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ABSTRACT

This essay explores the role of rupture in the editorial process. Drawing on Wordsworth and Freud, it proposes that the editor's labor, specifically the preoccupation with the restoration of textual connections, may reflect an unconscious desire to heal non-textual wounds. Part autobiography, part elegy, the essay reminds us that the labor of editing is contingent and transient.

I BEGIN WITH AN ANECDOTE. FOUR FRIENDS WERE DISCUSSING THE FILM *Titanic*. Seemingly out of nowhere, I said, "this film is about rupture". At first the remark was ignored, as it was not on topic. But I spoke it with a catch in my throat, signaling that this "rupture" was not an ordinary topic in our discussion but was particularly meaningful for me. I recalled the powerful imagery and stunning sound effects of the movie, particularly when the aft quarter of the great ship rises out of the water, breaks in two, and plunges into the ocean, tearing our romantic young couple apart, each slipping out of each other's grasp.

The horror of the sinking ship was perfectly resonant, and not just cinematically. The question was, with what? What in my life corresponded to the scale and power of that movie? Memories of my losses have apparently disappeared from my consciousness. What follows reconstructs a narrative from family lore, and my intuitions and memories, all under the rubric "Probably".

The trauma most corresponding to the grandiosity of my cinematic phantasy was when my live-in nurse, Edie ("nanny", in NYSpeak), left our home to marry Forest Mathes.

I was bereft. From age three to age six, Edie had been my entire world, and, I believed, her only responsibility. It was an active house, and in wartime. I had two older brothers, going off variously to school, or college, or quite possibly the Army. The drama of their needs occupied my parents. Edie saw to it that mine were met. I can recall sitting in her lap announcing that I was going to marry her when I grew up. Then her leave-taking, the rupturing of our connection.

Actually, she had a boyfriend who would wait in his car for her, Saturday evenings, when she was off. So I must have got used to her absence on Sundays, her day off. But she always came back. I was not prepared for her definitive departure, nor allowed to grieve my loss. If I had been, memories of this incident would not now be so accessible.

I was told that I did not recognise her later when she visited us. Small wonder. The local psychiatrist told mother: “Mrs. Hill, if William were an adult I would say that he is having a nervous breakdown”. Why there was an age requirement is unclear. At least I was not hospitalized (so far as I know). Such was the state of mental health care in provincial Louisville in the 1940s. The portrait of William age seven or eight speaks to my sadness at my loss.

Note Bene: While I am neither a therapist nor an analyst, most of my friends beyond the walls of the City University of New York (CUNY) are one or the other, and Linda, A.K.A. Candor, my wife and Muse, is a practicing analyst. I have had three years of formal psychoanalysis, which were helpful as far as they went. I did, however, learn to free associate, and I have my own model of the unconscious, which I will share with you.



Plate 2: William at seven or eight, c. 1942–1943. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.



Plate 1: Edie and Forest, c. 1940. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

The unconscious is like a kettledrum. Its tympanum is taut, impermeable, and only minimally tunable. Beneath the membrane is a cavity whose contents are not ordinarily or directly available to us. But repressed, or in more contemporary usage, dissociated feelings stored within that cavity can and do resonate sympathetically with those that are conscious, acknowledged, or expressed. Indeed, they can surface any time, in a bewildering variety of unrecognisable forms. This can be anxiety provoking. Wordsworth speaks of strong feelings recollected in tranquillity. In my experience, the recollection of trauma is anything but tranquil. It is tu-

multuous, and its power remains long past the event(s) that provoked it.

The event I reconstruct here would have taken place sometime before December 1941. I am now seventy-two. That's six decades ago. A friend says, helpfully, "Speed, get over it; it's past; get on with your life". But these feelings come from a part of the self that does not know durational time. Shakespeare captures this experience with uncanny accuracy in Hamlet's first encounter with his ghostly father. It is as if the membrane of Hamlet's unconscious had been ripped off the body of the drum, leaving him defenseless, his innermost feelings spilling out, no longer under effective control or focus. And it is the wily Claudius, you will remember, who counsels, "Get over it".

But, you ask, what do membranes, kettle drums and questions of consciousness have to do with textual criticism? What is the connection? Well, think for a moment about "rupture". Ruptures do not heal of their own accord; intervention is necessary. Ruptures destroy connections. Editors restore (textual) connections, repair textual trauma within the limits of the evidence. They are to texts what surgeons are to hernias. For textual error does not correct itself; it will simply be repeated, in each subsequent reprint, unless there is deliberate corrective intervention.

My son, a biologist, tells me that there is an analogous, on-going process of clean-up, of getting rid of potentially injurious mutations within our DNA, activated by what are called "house-keeping" enzymes. When a cell divides, a perfect copy, identical to the original, should be reproduced. To assure this, there are "proof-reading" enzymes whose job it is to assure that the replication is indeed exact. Critical editors perform these procedures routinely.

Once we admit "connection" to be the reciprocal of "rupture", we are at the very heart of what textual criticism is and does. We have Jacques Derrida to thank for showing why this is a process without end. He calls the phenomenon "supplementarity", the endless capacity for connection and reconnection that defines us as humans (DERRIDA 1976). The downside of this fecundity of connection is that once a link has been established it is always at risk of rupture.

William, meanwhile, seems to be coping remarkably well with his dis-

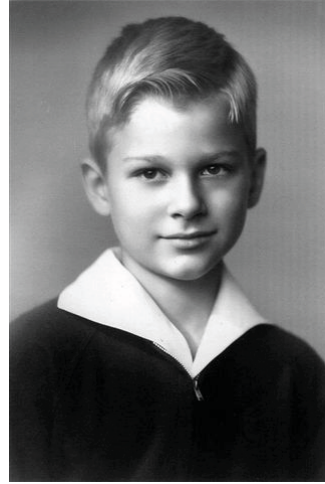


Plate 3: William, age eleven or twelve, 1946. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

connection. Here he is poised, posture erect, eyes sharp and focused. However, as Candor observes, the beguiling, winsome, almost pretty child in the portrait masks the inner William. It masks that clarity of vision, that sureness of self of one who has become resourceful in getting his needs met. Mother is spending more time with him, now that the War is over. He is beginning to read. Edie returns for a visit. The fog of early childhood depression begins to lift. But the portrait also masks his anger, which he is much too frightened to express. It will metamorphose into ambition. The longing for acknowledgment is already visible. The intellect remains concealed. The need to express those skills and displays of intelligence in public, where they and it can be acknowledged, will grow stronger. The relational roots of this need lie in his fear of his father, who, increasingly suspicious of the boy's smarts, and otherwise occupied, begins to withdraw.

Hence the boy's need for constant, concrete objects, like books, of his own manufacture, which would impress his father and elicit the longed-for acknowledgment. The bias to the concrete particular is part of the Hill DNA. The other three men in his family were all trained as engineers.

* * *

Then there is that other William, the one who famously said, "The Child is father of the Man", to which I might add: "some assembly required". So how can this child have fathered today's speaker? The other William did not yearn to grow up. On the contrary, for Wordsworth, it is the Infant who is born "trailing clouds of glory"; the adult can only see the vision "die away, / And fade into the light of common day".¹

However, with the help of Candor, together with external consultations too numerous to count, I have my own "spots of time" by means of which a trajectory may be plotted connecting son to father.²

First (more stain than spot), I became my mother's intellectual companion and cultural consort in the decade of my early manhood, ages fifteen through twenty-five. This was a role my father had abdicated. I was a teenage Oedipal victor. I am told that the term in its explicit Freudianism is dated. Some say Freud is too. Leaving the currency of Freud aside, we can say: Sophocles got it right.

1. The lines from Wordsworth quoted here appear, respectively, in *My Heart Leaps Up* (7), and *Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood* (vv. 7, 18–19).

2. See Wordsworth's lines in *The Prelude*: "There are in our existence spots of time, / Which with distinct pre-eminence retain / A renovating Virtue, whence, [. .] our minds / Are nourished and invisibly repaired" (Book 11, verses 258–78).

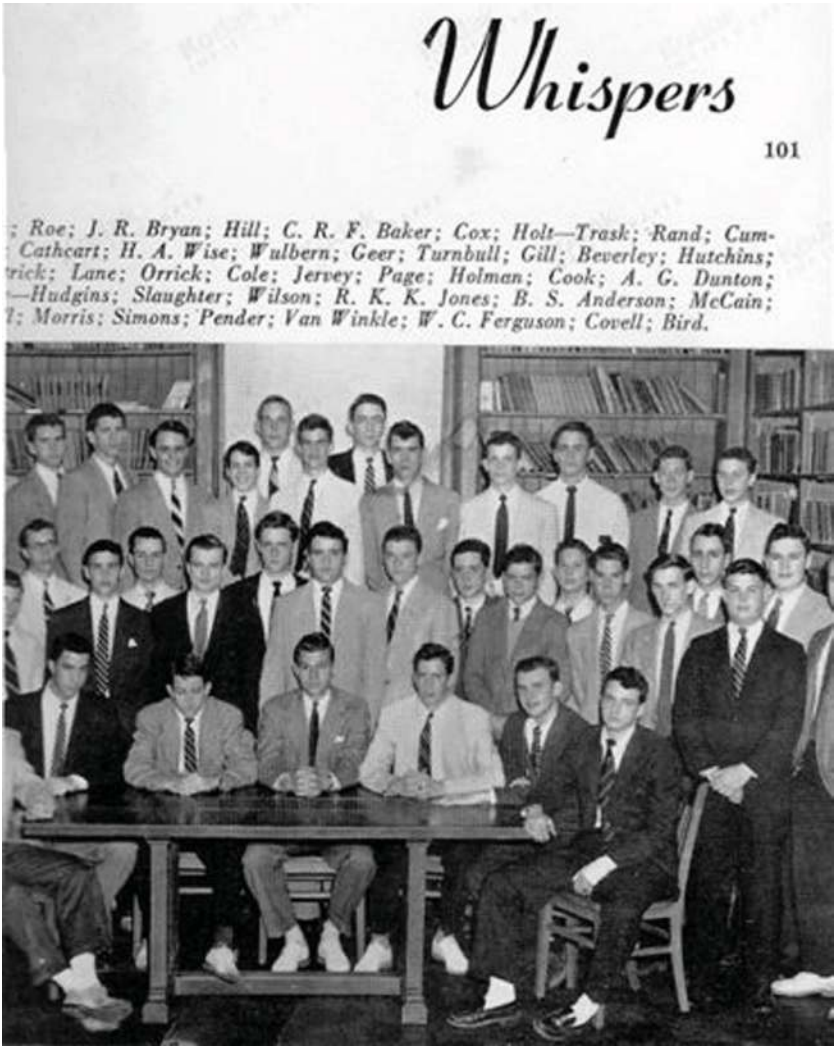


Plate 4: *Whispers*, Episcopal High School Year Book, 1953. W. Speed Hill, General Editor, appears in the center of the front row. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

When Oedipus sets out from Corinth to Thebes, his whole life unrolls before him; only the Oracle's prophecy that he will kill his father gives him pause—as well it might!—but that threat he believes has been neutralised by his flight from Corinth. En route he kills an older man who had forced him off the roadway with his chariot (these were the Panzer tanks of early Greece; an ordinary foot soldier would not stand a chance against one). But Oedipus prevails. Fearless, he does not connect the prophecy and the murder.

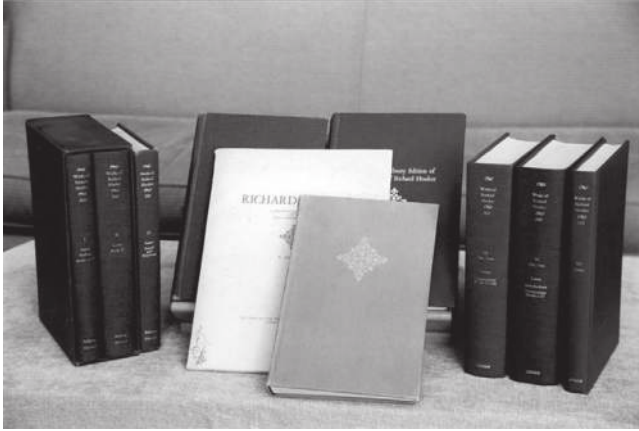


Plate 5: The image includes selected volumes edited by W. Speed Hill, including *The Folger Library Edition of the Works of Richard Hooker* (1977–1998); *Studies in Richard Hooker: Essays Preliminary to an Edition of His Works* (1972); and *Richard Hooker: A Descriptive Bibliography of the Early Editions: 1593–1724* (1970). Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

He solves the Sphinx's riddle, risking his life once more, this time to rescue Thebes. He is wise beyond his years. There is nothing he cannot accomplish, no problem he cannot solve. He is potent (and Jocasta fertile); they bring forth four children. Nobody talks about it, but Oedipus has been an exemplary ruler for at least twenty years. Only a strangely deformed foot mars the splendid picture (think of Byron). He disperses criticism, risk, cost, obstacles—anything negative—like a dog shaking himself dry in a shower of water droplets. His self-confidence is orders of magnitude greater than the norm.

It attracts followers, gains access to patrons, sustains and supports suitors, engages allies, co-opts professional colleagues who might otherwise become competitors, and inspires melancholy co-workers who are momentarily stymied, depression being chronic among scholarly editors.

The deformed foot suggests victor was once victim. So richly inventive is Sophocles in depicting Oedipus's victimisation that its portrayal has no need of our paraphrase.

From the sublime to the ephemeral. A “spot of time” emerges from the family archives. Speed is beginning to extract himself from the victor/victim bind. In boarding school, away from home, he learns how to deal with competition, academic or physical, and to distinguish himself from his peers. He asks to be called by his middle name, “Speed”, an obvious gesture of self-fashioning. The group portrait of the staff of the school yearbook is identical from year to year; only the occupants of the chairs change. And this year, the central chair is occupied by Speed, Editor-in-Chief.

Such careerism is not specific to scholarly editors, but it is essential if you aspire to edit Hooker and do not have patristic Greek or Latin. Others needed to be persuaded to work with him/me towards a common goal, one none of us could achieve alone. Quite unwittingly, work on *Whispers* produced a scaleable template for editing Hooker two decades later.

These organising skills are not specific to scholarly editing, but they are critical in mounting a multiple-volume edition of a major English writer in a professional world defined by success in securing NEH grants.

How, then, did I come to acquire these skills, which defined my father's world of corporate business, but which I, by being a teacher, disdained? Evidently by modeling myself on the very same father from whom I felt so painfully estranged. At his retirement he held directorships on eight corporations and served on another eight boards *pro bono*. While the family phrase was that Dad was "good with people", he was clearly more than that. He was widely respected for his business acumen and judgment, not simply because he could be an entertaining host or an efficient manager. Acknowledging this was one step in rehabilitating our relationship.

* * *

My penultimate "spot of time" more obviously maps my neurosis on my career. While often ideologically radical, the profession's social behavior con-



Plate 6: Herschel Baker, n.d. This photograph of Herschel Baker hung in W. Speed Hill's study for many years. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

tinues to be structured on a patron/protégée axis. My problem was that Herschel Baker, whom I admired, did not reciprocate. It took the better part of a year to secure a declaration of intent from him that he would direct my dissertation. He was reluctant to take me on because he was skeptical that I would finish. Based on the dubious testimony of my graduate transcript, he was right. Later, at a reception marking the publication of volume 3 of the Hooker edition, he commented: "Speed, your success could not have been predicted". Later, for a variety of reasons, I found I could not fruitfully model myself on him; he was too smart, had read too widely, knew too much, yet was still too withholding.

The psychic risk was that I would act

out my anger at my biological father in my new relationship with Herschel. The key insight was when I realised that patronage was a two-way street, that I had something of value to exchange for my patron's tuition, sponsorship, and guidance, and that I had a role to play in this little drama. Good teachers need good students. They become surrogate sons, amplifying a reputation, scattering the genes, spreading the word.

* * *

With this portrait, the child's trajectory to manhood is complete. It was taken in 1994, thirteen years ago. The eyes are still focused, but on the *via media*, not the horizon. He is more an observer, less a seeker. The figure does not directly engage the viewer, but is turning inward. The reserves of energy will lessen; Parkinson's will accelerate this deficit. The Hooker Edition, his life's work, is not yet complete—the *Index of Works and Names* will not be published for another three years—but against long odds, the project will be finished. There is a world-weariness that is authentic but inappropriate for one who looks so young. He welcomes—indeed craves—recognition (a prize for scholarship occasioned the above picture). But he is sad to realize the toll his work has exacted on his marriage and his children. His own deficits, his own yearnings, seem variously visited on his offspring. The trek from innocence to experience has been more arduous than he anticipated.



Plate 7: W. Speed Hill, Lehman College, 1994. Reproduced courtesy of the Estate of W. Speed Hill.

* * *

The traumatic event with which I began is less susceptible to editorial closure. Indeed for those of us who live in a world of words, who convert words as counters for feelings, and who manipulate these symbolic counters so as to allow access to the world beneath the tympanum, will be forever frustrated. If the wound or loss occurred when the child was not yet fully verbal, then by definition, this trauma would be inexpressible through words. On the taut surface of our kettle drum one can display language in all its forms, be fluent to the nth degree, even edit texts, without gaining direct access to the world beneath the membrane that retains and contains the uncon-

scious. Again, as Wordsworth put it, “the thoughts too deep for words”.³ There are two exceptions to this structural impermeability, neither of much specific use to the editor: psychoanalysis and psychosis. What cannot be expressed in words cannot be edited.

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3. Here, Speed Hill has misremembered: the quoted lines are in fact from Coleridge, *To William Wordsworth* (1807); they echo Wordsworth's final lines in his *Intimations Ode* (1803–1806): “To me the meanest flower that blows can give / Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears” (11, 16–17).