EDITING A BOOK FOR A SERIES

by Joost Daalder

It would be an understatement to say that the word 'editing' can mean, or at least imply, a good many different things. It is not my purpose in this paper to consider all of them, but I do want to make some important distinctions based on my own experience with regard to some of the more practical aspects of editing.

As an editor, one suffers the least constraint if one is either given complete carte blanche by a publisher or if one publishes one's own edition. I doubt whether any of us have been lucky enough to experience the former, and probably not many people have been foolhardy enough to attempt the latter. My own experience under the heading 'publishing one's edition' is limited to the publication of one book namely, Aspects of Australian Culture. I first edited this, with Michèle Fryar, and then, when the New Zealand publisher who was going to print it as part of a series had to let me down, I decided to publish it myself. In fact my freedom was illusory, for I printed the contents exactly as I had edited them anyway. By 'edited' I mean here 'selected and prepared for typesetting'. And there was little to value in the freedom of being able to choose one's own typography, cover, etc., since the choices were either comparatively unimportant or conditioned by economic considerations. The
unexpected difficulties of supervising the process of book production in the 'physical' sense took much away from the novelty of being in control of operations which an academic normally has to leave to others. There was, admittedly, a degree of pleasure in making available work done by other people which might otherwise not have seen the light of day. That was a satisfaction, however, which I had already experienced for some years as Australian editor of Pacific Quarterly, and the disadvantages of publishing one's own anthology instead of preparing one for another publisher included also, somewhat surprisingly, the fact that some people saw one's labour as designed to cater for one's own vanity.

So, as the editor of other people's articles, poems, reviews, etc., I cannot say that I have found the difference between editing for a series published by another publisher or for myself as publisher a very startling one, although I might have had a different attitude if during my five-year stint as an editor of Pacific Quarterly I had not been given sufficient latitude in selecting suitable materials, preparing it for the press, etc. As it was, the task of publishing Aspects, in addition to part-editing it, on the whole meant extra work which did not influence the contents greatly, except that I came to value them the more. I would not, by choice, publish another edition, no matter whether that edition was that of, say, a series of essays or a more scholarly undertaking, like that of a Renaissance text.

Before I say something about the constraints which I have experienced as an editor of Renaissance texts, I should first like to make a few comments about the way I view editors as a contributor to journals (like Pacific Quarterly) or anthologies (like Aspects). By 'editor' I mean in this case someone who chooses to print one's work, or to reject it, usually with some comments, and who sees it through the press. The editor may, of
course, himself/herself have to act according to an editorial policy imposed by others, or may be obliged to seek the advice of one or more readers. The constraints which operate here make for an interesting subject in themselves, but I propose not to distinguish between a 'free' editor and a 'constrained' one. It is not always clear to a contributor whether an editor actually belongs to the former category or to the latter, and in any case the fact probably does not make much difference to the contributor. Similarly, it is not always easy to tell whether the general editor of a series of scholarly books is acting independently or not, and I shall assume that the outcome for the contributor is much the same. I have, in any case, found the differences between journals quite startling in the ways they have treated me. I must immediately add that on the whole I feel I have been dealt with very fairly. Even so, there are enormous discrepancies. I cannot say, for example, that I have found it easier to gain access to the less well known journals. Indeed, my own experience is almost the opposite, and I certainly believe that editors of less prestigious periodicals are more likely to tamper with one's text than those who see more top-class material and who appear to be—probably as a result—more secure in their judgements. But even this statement is not one which I would claim to be true in all cases, and I believe that no ready generalizations are possible in these matters, the human factor being paramount in creating quite unpredictable differences.

Having prepared two more or less scholarly editions of Renaissance texts for two different series, I would say that much the same situation exists there. It is not often realized by people who have not gone through such experiences quite what difference the policy of one publishing house (or general editor) as distinct from another can make to one's text. Many people of course have never edited a literary text for a series, and it
would be unreasonable to expect them to guess what factors are involved. Others may have done work for only one series. Personally I would not have been able to predict from my first editing job, in this area, how different my experience with the next one would be. I also am inclined to think that these differences are particularly likely to occur now, with publishers trying to cater for educational markets which have rapidly been changing—not to mention general economic factors which influence any publishing activity. The question of whether or not publishing policies influence our work as editors of literary texts seems to me a highly important one, and I shall now describe my experiences with two publishers, in the hope that they will be found to be of general interest. As will be clear from my previous remarks about *Aepeata* and about journal-editing, I do not believe that there will be point in trying to formulate a blueprint for reform; the whole purpose of my account has, on the contrary, been to suggest that publishing does not take place in a void, and that therefore one's work as a writer is significantly, and unpredictably, affected by practical circumstances beyond one's control—sometimes in such a way that circumstances work wholly in one's favour, and sometimes the opposite, with various possibilities in between. But, although I consider this variability to an extent inevitable, I do not mean that we should not try to understand it, and possibly take steps to try and change it towards something perhaps less unpleasantly perplexing.

My first edition of a Renaissance literary text was *Sir Thomas Wyatt: Collected Poems* for Oxford University Press in 1975, and later I went on to prepare an edition of Jasper Heywood's translation of Seneca's *Thyestes*, which was published by Ernest Benn and W.W. Norton in 1982. The Wyatt was part of the 'Oxford Standard Authors' series, while the Seneca-Heywood was one of the 'New Mermaids'. The design of the two series was
roughly similar, in that the text had to be modernized so as to make it more accessible to what are usually called 'general readers' (mostly, but not exclusively, students); the assumption of publishers tends to be that texts in their original sixteenth-century spelling are too difficult for the modern audience most likely to buy them. In both cases, there had to be annotation to explain difficult points for today's non-specialist reader. The editor was to place emphasis on such explanatory annotation, not on technical matters like textual variants. One was, indeed, supposed to say very little about textual questions, unless some major literary point was involved, such as choice between two readings which could both be defended on scholarly grounds but which made a significant difference in sense. One nevertheless had to do one's homework to try and arrive at a responsible text; the fact that one could not say much about that homework did not mean that one did not have to think about, for example, the merits of various versions of a text. This was particularly true in the case of Wyatt, for it was not possible here, as it usually with OSA texts, to use another Oxford text as one's basis. Indeed, my chief reason for doing an edition of Wyatt was that the text was not available in any edition which could be called textually satisfactory, so that one had to start anew. But no obstructive textual apparatus was allowed. Both editions had to include an introduction, largely of a non-textual nature, concerning, chiefly, the general literary significance of the text. A last point of resemblance was that both texts were Renaissance texts: indeed, Heywood's translation of Thyestes, which was published in 1560, appeared less than three decades after the time when probably Wyatt wrote most of his poems.

Despite these seeming similarities, in practice I found the task of preparing these editions very different. In part the difference was due to the nature of the text, but in part it was
also due to the details of policies which were superficially more alike than they were in actuality. Such policies as I have described fit certain texts better than others, and I think that Thyestes would always have been the easier text to modernize, etc. But the editorial policy was also more liberally applied in the case of Thyestes than that of Wyatt, while it was really with the Wyatt that I needed a freer hand.

About Thyestes there was, really, very little problem. I still find it surprising that a commercial publisher was so willing to publish a Renaissance translation of a Roman dramatist who is admittedly rapidly re-gaining popularity and who is historically very important, but who nevertheless does not enjoy a huge readership today, and who, moreover, is most likely to get read, if he is read at all, in a modern translation rather than a Renaissance one. The general editors took the view, as I did, that the Renaissance translation will reveal more to us about the importance of Seneca in the Renaissance than any modern translation could. The publishers, to their great credit, accepted this view.

Furthermore, they gave both the general editors and myself a large amount of freedom concerning the question how the edition might best be proceeded with, provided that the overall guidelines were met. In practice, I was allowed a very extensive introduction about Seneca himself, about his impact on the Renaissance, about the merits of Heywood's translation, and so on. I think this decision to be elaborate was wise, for editions of this type, which are not just designed for the advanced scholar, must serve the needs of those who know little and who therefore want a good deal of help from both the introduction and the explanatory notes. In the notes I was permitted to explain everything I thought modern readers might need if they did not know much about Renaissance English or about classical culture. In fact, I could
move even beyond this consideration—into quite academic

In making this last remark, I am passing on to the more

scholarly aspects of the edition. One might well wonder, since

the edition was so clearly constructed to serve the needs of the

'general reader', what scholarly sacrifices had to be made. In

fact, there were very few. While working on the edition, I

identified the Latin text from which Heywood had principally

translated. There were several which in theory he could have

used, but since they all differ it was possible, through a variety

of comparative techniques, to work out which one, chiefly, he

did use. I speak of a 'variety' of comparative techniques,

because it would not do simply to compare Heywood's translation

with all Latin texts to which he could have had access, although

that exercise is revealing. What clinched matters, however, was

the fact that when he translated *Hercules Furens* Heywood chose

to print what he considered to be Seneca's Latin side by side

with the translation. Although he pretends otherwise, Heywood in

fact derives his Latin text from Gryphius (1541). I could not, of

course, reproduce Gryphius' text entire, but it was possible to

refer the reader to a current 'modern' edition (the one in the

Loeb series) and to note where it differs from Gryphius. By this

means, the modern reader can work out quite easily what Gryphius'

text contains, and can thus—and this is what really matters—
determine for himself (if able to read Latin) quite how Heywood

deals with his source. I do not claim that this listing of

variants from Gryphius is a perfectly satisfactory scholarly

method, but it is adequate, and the kind of thing that an editor

may be expected to do in an edition which is to be 'popular' yet

not superficial. A less generous publisher might have prevented me

from printing such Latin as I include, but I think myself that the
Benn/Norton combination will eventually not regret giving me the slight extra space needed, since the book is now a good deal more useful as a result.

As for the text itself, I was fortunate that in essence there is only one Renaissance text on which a modern edition can be based. Thus the problem of listing or not listing variants, which is a real one with Wyatt, does not arise in this case. Furthermore, the text was not particularly hard to modernize, although any modernization of a literary sixteenth-century text (and particularly a poetic one) involves some loss. Very little damage was done in this instance, however. There was little ambiguity about what words the old forms were meant to represent, since one could work out from the Latin what Heywood intended in his English. Once or twice he manages to pun, and puns are not easy to preserve in a modern text—although the problem is not always one of modernization, since often the pun turns upon a sense that has become obsolete. Still, occasionally the old spelling will more readily suggest a pun than a modernization will: I shall discuss an instance in Wyatt later. The punctuation in the Heywood text was no problem either, since his syntax in English, too, can be determined from the Latin he was translating. Even most of the aesthetic aspects could be dealt with reasonably satisfactorily. Heywood wrote a very regular line, and he marked all his elisions, etc., through his spelling. One could readily use an apostrophe wherever a syllable was dropped, and I was fully allowed to make use of such conventions, at my own discretion. No modern text can of course indicate how the rhymes sounded in Heywood's time, but neither—to a modern reader—would Heywood's spelling do so with any completeness. Indeed, he spelled his rhyme-words with such care that the spelling suggests a perfect rhyme in all instances; but we cannot necessarily deduce from such spellings what the rhymes were, and some of them may be eye-
rhymes. In other words, though the text looks less pleasing when it is modernized, we cannot feel at all sure that the old spellings reveal much. The modern reader, I think, normally recognizes well enough that the rhymes were probably most often real, and—knowing he is ignorant of the sounds of sixteenth-century English—makes allowance for what now seem non-rhymes. While this is an unsatisfactory situation, it is doubtful whether it will be improved by once again printing sixteenth-century texts in their original spelling.

All in all, then, I was very happy about doing the Heywood, and I still am—in part because it was a text which could be edited fairly well for a series of modernized plays, but also, in no small measure, because I could do my job without any undue restraint, and to such an extent that I felt contented about the edition as a pedagogic exercise as well as a scholarly one. The Wyatt proved a lot harder, although I do not wish to sound unduly disgruntled about it.

Everything in the Wyatt edition had to stay within rather narrow limits, and it had to fall in line with a rather rigid policy. The introduction had to be very basic indeed, though that was not, I felt, a major drawback. What was far more serious was that the annotation had to be very sparse. I was not, for example, allowed to gloss words which are glossed in The Concise Oxford Dictionary, even though some of them, or some of their senses, anyway, are now so unusual that reviewers sometimes complained—to my mind quite rightly—that I should have glossed them. I do not mean that I should not be blamed for what I did. Of course, it would have been possible not to accept OUP’s commission at all. Still, for a beginner in scholarly publishing, as I was, that is hardly a realistic choice. Also, one genuinely has to ask oneself whether it is not better to have an edition with a compromise than no edition at all. And I was naive enough
to believe that a reference to OUP's policy concerning this in my Preface would be seen as a good enough excuse. In retrospect, I think it is a great pity that I was not given a little more leeway, and I am convinced that glosses and other explanatory material would have been far more adequate even if I had been given only a few more pages relative to the total. It might be suggested that I could have given myself more space by including yet fewer doubtful poems (though I am in any case more modest with those than other modern editors). In fact, there was no real option in this respect. Even if I had printed fewer poems, words in the COD would still not have been included; and I think I am genuinely describing an instance of an editorial policy (imposed by the publisher or general editor) which quite arbitrarily influenced the value, or at least the usefulness, of the edition.

There were also problems with the text which I regret. Some of these were inevitable in a modernized text of Wyatt. For example, some of his puns do seem more natural/recognizable in the original, like 'spytt of ther spytt' ('Spit of their spit' in my edition). Here the manuscript more readily indicates than any modernization that 'spytt' is a pun on the now distinct forms 'spite' and 'spit' (with two senses for 'spit'). But I do not mean that the situation is in principle different for the Heywood, and, if it is worse for Wyatt, then any publisher prescribing modernization would have been in a position similar to OUP. The same goes for the modern punctuation. In fact I was allowed freedom in that area, and I think that the punctuation—given that the text is a modern one—is the strongest feature of my edition. At least it consistently helps to produce sense, which cannot be said of the edition of Muir and Thomson\(^2\) (preceding mine) or that of Rebholz\(^3\) (coming after), both of which quite frequently employ punctuation which can be shown to misconstrue Wyatt's syntax—either because one can argue that an alternative sense is
more logical, or because it is really impossible to find any sense in the punctuation of these editions, or because the intended sense can be deduced from Wyatt's sources (although this is less often the case than with Thyestes).

Some problems occurred in my Wyatt which I think could have been avoided with a more flexible editorial policy. In particular, I was given very categorical guidelines dictating the use of forms which could have aesthetic significance and therefore should in my opinion have been included. One perceptive reviewer commented that in my introduction I point out that Wyatt, when poems are in his own hand, seems to have distinguished between syllabic provokyd and non-syllabic provokt. As the reviewer said, I did not do due justice to that kind of distinction in my text, simply printing provoked. The explanation is that I was very firmly told not to use the modern renderings provoked and provoked. I would, under the rules, have been allowed to use provoked, but only if one could have known quite certainly that Wyatt did sound the final syllable, and, since there is considerable doubt about his prosodic practice (with the habits of his scribes even more variable than his own), it would have been irresponsible to suggest editorial certitude when one did not have any. My point was that although one cannot invariably be sure that provokyd was syllabic, or even that provokt was non-syllabic, there is always the possibility that such forms may somehow turn but to be significant for our knowledge of pronunciation and prosody in Wyatt's time, while modern provoked, without further comment, is undifferentiated. I still think, with some of the reviewers, that the distinctions in the primary sources should have been retained in these cases, and that they could have been—without any loss that I can see. When I look at the edition now, I find that its streamlined modernization is its least attractive feature and that it would have been very easy
to do better in this respect.

The general import of my remarks is that external constraints do operate on our work as editors, but that some of the constraints are very real and disadvantageous, while in other cases they are actually not constraints at all, in that we are given decent freedom, or would, if we had been left wholly to our own devices, have produced the same book as series editors/publishers ask us for. *Aspects of Australian Culture* was originally meant to be part of a series; when I came to publish it on my own this made not the least difference *editorially*: I would have chosen just the same material if I had started all over again, and as a publisher I, too, had to accept just such constraints as other publishers. (Of course I did not publish for profit, but without a large distribution network it was difficult enough for me to 'break even'.) Publishing a book for a series controlled by others may seem to involve more constraint than publishing one's own edition, but I have found in practice that whereas in the case of Wyatt I did have to accept constraints which I would not have imposed on myself, this was not true in the instance of *Thyestes*. My experience with editors, whether they are general editors of series like 'New Mermaids' and 'Oxford Standard Authors' or editors of journals, has been that the human factor is all-important and is sometimes helpful but at other times a hindrance. Nor could one say that different policies are simply due to different editors, for they too are subject to the decisions of others. The policies may sometimes seem understandable even if one does not like them, but at other times they are not necessarily sensible even from a commercial viewpoint. I was grateful to Oxford University Press for enabling me to edit Wyatt's poems, but I still cannot persuade myself that the concessions which I had to make were of any actual advantage to the publishers themselves. Finally, the decisions in academic
publishing must inevitably be based on good academic considerations as well as commercial ones, not least because the books will not usually be bought for commercial reasons which one can artificially separate from academic thinking. For example, an edition like mine of Wyatt's poems is one aimed, mainly, at students. They will buy what their teachers suggest or prescribe, and those teachers are usually themselves academics. The teachers—or for that matter the students—will in all probability be swayed, in their buying, by just such considerations as lead the individual editor to feel that the edition should be done in one way and no other. Of course general editors and publishers cannot be expected to yield all responsibility for decision-making to the individual editor, but neither would it be correct to assume that the individual editor cannot possibly know what will benefit the edition in both academic and commercial terms.

1. Aspects of Australian Culture, eds Joost Daalder and Michèle Fryar (Adelaide, 1982). My 'firm' was called Abel Tasman Press.
