

Watching the
Ps & Qs

Editorial treatment
of Accidentals

JAMES THORPE

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS LIBRARIES

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS PUBLICATIONS

Library Series, 38

*The 16th Annual Public Lecture on
Books and Bibliography, presented
at the University of Kansas
on 30th April 1971*

Watching the
Ps & Qs

Editorial treatment
of Accidentals

JAMES THORPE

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS LIBRARIES

Copyright 1971 by the University of Kansas Libraries
Library of Congress Catalog Card number: 75-185313

Printed in Lawrence, Kansas, U.S.A.

by the University of Kansas Printing Service

It is a truth

universally acknowledged that the greatest human effort is spent on the least important details.

Textual students appear not to have risen above this state of nature. Indeed, the recorded life of our mystery testifies to our support of providence in sharing a special concern for mites, motes, and mustard seed. As early as the fifth century, St. Jerome set our standards: when a woman asked him for advice on raising her young daughter, the textual scholar within him suggested that her treasures be manuscripts of the Holy Scriptures and that the daughter concern herself with the correctness and the punctuation of the text.¹

As we are fond of reminding ourselves, the lowly comma is capable of moving mountains of meaning. It is certainly true—as everyone old enough to know the difference between restrictive and nonrestrictive clauses is aware—that a change in punctuation can change the meaning. In the last half century, one of the main preoccupations of textual scholars has been with punctuation, along with spelling, capitalization, and italicization—the features of the formal presentation of a text which have come to be known as the “accidentals” of the text, as opposed to the “substantives” or verbal readings that directly communicate the essence of the author’s meaning. The deep concern for accidentals is plainly evident, for example, in work on English plays of the latter sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and in editions of American fiction of the nineteenth century. It would be only a modest exaggeration to say, for example, that the prime subject of textual studies of Shakespeare within the last couple of generations has been the accidentals of his text.

The scholarly preoccupation with spelling and punctuation and capitalization derives from the altogether laudable ambition to know the intentions of the writer to the maximum extent to which this is possible, and to know it in the smallest details. The purpose of my talk today is to question some of the assumptions underlying this preoccupation. Will great care about accidentals help us to recover the intentions of the writer? Are there any serious limitations in principle to the success of that effort? As I see it, this work is much more uncertain than is assumed.

I will also consider the vexed editorial question as to whether to modernize the accidentals or not. Most scholars with a special interest in texts agree that there are serious difficulties for the editor whether he decides to modernize or to prepare an old-spelling text. Either plan involves compromise, ambiguity, and the risk of misleading considerable groups of readers. It is not surprising to discover that some scholars conclude in favor of modernization, and some in favor of old-spelling. However, the most eminent textual scholars of our time have settled firmly against modernization, at least wherever possible. W. W. Greg felt that "the former practice of modernizing the spelling of English works is no longer popular with editors, since spelling is now recognized as an essential characteristic of an author, or at least of his time and locality."² Fredson Bowers holds the same general views. "By its nature," he writes, "no modernized text of an Elizabethan play can be trustworthy enough to satisfy the requirements of a serious critic"; or, to put it the other way round, "such an edition must be in old spelling."³ For nineteenth-century American books, "one may flatly assert that any text that is modernized can never pretend to be scholarly, no matter at what audience

it is aimed."⁴ As he sees the world of the textual scholar, "at present," he says, "opinion seems to be hardening that early texts for popular general reading had better be modernized, despite the inevitable inconsistencies that result, whereas editions of literary works intended for scholarly use had better remain in old-spelling."⁵

Perhaps scholarly opinion *is* hardening—as Bowers says it is—about when to modernize and when to retain old-spelling. If so, it may now be all the more timely and important to examine any principles which govern accidentals before opinion takes an absolutely rigid position. It seems to me that the status of accidentals has been examined only in a cursory fashion before deciding that only one type of edition can merit the name of "scholarly" or a "critic's edition." We all like to have easy rules of thumb, and it would be convenient if we could rightly conclude that scholars and critics require old-spelling texts while other readers are adequately served by modernizations. I cannot help feeling that deeper principles should be consulted before drawing any conclusions. I would like, first, to review briefly the attitudes that writers have in fact taken toward the accidentals of their own work. It is, after all, the intention of the writer that counts for most in textual studies. Secondly, I will consider the degree to which the writer's accidentals have or have not been respected in the transmission of texts and the likelihood of recovering them. I hope that an exploration of these two topics will provide a basis for reaching sound conclusions about the treatment of accidentals.

II

A good many writers have taken occasion to complain, sometimes bitterly, about inaccuracies in the published

form of their works. For example, Dryden tells his publisher, Jacob Tonson, that "the Printer is a beast, and understands nothing I can say to him of correcting the press." Or, later, that "you cannot take too great care of the printing this Edition, exactly after my Amendments: for a fault of that nature will disoblige me Eternally." Dryden had other threatening remarks at his disposal: "I vow to God, if Everingham takes not care of this Impression, He shall never print any thing of mine heerafter."⁶ Likewise, John Evelyn felt that the common calamity of those who had their work printed was that they were "at the mercy of Sotts & Drunkards; that can neither print Sense nor English, nor indeede any other language thô it lie never so plainely before them."⁷ It is a rare writer whose tolerance extends to the committer of errors in his book.⁸

It does not necessarily follow, however, that complaints against printers signify a concern about accidentals. Even Ben Jonson and Milton—who were long thought to have grave care for accidentals—have now been shown to be less preoccupied with those details.⁹

When scholars begin to examine closely the evidence that is available about the interest of seventeenth-century writers in accidentals, they often come to such a conclusion as Roger Sharrock did about Bunyan: "There is no evidence that he was interested in the exact preservation of the minutiae of his original copy; nor does it appear that he felt strongly about the attempts of editors and printing-house correctors to improve on his provincial English and loose grammar."¹⁰ Some scholars who are widely acquainted with authorial practice in the seventeenth century can generalize more broadly, and they do so along similar lines. Bowers observes that "the usual experience of textual critics suggests that in the sixteenth

and seventeenth centuries, at least, many an author accepted with indifference the accidents of a print and would make slight effort to improve them except in cases of egregious error."¹¹ Similarly, John Russell Brown notes that in Elizabethan and Jacobean times "most authors and readers (each of whom always spelt to please himself) must have accepted the irregular spelling of their printed books with something close to the unthinking ease with which we accept modern, regular spelling."¹²

In the eighteenth century, we may take as an example Thomas Gray—fastidious Thomas Gray—who had very little interest in punctuation. When the Glasgow edition of his poems was about to be printed by the Foulis Press in 1768, Gray wrote as follows about the printing: "Please to observe, that I am entirely unversed in the doctrine of *stops*, whoever therefore shall deign to correct them, will do me a friendly office: I wish I stood in need of no other correction."¹³ (And the sentence is itself splendid testimony to his unversed condition.)

Wordsworth seems to have dictated a good deal of his poetry, and the manuscript versions tend to be heavy with multi-purpose dashes. He did not show much interest in putting the accidentals into any order himself. When the manuscript for the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* was being made ready for printing, he sent part of it to Humphry Davy—a man whom he had never met, a chemist, a lover of poetry recommended by Coleridge—and asked Davy to correct the punctuation and send the manuscript directly on to the printer: "So I venture to address you," wrote Wordsworth, "though I have not the happiness of being personally known to you. You would greatly oblige me by looking over the enclosed poems and correcting any thing you find amiss in the punctuation a

business at which I am ashamed to say I am no adept. . . . You will be so good as to put the enclosed Poems into Mr Bigges hands as soon as you have looked them over in order that the printing may commence immediately."¹⁴ (It seems usual for writers to demonstrate their inability to punctuate by the manner in which they write their pleas for assistance in punctuation. Sometimes the resulting plea seems to verge on parody of a plea.)

Byron repeatedly called for help with the punctuation of his poems. "Do you know any body," he writes to John Murray, "who can *stop*—I mean *point*—commas, and so forth? for I am, I hear, a sad hand at your punctuation." He cheerfully accepted the punctuation inserted by others. "Mr. Hodgson has looked over and *stopped*, or rather *pointed*, this revise, which must be the one to print from." Or, later he writes to Murray, "Correct the *punctuation* of this by Mr. G[ifford]'s proof." Or, as a general exhortation to Murray, "Do attend to the punctuation: I can't, for I don't know a comma—at least where to place one."¹⁵

Many authors have been content to leave the handling of the accidentals (and many other things as well) to their publishers. James Fenimore Cooper asked John Murray, his English publisher, to improve his text of *The Pioneers*; Cooper went so far as to say that "if you find any errors in grammar or awkward sentences you are at liberty to have them altered."¹⁶ Charlotte Brontë (as C. Bell) returned thanks to her publisher, Smith, Elder, and Company, for punctuating *Jane Eyre*: "I have to thank you for punctuating the sheets before sending them to me, as I found the task very puzzling, and besides, I consider your mode of punctuation a great deal more correct and rational than my own."¹⁷ As for Trollope's *The American Senator*, Bentley (the editor of *Temple*

Bar) punctuated it, adding about 4,500 commas and other marks in proportion.¹⁸

Some writers leave the choice of accidentals to their readers. Perhaps no one ever did so with the explicitness of Timothy Dexter. In *A Pickle for the Knowing ones*, he says: "fourder mister printer the Nowing ones complane of my book the first edition had no stops I put in A nuf here and thay may peper and solt it as they ples." There follow three lines of commas, two of semicolons, one of colons, one of periods, four of mixed periods and exclamation points, one of commas, and one of mixed periods and question marks.¹⁹

A few counter examples are required, however, to present the nineteenth-century situation fairly. Keats sometimes showed an interest in accidentals. When he received an advance copy of *Endymion*, he sent a list of errata to the publisher immediately; half of the twenty-one items were corrections in the punctuation ("place a comma after *dim*," "dele comma").²⁰ Tennyson was also particular with his proofs, and once wrote to Moxon, his publisher, saying "I think it would be better to send me every proof twice over—I should like the text to be as correct as possible."²¹ Mark Twain's comment to William Dean Howells about *A Connecticut Yankee* is, I think, regarded as a classic (and I suppose comic) remark: "Yesterday Mr. Hall wrote that the printer's proof-reader was improving my punctuation for me, & I telegraphed orders to have him shot without giving him time to pray."²²

For the twentieth century, a brief review of writers who alleged little interest in accidentals may begin with William Butler Yeats. In 1915, Yeats wrote as follows to Robert Bridges: "I chiefly remember you asked me about my stops and commas. Do what you will. I do

not understand stops. I write so completely for the ear that I feel helpless when I have to measure pauses by stops and commas."²³ Bridges was certainly not the only person to whom Yeats gave permission to punctuate for him. In 1932 he wrote to his publisher's editor, T. Mark, "I have never been able to punctuate properly. I do not think I have ever differed from a correction of yours in punctuation. I suggest that in the remaining volumes you do not query your corrections."²⁴ Mrs. Yeats testified similarly about her husband's punctuation. G. D. P. Allt reported that she spoke to him as follows: Yeats "always said 'I know nothing about punctuation.' He once said to me, 'I never know when I should use a semicolon or a colon. I don't like colons.' He also disliked a dash, and detested brackets. . . . But punctuation, apart from a comma and a full stop, were, I think mainly outside influence."²⁵

To return to the end of the nineteenth century, Stephen Crane is one writer who had a splendid indifference toward accidentals. He wrote to Ripley Hitchcock of Appleton and Company that "the proofs make me ill. Let somebody go over them—if you think best—and watch for bad grammatical form & bad spelling. I am too jaded with Maggie to be able to see it."²⁶ D. H. Lawrence also expressed indifference about the accidentals which give such concern to textual scholars: "What do I care if 'e' is somewhere upside down, or 'g' comes from the wrong fount? I really don't."²⁷ As for Sherwood Anderson, Waldo Frank gives a vivid account of his punctuation: "I read *The Untold Lie* and wrote back to Anderson how luminous and exciting I found it. But . . . I said . . . before I bought his story, would he mind throwing in a few commas? and I returned the manuscript which was virtually free of punctuation. It came

back to me with a savory note in which the author hoped he had provided enough punctuation; if not, would I please suit myself? What he had done was to thrust a comma after each half dozen words or so, irrespective of sense."²⁸

On the other hand, the twentieth century has been inhabited by several writers with notable solicitude for the minutiae of the texts of their works. A. E. Housman was very reluctant to let his publisher make a typewritten copy of his poems to send to the printer for fear that a minor slip should be introduced. He hurried his *Last Poems* into print for the reasons that he gave in the Preface: "What I have written should be printed while I am here to see it through the press and control its spelling and punctuation." Even so, the result was not what he had wished for; opposite these words in his own copy of the book, he wrote the words "Vain hope!"²⁹ Max Beerbohm also took considerable interest in the accidentals of his work. In returning the corrected proofs of two stories to the editor of *The Century Magazine*, he deplored the unnecessary trouble that had been imposed on him by the printers and proofreaders. "It is due merely," he wrote, "to their crude and asinine interference with my punctuation, with my division of paragraphs, and with other details." He mounted his platform and delivered a little lecture on the subject in general: "Details? No, these are not details to me. My choice of stops is as important to me—as important for the purpose of conveying easily to the reader my exact shades of meaning—as my choice of words." He went on to fulminate against those who ventured to alter his accidentals: "It is most annoying for me to find my well-planned effects repeatedly destroyed by the rough-and-ready, *standardizing* methods of your proof-readers. These methods

are, no doubt, very salutary, and necessary, in the case of gifted but illiterate or careless contributors to your magazine. But I, personally, will none of them. And if, at any future date, you do me the honour to accept any other piece of my writing, please let it be understood that my MS. must be respected, not pulled about and put into shape in accordance to any schoolmasterly notion of how authors ought to write."³⁰

In reviewing the attitudes of writers of the last four hundred years toward accidentals, it is of course impossible to do more than to offer a small sample of the possibilities. I hope that this sample is a fair cross section of all who might have been cited. I think that I have a little overemphasized writers who have concern about the accidentals of their text; I have done so, I suppose, because those remarks have been more popular with editors and have thus been given greater prominence. In any event, I could much more readily multiply the examples of writers who were, to varying degrees, indifferent about accidentals. And it is usually true that people do not write about what they do not have much concern for.

The most obvious conclusion to this review is that some think one thing and some another, with the great majority being of the indifferent persuasion. What this—and its less obvious corollaries—signifies should await a consideration of the degree to which accidentals have been respected in the transmission of texts.

III

One assumption underlying my remarks is that the attitudes which writers have taken toward the accidentals of their own work have a bearing on the attitudes which we should take toward those accidentals. Of all of the

intentions of the writer, however, the intention with respect to accidentals is the most fragile. In the transmission of texts, it is the accidentals that are the most likely to be altered and those alterations that are the most likely to pass unnoticed. From Elizabethan times through the nineteenth century, it was the printers (particularly compositors and proofreaders) who mainly exercised control over the text in the process of transmitting it. In practice, therefore, it is crucial to note their attitudes toward accidentals in order to understand the limits that this practice imposes on our ability to recover the author's accidentals. To that end, I offer a short review of those attitudes, concluding about the end of the nineteenth century and not trying to treat the role of the editor.

The first extensive printer's manual which sets forth English practice did not appear until 1683, in the form of Joseph Moxon's celebrated and valuable treatise, *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing*. It is possible to deduce the earlier practice of printers with some confidence, however, by observing what actually took place in a printing shop. Perhaps the most famous (and closely-studied) example of an extant Elizabethan manuscript which served as printer's copy is the autograph of Cantos XIV-XLVI of Sir John Harington's verse translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. The translation was printed by Richard Field in 1591, and a comparison of the book and the copy from which it was printed reveals the degree of freedom that Field took with the accidentals of this clear and meticulous manuscript, which includes instructions from the translator to the printer. Field's work was extremely careful, but the liberties he took with the accidentals were considerable. On a single page he made as many as seventy changes in

spelling (not counting the expansion of contractions and changes in medial "u" and "v"), and a dozen changes in punctuation on a page. Harington's spelling was, for example, archaic and irregular, and Field and his workmen did not scruple to make it modern and regular; similarly, for example, they took out and inserted colons (or changed them to semicolons), and they took out and inserted commas as desired.³¹

Scholars who have studied the habits of printers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in dealing with their copy have generally reached similar conclusions. Fredson Bowers has written that "of all features of an author's manuscript the Elizabethan compositor seems to have followed the punctuation the least faithfully, even when it existed—as mostly it did not."³² F. P. Wilson concluded that "normally the printer considered the regulation of spellings and capitals to be within his own province."³³

When we come to the latter seventeenth century, we have available the first in a long series of important printers' manuals. These manuals, mainly for the instruction of apprentices and others learning the craft of printing, describe the practice of their time. Since printing was one of the more conservative crafts, a given manual tends to embody the practice of earlier times as well; moreover, the amount of acknowledged and unacknowledged quoting and paraphrasing in one manual from its predecessors draws them together into a relatively unbroken progression.³⁴ In view of these facts, one can take seriously the statements of practice in these manuals, particularly when they are repeated in successive manuals.

Moxon's book is not only the earliest but also (I believe) the most influential of all English and American

manuals. It is, even among textual scholars, one of those books more known about than read, and very short phrases taken out of context often seem to have satisfied any floating curiosity. As with all such manuals, the material of greatest interest to us is set forth in the instructions to the compositor and, secondly, to the "corrector" of the press. In his Preface to the Compositor's Trade, Moxon begins with the hallowed statement, clung to by printers as if it were their most valuable defense against a hostile world, that "*by the Laws of Printing, a Compositer is strictly to follow his Copy, viz. to observe and do just so much and no more than his Copy will bear him out for; so that his Copy is to be his Rule and Authority.*" As soon as that statement of theory is out of the way, however, Moxon proceeds with practical matters:

But the carelessness of some good Authors, and the ignorance of other Authors, has forc'd Printers to introduce a Custom, which among them is look'd upon as a task and duty incumbent on the Compositer, viz. to discern and amend the bad Spelling and Pointing of his Copy, if it be English. . . .

*Therefore upon consideration of these accidental circumstances that attend Copy, it is necessary that a Compositer be a good English Schollar at least; and that he know the present traditional Spelling of all English Words, and that he have so much Sence and Reason as to Point his Sentences properly. . . .*³⁵

Moxon has, for the compositor, a good many specific instructions which reveal the degree to which he is in fact responsible for punctuation, capitalization, and the use of type to indicate the author's meaning. For example, "As he *Sets* on, he considers how to *Point* his Work, viz. when to *Set*, where; where: and where. where to make () where [] ? ! and when a *Break*" (p. 215). The compositor was made to feel personal responsibility for

the accidentals; or, to put it another way, he was made to feel personally free to change, add to, or subtract from the accidentals which the author had in his copy.

The other agent of the printer in a regular position to alter the accidentals was the corrector of the press. This person read the proof; ideally he was learned in several languages and had an important responsibility in correcting errors, but actually it was only the larger printing offices that had correctors before the middle of the eighteenth century. Moxon describes the larger printing offices of his own time when he says that "a *Correcter* should (besides the *English Tongue*) be well skilled in Languages. . . . He ought to be very knowing in Derivations and Etymologies of Words, very sagacious in *Pointing*, skilful in the *Compositers* whole Task and Obligation, and endowed with a quick Eye to espy the smallest *Fault*." While watching the proof as copy is being read to him, the corrector also "considers the *Pointing*, *Italicking*, *Capitalling*, or any error that may through mistake, or want of Judgment be committed by the *Compositer*" (pp. 246-247). It is plain that in those offices that had correctors—and in virtually all offices after the middle of the eighteenth century—correctors were expected to exercise considerable control over the accidentals of printing with a view toward regularizing them to the "correct" current style.

The practice of the middle of the eighteenth century can be represented by John Smith's manual, entitled *The Printer's Grammar* (London, 1755). There is no intervening book between Moxon and Smith of comparable importance, and Smith gradually took over Moxon's place and was widely influential for three-quarters of a century. There is a certain tartness in his observations, and he exhibits a strong sense of loyalty to printers

as a band of long-suffering men who are more sinned against than sinning. Compositors must, says Smith, do what is neglected by authors, who "point their Matter either very loosely, or not at all: of which two evils, however, the last is the least; for in that case a Compositor has room left to point the Copy his own way; which, though it cannot be done without loss to him; yet it is not altogether of so much hinderance as being troubled with Copy which is pointed at random, and which stops the Compositor in the career of his business more than if not pointed at all" (pp. 86-87).

Smith recommends a rough and ready punctuating to compositors. "When we compare the rules which very able Grammarians have laid down about Pointing," he says, "the difference is not very material; and it appears, that it is only a maxim with humourous Pedants, to make a clamour about the quality of a Point; who would even make an Erratum of a Comma which they fancy to bear the pause of a Semicolon, were the Printer to give way to such pretended accuracies. Hence we find some of these high-pointing Gentlemen propose to increase the number of Points now in use" (p. 87). Printers must take a firm stand with these "high-pointing Gentlemen." "For these several reasons," Smith later writes, "it will appear how material it is not to make an Erratum of every trifling fault, where the sense of a word cannot be construed to mean any thing else than what it was designed for; much less to correct the Punctuation, unless where it should pervert the sense" (p. 223).

After reciting "the Laws of Printing"—from Moxon, of course—that the compositor should follow copy and not vary from it, Smith proceeds immediately to a statement of present practice:

But this good law is now looked upon as obsolete, and most Authors expect the Printer to spell, point, and digest their Copy, that it may be intelligible and significant to the Reader; which is what a Compositor and the Corrector jointly have regard to, in Works of their own language, else many good books would be laid aside, because it would require as much patience to read them as books did, when no Points or Notations were used; and when nothing but a close Attention to the sense made the subject intelligible. (pp. 199-200)

Smith advises correctors to review copy before it goes to the compositor and make their changes in the manuscript. Thus the compositor will not be bothered by having to change in proof the alterations which the corrector has to make to the author's copy, "especially if they are of no real signification." "What is chiefly required of a Corrector," he says, "besides espying literal faults, is to Spell and to Point after the prevailing method and genius of each particular language."

Smith's heart is with the compositor. Charles Stower followed Smith in many large and small details—even to the title, *The Printer's Grammar* (London, 1808). But the corrector enjoys a larger role in Stower—thanks, no doubt, to the fact that he enlisted the help of Joseph Nightingale, who is introduced as "Reader in one of our largest printing-offices" as well as "author of a 'Portrait of Methodism.'" Stower's book asserts that the reader or corrector of the press "should make it a rule never to trust a compositor in any matter of the slightest importance—they are the most *erring* set of men in the universe" (p. 397). It is the corrector who has to assume major responsibility, as with punctuation. "The duty of punctuation is often made to devolve on the corrector; and what has been disregarded as a matter of little consequence, by the author, becomes an important part of

the corrector's business. Let him discharge this duty with propriety and uniformity" (p. 391).

T. C. Hansard's *Typographia* (London, 1825) is based on Smith and Stower and repeats those authorities in full measure. He lays the responsibilities for accidentals on compositor and corrector, and he gives them the authority to make all necessary changes. One passage in Hansard was apparently of special appeal to other writers of manuals. Since it appears in several other manuals, I will quote enough of it to suggest its main drift and the source of its appeal to printers:

The late Dr. Hunter, in reviewing a work, had occasion to censure it for its improper punctuation. He advises authors to leave the pointing entirely to the printers, as from their constant practice they must have acquired a uniform mode of punctuation. We are decidedly of this opinion; for unless the author will take the responsibility of the pointing entirely on himself, it will be to the advantage of the compositor, and attended with less loss of time, not to meet with a single point in his copy, unless to terminate a sentence, than to have his mind confused by commas and semicolons placed indiscriminately, in the hurry of writing, without any regard to propriety.³⁶

And so Hansard proceeds, always careful to see that the best interests of the printers are uppermost, commonly quoting or paraphrasing the familiar ideas and passages that were the staple of earlier books.

This short review may be brought to a close with Thomas Mackellar's *The American Printer: A Manual of Typography* (Philadelphia, 1866). Mackellar's book was influential and popular; it reached its eighteenth edition by 1893. "The world is little aware," writes Mackellar, "how greatly many authors are indebted to a competent proof-reader for not only reforming their spelling and punctuation, but for valuable suggestions in regard to style, language, and grammar,—thus rectifying

faults which would have rendered them fair game for the petulant critic" (p. 180). Throughout, Mackellar carries on the tradition of the printer exercising substantial control over the accidentals. "The compositor," he says, "is bound to 'follow the copy,' in word and sentiment, unless, indeed, he meets with instances of wrong punctuation or false grammar (and such instances are not rare), which his intelligence enables him to amend" (p. 183). And so continued the practice of printers into the twentieth century.

IV

From my little survey, it appears that the great majority of writers in the period under review have not concerned themselves very seriously with the accidentals used in printing their writings. Every possible position on this subject has doubtless been taken by one or more writers: some have left the care for accidentals entirely to the printer, some have welcomed changes made in the printing office, some have tolerated changes, and some have resisted (with varying degrees of resolution) changes which were offered or imposed. The center of gravity among the attitudes of writers seems generally to have been in the area of indifference.

The great majority of printers were (in principle, at least) willing to follow the author's copy even to the details of accidentals provided that copy was legible, perfected, and "correct" in usage as it was understood in the printing house. In practice, however, the accidentals of the author's copy were—generally and regularly—considerably changed in the course of printing. From the printers' manuals we know that the printer felt these matters to be his responsibility and that it was his duty to set such details right; from a comparison of printer's

copy with the finished book we know that the printer did, in fact, ordinarily make very numerous changes in such details.

In general it can be said that spelling, punctuation, and capitalization were thought of as conventions that had to be treated with at least modest respect. Otherwise, they might form a barrier, small but real, between the reader and what he had before him to read. These details were troublesome to writer and printer alike, and most of the time each was content if the other would relieve him of these worrisome nuisances.

From this entire discussion of the treatment of accidentals, what are the consequences which affect the work of editors of literary texts? Our task is, I believe, to fulfill the intentions of the writer in these small details as well as in greater matters. The most apparent conclusion seems to me to be that no simple rule of thumb can be made to cover all situations. We cannot say that, in principle, it is "right" to use old-spelling for scholars and modernize for general readers, nor that one should modernize before a certain date—1800, say—and not modernize after that time.

The sound principle is, of course, to try to determine the intentions of the writer. Unfortunately, most of the time it is not clear that we know how to determine what the intentions of the writer were with respect to accidentals. In many cases, probably in most cases, he expected the printer to perfect his accidentals; and thus the changes introduced by the printer can be properly thought of as fulfilling the writer's intentions. To return to the accidentals of the author's manuscript would, in these cases, be a puristic recovery of a text which the author himself thought of as incomplete or unperfected: thus, following his own manuscript would result in sub-

verting his intentions. (An argument could be made along these lines against the practice of the Centenary Edition of *The House of the Seven Gables*, which follows the accidentals of the extant manuscript rather than of the print, with three or four thousand differences between the two.) An editor will, of course, inform himself of any views on this matter that were expressed by the writer whose work he is editing. Where no direct evidence is available, the editor can often infer the writer's attitude by comparing the printed version with the final manuscript which the author turned over to the printer, by examining his corrections to proof sheets, by weighing the testimony of those involved in the process of publication, or by considering any other such evidence that is available. When the editor finds evidence that the writer took a position about the accidentals of his own work—any position at all—then the editor is, in my judgment, bound to respect that position and to give it effect in any applicable example of the writer's work. If the writer wished his own accidentals to be used, the editor should carry out that wish; if the writer was satisfied with printer's accidentals, then the editor should be also.

There will remain many examples for which no inkling of the writer's position on accidentals can be discovered. How should the editor then act? When there is no other principle to use as a guide, then probability must serve as an expedient. As we have seen, the probability is all on the side of the writer being indifferent about accidentals and of the printer changing, with considerable freedom, the accidentals in his copy-text: it seems reasonable for the editor to assume that such are the source and authority of the accidentals when other evidence is lacking.³⁷

It is evident that it is rarely possible to know whether a specific accidental—a given comma, or a certain spelling, or a particular capitalization—is or is not authorial. It is not even possible to feel much confidence as to whether the majority of the accidentals ordinarily subject to variation are or are not authorial. The attempt to penetrate the opaque curtain of the accidentals by reasoning, in order to find their source, is so fraught with uncertainties that it can rarely be expected to yield any reliable results.³⁸

Part of the difficulties in making these determinations is due, finally, to one simple fact. Namely, that authors and printers did not, for the most part, feel that these matters were of very much importance. While we, as editors, are under no obligation to share that view—and, indeed, much scholarship depends on devoting a disproportionate amount of attention to relatively small details—we expose ourselves to the commission of various kinds of folly if we do not. In my opinion, the editor will do best to spend only a modest amount of his time on accidentals—mainly a losing cause—and devote himself to matters of substance.

The question of modernization remains. It remains, in my opinion, not so much a question of principle as it is a question of convenience. As such, it can be dealt with briefly. Herbert Davis maintained, in 1960, that English writers of the eighteenth century would now prefer their works to appear in modernized texts. "It is amusing to reflect," he wrote, "that the writers whose works are being so carefully edited would certainly have been much more concerned that they should be read today in modernized texts than preserved in those particular forms which they feared might make their books unreadable in later times. They would some of them

have disliked modern scholarly editing as much as they disliked what they called the pedantry of scholarship in their own day."³⁹ Most writers are glad to have an audience, and they would doubtless think that modernization—since it eliminates a possible barrier in the form of unfamiliar conventions—would increase that audience. We may sympathize with that wish without installing it as a textual principle. The writer usually has more interest in the fate of his own work than others do, but his authority does not extend into its after life. Once he has communicated it to his usual public, his control over it—at least in that version—is at an end.

The question of modernization has an analogous relationship to the question of translation. It is easier to read a text in a language or form with which one is familiar through current use, and yet there is much to be said in favor of the extra return from reading it in its original form. Is the return worth the effort? It depends on many things: the value of what is to be read, the quality of the extra return, the willingness and skill of the reader, and the further use of the skill. Or, to put it the other way, does the gain from translation—reading what might not otherwise be available, saving time, understanding more clearly, perhaps—overbalance the inevitable loss involved in translation? Again, it depends. Most of all, these answers depend on the nature of the audience. As there are not just one or two but many audiences, so there must be many answers. There is no rule of thumb that will relieve the editor from considering all of the relevant factors and arriving at a decision which he is willing to defend. There is at least a theoretical need—and, mostly, a practical need of some consequence or other—for both a modernized and nonmodernized text of every work which is separated far enough

in time from the present for changes to have taken place in the conventions governing accidentals; and it follows, of course, that a modernized text would need to be re-modernized after the lapse of such time. (It seems to me that a good deal of "modernizing" is only partial, as if it were done by someone not quite in touch with contemporary writing.) From my personal experience, I can say that the losses from modernization seem to me to be less than the amount assumed by most textual scholars, and that the gains from modernization tend to be greater.

Accidentals usually involve the textual scholar in a quantity of effort which may seem disproportionate to the results. Frequently the decisions are close ones, and it is the marginal cases, like the sour grape, that set the teeth on edge. But they are decisions that have to be made even if the results are usually of negligible importance. Of all phases of textual criticism, I believe that the treatment of accidentals is the one, most of all, in which much is to be endured and little to be enjoyed.

NOTES

1. Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (New York, 1964), p. 4n.
2. "The Rationale of Copy-Text," *Studies in Bibliography*, 3 (1950-51), 21.
3. "Old-Spelling Editions of Dramatic Texts," in *Studies in Honor of T. W. Baldwin*, ed. D. C. Allen (Urbana, 1958), pp. 13, 12.
4. "Some Principles for Scholarly Editions of Nineteenth-Century American Authors," *Studies in Bibliography*, 17 (1964), 223.
5. "Textual Criticism," in *The Aims and Methods of Scholarship in Modern Languages and Literatures*, ed. James Thorpe (New York, 1963), p. 26.
6. *The Letters of John Dryden*, ed. Charles E. Ward (Durham, 1942), pp. 97, 98, 99.
7. For the full letter, see the Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, "Gabriel Naudé and John Evelyn: With Some Notes on the Mazarinades," *The Library*, 4th Ser., 12 (1931-32), 392.
8. The only example I know is Damas van Blyenburg, who collected a large number of misprints in his book, *Cento Ethicus* (1599), and observed (in Latin) that "it makes no sense—which even a child might see, or somebody unskilled in poetry (perhaps the proofreader was such a person). But typographical compositors should be pardoned for two reasons: first, because they may be ignorant; secondly, because it is hard for them to follow manuscripts written in hasty, cursive fashion. I myself have had such difficulty; but I manage to get the sense of a passage from the context. . . ."
9. *Ben Jonson*, ed. C. H. Herford and Percy Simpson, IV (Oxford, 1932), 335-340, 6-17; J. A. Bryant, Jr., "Jonson's Revision of *Every Man in His Humor*," *Studies in Philology*, 59 (1962), 641-650; John T. Shawcross, "What We Can Learn from Milton's Spelling," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 26 (1963), 361, 352.
10. *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. Sharrock (Oxford, 1962), p. xxxviii.
11. "Established Texts and Definitive Editions," *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), 13.
12. "The Rationale of Old-Spelling Editions of the Plays of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries," *Studies in Bibliography*, 13 (1960), 60. Further generalizations along the same line are made in Percy Simpson's *Proof-Reading in the Sixteenth, Seventeenth, and Eighteenth Centuries* (London, 1935), which (despite its age and despite the modifications that more recent work has indicated) reviews a large quantity of relevant authorial and printing practice. Virtually all of his examples of corrections by authors to proof concern substantives; in his view, modern students who champion "the spelling of the poets," if they had looked into it, "would have learnt that, with rare exceptions, they were championing the spelling of the printers" (p. 52).
13. Undated MS letter, to Mr. Beattie in Aberdeen, now in the Robert H. Taylor Collection. These sentences were quoted in "Letters of English Authors: From the Collection of Robert H. Taylor," *Princeton University Library Chronicle*, 21 (1960), 212-213.
14. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest de Selincourt, 2nd ed. rev. by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), pp. 289-290.
15. *Works: Letters and Journals*, ed. R. E. Prothero (London, 1898-99), II, 252; II, 283; III, 3; II, 284. I am indebted to Leslie A. Marchand and to Thomas L. Ashton for calling my attention to these passages.

16. *The Letters and Journals of James Fenimore Cooper*, ed. James F. Beard, I (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 86.

17. *The Brontës: Their Lives, Friendships and Correspondence*, ed. Thomas J. Wise (Oxford, 1932), II, 142.

18. Robert H. Taylor, "The Manuscript of Trollope's *The American Senator* Collated with the First Edition," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 41 (1947), 123-139.

19. I have used the Boston, 1838, edition, p. 42. This passage is said to derive from the second edition, 1805, which I have not seen; the passage is not in the first edition, Salem, 1802.

20. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), I, 270-273.

21. "Letters of English Authors," p. 222.

22. *Mark Twain—Howells Letters*, ed. Henry Nash Smith and William M. Gibson (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), p. 610. Twain thought punctuating was a special art. In an essay in the *Atlantic Monthly*, 45 (1880), 849-860—identified as Twain's by Charles Neider in *Harper's Magazine* for June 1952, pp. 52-53—he wrote: "Some people were not born to punctuate; these cannot learn the art. They can learn only a rude fashion of it; they cannot attain to its niceties, for these must be felt; they cannot be reasoned out. Cast-iron rules will not answer, here, any way; what is one man's comma is another man's colon. One man can't punctuate another manuscript any more than one person can make the gestures for another person's speech."

23. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade (London, 1954), p. 598.

24. Unpublished letter, quoted in Jon Stallworthy, *Between the Lines* (Oxford, 1963), p. 12.

25. "Yeats and the Revision of His Early Verse," *Hermathena*, 64 (1944), 96-97. Allt added that his own examination of the printed texts and of the manuscripts had led him independently to form a similar conclusion about Yeats's punctuation.

I should add that in 1954 Mrs. Yeats told Russell K. Alspach that "in later years W. B. had become very irate several times with a publisher who had taken it upon himself to change the poet's punctuation. Perhaps Yeats became more careful and more knowing as time went on" (*The Variorum Edition of the Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Peter Allt and Russell K. Alspach, New York, 1957, p. xv). Marion Witt has expressed the opinion that "Yeats's protestations that he was never able to punctuate properly may be one of those proudly humble statements which he was fond of making to avert or parry criticism" ("Yeats: 1865-1965," *PMLA*, 80, 1965, 312).

26. *Stephen Crane: Letters*, ed. R. W. Stallman and Lillian Gilkes (New York, 1960), p. 122.

27. D. H. Lawrence, Introduction to *A Bibliography of the Writings of D. H. Lawrence* (Philadelphia, 1925), p. 9.

28. Waldo Frank, "Sherwood Anderson: A Personal Note," *The Newberry Library Bulletin*, Second Series, No. 2 (December, 1948), 40.

29. Tom Burns Haber, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 65 (1966), 740, and Haber, "A. E. Housman's Printer's Copy of 'Last Poems,'" *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 66 (1952), 70-77.

30. Unpublished letter, dated March 6, 1916, in the Robert H. Taylor Collection. Excerpt printed in "Letters of English Authors," pp. 232-233.

31. See Simpson, *Proof-Reading*, pp. 71-75. This relationship had earlier been discussed in detail by W. W. Greg in "An Elizabethan Printer and his Copy," *The Library*, 4th Ser., 4 (1923), 102-118.

32. "Today's Shakespeare Texts, and Tomorrow's," *Studies in Bibliography*, 19 (1966), 48.

33. "Shakespeare and the 'New Bibliography,'" *Studies in Retrospect* (The Bibliographical Society 1892-1942) (London, 1945), p. 128.

34. For a summary review of the relations among English and American manuals, see Lawrence C. Wroth, "Corpus Typographicum: A Review of English & American Printer's Manuals," in *Typographic Heritage*, Typophile Chap Books, 20 (1949), 55-90.

35. Joseph Moxon, *Mechanick Exercises on the Whole Art of Printing* (1683-4), ed. Herbert Davis and Harry Carter, 2nd ed. (London, 1962), pp. 192-193.

36. Pp. 434-435. Among other manuals which include this passage are the following: C. H. Timperley, *The Printer's Manual* (London, 1838), p. 4; Joel Munsell, *The Typographical Miscellany* (Albany, N.Y., 1850), pp. 27-28.

37. One sometimes meets with exactly the opposite assumption. Paul Baender writes that "obviously, if accidental changes are to house style or compositor's style, if they are indifferent choices, and if we do not know the author's wishes or his instructions to the printer, our judgment should tip in favor of the manuscript readings" ("The Meaning of Copy-Text," *Studies in Bibliography*, 22, 1969, 316).

38. Fredson Bowers has been at great pains to resolve the question as to which accidentals are authoritative in his edition of Stephen Crane. Donald Pizer has taken exception to some of the results because of "the tortured road of 'possibles' and 'probables' by which assurance is gained," and an "exercise in tentativeness" ends in "firm adoptions" (*Modern Philology*, 68, 1970, 214).

39. Review of *Studies in Bibliography*, 13 (1960) in *Review of English Studies*, 12 (1961), 324-325.

Library Series

Editor, JAMES HELYAR

1. *University of Kansas: List of Publications*. Compiled by Mary Maud Smelser. 1935. available on request
2. *University of Kansas Graduate School Theses, 1888-1947*. Compiled by Bessie E. Wilder. 1949. •
3. *Two Augustan Booksellers: John Dunton and Edmond Curll*, by Peter Murray Hill. 1958. \$1.00
4. *New Adventures Among Old Books: An Essay in Eighteenth Century Bibliography*, by William B. Todd. 1958. •
5. *Catalogues of Rare Books: A Chapter in Bibliographical History*, by Archer Taylor. 1958. •
6. *What Kind of a Business is This? Reminiscences of the Book Trade and Book Collectors*, by Jacob Zeitlin. 1959. •
7. *The Bibliographical Way*, by Fredson Bowers. 1959. •
8. *A Bibliography of English Imprints of Denmark*, by P. M. Mitchell. 1969. \$2.00
9. *On the Burning of His Library and On Medical Travel*, by Thomas Bartholin, translated by Charles D. O'Malley. 1961. •
10. *A Bibliography of the Frank E. Melvin Collection of Pamphlets of the French Revolution in the University of Kansas Libraries*, by Ambrose Saricks. 1961. 2 vols., \$7.50
11. *Observations on Paper as Evidence*, by Allen H. Stevenson. 1961. •
12. *University of Kansas Graduate School Theses, 1948-1958*. Compiled by Bessie E. Wilder. 1961. \$2.50
13. *Six Variant Readings in the First Folio of Shakespeare*, by Charlton Hinman. 1961. \$1.50
14. *A Petition Regarding the Conditions in the C.S.M. Prison at Columbia, S.C., Addressed to the Confederate Authorities by Col. John Fraser*. Edited by George L. Anderson. 1961. \$1.50
15. *William Dampier: Seaman-Scientist*, by Joseph C. Shipman. 1962. \$1.50
16. *Maps of the 16th to 19th Centuries*, by Thomas R. Smith and Bradford L. Thomas. 1963. •
17. *Looking at an Early Map*, by R. A. Skelton. 1965. •
18. *A Bibliography of James Joyce Studies*, by Robert H. Deming. 1963. •
19. *Maps of Costa Rica*, by Albert H. Palmerlee. 1965. •
20. *A Checklist of Linneana, 1735-1835*, by Terrence Williams. 1964. \$1.50
21. *International Bibliography of Vegetation Maps*, edited by A. W. Küchler. Volume 1: North America. 1965. •
22. *Four Centuries of Shakespeare Publication*, by Giles E. Dawson. 1964. \$1.00
23. *A Guide to the Ssu Pu Ts'ung K'an*, by Karl Lo. 1965. \$1.50
24. *A Classified Bibliography of Korean Materials, 1808-1962*, by Felix Moos. In preparation •
25. *Censored: Books and their Right to Live*, by Elmer Gertz. 1965. •
26. *International Bibliography of Vegetation Maps*, edited by A. W. Küchler. Volume 2: Europe. 1966. \$10.00
27. *Bibliography and Natural History: Essays presented at a Conference convened in June 1964 by Thomas R. Buckman*. 1966. \$5.00
28. *A Bibliography of 17th Century German Imprints in Denmark and the Duchies of Schleswig-Holstein*, compiled by P. M. Mitchell. 1969. \$15.00
29. *International Bibliography of Vegetation Maps*, edited by A. W. Küchler. Volume 3: Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Asia, and Australia. 1969. \$7.50
30. *Rilke's last year*, by George C. Schoolfield. 1969. \$1.50
31. *The Two Worlds of University Publishing*, by Roger W. Shugg. 1968. \$1.00
32. *Bibliographical Contributions*, 1. \$2.00
33. *A Bibliographical Catalogue of the Ellis Collection of Ornithological Literature*. Vol. I. In preparation
34. *The Cuban Revolution of Fidel Castro Viewed from Abroad: an Annotated Bibliography*, by Gilberto V. Fort. 1969. \$3.00
35. *Growth and Change in the Early English Press*, by Richmond P. Bond. 1969. \$1.00
36. *International Bibliography of Vegetation Maps*, edited by A. W. Küchler. Volume 4: Africa, South America, and World Maps. 1970. \$12.00
37. *Gilbert and Sullivan: Papers presented at the International Conference held at the University of Kansas in May 1970*. Edited by James Helyar. 1971. \$6.00
38. *Watching the Ps and Qs: Editorial Treatment of Accidentals*, by James Thorpe. 1971. \$1.00

* Titles marked with an asterisk are now in short supply, and are normally only available to complete the files of institutions maintaining exchange agreements with the University of Kansas Libraries.

The Library Series and other University of Kansas Publications are offered to learned societies, colleges and universities and other institutions in exchange for similar publications. All communications regarding exchange should be addressed to the Exchange Librarian, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. Communications regarding sales, reviews, and forthcoming publications in the Library Series, should be addressed to the Editor of Library Publications, University of Kansas Libraries, Lawrence, Kansas 66044. European sales are handled by Anton W. van Bekhoven, Publishing Dept., Ruysdaelplein 35, Naarden, The Netherlands.