

## Introduction: Textual Histories

Yuri Cowan

Volume 4, numéro 2, printemps 2013

Textual Histories  
Histoires textuelles

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016735ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016735ar>

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Éditeur(s)

Groupe de recherches et d'études sur le livre au Québec

ISSN

1920-602X (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Cowan, Y. (2013). Introduction: Textual Histories. *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016735ar>

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# INTRODUCTION:

## Textual Histories

**Yuri COWAN**

Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Our understanding of texts is shaped by the material forms in which they come down to us; multiple factors influence the transmission of texts across time, and readers therefore experience past texts in diverse forms that often share little resemblance with the forms in which past generations received them. The process which Randall McLeod calls “transformission” occurs every time a text is printed, reprinted, repurposed, or remediated, and the material form taken by a text at any given time has important consequences for the ways in which that text is understood by contemporary and future readers. Every text has a material history—in many cases a long and rich one—dictated by the cultural, aesthetic, and economic choices of authors, publishers, printers, editors, and illustrators. This history calls into question many things that general readers might take for granted about texts: the idea of the “original version” for instance, or the importance of the first edition of a book. Indeed, even the integrity of literary narratives may also be called into question by an awareness of textual history, as happened for instance with the British and American editions of Anthony Burgess’s *A Clockwork Orange*, when the American publisher, W. W. Norton, thought the redemptive ending to be inconsistent with the tenor of the rest of the book and cut out the last chapter entirely from every American printing up until 1986. The reader’s encounter with the book is influenced and readerly opinions are shaped by just such incidental circumstances like these; textual histories thus speak to the history of reception as they reveal the ways in which typographical decisions, editorial choices, and the pressures of publishing combine to produce the various apparently finished forms of a

text as it appears on the press, in the marketplace, and then later in the reading environment at diverse points in time.

When I first considered this special issue I had in mind the changes made by later generations to much older texts. Informed by my own work on the textual recovery projects of the nineteenth century—Victorian projects as diverse as the Bannatyne Club, the Early English Text Society, and the private presses of the 1890s,—and on the reprinting of Victorian fantasy in the 1970s (in an article published in *Mémoires du Livre / Studies in Book Culture* 1.2) I envisioned the current special issue as a place to discuss how texts have been recovered and materially reinterpreted as new technological and editorial processes and/or changes in taste influenced the material forms in which those texts manifested at moments far removed from their first appearance. It is certainly the case that those Victorian editors of medieval texts exerted a potent influence on our mental image of those remote texts today. To give only one important example, in the unique manuscript and in the 1839 Bannatyne Club edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the so-called “bob” is placed directly to the right of the line preceding the four-line “wheel,” while in Richard Morris’s 1864 Early English Text Society edition of the poem he placed the bob on a line of its own preceding the wheel. Later editions have uniformly followed Morris, affecting the reception of the poem in a subtle way for subsequent generations of undergraduates.

And yet a text can also mutate under much more immediate pressures, and can take radically different forms from just one printing to the next, like Charles Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*, which was published simultaneously in weekly and monthly serials and then in one-volume format, all within the course of the first year of publication. When Adrian Johns, in *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making*, took issue what he saw Elizabeth Eisenstein’s over-reliance on the notion of typographical fixity in her landmark work on the early years of printing in Early Modern Europe, one of his most striking examples is that of the lunar illustrations in the first edition and three subsequent versions of Galileo Galilei’s *Siderius Nuncius*, from 1610 to 1683. The second version, pirated in Frankfurt and near-named “*Siderius, Nuncius*”, reverses the order of the images, a practice followed by the later London printings, which were also degraded in their detail (Johns 22-3). There was not a gap of centuries between these editions, and the lunar illustrations were even in some cases printed from the same

woodblocks, but the differences between them are striking. In fact, as Henry Clay Folger realized when he presciently set about collecting multiple copies of Shakespeare's First Folio, variations can take place even within a single printing of a book, as changes are made (purposely and otherwise) on the fly. Time certainly enters into the equation; however, as many of the articles in this issue suggest, the long diachronic scope may not be the only way to look at textual histories.

For the essays in this special issue, authors (first in the act of the book's original conception and then in dialogue and sometimes in conflict with their publishers) are the initial landmarks by which textual histories can be oriented, and authors, in addition to being the brand by which the work is marked, can certainly be an important force in influencing the earliest material forms taken by a text. But not every author can be like Thomas Hoccleve writing out his own manuscripts, or James McNeil Whistler, who as Nicholas Frankel describes it exerted tremendous pressure on his publisher to give *The Gentle Art of Making Enemies* its final published form. Publishers, printers, and booksellers have their own ideas about format, design, and presentation. At the same time, publishers and authors alike also respond to readers (either active or potential), as shown by the blurbs that accrete on the backs of subsequent reprints or by the covers of science fiction reprints that update artistic interpretations of the future in order to accommodate current changes in taste and technology. In between the reader and the author, the marketplace emerges in these essays as a grey eminence every bit as influential in forming the book. Still, the scholars in this collection find no difficulty in discerning the traces of individual hands at work influencing the physical forms of texts, so that the process of textual formation emerges as adjusted in specific ways by individual authors, editors, and collaborators previous to being submitted to the greater collective of typographers, printers, publishers, and prospective readers. It is always useful to trace individual interventions, but as these essays show textual histories are complex, and given such a diversity of hands it is rare that any one person can be said to control the final form of a text.

Medieval and humanist books form the first such sites where personal interventions become visible in the text. Cécile Paret-Parras's contribution "Lire entre les Lignes: le Commentaire de Philargyrius aux *Bucoliques* de Virgile" finds "les traces d'une architecture textuelle antérieure" in the form

taken by the glosses and scholia of manuscript culture. The individuality of manuscripts has often been remarked, and yet in this article form, content, *lecture*, and authorship come together to offer a dynamic and mobile picture of the evolution of texts over time. As Paret-Parras finds, within the *mise en page* of the commentaries “on constate une variété formelle, correspondant aux formes marginale et lemmatisée. Chacune d’elles répond à des besoins spécifiques, liés à l’enseignement et au milieu culturel d’une époque.” The copier and the annotator become more than just transmitters of knowledge, they become organizers of it, and the formal conventions of marginal commentary (or not-so-marginal commentary, since it brings the writing reader closer to the centre of the textual situation) serve the intellectual needs of the first reader as well as those of readers after him or her. This kind of dialogue manifests itself not only in manuscript culture but after the advent of print as well. According to Jean-François Vallée in “Le Livre Utopique,” “pour des humanistes comme More et Érasme, la lecture d’un livre imprimé devait tenter de recréer la dynamique d’un dialogue.” Vallée also makes the important point that the idea of fixity that we associate with the post-Gutenberg book is particularly difficult to apply to the humanist book with its multitude of *parerga* and prefatory correspondences. *Utopia* is revealed in his study as a text that works to embody the dialogues among its earliest readers and then evolves to take on diverse forms as it comes down to its later readers. Not only does Vallée’s article speak in interesting ways to the ways in which the typography and material form of books create a very particular “dynamique de lecture”, his discussion of the *parerga* of *Utopia* and the letter-preface of More to Peter Giles suggests that the humanist authors, like the medieval scholiasts, saw typography as being capable of creating visual prompts suggesting the ways in which those books should be read. Caroline Prud’homme’s discussion of the integration of Froissart’s fourteenth-century *Chroniques* into the compiled histories of Jean de Wavrin in the following century exemplifies in similar ways the power of editors to reframe, reinterpret, and rewrite texts in new contexts. The transformations remarked by Prud’homme result in Froissart’s own text appearing as a kind of palimpsest within Wavrin’s, identifiable in “ghostly” passages that resurface momentarily. Like Vallée’s humanists, Prud’homme’s medieval chroniclers position their texts in dialogue with others, as when “in volume III onwards, Wavrin deals with events contemporary to him, and he includes to a certain extent his own experience and reflections within his narrative.”

In discussing numerous versions of the Maisonfleur collections of protestant poetry in France, Sara Barker suggests that editions of such anthologies made their cameos in the print environment under rapidly shifting historical circumstances. Thus “any attempt to find an all-encompassing explanation for their production is likely to be futile, given the three decade time-span of production which covers some of the most unsettled years of French history, and the involvement of nine named printers, to say nothing of the mysterious editors and varied contributing authors, knowing or not.” This diversity of arrangement among these anthologies is an example of publishers adjusting their tactics in order to suit historical context and the predicted needs and desires of readers. Barker connects the particular arrangements of the anthologies’ sections to the historical context to which they responded. This was a process that relied both on the tried-and-true and on attempts at innovation. In Barker’s words, “expanding the collection internally, taking advantage of flexible positioning, printers and booksellers could present each version of the collection as a distinctly different product, redesigned and reconsidered rather than simply expanded, whilst simultaneously promoting and exploiting the anthology’s reputation and heritage.” This desire to respond to the apparent needs and desires of a reading audience also appears in the contribution of Doris Lechner, who discusses the digestion of (particularly historical) books for the Victorian periodical *The Leisure Hour*, printed by the Religious Tract Society. These “travelling texts,” as they migrate from form to form, are shown by Lechner to have been adapted particularly with the needs and interests of their intended audience in mind, to the point of adding phrases (like “working men”) that do not appear in the originating text. As digest and adaptation, the kind of “media transfer” described by Lechner is similar in kind to the media transfer noted by, for instance, Prud’homme in her article on Wavrin’s adaptations of Froissart—but the greater consciousness of audience in the case of the Victorian evangelical publisher is striking. As Lechner shows, “The transformation from book into periodical serial went hand-in-hand with substantial changes to text and peritext in order to adopt an explicitly working-class perspective in the serial’s construction of national historical identity.” In the first great age of advertising and branding, *The Leisure Hour* focussed squarely on its audience of working men, with an eye to their improvement.

Matthew Day's contribution, "Travelling in New Formes," deals with the reissue and reprinting of travel literature in the eighteenth century, and shows that the up-to-date genre of travel literature was particularly suited to reacting to subtle pressures of the marketplace by adjusting the physical appearance of its texts. As Day remarks, "The re-release of a text provided opportunities for repackaging it and these subsequent versions were often far from innocent. The timing of reissues and new editions reflected a judgement that there was demand in the market, or a political, ideological or financial imperative." Day describes changes being made to texts on the basis of ongoing lawsuits, others being completely recast with regard to their apparent contents by means of the mere replacement of a title page, and still others repurposed at later date, morphing "from news pamphlet to historical document". Like Barker, Day remarks that "reissues often demonstrated sensitivity to historical events, the political climate or a change in perception about how works could be received." Gregory Mackie's contribution similarly illustrates what a change of historical context can do to a text. In analysing the ways in which Oscar Wilde's "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" was repurposed as *The Soul of Man* in a pamphlet by Arthur Lee Humphreys a few days after Wilde's sentencing for gross indecency in 1895, Mackie describes how "Humphreys' edition updates the 1891 essay's plea for sexual freedom by intervening editorially in Wilde's text." It is thus not only editorial or printerly emendation in combination with other changes of format that can impact the reception of a text, but also the alteration of the external circumstances surrounding its circulation and publication. In the same way, as Mackie points out, the vaguely scurrilous reviews of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* upon the book's first publication in 1890 could be recast as damning evidence at Wilde's trial five years later.

The history of texts is full of examples in which the text moves to some extent out of the power of the author and is reshaped in the hands of the publisher, or of an editor, or of the public at large. Giovanna Devincenzo, for instance, re-examines the editorial efforts of Michel de Montaigne's "fille d'alliance," Marie de Gournay, in editing Montaigne's *Essais* after his death. It is an example of editorial history that evokes the way in which prefatory material accumulates as the book moves out of the control of the author into that of the editor, precipitated in part by the actual death of the author Montaigne in 1592. Gournay's editions are also an interesting example of

the changes undergone by a text as it moves gradually further and further from the moment of its first publication. Moreover, when Devincenzo examines the history of one single version of the text (the so-called Exemplar), she illustrates the importance to editorial history even of versions that were distrusted by their own author. Lastly, Marie Doga's contribution is a useful discussion of the way in which authors, both independent and in collaboration, can influence their public reception by managing their texts and networks. The conversations of Francis Ponge and Philippe Sollers, migrating from radio broadcast to text, show how important the relationships between writers can be in forming an authorial image, as Ponge and Sollers positioned themselves against a hostile literary reception: "l'activité de l'édition participe de la conquête d'une autorité qui lui assure le contrôle de la production culturelle." Still more intriguingly to me, the catalogue of missed opportunities for publication can also provide fruitful reflections on *alternative* textual histories—on texts that could have appeared but didn't. Doga describes, for instance, the unsuccessful attempt to repurpose Sartre's long essay "L'homme et les choses" as an introduction to Ponge. As Doga points out, this failure was ultimately just as well, since it allowed Ponge eventually to position himself in relation to the coming generation rather than to the established intellectual milieu: "Sartre, c'est l'arrière-garde; Ponge, lui, souhaite agir avec l'avant-garde." The history of a text can thus speak to an author's desire to exert some measure of control over his own image, and the alternative histories of a text can serve to show how an author might have been remembered as another kind of intellectual entirely should things have fallen out differently and the text have appeared in another form and in another context.

Although many authors have exercised considerable control over the physical form in which their works appear, and/or have called upon their acquaintances to influence the reception of their works through the power of reviewing and blurb-writing, in the end the analysis of textual histories serves to call into serious question the power of authors when it comes to positioning their texts, especially when long periods of time are involved. The author is hardly helpless, but it is clear that even in the age of copyright there are multiple other forces at work, obscuring the author's message, amplifying it, or subtly altering it to suit entirely other ends. The results can be bewilderingly complex. As I was writing this introduction Marta Fojutowska, a Master's student whose dissertation I was supervising (on sex



in the neo-Victorian novel), came to me with a problem of citation. She wasn't sure how to describe in her Works Cited list her copy of Charles Knowlton's 1832 treatise on birth control, entitled *Fruits of Philosophy*, over which Knowlton had been prosecuted in America, imprisoned, and sentenced to hard labour. Knowlton had apparently published it again in 1841 as *Fruits of Philosophy: or the Private Companion of Young Married People*. But the *MLA Handbook* had failed Marta. It failed me, too, when I came to look at her book, which turned out to be a print-on-demand edition of Knowlton's text, from the "Ulan Press" with Amazon's imprimatur inside the back cover (incidentally, when I asked my student why she hadn't just downloaded a free copy from Project Gutenberg or the Internet Archive and then printed it out, she stated her preference for having a "real book"). In addition to the digital distance that the anonymous twenty-first century editors had placed between Knowlton and the modern reader by way of the occasional illegible scanned page ("Luckily I didn't need that part," remarked Marta) and a lack of any helpful scholarly apparatus, the Ulan Press had chosen as its copytext a reprint of Knowlton's text that had been published by the activists Annie Besant and Charles Bradlaugh with their own names on the title page. They had printed the book in multiple editions and tens of thousands of copies even after they had been prosecuted for it in England in 1877 (they too were found guilty, though released on a technicality). The Ulan Press's edition was taken from an 1891 version, published by "The Reader's Library" in San Francisco as one of its monthly tracts. Knowlton's name is not to be found on the title page of that volume; Bradlaugh's and Besant's names are prominent, doubtless not out of self-aggrandizement but from a desire to provoke and to take activist responsibility for the text; and they have renamed the book in more characteristically Fabian fashion as *Fruits of Philosophy: a Treatise on the Population Question*. This is thus a text with a complex sociology, a history of provocative if not exactly surreptitious publication, and a bewildering number of dates behind it. Its multiple versions have been catalogued thoroughly by Janet Farrell Brodie in *Contraception and Abortion in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century America*, and those versions speak simultaneously to the courage of the activists who first read and valued and then later reprinted these books; to the international interest of contemporary readers in a contested topic; and even now to the opportunism of a new thriving print-on-demand service that prioritizes wide access over legibility. Above all this Ulan Press edition of *Fruits of Philosophy*, with all its complex textual history behind it, reveals

the ability of print culture to resurrect old issues in new forms at different points in time, to speak over time in different guises to different reading audiences, couching its rhetoric in new material and textual forms and improvising all the while according to the shifting cultural moment.

Yuri Cowan is Associate Professor in the Institute for Modern Foreign Languages at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim. His current research works to describe diverse Victorian historiographies of everyday life. In the field of book history, he is interested in textual histories, the material book, and constructions of authorship, especially with regard to the circumstances of the form, publication, and reception of nineteenth-century editions of medieval texts. He has published various articles on William Morris, the Aesthetic Movement, ballad literature, and the reprinting of Victorian fantasy in the 1970s, and he is currently completing a book-length manuscript entitled *William Morris and Medieval Material Culture*. He is also Associate Editor of the online peer-reviewed open-access journal *Authorship*.

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