Editor, Author, Engineer —

Transformation of Authorship in Scholarly Editing?

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All philosophical and academic thought aside for a minute what does it mean if there is a name printed above a text or on the cover of a book? I dare posit that if asked, 99 out of 100 people will say that this name is the name of the person that wrote that text, respectively that book. Thus the most powerful function of putting a name on a text is that of appropriation. Of course this purpose or function has been culturally shaped. The apparent person name on the cover of a book, or above or below a text has over centuries been loaded with its semiotic function. And apparently this is important for us. In this paper I want to consider some of the functions the attribution or appropriation of a text has in the domain of literary scholarship. I shall also try to relate these functions to the historical development of authorship, because I believe these historic roots are important for understanding why the naming of authorship is paramount. I then signal a few developments in the domain of scholarly editing—foremost those inspired through or resulting from digital technology—that result in tensions with the traditional model of appropriation of authorship of scholarly editions.

The historic roots of appropriation

Seán Burke (1995) has described the history of authorship in the West as a continuous tension between the presence and absence of the author. Throughout this history views on authorship have swayed back and forth between author essentialism and almost complete impersonalisation. Plato can be said to have sided with the idea of impersonalisation. To Plato the personality and poetic imagination of an author was entirely unimportant. The world of forms was just a shadow of the ideal world of ideas, so any meddling in by creative imagination on the part of the

author when describing the world would just result in mere shadows of shadows. True knowledge could only be attained by disinterested rational enquiry. By advancing the idea of catharsis Aristotle on the other hand of course defends the empathetic nature of literature and poetry and thereby the empathetic role of the author. These perceptions of the role of the author are connected with epistemological claims. That is, essentially they are asking whether authorship is a means to knowledge—to which Plato answers nay as it can merely record, and even that it can do only inadequately; but to which Aristotle answers yes, the empathetic imagination attached to the act of authoring may bear on knowledge. As such the roles of authorship and of the author become attached to epistemological claims, to claims on truth. With the rise of Christianity the debate about these roles becomes even more pivotal, as authorship pertains to the Scriptures and to hermeneutics, or the interpretation of these scriptures. How have the scriptures been conceived? Were the authors mere vessels for God to fill with Divine inspiration, non interfering bodies that merely move the quill while sacred words pass through? If this might go for the original scriptures, what of such written interpretations such as those of Augustine? To explain the epistemological power of hermeneutics the idea that divine truth can be revealed in an author is essential. This *auctoritas* becomes the keystone of the early medieval age epistemic: an author that can be named and referred to as the authority for given knowledge. Yet, as the Middle Ages draw to a close a theory of hermeneutics emerges that holds that truth and knowledge may be acquired also through careful reading and reasoning. The epistemic changes significantly from given to derived. Both epistemological modes—that of given and derived—depend however on appropriation. An *auctoritas* must be named, simply to claim its authority. But in case a text is not based on external authority, to be able to make claims on truth and truthfulness the moral and literary status of the individual author must be unquestionable. Of course, for the reader to be able to recognize or assume these properties, also in this case authorship must be appropriated.

An excerpt from the 13th century prologue of Jacob van Maerlant's *Der Naturen Bloemen* ("Of the Beauty of Nature") shows the traces of divination, of God revealed in

nature and author, as Van Maerlant warns the reader for fables and lies (i.e. anything that is fiction) that are not based on auctoritates.

Wien so fauelen dan vernoien	Who is thus bored of fables
ende onnutte loghenen moien	and weary of useless lies
lesier nutscap ende waer	reads utility and truth here
ende uersta dat noit een haer	and will understand that never a hair
om niet ne mekede nature	was made by nature to no end
het nes so onwerde creature	nor any puny creature
sones teregher sake goet	or it is good for something
want got die bouen al es vroet	because as God is wise above all
dans te gheloeuene meer no min	it is impossible to belief
dat hi hiet makede sonder min	he would create it without purpose

Thus the philosophical legacy of the middle ages results in two basic tenets for authorship. One is reasoning, the other is divine inspiration. Reasoning and ratio will eventually become the basic tenet of Enlightenment. As the religious undertone retreats inspiration eventually becomes equated with Romantic creative imagination. Romantic authorship still involves overtones of divinity. But no longer is this (exclusively) a religious divinity. The divine and sanctity have become aspects of an innermost personal genius that moves the author. Burke in this respect refers to Edward Young who speaks of a 'stranger within' and a kind of 'inner God'—most explicit we find such in a poem by Dutch Poet Willem Kloos.

Sonnet (Willem Kloos, 1859 - 1938)

Ik ben een God in 't diepst van mijn gedachten,
En zit in 't binnenst van mijn ziel ten troon
Over mij zelf en 't al, naar rijksgeboôn
Van eigen strijd en zege, uit eigen krachten.

En als een heir van donkerwilde machten
Joelt aan mij op en valt terug, gevloôn
Voor 't heffen van mijn hand en heldere kroon:
Ik ben een God in 't diepst van mijn gedachten.

-- En tóch, zo eindloos smacht ik soms om rond
Úw overdierb're leên den arm te slaan,
En, luid uitsnikkende, met al mijn gloed

En trots en kalme glorie te vergaan
Op úwe lippen in een wilden vloed
Van kussen, waar 'k niet langer woorden vond.

At the end of the 19th century the author is strongly immanent in both types of authorship—the rational culminating *inter alia* in positivistic naturalism, while the inspired authorship is found from romanticism to expressionism. For both types of authorship it is pivotally important who speaks, who authors. Because both types of authorship lay claims to truth. Positivism claims social or political truths and the authenticity of the author is part of establishing that claim. Romanticism claims an inner truth of the author as person: the most intimate expression of the most intimate experience.

Thus we can say that until the early 20th century appropriation is a paramount feature of authorship because it makes claims to some truth that becomes apparent through the authored text. I dwell on these historical roots of Western authorship and appropriation a little because it is important to realize how deep these associations of appropriation and truth claims are embedded in cultural and intellectual history. The possible notion of subjectivity and 'readerly text' only comes into the story with Albrecht Husserl's phenomenology and Martin Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics. These new theories of perception and interpretation erode the authority of the author. Late 19th century literary history and criticism were mostly concerned with establishing criteria of aesthetics—often motivated by a need for nationalistic literary canonization. Authorial poetics and the intent of the author were important aspects in this type of criticism. However the acknowledging of the subjectivity of interpretation causes a 'decentering' of the author. This is reflected strongly in New Criticism that accepts biographical information about an author as contextual evidence for a possible interpretation of a text, but generally assumes that the true authorial intent can not be established. Or in the words of Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The Intentional Fallacy" (1946): "the author's intentions in writing are neither recoverable nor pertinent to the judgment of the work." From "The Intentional Fallacy" it is only a small conceptual step to Roland

Barthes' "Death of the Author" in which he argues that any text is primarily a locus for intertextual meaning forming which is at the hand of the critic and the reader rather than the prerogative of the author:

> *We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.*

The precarious position of the scholarly editor

What is it that a scholarly editor does? Editing in general is the preparation of a text such that it may be printed or otherwise published for reception by an audience. Scholarly editing concerns itself with establishing, curating, and studying the record and archive of historic texts—in practice the legacy in any form of dead authors. If we follow David Greetham (1994) on this the work of a scholarly editor entails several activities: finding a text, reproducing the text (which involves reading, evaluating, and transcribing the text of the original document or documents), criticizing the text, and editing the text. This process then results in a new representation of the text of the originating document(s). Although the phases of the process may be readily defined, each text is unique and each text confronts the textual scholar with complex and puzzling traces of the genesis of a text. In practice therefore the process of scholarly editing involves a series of choices that affect the eventual representation of the text. Because of the many idiosyncrasies a particular text may hold, it is generally accepted that consistency and accountability should be the hallmark of a proper scholarly edition. So making the same choice in the same situation and explaining this to the reader, for instance telling the reader that the editor chooses to represent the glyph 'u' consistently as a 'v' where in a medieval text it is used for the consonant. In the case of doubt only seldom there will be sufficient evidence to establish beyond doubt what an author intended to be the text. Of course this results in exactly the predicament of the scholarly editor with respect to authorship: the scholarly editor is in part author on behalf of an author. This is where the practices and principles of scholarly

editing clash with the 20th century ideas on the interpretability of text and the impossibility of establishing authorial intent.

Indeed as J. Stephen Murphy (2008) writes: "Much of the most advanced contemporary theorising about editing has suggested that the editor should follow the author into his grave." Scholarly editing has an uphill battle to fight here. How does a scholarly practice that is unable to define a precise and formalized way of establishing a text argue its primacy to the criticism and interpretation of historic texts in the face of a ubiquitous post-structuralism that has annihilated the relevance of the author, let alone the authority of a scholarly editor. David Greetham's (1994) rejoinder was to state that although such schools have perhaps effectively described the textual phenomena, they "have not yet produced a critical vehicle for representing them in a scholarly edition." Interestingly Greetham associated *inter alia* Jerome McGann with such schools of New Criticism. And no doubt Jerome McGann has become associated with new and digital forms of dynamic textual criticism, such as he experimented with in the Ivanhoe Game.[1]

Yet, in a recent publication McGann (2013) seems to return solidly to the archival primacy of scholarly editing. He rejects the post-structuralist project altogether and reasons that philosophy is actually a subroutine of philology concerned with testing, reconstructing, or falsifying its subjects of attention. But the primary task of textual scholarship should concern the Archive of what is known or has been known: "Philology is the fundamental science of human memory". McGann thus reduces the impact of post-structuralist hermeneutics to an 'after the fact' re-interpretation of established sources. This is in line with Cerquiglini's (1999) argument in his work "In Praise of the Variant: A Critical History of Philology". Cerquiglini argues that any text, any edition is not that text itself, but a theory, an argument about that text. This solves an important problem for textual scholarship, as it was attacked on the point of authorial intent. No longer claims textual scholarship to know how a certain text should be interpreted, rather it says there exist hypotheses about that interpretation.

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[1] http://www.ivanhoegame.org/

The claims of the scholarly editor

What does it mean when we see this or that title by this or that author "edited by ⋯"? Given the above we have to assume that we are dealing with both an appropriation and a claim to a hypothesis: the named editor claims to be the author of an argument about the text of another author. How strong is this claim, and in effect what does it claim? It would be a fallacy to judge there is no claim attached to such an appropriation. At the very least the scholarly editor makes known his claim to have edited the text. In textual scholarship such is often also a claim to the text or the work itself, even before an edition is published. A scholarly editor is 'working on' a text and usually intentionally lets this be known through papers and presentations on conferences or a website, actively claiming that text as a personal or institutional site of research. The appropriation is also a claim to qualification and adequacy as to the work of editing the text. Not anybody is skilled and qualified to edit a text properly and in a scholarly manner as David Greetham (1994) and others (e.g. Shillingsburg 2006) argue. Connected to this claim of craftsmanship is a claim to truth. Few hold these days an editor is able—or indeed that it is fundamentally even possible—to reconstruct the authorial intent and with that the text as intended by the author. Both because production and reception of a text are situated and because in all probable cases essential evidence for the authorial intention is lacking and impossible to attain. Yet customarily scholarly editors of historic texts will argue from contextual and biographical evidence the motivations and intent of an author. However deconstructivist one wishes to turn, this historicized situatedness of the author is valid information pertaining to the interpretation of a historic text. One can argue if an editor is able to decide on a 'best text' based on such information, and as said an edition at most will be an argument about a text. Yet this argument through the other claims made and of itself lays a claim to a truth: the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the text. A fifth claim is constituted because the appropriation of an edition is both a honorific and passport to academic credit. An editor often goes by the name of the text he or she is working on, so that the editor can be be known as 'the editor of the Canterbury Tales' for instance or 'the editor of James Joyce'. A scholarly editor can establish his name in the field in this manner and often a Matthew-effect is connected to appropriating a particular prestigious edition. In other

words: there is a lot of value attached to the appropriation of an edition of a particular text. There is the intrinsic cultural and social value for instance of the curated text. But there is also the economic and social value connected to the publishing of a new edition of a classic text. And of course the academic values of scholarly skill and knowledge of textual editing that a scholar builds. And lastly the academic status that he or she derives from this.

Predicament by the digital

The ways in which these values are constituted have all become volatile in the last decade. It should be noted that in part this trend must be imputed to institutional politics. However this is outside of the scope of this paper. Here I want to consider how the increasing digitization and softwarization of scholarly editing and editions incited a number of tensions with the existing model and process of scholarly editing. The easiest way to contrast the digital remediation of scholarly editing is to describe it as the teamwork that *inter alia* Patrick Sahle (2013) has called it. In stark contrast to the negative stereotypical yet in many cases still wonderful fitting image of the textual scholar working in the splendid isolation of an ivory tower, developing a high end digital edition is often a collaboration involving computer engineers, graphical interface designers, an IT-project manager, a data steward, and possibly several others with additional roles. This work is often seen as a service, as the offshoring or outsourcing of production work. However the creation of the data, code, and interface of a digital edition involves scholarly work and scholarly decisions as well. Alan Galey and Stan Ruecker (2010) in "How a Prototype Argues" have argued that digital objects and the design of interfaces are arguments too. We can extend what textual scholars generally hold of an edition—namely that it is a scholarly argument—to interface and programming code as well. This is certainly necessary to avoid lightweight thinking about the digital remediation of scholarly editions.

Authoring or building a scholarly adequate digital edition involves digital designers and developers that are well rehearsed in the material and content problems of scholarly text editing. This hybridity of skills and knowledge becomes all the more important when digital editions start embracing the possibilities of computational approaches.

Greetham in his introduction to his book "Textual Scholarship" (1994) writes: "textual scholars study process". He found that so important that he had 'process' printed in italics. That is most fortunate, because that is what computers excel at: reproducing process. Digital scholarly editions—though admittedly most of these are still slavish digital metaphors of the book—allow scholars to add process and performativity to texts.

At the Huygens Institute for the History of the Netherlands we are currently experimenting with graph models that allow us to precisely and computationally describe the genesis of a text. Graph models are not new, but their application within textual scholarship is, and arguing and implementing this application should qualify as a scholarly contribution. The research behind the application of these graph models is only in part the merit of the textual scholars involved. Most of it is done by software engineers that have acquired a scholarly understanding of the content problem.

Graph model of genetic stages in a text.
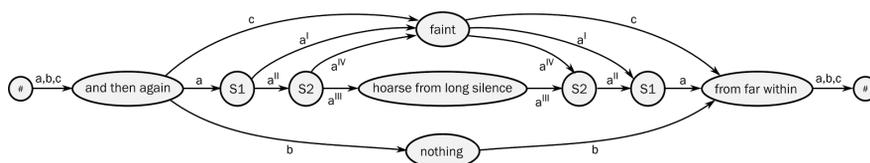
A third way in which digitality and softwarization affect the practices of scholarly editing is connected to crowdsourcing and open ended or social editions. Increasingly scholarly editors involve not fully formally trained persons, such as students and interested amateurs, to participate in the editing process. Web based tools for instance make it easy and affordable to engage a wider audience in the transcription of manuscript material that can not be digitized otherwise than by manual transcription. In this way an important part of scholarly editing is increasingly outsourced to a voluntary labour force. Currently this is usually as far as the openness of

the editing process goes. However there is no real reason why not "all readers may become editors too" as Peter Robinson (2004) once put it. A scholarly edition could open up itself to annotation and reuse at large, without threatening the base layer of scholarly warranted quality text. In this way scholarly editions may develop into social sites of knowledge building.

These examples show how the scholarly editing process is potentially changing significantly due to softwarization and computational methods. These changes are not fictitious. They are happening to a smaller or larger extend right now. In many cases the contributions that are made involve work at a scholarly level, or work that significantly affects the scholarly process and product. This should mean that such effort would both be appropriated and accountable by the people putting in the actual intellectual and creative effort. However as I have shown appropriation currently benefits mostly the scholarly editor. Academic credit does not trickle down. On the other hand it is only fair to point out that in the realm of accountability matters are amateuristic at best. Thorough and adequate scholarly code criticism is non existing, certainly in the field of digital textual scholarship. Some suggestions and experiments for peer review and criticism for scholarly computer code have been put forward, but a widely accepted and thorough framework for evaluation of scholarly code is missing. Moreover I dare posit that virtually no textual scholar is sufficiently code literate to provide any level of code criticism. Yet they appropriate scholarly digital editions. Until we have rethought thoroughly this matter of appropriation and accountability they trod dangerous grounds.

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