

# Digital Scholarly Editions of Modernist Texts: Navigating the Text in Samuel Beckett's *Watt* Manuscripts

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Modernist literary texts produced in the early years of the twentieth century stake out a direct challenge to conventional notions of literary language, genre, and even the concept of the literary text itself: such novels as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and *Finnegans Wake* (1939), the concrete poetry of Guillaume Apollinaire and the Italian Futurists, and the strange poetic decompositions of the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven (to cite a few striking examples), provide an array of challenges to reading and interpretation, and even to the basic task of identifying the text object. Experiments in form, particularly by writers who self-identified with the avant-garde, continue to fundamentally challenge scholarly practices of reading, critical evaluation, and editing. Scholars have honed these practices, in turn, to seek new ways to understand Modernist textuality more fully.

Theories of the text in Anglophone scholarship have undergone profound changes in the last three decades, especially in the field of textual criticism and editing. An array of editing techniques and theories have emerged in recent years that aim to deal more adequately with unruly and inadequately defined elements of Modernist textuality. The promise of more powerful and nuanced methods of text presentation in the digital domain has emerged alongside these new (or renewed) textual theories and methods. The subtle relationship between the digital domain and scholarly editing offers scholars an opportunity to rethink Modernist textuality at a fundamental theoretical stratum, and to generate new modes of understanding textuality *per se*. The work that emerges from this crisis (κρίσις in the Greek sense of an event demanding judgment and decision, in other words, *critical* discernment) will bear directly upon the future of

textual scholarship, literary theory and scholarly reading practices, and their mutual imbrications.

### Defining Modernist Textuality

Modernist texts have precipitated a crisis in the very concept of textuality—including scholarly editors' ability to represent them and to provide coherent, comprehensive descriptions of their structures and processes. This crisis is still to be fully understood partly because, until recently, theories and methods of editing and interpretation remained contingent upon outmoded text models: the authoritative text or draft that represents the author's intention most completely; the linear, progressive course charted from notes and manuscripts to published texts; and the stable authoritative imprimatur that comes with the fact of publication. These models and assumptions were sufficient for most pre-Modernist texts, and indeed for most modern and contemporary texts that tend not to veer too far from classic text structures. But they are neither able to accommodate a number of experimental avant-garde texts, nor more recent innovations in digital textuality (whether analogue texts transferred into the digital domain in the form of digital archives or editions, or born-digital texts).

A basic problem asserts itself when any attempt is made to sort such texts into zones of stability and experimentation: Modernist textuality is itself a problematic term, at once too broad and too narrow. It captures a variegated range of textual practices. If formal experimentation is considered to be a dominant thread in Modernist writing (and this is obvious in the case of the avant-garde) then a specific concept of 'text' can be applied to kinds of writing by certain authors, and in some cases, even to individual texts by those authors. In other words, we find numerous instances where the generic question 'what is a text?' devolves into the question 'what is this text in front of me?' (e.g. What is the Steinian text? What is this beast named *Finnegans Wake*? Is this published series of notecards a text proper, even if authored by Vladimir Nabokov?)

Approaching this problem from the other direction, Modernist text practices, however we define them, constitute only a discrete portion of literary production at any moment in time. A range of more popular, stable, and enduring textual practices were at work in 1909, or 1922, or 1939. For example, the year Gertrude Stein published *Three Lives* (1909) was also the

year that L. Frank Baum published *The Road to Oz*, the best-selling fifth instalment in his fantasy series; and Rafael Sabatini's novel *Captain Blood* was perhaps *the* popular publishing event of 1922, at least in the United States, and it later achieved a further level of fame as the source text for the 1935 film starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland. Such works of literature were not interested in radical reconsiderations of the concept of text, or with formal experimentation. Other widely read works of literature demonstrated compelling literary quality. Pearl S. Buck, the 1938 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the first American woman to have achieved this distinction, is one prominent example: her novels of peasant life in China (where she lived most of her life) could not be described as Modernist in any coherent sense of the word. The novels of Dashiell Hammett (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1930) and Raymond Chandler (*The Big Sleep*, 1939), which were made even more famous by their film adaptations, stand in for an entire genre of popular writing that was long considered to be mere entertainment, and that saw its literary stocks rise only decades later.

In attempting to delineate what is meant by Modernist textuality, it is worth keeping in mind that the demarcation of a specifically literary heritage is itself a radical kind of exercise, albeit a useful one for the purposes of research and teaching in university literature departments. But it is a kind of artificiality, often utterly at odds with the lived practices and animating circuits of filiation amongst those working creatively in other media during the early twentieth century (and in other centuries). The time of Modernism leaches into the nineteenth century, on one hand, and the postmodern, on the other, and does so at different moments and in varied ways in Britain, Ireland, France, and the United States. In addition, the literary text, for all of its formal delineations, is not easily demarcated from Modernist artistic production in music, the visual and plastic arts, architecture, opera, and so on. Of course it has always been thus, but this is perhaps more sharply focussed in the wake of the Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the 'total artwork') and French Symboliste speculations on the correspondences between colour, musical pitch, syllabic enunciations, and geometrical shapes.

Reflection on the range of artistic and cultural production in the Modernist era, and on the subdivisions within those practices, may be of help in working through a number of issues critical to a clearer understanding of Modernist textuality and its intersections with the digital domain: how do we consider the Modernist text in the light of subsequent

changes to textual production, not least the impact of digital media? Do we need to update our theories and methods of literary analysis (perhaps as cultural studies and other fields have been doing for some time already)? Do we need to reconsider the status of the text as a cultural object and as hermeneutic field for the purposes of editing, conservation, and textual criticism? Are there specific areas in which scholars still need to catch up with Modernist texts, conceptually and even formally, in order to better edit, analyse, and comprehend them? Material and conceptual changes in aesthetic mediation—foremost being the quick rise to ubiquity of digital media—demand renewed scholarly practices that do not simply react to such change but span traditional practices and those emergent in new media.

### Scholarly Editing: Analogue and Digital

The principles and methods of scholarly editing have changed enormously in the last three decades. One significant reason for this change is found in the way scholars and editors have reflected on their discipline, subjecting basic concepts to intense scrutiny. The force of critical theory can be observed in essays and monographs pertaining to scholarly editing practices. David Greetham's *Theories of the Text* and G. Thomas Tanselle's series of essays<sup>1</sup> published in the discipline's flagship journal, *Studies in Bibliography*, are two examples, written from the disciplinary heart of textual scholarship, that explore the way psychoanalysis, Marxism, deconstruction, and other denominations of literary theory inflect the way textual scholars think about and edit texts.

At the same time a number of textual scholars became keenly interested in editorial methods that developed outside of the dominant Anglophone custom of copy-text editing. Such methods as genetic and synoptic editing—core practices in modern German textual scholarship that descended from the great philological movement of the eighteenth century—opened up novel ways of understanding the bibliographical and even physical structure of texts, and thus provided the means by which to edit texts thought to be described inadequately by prevailing conventions. The genetic editorial approach, broadly conceived, avers that all stages of a

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<sup>1</sup> See D. C. Greetham, *Theories of the Text* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999); G. Thomas Tanselle, 'Textual Criticism and Deconstruction,' *Studies in Bibliography* 43 (1990): 1-33; and 'Textual Criticism and Literary Sociology,' *Studies in Bibliography* 44 (1991): 83-143.

text's evolution, from manuscript working drafts, to setting copy and published editions, are essential aspects of that text's identity, and that the relationship between them are to be made fully explicit. The expression of this accretive view of a text's history is best illustrated in the synoptic edition, in which no single document or published text is considered to hold an essential authorial imprimatur against which other documents are to be measured. Hans Walter Gabler's edition of Joyce's *Ulysses* is the most prominent (and controversial) example of the synoptic edition in Anglophone literature. Other scholars have followed Gabler's synoptic-genetic editorial lead, most notably Charles Krance in his synoptic bilingual edition of Beckett's later short prose text *Mal Vu Mal Dit / Ill See Ill Said*.<sup>2</sup>

The German philological model of the *Handschriftenedition*—the 'sui generis edition of working drafts and manuscripts'<sup>3</sup>—comprises an editorial platform in which an imperative authorial intention (usually linked to publication) is displaced by the authority of the documents themselves. Textual analysis proceeds by taking any one document as an anchoring point from which the history of the text's production radiates: the edition provides a cross-sectional view of the temporal and compositional relations between documents, and is not bound to observe a privileged status of publication. This model might prove to be groundbreaking in providing Anglophone scholarly editors with a flexible, contingent model: one in which documents can stand in relation to each other without the need for base texts—usually the first published edition, against which all other documents are measured—or stemmatic hierarchies—the 'family tree' diagrams in which families of documents are ordered according to strict, causal lines of descent.

In other contexts, editors came to consider contextual material to be increasingly relevant to the identity of specific literary texts, and developed methods that dissolved conventional boundaries between the text and the context in which it came into being (and the contexts, across time and

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<sup>2</sup> Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior, eds., *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, 3 vols. (New York and London: Garland, 1984; rev. ed. 1986); Charles Krance, ed., *Samuel Beckett's Mal vu mal dit / Ill Seen Ill Said: A Bilingual, Evolutionary, and Synoptic Variorum Edition* (New York and London: Garland, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> Hans Walter Gabler, 'Introduction,' in *Contemporary German Editorial Theory*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler, George Bornstein and Gillian Borland Pierce (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1995), p. 4.

space, in which the text is and has been read). The social text model is one such concept of textual production and reception as a socialised series of events, best articulated by Jerome J. McGann and D. F. MacKenzie.<sup>4</sup> This model is sensitive to the role of all documents in contributing to a text's identity, and thus its representation, but asserts a wider range of potential sources than manuscripts and published editions: the role of non-authorial actors, such as editors, family members, literary executors, and 'environmental' influences such as theatre architecture, postal systems, social interactions between authors and audiences, all directly shape the text's identity in potentially profound and foundational ways. Editions of literary texts that accord to a social text model require the means to represent these dimensions of text identity, and are clear candidates for digital editorial treatment: Jerome J. McGann's Rossetti Archive<sup>5</sup> is perhaps the most elegant expression and embodiment of this textual worldview, in which Dante Gabriel Rossetti's complex process of textual revision and republication is integrated with his visual art, and the socialised nature of his aesthetic production is given full expression.

These reconsiderations of the materials and methods of scholarly editing go to the heart of what scholars consider to be the substance of their enterprise. Yet the practical effects of intense theoretical reflection are not widely manifest in the production of scholarly editions. The basic premise of scholarly editing has remained constant regardless of an editor's method or theoretical disposition: to produce a reliable, readable text that seeks to remove or minimise error according to a rationale or set of governing principles. Editors will often choose to conform to the orthodoxies of Anglophone editorial practice if not faced with pressing reasons to employ other means to represent a particular text. To take a very recent example, indeed a landmark literary event of recent decades: *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929-1940*.<sup>6</sup> This text is edited much as it might have been fifty or a hundred years ago (had its primary materials existed then).

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<sup>4</sup> See Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983; repr. Charlottesville and London: U of Virginia P, 1992); D. F. MacKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (1985; London: The British Library, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> The Rossetti Archive <[www.rossettiarchive.org](http://www.rossettiarchive.org)> is housed under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities and NINES (a digital research environment for nineteenth century studies), Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>6</sup> Samuel Beckett, *The Letters of Samuel Beckett, Volume I: 1929-1940*, ed. Martha Dow Fehsenfeld and Lois More Overbeck (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009).

The arrangement and presentation of transcribed documents, annotations, translations, and other appended primary and critical materials are all clearly explicated by means of rigorous traditional scholarly principles. Although the edition's publication was heavily expedited by the availability of digital technology (digital photographs, email correspondence, digital submission to the press, and so forth), its form and conceptual structure are not fundamentally dependent upon the paraphernalia of the digital age. Of course a conservative editorial approach is not in itself necessarily a bad thing: new methods and techniques, as well as the technologies supporting them, demand justification in a process of critical appraisal. Traditional methods of textual scholarship often suffice: indeed, a renewed focus on the traditions of scholarly editing may provide the means for conceptual breakthroughs in the field.

### **Testing the Limits of Modernist Textuality: Samuel Beckett's *Watt***

A suitably challenging text will best illustrate the ways in which innovative Modernist texts place pressure on concepts of text, and consequently of editing, interpreting, and theorising about them: Samuel Beckett's 1953 novel *Watt* marks itself out as a distinct outlier in definitions of text and editorial processes. The manuscript of this text was first composed in 1941-45, during the Second World War, first in Paris, and following the fall of Beckett's Resistance unit, in Roussillon in the Vaucluse in Free France. The obvious distinction of the archival material lies in its florid visual appearance: the six notebooks (housed at the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin) amount to nearly a thousand pages and are heavily illustrated. The text material, in Beckett's notoriously challenging hand, displays the signs of intensive processes of composition. The doodles and multi-layered erasures and emendations suggest a recursive mode of composition, where material is submerged, quarantined, refined, and recycled. The relationship between the archival material and the published text breaks down into two basic categories: the first three and a half notebooks do not correspond directly with the published text, although some sections are reworked and sedimented into phrases or short passages; the last two and a half notebooks reappear almost verbatim in the published narrative, although out of any perceivable order. In addition, a partial typescript divides into material that appears in the published text but not in the manuscript, or otherwise to material in the manuscripts but not in the published text.

The basic relation between archival document and text is put under radical scrutiny by virtue of the physical arrangement of the materials. This is compounded by the recurrent preoccupations in the narrative—in both manuscript and published text—with the relative fragility of texts and concepts in times of physical duress (war) and indeed of metaphysical duress. In fact there are physical resemblances to the manuscript in specific features of the published text. The narrative concludes in a moment of suspended action (not unusual for a Beckett text) but is unique in being followed by a sequence of Addenda items that gesture towards metanarrative and even archival significance: ‘*Watt learned to accept etc.* Use to explain poverty of Part III,’ ‘Note that Arsene’s declarations gradually come back to Watt,’ ‘change all the names.’<sup>7</sup> The value of aesthetic production *per se* recurs as a dominant theme of profound reflection in Beckett’s writing: a theme not uncommon to other texts composed at this time and in similarly straitened circumstances (Ezra Pound’s *Pisan Cantos* is an obvious case in point).

The task of establishing this text is a vexed one. The published text betrays a notoriously uneven linguistic surface, and the corrugations of the Addenda items follow a narrative that itself begins to leach metanarrative clues as to its mediation by layers of narrators, transcribers and ‘editors.’ These complexities attest to the relative paucity of critical commentary on *Watt*, despite its being one of Beckett’s most substantial texts. The novel is significant in marking a defining shift in his aesthetic outlook, from plenitude to indigence, and from English to French as his preferred language of narrative composition. Scholars often attribute the multitude of textual conundra and riddles to the author’s characteristic perverse humour or the gnomic tone of his emergent aesthetics, but they fail to account for the many obvious references to extended manuscript episodes that either do not appear in the published narrative or do so in submerged form. And it is entirely understandable that this failure occurs: the contents of the manuscript archive, so critical in determining the various gradations of text material, are simply not available to most scholars. The first critical step in establishing the text of *Watt*—if indeed this can be done by conventional means at all—is to produce a representation and transcription of the manuscript notebooks. For reasons deeply implicated in the archival materials and their relationship to the published text, this task is not readily

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<sup>7</sup> Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (1953; New York: Grove, 1959), pp. 248, 253. Subsequent citations from the novel are taken from this edition and are incorporated in the essay text.

conceivable in a conventional codex facsimile edition; indeed the complex imbricated relationships between narrative episodes and fragments cannot be represented at all adequately in the linear structure of the codex.

As a consequence, any edition of Beckett's *Watt* that seeks to integrate archival materials (compelling reasons for which are evident) must begin with a digital transcription and representation of the manuscript notebooks. This task forms a part of a larger international project—the Samuel Beckett Digital Manuscript Project—that aims to have all of Beckett's literary manuscripts transcribed and represented in digital form. This initiative responds to a profound deepening of scholarly interest in Modernist manuscripts as potential sources of literary hermeneutic attention, and in concert with this focal shift, a renewed interest in theories of textuality and textual criticism. The specific (and heightened) relevance to this particular text in Beckett's oeuvre is immediately apparent in light of the complex series of heavily revised and illustrated manuscript notebooks. The *Watt* archival documents provide a huge amount of material that illuminates Beckett's composition processes and the emergence of his aesthetic programme in this text. It only requires a mode of delivery adequate to the task of representing these features.

The digital manuscript of *Watt* presents the transcription marked up in XML in a simplified version of TEI5: the fifth edition of the Text Encoding Initiative Guidelines. It is presented in an interface powered by Apache Tomcat (a servlet container that basically provides a means to run Java code in an HTTP server), allowing specific textual features and annotations to be hidden or made prominent, depending on the scholarly use to which the digital manuscript is put. The content, placement, and kinds of erasure and emendations can be tracked, as well as the writing implement in any one example or set of examples. All matters of editorial interpretation can be read against a high resolution digital photograph of the manuscript page, which also illustrates the types of relationship between doodles, diagrams, lists and notes, and nearby narrative matter.

The primary purpose of numbering sentences and paragraphs in the TEI markup is to allow for comparisons to be made between corresponding segments in a series of documents, whether manuscripts, typescript, pre-publication documents, or published editions. Beckett often composed long series of manuscripts and typescripts, in both English and French. *Watt* functions as a complex exception to this trend, having just one manuscript (albeit one of nearly a thousand pages), a partial typescript and a series of

published texts, in French, British and American editions. The SBDMP is not permitted to reproduce published material, but the existence of page proofs or setting copy provides most of Beckett's manuscripts with a control text very similar to published editions. This is the case for *Watt*: the setting copy is housed in the Beckett International Foundation at the University of Reading. But this document only correlates with the last two and a half notebooks, whilst the partial typescript correlates (roughly) with the first three and a half. The fully transcribed manuscript will be numbered against two documents: the typescript and the setting copy. This practice is a world away from copy-text editorial practices, and is not meant to serve such a purpose. However, it does highlight the practical and theoretical challenges presented by the *Watt* archive and editions to conventional Anglophone editorial practices.

The conventional scholarly work of manuscript transcription is reflected in the tags employed to identify and collate the documentary information (including the illustrations), which bear morphological affinities with the bibliographical codes scholarly editors have traditionally used. The TEI encoding operates on a segmentation level of the sentence, which allows for comparisons between manuscript versions and the chosen base text where these exist in other of Beckett's manuscripts, and also makes provision for *paralipomena*, omitted passages in subsequent versions, wherever they are deemed to exist. Each paragraph is also numbered. The physical layout of the manuscript page is also largely preserved in the TEI, where div markers of type 'page' and rend values of 'recto' or 'verso' preserve the spatial relation between text segments. Once the material is coded in this way, it is ready for web delivery, and can be manipulated in a variety of ways. A preliminary view of the interface, before digital photographs of the manuscript pages and searchable database facilities have been added, illustrates several features of the digital transcription and the compositional practices at work in the documents. Below is the transcription of the top half of Notebook 1:19, showing Beckett's deletions and additions (in blue):

Samuel Beckett  
Digital Manuscript Project  
[\[back to the index\]](#)[\[place indications\]](#)[\[writing tools\]](#)[\[top layer\]](#)[\[normal view\]](#)[\[sentence numbers\]](#)

Watt HRC

**Transcription of Watt MS 1:19**

A man, old. The name, James John McEvoy.  
 Answering to the name James John Mc Evoy.  
 He answers to the name of James John McEvoy.  
 James John McEvoy Molloy . The Name! Unmoved among  
 the ruins. Faithful among the faithless. The last to leave quit unmoved among the ruins.  
 Jack or Jim, twas all the same to him.  
 James John Molloy Quin. The Name! Accursed  
 among the ruins.  
 Jack James or Jim, twas all the same to him.  
 The last to suit, said Molloy desert, said Molloy Quin to himself, the  
 last to renege, the last to let up, the last to relent  
 have mercy. He'll They will stand on my tomb, in  
 lead letters, but he's they're going from here.

SBDMP transcription of *Watt* Notebook 1:19

Beneath the project title a command menu provides a sequence of features, drawing from the transcription files marked-up in XML that serve as a kind of database of all encoded manuscript information. The *place indications* command reveals exactly where on the page Beckett's deletions and emendations occur:

Samuel Beckett  
Digital Manuscript Project  
[\[back to the index\]](#)[\[place indications\]](#)[\[writing tools\]](#)[\[top layer\]](#)[\[normal view\]](#)[\[sentence numbers\]](#)

Watt HRC

**Transcription of Watt MS 1:19**

A man, old. The name, James John McEvoy.  
 Answering to the name James John Mc Evoy.  
 He answers to the name of James John McEvoy.  
 James John McEvoy [place=supralinear] Molloy . The Name! Unmoved among  
 the ruins. Faithful among the faithless. The last to leave [place=supralinear] quit [place=supralinear] unmoved among the ruins.  
 Jack or Jim, twas all the same to him.  
 James John Molloy [place=supralinear] Quin. The Name! Accursed  
 among the ruins.  
 Jack [place=supralinear] James or Jim, twas all the same to him.  
 The last to suit, said Molloy [place=supralinear] desert, said Molloy Quin to himself, the  
 last to renege, the last to let up, the last to [place=supralinear] relent  
 have mercy. He'll [place=supralinear] They will stand on my tomb, in  
 lead letters, but he's [place=supralinear] they're going from here.

SBDMP transcription of *Watt* Notebook 1:19 showing place indications

The *writing tools* command indicates the implement used at each point of emendation or deletion, and the hand responsible for it:

Samuel Beckett  
Digital Manuscript Project  
[\[back to the index\]](#) [\[place indications\]](#) [\[writing tools\]](#) [\[top layer\]](#) [\[normal view\]](#) [\[sentence numbers\]](#)

Watt HRC

**Transcription of Watt MS 1:19**

~~[hand=SBblackink] A man, old. The name, James John McEvoy.~~

~~[hand=SBblackink] Answering to the name James John Mc Evoy.~~

~~[hand=SBblackink] He answers to the name of James John McEvoy.~~

James John ~~[hand=SBblackink] McEvoy~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] Molloy~~ . The Name! ~~[hand=SBblackink] Unmoved among~~

~~[hand=SBblackink] the ruins. Faithful among the faithless. The last to leave~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] quit~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] unmoved~~  
~~among the ruins.~~

Jack or Jim, twas all the same to him.

James ~~[hand=SBblackink] John Molloy~~ ~~[hand=SBpinkink] Quin~~. The Name! Accursed  
among the ruins.

~~[hand=SBblackink] Jack~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] James~~ or Jim, twas all the same to him.

The last to ~~[hand=SBblackink] suit~~, said ~~[hand=SBblackink] Molloy~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] desert~~, said ~~[hand=SBblackink] Molloy~~ Quin to himself,  
~~[hand=SBblackink] the~~

~~[hand=SBblackink] last to renege~~, the last to ~~[hand=SBblackink] let up~~, ~~[hand=SBblackink] the last to~~ ~~[hand=SBblackink] relent~~

~~[hand=SBblackink] have mercy~~. ~~[hand=SBbrownink] Hell~~ ~~[hand=SBbrownink] They will stand on my tomb~~, in  
lead letters, but ~~[hand=SBblackink] he's~~ ~~[hand=SBbrownink] they're~~ going from here.

In this case the hand is always Beckett's, but this tool is of critical importance in situations where editors or other agents actively participate in the shaping of a manuscript. Beckett uses several different writing implements on this page of the manuscript: the more substantial emendations are made in black ink and then brown ink, but crucially, the change in the protagonist's name, from James John Molloy to James Quin (the precursor to the character who will become Knott in the published text), is recorded in pink ink. A pattern emerges across manuscript pages, where name changes are made in this ink colour, suggesting a discrete process of revision. Other patterns of revision can be adduced from similar colour traces throughout the manuscripts.

This digitised manuscript is a first step in describing the complex, imbricated relationship between archive and published text. It provides scholars with the raw material with which to begin such explorations, and will undoubtedly alter the critical terrain, such as it is, of this pivotal novel in Beckett's oeuvre. Of all of his major texts, *Watt* has received the least critical attention, despite significant scholarly curiosity regarding the deep ambiguity of the published narrative and the baroque nature of its

manuscript archive.<sup>8</sup> The well-known hermeneutic difficulties presented by the published narrative are thus in no way adequately understood in relation to the primary materials, because they themselves constitute a kind of *terra incognita*. By representing and transcribing the manuscript archive of this pivotal text in digital form, such relations between the archive and publication can begin to proceed in an informed way, and more adequate editorial and hermeneutic strategies can be brought to bear on this most inscrutable of Beckett's texts.

### 'change all the names': Hackett ↔ Watt

There are distinct hermeneutic benefits in introducing digital collation tools into an expanded critical edition of *Watt*, especially given the limited document set available for collation. Tools such as Juxta<sup>9</sup> or Versioning Machine<sup>10</sup> allow the reader to locate significant patterns of divergence between documents. A sequence of pages in Notebook 6 (the leaves 98-100) corresponds very closely to passages in the British and American editions of *Watt*:

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<sup>8</sup> J. M. Coetzee described the *Watt* manuscript material and hypothesised its stages of composition in his PhD dissertation nearly forty years ago at the University of Texas at Austin. An epitome of this description and analysis was published in his essay, 'The Manuscript Revisions of Beckett's *Watt*,' *JML* 2.4 (1972): 472-480. Other discussions include: Sighle Kennedy, "'Astride of the Grave and a Difficult Birth': Samuel Beckett's *Watt* Struggles to Life,' *Dalhousie French Studies* 42 (1998): 115-147; David Hayman, 'Beckett's *Watt*—the Graphic Accompaniment: Marginalia in the Manuscripts,' *Word & Image* 13.2 (1997): 172-182 and 'Nor Do My Doodles More Sagaciously: Beckett Illustrating *Watt*,' in Lois Oppenheim, ed., *Samuel Beckett and the Arts: Music, Visual Arts, and Non-Print Media* (New York and London: Garland, 1999), pp. 199-215; and John Pilling, 'Beckett's English Fiction,' in Pilling, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Beckett* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994), pp. 17-42.

<sup>9</sup> Juxta was originally developed as a collation tool for Jerome J. McGann's digital Rossetti Archive <[www.rossettiarchive.org](http://www.rossettiarchive.org)> and is now housed under the auspices of the Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities and NINES (a digital research environment for nineteenth century studies), Alderman Library, University of Virginia.

<sup>10</sup> Susan Schreibman began developing Versioning Machine <[v-machine.org](http://v-machine.org)> in 2000. It is housed at the University of Maryland Libraries and the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities.

The screenshot shows the Juxta software interface with two manuscript windows side-by-side. The left window, titled 'Watt 6.98-100.txt', contains the original manuscript text. The right window, titled 'Watt Grove 238.txt', shows the same text with numerous green blocks and lines indicating deletions and corrections. A 'Comparison Set' panel on the left lists the files being compared. At the bottom right, a 'Collation Histogram' displays a bar chart representing the differences between the two versions. The text in the right window is annotated with green blocks and lines indicating deletions and corrections.

Juxta window of *Watt* MS 6:98-100 and *Watt* (New York: Calder, 1959), p. 238 with Collation Histogram

The dialogue between Tully and Parnell in the manuscript, shown in the left panel, is transformed into a nearly identical conversation between the newly named Nolan and Gorman on the right (variations are shown in green colour blocks and almost uniformly refer to deletions and corrections in the manuscript). The significance of these changes rests in what they tell the reader of Beckett's style of allusion. He decides to 'change all the names' as recorded in the Addenda in the published text, from those of two historically significant figures—Tully is the Roman philosopher and orator Cicero, and Charles Stuart Parnell, the nineteenth-century Irish nationalist leader. The change to two generic Irish family names diminishes any prominent intertextuality in a process of distancing or 'vaguening' that was to become one of Beckett's compositional hallmarks.

Of course it can be most diverting to incorporate digital tools into one's editorial work, but the question of utility should accompany the selection of any particular tool. In the case of this small example, it is immediately clear that the otherwise very strong correlation between Notebook 6 and the published editions of *Watt* diverge on the subject of characters' names. These changes, so late in the manuscript record, recall that Addenda directive to 'change all the names.' But the provenance of that textual element is actually Notebook 3:62, nowhere remotely close to the substance of Notebook 6. This supports the notion that the Addenda item and the fact of Beckett's changing the names of his characters are linked but are not one and the same, that the 'archived' Addenda items





and that when I see you, or think of you, I think of him. I have no idea why this is so' (19). With the aid of the manuscript transcription, and the visual clues of the wordclouds, the attentive reader knows precisely why Nixon finds himself in this uncanny predicament. It is because Hackett and Watt are different stages of the same fictional character, appearing together in the same place, contrary to all rules of naturalistic representation. Hackett is an archival revenant of the novel's anti-hero, visibly desiccating before Nixon, as physically fragile as the manuscript pages from which he emerges and to which his presence subtly refers.

The relationship between archival material and published text in this case is neither linear nor teleological. An adequate conceptual model for this complex literary manuscript is a necessary first step in any scholarly edition of the text. The singularities of the *Watt* archive present specific challenges to current editorial practices, but the material may also represent more wide-ranging aesthetic change in the Modernist era. The blurred edges between archive and published text pose radical questions of the conceptual possibility of stable published texts that push into zones of contingency outside the range of even the most experimental literary productions of the Victorian age. The profound reconfigurations of text status present basic challenges to Anglo-American editorial practices, but they also provide clear opportunities for digital tools and methods to represent texts in ways impractical or impossible in analogue forms. In other words, the value of any digital edition will rest upon how it answers the question: what specific bibliographical and hermeneutic innovations are made available by virtue of its digital delivery?

### **Digital Technology and Editorial Practice**

The presence of digital technology in scholarship has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Digital aides to scholarship (online library catalogues, concordances, databases, digital repositories of journals, digitised images of literary manuscripts, etc.) provide extensions to existing scholarly tools and practices, facilitating certain kinds of scholarship. Primary sources can be identified by means of web-based archive catalogues, and online digital representations of manuscripts allow scholars to conduct particular kinds of work at geographical distance. Whilst access to the physical document may be desirable or even critical in the final event, several stages of research can be accomplished prior to such access. Digital extensions of traditional analogue research tools are perfectly

commonplace, and are not particularly difficult to integrate into the culture and mentality of scholarly disciplines. How might the obvious virtues of digital technology best support, or even inform, editorial theory and practice in relation to Modernist texts?

Recent innovative approaches to Modernist scholarly editing tend to imply or assert the relevance of a wider array of documentary sources. Genetic editions, such as Hans Walter Gabler's synoptic edition of *Ulysses*, seek to incorporate all available manuscript material and published versions of a text, as well as a rationale of any stemmatic relationship between them, in an attempt to provide a 'total' text. Social text methods seek to integrate erstwhile secondary documents and materials into the very conceptual fabric of a text, as constituent parts of a text's identity. These more aggregative models of text identity, and more specifically the texts to which they pertain, are clearly conducive to presentation as digital scholarly editions. Conversely, digital modes of representing literary texts can bring questions of a text's identity into sharp focus. The representation of multiple textual witnesses in collation software such as Juxta or Versioning Machine alters rather profoundly the reader's apprehension of the textual matter at hand. The text is digitally mediated and may be represented by transposed digital reproductions and transcriptions suitably marked up for digital display. But this mediation can go to the very heart of what is considered to be the text. Any digital collation of the *Watt* manuscript and the published text forces the editorial hand: not so much in terms of the choice of singular base texts and linear, stemmatic lines of descent to which codex editions are structurally well-configured, but in terms of the links made between textual units, the division of material into units of varying kinds, the nature and extent of annotations, and the relative degrees of freedom provided to the reader of a digital edition to explore or even create links of their own. Decisions of legitimacy—of annotation, of textual comparisons, of the reader's theoretical and hermeneutic lines of thought arrived at heuristically—are basic to the structure of a digital edition. Clearly a well-designed digital edition can, and perhaps should, abdicate a traditional, centralised editorial power (which is the exercise of another kind of power) and stimulate editorial decision-making in the ways readers use the edition.

Digital scholarly editions can do two things that seem fundamentally new: firstly, a potentially large corpus of material can be represented in one space, and manipulated in ways simply not possible in the world of physical manuscripts and codex editions (a basic premise of the digitised

manuscript of *Watt*). Secondly, digital collations allow for manipulations of the text material that are visually straightforward and intuitively intelligible, whilst bearing profound implications for the text's identity and the authority of textual evidence. The digital manuscript of *Watt* deploys software designed to demonstrate how the manuscripts accord very closely to the published text in many places but diverge almost absolutely in many others. From this conceptual ground, more sophisticated understandings of text structure evolve, providing us with textual models that do justice to the complex artworks we read, and to our already theoretically informed modes of reading.

### **Digital Futures of Modernist Scholarship**

A sufficient number of Modernist texts present basic challenges to conventional notions of text status and, consequently, to the editorial methods and hermeneutic strategies brought to those texts. Scholars need to reconsider the grounds upon which such texts are understood. The dominant features of this aesthetic and conceptual revolution—deeply ambiguous borders between text and archive, the radical displacement of the stable, complete published text entity by virtue of an equally radical doubt concerning literary value—are not novelties that arose *ex nihilo* at the outset of the last century, but rather in a context of a rapidly changing media ecology, and within novel circuits of filiation and collaboration. The novels, plays, poems and other writing produced during the high Modernist era broadly conform to formal and generic categories, but in a sense they are fundamentally different objects to their nineteenth century forebears. Indeed it is not certain that they are fully-fledged objects at all, as conventionally understood, but rather text processes that require flexible, innovative editorial reflection, and subtle means of representation in order to more fully convey the precise challenge they provide to their own aesthetic landscape. The challenge for textual scholars and editors is to try and catch up to Modernist aesthetic innovation, by using the most powerful traditional tools combined with new media and innovative scholarly methods.

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editing techniques. His ARC Discovery Project, due to begin in 2011, aims to produce a longitudinal study of literary text structures from the mid-nineteenth century, and the range of editorial methods (analog and digital) used to represent those texts.