thomas Tanselle’s *Textual Criticism since Greg: A Chronicle, 1950-1985* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1987), 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books: Readers, Authors, and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and the Eighteenth Century*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 11, 9, 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Paul Eggert, “Version — Agency — Intention: The Cross-Fertilising of German and AngloAmerican Editorial Traditions”, in *The Book as Artefact: Text and Border*, ed. Anne Mette Hansen et al., special issue of *Variants* 4 (2005): 6-7, 8. Other scholars who have used the metaphor of the “biography of the text” are Warwick Gould, “Biography and Textual Biography: Towards a Life of Yeats’s Text”, in *The Commonwealth of Books: Essays and Studies in Honour of Ian Willison*, ed. Wallace Kirsop and Meredith Sherlock (n.p.: Centre for the Book, Monash University, 2007), 96-119, and Michael Groden, who gave a paper on “Notes towards a Biography of James Joyce’s Ulysses” at the MSS: Modern Manuscript Studies Seminar, Institute of English Studies, 29 November 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Peter L. Shillingsburg, “Practical Editions of Literary Texts”, in *The Book as Artefact: Text and Border*, ed. Anne Mette Hansen et al., special issue of *Variants* 4 (2005): 29-30. The main line of Shillingsburg’s objections is not that the information is not available, but that it does not mediate this information, accurately and completely, to literary critics, college lecturers and classroom readers who are not experts in textual scholarship. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Eggert, 8, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)