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Gailey, Amanda A., "Cold War Legacies in Digital Editing" (2012). *Faculty Publications -- Department of English*. 197.
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Cold War Legacies in Digital Editing

Amanda Gailey

ABSTRACT

The editorial methods developed during the Cold War professionalized scholarly editing and appealed to new ideas about the relationship between American academics and the government by aligning with the supposedly value-neutral goals and methods of the behavioral sciences, much to the discomfort of many humanists. Some of the implicit assumptions underlying midcentury editorial methods persist in digital editing, and may risk positioning digital editions as marginalized scholarship within the digital era, just as print scholarly editions became widely considered second-rate scholarship in the twentieth century.

FROM ABOUT 1960 TO 1980, THE U.S. WITNESSED AN UNPRECEDENTED flourishing of scholarly editions. The works of canonical authors—almost all of whom were white and male—were rigorously collected and edited according to new scholarly standards. These editions were typically intended as a value-neutral way to make American literature available to a student population that had swelled under the G.I. Bill. However, as this essay will explore, these seemingly value-neutral volumes were actually deeply rooted in Cold War politics, and gave rise to naturalized views of editing and textuality that continue to shape the creation of digital editions today.

Greg’s “Rationale of Copy-Text”

W. W. Greg’s essay was one of the early attempts among Anglo-American scholars to outline principles for the systematic and professional editing of literature.¹ His assertion was so simple and so provisional that we might

1. GREG 1950–1951. See *Textual Cultures* 4.2 (2009) for additional cultural implications of Greg’s work in various fields of scholarly textual editing and bibliography. We recall, of course, the earlier codifications of Lachmannian stemmatics

wonder why it is credited with almost single-handedly setting the course for a concerted, collaborative national academic movement. Looking at a long tradition of slipshod editing of early English works in which individual editors typically selected among variant passages based on aesthetic preference, Greg suggested a more objective approach to editing. Early modern authors tended to hand over their manuscripts to printers who were generally conscientious about adhering to the important aspects of the author's writing—namely, the words, or “substantives”—but who were quite comfortable playing fast and loose with what Greg called the “accidentals”—the punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, which really hadn't been standardized and so were often seen as being left to the judgment of compositors—or more accurately, were not really “seen” at all.

When we have several editions from an author's lifetime, then, we should consider the accidentals and substantives differently. A substantive change in a later edition more than likely reflected an authorial revision rather than a printer's obtrusiveness or carelessness, causing modern editors to consider the latest, substantive variants to be authoritative. For accidentals, though, which would have been freely interpreted and reinterpreted with each edition, editors should look to the earliest edition, which was probably also different from the author's manuscript but not as different as later copies of the work. According to Greg, we should treat these differently in order to produce a text closer to the author's final intentions, but also feel free to deviate from these guidelines anytime additional evidence suggests we should.

Though transparent and conditional, Greg's method soon proved inapplicable to many American literary texts, at least without adjustments. These adjustments were provided by early-modernist-turned-Americanist Fredson Bowers, who enumerated provisions for various textual conditions arising from industrial printing, surviving manuscripts, and transatlantic trade. Bowers also provided crucial early momentum to the scholarly editing of American literature, not only by making it—through his own example—a respectable academic enterprise, but also by arguing for the importance of the emerging field in influential postwar works such as *Principles of Bibliographic Description* (1949).

So why did the Greg–Bowers method ignite a scholarly movement? It is hard to imagine how Greg's simple and friendly suggestion—look to early

in Paul Maas's *Textkritik* (1927) and the systematic reactions to Lachmannian methods by, among others, Joseph Bédier (1913, expanded in 1928), Henri Quentin (1922, expanded in 1926), and Giorgio Pasquali (1934).

copy for spelling and punctuation, look to late copy for word selection; or do something else if that seems best—could have mobilized hundreds of editors, professors, and graduate students to create well over a hundred volumes of editions of American authors with unprecedented governmental funding. The method gained traction because the timing of Greg’s paper, along with the seeming objectivity and flexibility of his method, resonated in the United States at a time when federal spending priorities were dramatically changing American academia, and provided a compass for the humanities to navigate the middle decades of the Cold War.

Scholarly Editing and the Behavioral Sciences

During World War II, the federal government began pouring unprecedented amounts of money into military research and development. At the close of the war, the momentum transferred into a research and development policy in which the government underwrote research activities that worked for the common good and bolstered the international reputation of the United States (WELLS 1994, 22–27). The underlying research and development principle was that government would fund basic research—sometimes thought of as knowledge for knowledge’s sake—and commercial enterprises, squeamish about investing in expensive research with no clear practical outcome, could then use the fruits of government-funded research to develop specific, profitable applications. We typically hear about this momentous rise of research and development in regard to its influence on the sciences in American universities as it transformed universities around the country into federally funded laboratories. But this policy shift was similarly consequential to the field of American scholarly editing, which scarcely existed before WWII and has never since enjoyed the energy and bounty of the Cold War years, except perhaps in the first decade of the twenty-first century, when it was re-energized by the advent of digital editions.

During the Cold War, a crop of ad hoc federal agencies arose to fund a number of projects designed to showcase not only America’s scientific prowess but also its cultural and artistic accomplishments. This was an era not only of supersonic flight, the moon landing, and general purpose computers, but also of “goodwill tours”, “jazz ambassadors”, and other efforts to show both America’s Cold War enemies and developing nations just how enviable the American Way truly was. Government funds had tended to support scientific knowledge, but humanistic inquiry presented

a thornier subject, because it dealt directly with studying and interpreting culture, and was thereby quite difficult to present as value-neutral. What was needed was a humanist enterprise that was seemingly free of ideology but that affirmed American history and cultural accomplishment in a way that evaded ideological, political, and cultural scrutiny by politicians and the public.

In the 1960s, the federal government laid the groundwork for such endeavors. In 1965, Congress passed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act, which postulated that “[a]n advanced civilization must not limit its efforts to science and technology alone” (see POWELL, Jr. 1965, §3). It argued:

The world leadership which has come to the United States cannot rest solely upon superior power, wealth, and technology, but must be solidly founded upon worldwide respect and admiration for the Nation’s high qualities as a leader in the realm of ideas and of the spirit.

(POWELL, Jr. 1965, §8)

With this nationalistic objective, in 1966 the newly formed NEH funded as one of its first projects the Center for Editions of American Authors (CEAA). The CEAA proudly billed itself as the product of the only nation that saw fit to fund the rigorous, professional editing of its authors.² Bowers’s adaptation of Greg’s methods was just the catalyst that textual scholars needed to join the ranks of generously funded, conspicuous research programs. It provided a quasi-scientific research methodology at a time when scientific progress largely defined American academics both to the federal government and to the international community. Further, by insisting upon its own objectivity and retreat into the text, it provided an “objective”, supposedly apolitical, humanistic scholarly activity at a time when American universities, recently besieged by the Red Scare and inundated with a new co-ed hoi polloi, often wanted to retreat from the messy politics of the day.

A key factor in the institutional and financial success of Cold War editing was the discipline’s alignment with the methodologies and ethos of the behavioral sciences, that proliferated after World War II, soon came to dominate Cold War academia, forever altering the relationship between

2. This characterization was not entirely accurate. For example, Germany undertook a similar effort to create large editions in the 1960s, based mostly on the method of genetic editing favored by German editors (see PLACHTA 1995).

government funding and academic research. The humanities, on the other hand, suffered on many fronts after the war: first, the enormity of the war called into question some of the values at the very core of a classical education; later, an increasingly paranoid government and citizenry became wary of any enterprise that called for trying out dangerous doctrines and politicizing knowledge. The behavioral sciences, by contrast, offered apparently value-neutral knowledge and quantifiable results. While humanists worked alone on subjective, interpretative undertakings that seldom had practical ramifications, behavioral scientists worked in professional teams that lent academia an air of comforting competence, authority, and consensus (see ROBIN 2001).

Scholarly editing closely paralleled the model of midcentury behavioral sciences, and became a way that the humanities could reap some of the behavioral sciences' rewards, both financial and reputational. It assumed some of the same precepts as the behavioral sciences in its interest in both the motivation and agency of the individual author and the examination of quantifiable patterns of behavior. By examining compositional and publication histories while eschewing sociopolitical contextualization, it studied evidenced behavior without explicitly taking up the more complex and incendiary questions of how to interpret American history. In fact, the very name of the Center for Editions of American Authors suggests the purportedly ideology-free parameters of the project: the metonymy between an author and his or her works is altogether taken for granted by the name, and invisibly suggests that the Center would not be looking much further than authorial biography in its presentation of texts. By undertaking this work in professional teams overseen by sanctioning committees, Cold War scholarly editing aligned itself with the purportedly value-neutral think tanks that proliferated in the behavioral sciences and appealed to government funders. Taken together, these developments signaled what seemed to many humanists to be a distressing overprofessionalization of the humanities, and consequently editing would become a lightning rod for the animus that some scholars felt toward changes in their profession.

The CEEA accomplished many of the goals of federal funding during the Cold War. Granted large amounts of money from the NEH, the CEEA funded the creation of critical editions that would become monuments to American literary genius. Through the Greg–Bowers method, critical editions were necessarily the aim: that is, the method aimed to produce editions that did not necessarily represent any document that had ever previously existed, but rather an ideal representation of authorial intent stitched together from eclectic sources of evidence. Critical editions, then,

while produced from intense scrutiny of textual history, evaded pointing to any particular historical moment in order to serve as tributes to atemporal authorial genius. Only authors whose demographic position and writing seemed so natural and timeless as to transcend their particular contexts could be eligible for such treatment. In its decade of administering funds, as the Civil Rights movement came to a boil, the New Left set up residence in college campuses, and the sexual revolution began, the CEAA directly funded or otherwise supported editions by the following authors: Stephen Crane, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, William Dean Howells, Washington Irving, Henry David Thoreau, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, James Fennimore Cooper, Herman Melville, William Gilmore Simms, Charles Brockden Brown, Harold Frederic, William James, and John Dewey. Taken as a whole, these editions suggest how a conservative academic discipline wanted to view the history of American letters.

Editing and the Decorruption of American Genius

The Greg–Bowers method provided editors with a way to systematically enshrine the genius of American authors by narrowing the scholarly focus to the text itself and to the compositional process that created it. Only by stripping away the “corruptions” of the outside world can the editor uncover the true text—the one, as Joel Myerson (1995) has argued, suitable for the New Critical analysis—and uncover the Romantic genius at work. From the release of the first editions, the CEAA fielded fierce criticism from scholars who viewed the volumes as exercises in pedantry, who famously charged editors with trapping textual beauty “behind barbed wire” (MUMFORD 1968, 3), and who were generally uninterested in any variants except the most apparent substantives. To defend against these charges, the champions of the Greg–Bowers principle accused their critics of intellectual laziness, of caring more about the ease of carrying a book on an airplane than the rigor of the text, and ultimately resorted to a New Critical defense that “the real bouquet of a style develops in the thousands of fine distinctions the author makes in the act of creation” (BRUCCOLI 1971, 587).

The alleged pedantry of critical editions was in reality the materialization of a Cold War ideal, in which universities provided space for pure research that would eventually, it was hoped, materialize into practical private application. So as the CEAA dumped money into “barbed wire” volumes—in today’s dollars, each CEAA volume cost about \$85,000 in

editing alone, not including printing—the goal was always that CEAA-supported professional editions with complete, rigorous apparatuses would provide the basis for private publishers to create accessible readers' editions and textbooks, stripped of the apparatus and ready for the swollen student body squeezing into New Critical classrooms after the G.I. Bill.

This configuration was a public/private partnership, in which the government underwrote supposedly depoliticized, scientifically edited, esoteric volumes with the goal of producing publicly accessible monuments to American genius, and directly resulted from Cold War opinions about the purposes of academic research and the government's role in supporting it. "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors", explained the first president of the CEAA, Matthew Brucoli, quoting Samuel Johnson, and the federal government seemed to agree.

From its beginnings, the professionalization of textual editing was intimately tied to war technologies. Scholarly editing was born out of the "New Bibliography", an interest in forensically examining canonical early modern print materials for evidence of their physical production, with the aim of using this information to determine the most authoritative variants. Interest in the New Bibliography began among literary scholars in the pre-war decades, but received a boost from technology used for aerial photograph comparisons during World War II. During the war, Fredson Bowers was stationed in Australia as a cryptanalyst, supervising the work of a team that included his future bibliographic protégé, Charlton Hinman. Hinman was apparently impressed by a demonstration on aerial photograph comparisons, in which two photographs, taken at different times, are viewed stereoscopically, allowing the examiner to spot quickly changes in the landscape as disturbances in his visual field.³ After the war, Hinman followed Bowers to the University of Virginia, where he applied both his skills as a careful analyst of text and his interest in the photographic compositor to the study of Renaissance literature. Borrowing equipment from the Navy, Hinman constructed what came to be known as the Hinman collator, which allowed a bibliographer to place pages from different textual witnesses in stereoscopic focus. As with wartime photograph compositors, this called the viewer's attention to any variation between the two. The collator required considerable time for set-up and adjustment but allowed scholars to identify textual differences much faster than by going back and forth between witnesses. In some cases the collator called atten-

3. See Steven Escar Smith's discussion (2000) of Hinman's inspiration for the collator.

tion to slight differences that were easily missed using older methods. The collator was an inventive marvel that helped set a tone of authority and technical analysis characterized scholarly editing through the Cold War, in particular through another kind of editorial “apparatus”, the lists of variants and explicatory notes.

The attention to textual detail among New Bibliographers and scholarly editors at midcentury reflected larger currents in academia and beyond. Textual scholars such as Bowers and Hinman adopted as one of their major projects the identification of Shakespeare’s first print compositors through careful study of spelling differences among textual witnesses. The bibliographers undertook this work under the assumption that the orthographic flexibility of the early modern period allowed compositors wide discretion in spelling, but that individual compositors would evidence consistent habits in how they spelled words. Ascertaining which compositors set which portions of which texts was important since this information could provide bibliographers with key evidence in discerning which variants were most likely to be authoritative and which were likely to be corruptions. Once identified, corruptions could be purged from new editions. Jeffrey Masten has argued that this fixation on systematizing individual behaviors was an outgrowth of a larger cultural preoccupation toward outward signs of sexual “deviance” during the Lavender Scare, that period of acute cultural paranoia about “homosexuals and other sex perverts” (UNITED STATES. CONGRESS. SENATE. 1950), as one government study put it, infiltrating and corrupting the body politic during the Cold War (MASTEN 1997).

Certainly the language of midcentury bibliographers and editors bore a resemblance to the language of political and social paranoia in the Cold War culture at large. Both were keenly preoccupied with the removal of corruption in order to achieve a pure ideal. Science and technology, together with powers of discernment and right thinking, could purge corruptions and produce an ideal text, mind, or body politic that never in fact existed. Purification as a goal predated the Cold War in both social policy and textual editing, but gained powerful momentum after WWII, when the specter of an insidious and corrupting enemy seized the public imagination.⁴ Doctors sought to purge mental disease and physical deformity from the population through invasive psychiatric treatments and compulsory sterilization programs; politicians sought to purge communists and homosexuals from the body politic; and New Bibliographers sought to

4. See Joseph Grigely’s extended discussion of textual criticism and early twentieth-century eugenics in his chapter “Textual Eugenics” (1995, 11–50).

purge printers' errors and post-authorial corruptions from iconic texts. The American Cold War Zeitgeist embraced these attempts to decontaminate systematically the gene pool, the government, and the record of American cultural prowess—and the very efforts to decontaminate were also evidence of American prowess.

The absolutism of the Cold War seeped into the way that editorial theorists, particularly proponents of the Greg–Bowers method, talked about their work. The Greg–Bowers method, they said, would produce “definitive” editions that were “authoritative” and would “establish a text that should not have to be reedited”. But it also rhetorically resembled its bedfellow, New Criticism. New Criticism, which arose as a conservative response to industrial capitalism by Southern scholars, similarly retreated into the text, or, rather, excised those portions of the contemporary world that it found distasteful and distracting, and concentrated on authors and texts that lent themselves to the view of literature as great works by great men. Scholarly editors focused on what Joseph Grigely has called “textual hygiene” (1995, 23), which idealized textual purity, decrying other editions as “notoriously corrupt” and viewing the history of any text as “a chronicle of corruption” (BRUCCOLI 1971, 587), while their New Critical brethren put the same goal in religious terms, framing the study of the text in isolation as a means of studying a pure, closed, symbolic system that can lead to enlightenment. Early proponents of New Criticism tirelessly campaigned for its adoption in American literature classrooms through the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, and then, just as New Criticism began its decline at the beginning of the Cold War, scholarly editing as a fundable research project became grafted to its underlying principles: both defended the tradition of great men putting great ideas into great words against a world that was constantly corrupting and interfering.

Through the late 1960s and early 1970s, scholarly editing attracted intense criticism from detractors who viewed it as pedantic, expensive, overprofessionalized, and, occasionally, willfully insulated from sociopolitical concerns. The most public of these critiques was a series of pieces that ran in the *New York Review of Books* in 1968, beginning with Lewis Mumford's send-up of the new field of scholarly editing as a pointy-headed farce that placed beloved texts behind the “barbed wire” of an obscure textual apparatus. Mumford's piece was followed by several letters and a long, two-part, inflammatory assessment of editing by Edmund Wilson, who viewed scholarly editions as pedantic hackwork by scholars working at subpar, Midwestern universities, looking to make an easy name for themselves. The strong distaste that Mumford and Wilson held for scholarly editing

seemed directed more at the larger shifts in American academia that scholarly editing represented. Mumford (1968) called editing a “pseudo-scientific [. . .] boondoggle” in “American literary scholarship on the eve of its surrender to the computer and to those limited problems that computers can so deftly and swiftly handle”. A respondent in a later issue of the *Review of Books* concurred, and added to the bevy of charges against scholarly editing: “These MLA ‘cops’ are slugging with their billy clubs of bibliographic obfuscation and cordoning off their ivory tower from all of us yippies”.

Against these impassioned charges, the CEAA tended to close ranks behind the goals and methodologies that had initiated it. Partly because of this, the Greg–Bowers method became monolithic within it, and its scholars became publicly defensive of it and the work of the center, writing public defenses of its goals and methods. By 1976, the CEAA stopped granting funds, but its dissolution into the Center (later Committee) for Scholarly Editions (CSE) reflected the entrenchment of its core principles rather than their failure. The CSE broadened its scope to include non-American and non-literary texts, and administered external review without directly making funding or publication decisions. By this time, the Greg–Bowers method had left an indelible impression on American editing, and even the primary competing methodology of historical documentary editing defined itself against Greg–Bowers while sharing its underlying commitment to textual purity and, arguably, authorial intent. Over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, as English departments fought the theory wars and generally shunned scholarly editing as an unsophisticated, even reactionary enterprise, they caused the foundational work of literary scholarship to take on enough of a marginalized status that it failed to receive the attention of more fashionable critical enterprises. Scholarly editing did not disappear, but was relegated to the role of a service industry: the kind of labor required to make the more glamorous enterprise run, but performed largely out of sight and without thanks.

Despite significant changes in textual studies and theory in the United States brought about by Jerome McGann, David Greetham, and others often associated with the STS in the 1980s and 1990s, older Cold War perspectives and goals continue to help form the implicit basis for digital editing. Digital archives and editions often privilege authorial intent by organizing around authorial identity, and make use of encoding approaches that are extremely attentive to composition and poetic form but not as well developed for describing post-publication variants or multivocal texts. Usually these methods are defended as a sort of Muzak approach that may

thrill few but at least will not offend anyone. Just as close reading continues to provide a popular and uncontroversial method for teaching literature, formalist markup has provided and continues to provide a mostly uncontroversial and rigorous methodology for textual encoding. Practitioners of TEI certainly engage in heated debate, but like the debates within New Criticism and midcentury scholarly editing, these tend to focus on ways to consider textual form or represent textual variants, and only rarely engage the questions at the centers of many ways of reading, such as feminism, postcolonialism, ecocriticism, or new historicism. Like editors of midcentury scholarly editions, we assume—perhaps rightly, perhaps not—that framing or commenting on the text in controversial, sociohistorical ways should not be the purview of an edition of the text, and that only uncontroversial and factual information about composition/publication history, biography, historical linguistic contexts, and form should be added to the edition, which of course perpetuates composition/publication history, biography, and form as the default, uncontroversial ways of considering the text.

As Amy Earhart points out in her essay in this group of essays, TEI can be credited for helping to save the discipline of scholarly editing from its decline in the 1990s. But as Brett Barney notes, through its admirable successes and broad appeal the TEI has become monolithic in the field of digital editing. Has the TEI reached such critical mass that, really, only considerations about implementation, interoperability, and scalability are likely to be taken up by its membership? Interoperability, which is at the crux of discussions about the role of TEI in “big data” contexts, is essentially at odds with the development of TEI’s expressive and interpretative potential, since any idiosyncratic or subdiscipline-specific markup would, by definition, fail to interoperate or would at least be ignored in the context of a large, communal corpora. In this light we should consider the differences between TEI Lite, which uses only a minimal tagset, and the new genetic encoding module, which provides deep and labor-intensive encoding. The TEI inherited some of the underlying assumptions about the purview of editing that were born out of a specific Cold War academic culture. Through its wide, international adoption—motivated in part by editors who, chastened by decades of institutional marginalization and worries about technological durability, believed that we must all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all hang separately—the uncontroversial perspective of the markup, as well as its commitment to interoperability, seem practically settled. Amy Earhart worries, as I do, that digital editing is once

again becoming separated from explicitly interpretative approaches—not only criticism, but also data mining. As we reflect on the place of scholarly editions in an age of big data, it is worth bearing in mind the historical development of our current editorial methodologies in an effort to offer an alternative to a future that looks much like the past of scholarly editing, when rigorous, closely edited texts seemed like expensive and pedantic exercises to humanists who saw the real intellectual work occurring among those who used the editions rather than those who made them.

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