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Armchair Philology in the Post-Truth Age

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Looking at the material that sits on the stand facing her, it is natural for the beginning music student to regard it as “The Music.”¹ While teachers take pains to disabuse students of the notion that the marks on paper are “The Music,” they rarely take the time to explore the practical, economic, and ethical implications of the relationship between those marks on the paper and whatever “The Music” might be. Students learning standard repertoire, of course, have a wide range of editions available for purchase or download. Some instructors have opinions—even very strong opinions—about which materials to use, and might direct students towards scholarly critical editions. But the recommended “clean” *Urtext* may be expensive, and students (and teachers) might turn to cheaper editions or free downloads.² These may be laden with spurious editorial phrasing and expression markings, and, moreover, might raise ethical questions about copyright. As the player advances in her musical study and aspirations, she may find that two or more editions of the same piece may appear startlingly different. The astute student begins to wonder: How significant are these differences? How did they get there? Does one get me closer to “The Music” than the other?

Students need to become attuned to textual differences. Awareness that editions differ is a first step. Beyond that, they should develop the ability to spot variants (a skill they may have forgotten since the childhood visual activity of spotting differences between otherwise identical pictures). Most importantly, students need to be able to interpret and evaluate the significance of variants—not merely dismiss them as essentially “alternative facts.” Indeed, each variant tells a story—a story of how a piece of music was conceived, disseminated, performed, and consumed—and as students learn to discern how sources relate

1. Two important catalysts for this project include Cecilia Sun’s presentation “Beyond Urtext: Editions as Ideology and Interpretation” (given at the meeting of the New York State—St. Lawrence Chapter of the American Musicological Society on September 27, 1997 at the Eastman School of Music) and Beth Christensen’s, “Warp, Weft, and Waffle: Weaving Information Literacy into an Undergraduate Music Curriculum,” in *Notes* 60 (2004), pp. 616–31.

2. For a discussion of why musicians may select different print editions see Walter Emery, *Editions and Musicians* (London: Novello, 1957), p. 7f.

to each other, they will uncover these stories. In short, students can trace how editions are related one to another if they know what to look for. Confronting students with several versions of the same music and asking them discern if and how they are related compels them to reckon with the significance of even seemingly trivial textual details: it is precisely those details that betray the relationships, and uncover at least a few branches of the textual family tree.

Texts out of Context

The “which edition?” dilemma may be a common one for the private music student, but in the music history classroom it may be bypassed altogether. In classroom settings, students usually interact with scores already anthologized. While this practice is certainly convenient for both student and instructor, it is the nature of an anthology that it assembles disparate sources—sources, that is, that reflect varying editorial agendas, tastes, and competence. The anthology editor is faced with a similar dilemma as the hypothetical student above: reprinting older public domain editions and vocal score reductions may help to lower the cost of the final product, but might also sacrifice the latest scholarly insights and fuller musical contexts, often without any explanation of the edition or description of other options available.³ An enterprising instructor may follow Blake Howe’s lead by presenting students with unabridged sources in their original contexts.⁴ Or instructors may choose to highlight the issues inherent in editing and anthologizing by focusing on textual ancestors (for example, a manuscript source of an anthology example) or a comparing the public domain anthology example to a recent scholarly edition. Even one such in-class discussion can serve to give students a sense that the anthology example is just one point in a substantial textual web, and certainly not “The Music.”

A decontextualized edition of music is just as fraught for misunderstanding and misinterpretation as a shared social media post. Whether we like it or not, we live in an age consumed by epistemological concerns: information is often received either as gospel truth or as fake news; where “news” items are disseminated (that is, anthologized) effortlessly through social media, ripped from whatever context they might have had. Information literacy—an awareness of what we know (and don’t know) and how we know it—is a survival skill that

3. A particularly egregious example of an anthology withholding information concerning its sources is the first volume of the *Oxford Anthology of Western Music*, ed. David J. Rothenberg and Robert R. Holzer (1st ed., New York: Oxford, 2012), in which the list of “source notes” at the back gives very incomplete citations, including sometimes merely the words “Public domain”—as if the purpose of a list of sources is to indemnify the publisher, rather than to credit those whose work appears.

4. See his “Against Abridgement” above in this roundtable.

can be taught across the curriculum, and musical texts are an excellent place to start. Musical editions, after all, are transmissions of musical ideas through and within particular notation conventions. In the same way that a translation shapes our reading of an original (as noted in this roundtable by Timothy Cochran), an edition shapes, refines, or redefines the nature of the musical work. In other words, an edition is an agent.⁵

As Rachel E. Scott has noted, understanding the differences between editions (and different types of editions) is an essential information literacy skill.⁶ Such an understanding engenders a healthy skepticism about any notational mark. Where did that come from? Does the way it appears in print reflect what a composer's manuscript (if such exists) was ostensibly communicating? In what ways has an "improvement" to the text interfered with other interpretations that would be consistent with the original source(s)? To what degree should any given source be seen as "authoritative"? And whose authority (composers, editors, performers, historians) takes precedence in any given context?

I wanted to be able to teach my students to see the markings on the page not as "The Music" (as they still tended to do) but rather as *manifestations of interpretive interactions with that music*. Anyone who interprets a text is effectively an editor (making editorial decisions about how to present the text)—and many different motives lie behind an editor's actions. Changes may be made to make the text more readable (for those unfamiliar with certain conventions), or more economical (requiring less space and thus less paper), or more readily playable (adding fingerings or respelling chords), or more in line with a certain source or performing tradition. A change may be the result of a typographical error or, most confoundingly, the result of mere editorial whim. In conscientious editions such changes may be documented in some way (sometimes in excruciating detail), but even then some editorial decisions are inevitably made without comment; and of course many editions do not comment on editorial changes at all. Indeed, some decisions are so routine that an editor might not be aware that she has made them.

5. See Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), especially 183ff. For particularly useful discussions of similar issues relating this specifically to musical works, see Philip Bohlman, "Musicology as a Political Act," in *The Journal of Musicology* 11 (1993): 411–36, especially 420f; Stanley Boorman, "The Musical Text," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 403–23; John Butt, *Playing with History: The Historical Approach to Musical Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 96–102; James Grier, *The Critical Editing of Music: History, Method, Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 21ff.; and Richard Taruskin, *Text & Act: Essays on Music and Performance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), *passim*, but particularly 43ff.

6. Rachel E. Scott, "The Edition-Literate Singer: Edition Selection as an Information Literacy Competency," in *Music Reference Services Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (2013): 131–40.

The Textual (and Pedagogical) Value of the Tiny Detail

In order to prompt my students to consider the editorial process, I ask them to scrutinize every detail of several editions of the same musical work. They study these different editions as instantiations within a larger textual tradition in order to be able to distinguish between “the text of a work” (which is multiplicitous and potentially unknowable) and “the text of a document” (which is fixed on the page, if only we can see it).⁷ The music I selected for this task, the hymn tune ANTIOCH (best known as “Joy to the World!”) is very brief and relatively simple (The complete text of my assignment appears in the **Appendix**). I chose a piece that the students were likely to know even if they had never paid any attention to particular documents transmitting that work.⁸

Hymn tunes work well for this sort of assignment because they are generally in four-part homophonic arrangements, usually printed on a single page, and many appear in multiple sources published across more than a century. The website hymnary.org makes thousands of page-scans from hymnbooks readily available on the web. Hymn tunes are an interesting example for this exercise because they are likely to have a number of variant readings because of the very disparate means of transmission among sources; collating these variants allows a student to construct a rudimentary stemma of texts, which can only be accomplished by a critical consideration of the significance of details that otherwise would easily pass them by.

For this assignment, I direct my students to online scans of many different editions of the tune ANTIOCH. I do not ask students to account for every source available: I ask for only eight. Students are not expected to search indices and track down recalcitrant sources in archives, and there are no consequences to ignoring evidence outside of their eight selections (hence the idea of “arm-chair philology” that I reference in the title to this essay).⁹ The assignment thus

7. G. Thomas Tanselle, *A Rationale for Textual Criticism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989), 35–38.

8. A good example for which many students will have a sense of “the text of a work” without perhaps ever having paid much attention to any particular notated example is a national anthem. (Please note that “work” in this usage need not be a substantial, intentional compositional effort.) The efforts of Mark Clague and Andrew Kuster with *The Star-Spangled Banner* might serve to demonstrate examples of markedly different instantiations (*i.e.*, documents), but the number of examples and nature of varieties of arrangements they deal with make it much too big a project for the routine undergraduate assignment I was seeking. See Mark Clague and Andrew Kuster, eds., *Star Spangled Songbook* (Ann Arbor, MI: Star Spangled Music Foundation, 2012).

9. A discussion of these examples for this assignment (and more details of its prehistory) has appeared on my blog: James Brooks Kuykendall, “The Philological Wading Pool,” *Settling Scores* (blog), December 1, 2017, <http://www.settlingscoresblog.net/2017/12/28-philological-wading-pool.html>.

makes clear that they will be working with a very incomplete data set; indeed, not even a set that I have narrowed in advance so that they might find certain links. Given these materials, it is possible that eight random examples will have no meaningful connections and will not suggest a particular lineage, but this is extremely unlikely.

Consider these three sources that a student might select (see **Figures 1, 2 and 3**):

116 ANTIOCH. L. M. Arranged from HANDEL.

Allegretto Risoluto.

Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re-ceive her King; And
 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re-ceive her King; Let ev'-ry heart pre-pare him room, And heav'n and na-ture
 Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re-ceive her King; Let ev'-ry heart pre-pare him room, And heav'n and na-ture

Ending for 3d Stanza.

heaven and nature sing And heaven and nature sing. Far as the curse is found.
 sing, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n, And heav'n and na-ture sing. Far as the curse is found.
 sing, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n, And heav'n and na-ture sing. Far as the curse is found.
 heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and nature sing, And heav'n and na-ture sing. Far as the curse is found.

2
 Joy to the world, the Savior reigns,
 Let men their songs employ;
 While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains
 Repeat the sounding joy.

3
 No more let sin and sorrow grow,
 Nor thorns infest the ground;
 He comes to make his blessings flow
 Far as the curse is found.
 { Second Ending.

4
 He rules the world with truth and grace,
 And makes the nations prove
 The glories of his righteousness,
 And wonders of his love.

Figure 1: *Carmina Sacra or Boston Collection of Church Music*, ed. Lowell Mason (2nd Ed., 1841). <https://hymnary.org/page/fetch/CSBC1841/80/high> [CS] Scan reprinted by permission of hymnary.org

316 ANTIOCH. C. M. Arranged from Handel. From the Carmina Sacra.

Molto Furioso
Joy to the world, &c. Let, &c.
1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth receive her King! Let ev'ry heart pre-pare him room,
And heav'n and na-ture sing. And heav'n and na-ture sing. Far as the curse is found.

Andante
And heav'n and na-ture sing. And heav'n and na-ture sing. And heav'n, And heav'n and na-ture sing. Far as the curse is found.
And heav'n and na-ture sing. And heav'n and na-ture sing, And heav'n, &c. Far, &c.

2. Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns,
Let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.

3. No more let sin and sorrow grow,
Nor thorns infect the ground;
He comes to make his blessings flow
Far as the curse is found.
Second Ending.

4. He rules the world with truth and grace,
And makes the nations prove
The glories of his righteousness,
And wonders of his love.

Figure 2: *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion*, ed. William Walker (“New” Ed., 1854). <https://hymnary.org/hymn/SHMC1854/316> [SH]
Scan reprinted by permission of hymnary.org

103 Joy to the World.

1. Joy to the world—the dark-ness flies, Let earth with glad-ness sing. The
 2. Joy to the world—for truth a-bounds, And er-ror with-'ring dies. In
 3. Joy to the world—the an-them be, A song of tri-umph sing, "Oh!

morn-ing comes, o'er all the skies She waves her pur-ple wing, She
 frag-ments, hurled up-on the ground, Her bro-ken al-tar lies, Her
 Grave! Where is thy vic-to-ry? Oh! Death! Where is thy sting?" "Oh!

1. She waves her pur-ple

waves her pur-ple wing, She waves, she waves her pur-ple wing.
 bro-ken al-tar lies, Her bro-ken, her bro-ken al-tar lies.
 Death! Where is thy sting?" "Oh! Death! Oh! Death! Where is thy sting?"

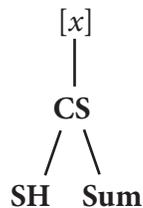
wing. She waves her pur-ple wing, She waves her pur-ple wing.

Figure 3: *Songs of Summerland*, ed. Thoro Harris (1943). <https://hymnary.org/page/fetch/SoS1943/84/high> (cropped) [Sum]
 Scan reprinted by permission of hymnary.org

A student examining these three sources should recognize that while it is clear that *The Southern Harmony* version (Figure 2, hereafter “SH”) is taken from *Carmina Sacra* (as confirmed in the upper right-hand corner), there is a substantial change in the musical text: where *Carmina Sacra* (Figure 1, hereafter “CS”) gives a four-part texture (with the melody on the staff directly above the bass, as is customary in early American hymnals), *The Southern Harmony* has only three parts, essentially deleting the second staff of *Carmina Sacra*. There are a few other changes: SH translates everything into shape notes; omits the sustained accompanying bass note in the third phrase of CS, and deletes the

bass figures (which only appear in the first few bars of CS). Both CS and SH preserve an archaic variant ending for stanza 3.¹⁰

Despite its much later date, the version of *Songs of Summerland* (**Figure 3**, hereafter “Sum”) is also in the *Carmina Sacra* line of transmission, notwithstanding the substantially different lyrics. Like SH, Sum has only a three-part texture derived from CS, but here the top staff of CS is omitted; most obviously, the notation of Sum is in the now-conventional melody-at-the-top format. (The added “tenor” third in the final chord is likely editorial.) Whether or not CS was the direct source for Sum (as there may well be other sources in between, or they may share a common ancestor), Sum could not possibly be derived from SH. With these conclusions, a student might construct Stemma 1:



Stemma 1

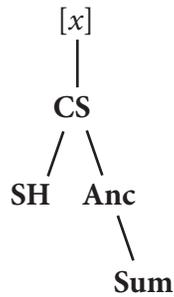
Adding a fourth source, *Song Anchor* (**Figure 4**, hereafter “Anc”), naturally complicates the stemma, even though a student is likely to recognize that it shares the same harmonization as CS, despite an apparent error in the second measure of the tenor voice.

Figure 4 *Song Anchor: A Choice Collection of Favorites for Sabbath School and Praise Services*, ed. J. E. White (1878). <https://hymnary.org/hymn/SA21878/page/123> (cropped) [Anc]

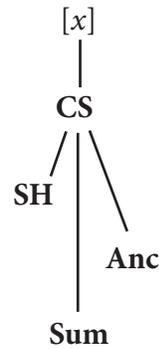
Scan reprinted by permission of hymnary.org

10. They also transmit a slight variant in Watts’s verbal text, beginning the second stanza with “Joy to the world” instead of his original “Joy to the earth.” See Isaac Watts, *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* (London: J. Clark, 1719), 253.

Like SH, the sustained bass of the third phrase has been eliminated; like Sum, the format is modernized with the melody in the top staff; a tiny variant occurs in the penultimate bar in the tenor, where the introduction of an eighth note allows all voices to change syllables at the same time, but does not affect the harmony. If a student decides that the elimination of the sustained bass note suggests that Anc was a source for Sum, then they will favor Stemma 2; if they believe the decision was made by two independent editors, then they will favor Stemma 3.



Stemma 2



Stemma 3

The next source introduces a substantial complication.

80 CHRIST.

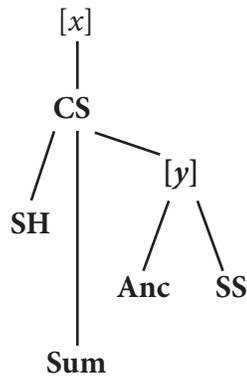
ANTIOCH. C. M.

1. Joy to the world, the Lord is come! Let earth re-ceive her King; Let
 ev-ery heart pre-pare him room, And heaven and na-ture sing, And
 And heaven and na-ture
 heaven and na-ture sing,..... And heaven and na-ture sing.
 sing,..... And heaven and na-ture sing.
 sing, And heaven and na-ture sing.

Figure 5: *Songs for the Sanctuary: or Hymns and Tunes for Christian Worship*, ed. Chas. S. Robinson (1868) <https://hymnary.org/hymn/SFTM1868/page/81> (cropped) [SS]

Scan reprinted by permission of hymnary.org

The 1868 date of publication puts *Songs for the Sanctuary* (**Figure 5**, hereafter “SS”) clearly before *Anc*, but it shares the same tenor figure in the penultimate bar and the lack of the sustained bass in the third phrase. Students will likely note that while it is essentially the same harmonization as CS, it has been transposed down to D major—and there is a slight but significant modification that essentially exchanges the alto and tenor voices in the first two measures. There is also a type-setting error in the text setting at the beginning of what ought to be the last phrase—the penultimate “sing” is sustained too long and a reiteration of the text “and heaven” is missing. Most importantly, this source has a short note—a dotted quarter—at the end of the second phrase (on “King” of “Let earth receive her King”); all the other sources reviewed thus far have a note twice as long here. For all these reasons, SS is clearly not an ancestor of *Anc* (or, for that matter, *Sum*), yet it is closer to *Anc* than any other. *Stemma 4* allows for a hypothetical common ancestor [*y*], explaining the similarities while also acknowledging the variants:



Stemma 4

Given the wealth of resources available at hymnary.org—to say nothing of those unscanned sources on shelves—students are likely to encounter versions very different from those discussed above. Indeed, a student might be frustrated to conclude that, at least with the data available, the stemma branches would meet only at the hypothetical *Ur*-text [x]. A student may also be tempted, having found a few variants, to assume too readily that this [x] marks the only meeting place for any of the sources, without trying to find linkages. This assignment requires patience and concentration—and at the very least should enable a student to realize that different editions may be very different indeed.

This assignment can work with any number of pieces. Hymns or unison songs are useful because of their relatively small scope, their use of both verbal and musical textual domains, and their dissemination in many available editions. A teacher might have students start from scratch, as I do in this assignment; alternately, it might be worth doing some of the groundwork first. I might, for example, present the students with the findings above, with the modified assignment as “Using your eight sources, add on to or refine Stemma 4.” Doing so would shift the focus of the assignment from the ability to recognize textual differences to the evaluation of their significance—by far the more important skill for the students to acquire. Students’ time may be better spent on trying to make sense of differences than merely spotting them. (This essentially changes the children’s picture activity from “spot the differences in these pictures” to “suggest what may have happened to cause the changes that you have identified.”)

After completing the stemma exercise, the students are attuned to the existence of variants and the possible interrelationships between editions, the student is aware of the distinction between the edition and “The Music.” The student has learned a new way to compare and evaluate, and as she becomes more familiar with the different types of editions, and editorial approaches she

will be able to evaluate the value of an edition, even without another to compare it to.¹¹

Although there is a large body of repertoire for which only one score is available to our students, there is an abundant textual tradition for many works they will study. Despite what their private instructors may say in the studio, in the music history classroom there is no such thing as a bad edition; there's only the (essential) question of what information any given edition conveys. If we can get students to regard the (re-)printed text itself as an artifact of music history, they make great strides forward in their acquisition of information literacy. The "text of the work" and the "text of a document" are not coterminous, but an awareness of the difference can prompt an array of interpretive questions central to a student's developing an autonomy of musicianship: *Why is this written this way? How might it have also been conveyed in notation? What sorts of things is it unable to convey? Who has been involved in the presentation of the text as it appears before me? What do I do with it?*

11. A useful assignment for achieving similar goals is outlined in Sara Haefeli and Kristina Shanton, "Evaluating Editions of Printed Music," in *Information Literacy in Music: An Instructor's Companion*, ed. Beth Christensen, Erin Conor, and Marian Ritter (Middleton, WI: A-R Editions, 2018), 104–107.

APPENDIX: Text of the “Armchair Philology” assignment

This assignment asks for you to compare different printed sources of a particular hymn tune (ANTIOCH, perhaps familiar to you paired with Isaac Watts’s text “Joy to the World!”), in order to try to trace lines of transmission and construct a textual stemma. Go to the page for this tune at Hymnary.org (http://www.hymnary.org/tune/antioch_handel), and select any EIGHT of the page-scans at the bottom of the page. Print these off (BE SURE TO NOTE the source of each, as this is on the webpage but will not automatically appear on the print-out). Study them carefully, and compare them for any variant in the music, either in melody or harmonization. If you come across two identical harmonizations, they are pretty much guaranteed to be grouped on one larger branch of the stemma. Note also the verbal text, both the lyrics of the hymn and the attributions of composer or arranger. Any alterations to the lyrics (especially omitted stanzas) can be significant clues, as can the ascription of the tune to Handel or someone else. Don’t just print off the first eight you find on the website—look around for some interesting ones. (There are, indeed, some with some really glaring errors—including one in which the whole first system is erroneously replaced with a system from a completely different tune, to which the text of “Joy to the world” is awkwardly applied.)¹²

Turn in to me:

1. A list of your eight sources, numbered 1–8 (in chronological order, as best that can be determined), with the bibliographic details for each from Hymnary.org
2. The eight page-scans you printed, numbered to match
3. A stemma (essentially a family tree of sources) to indicate how sources 1–8 are related, if at all
4. Notes of the principal idiosyncrasies you spotted that allowed you to construct the diagram. (You don’t need to account for every detail, just enough to show me how you sorted it out.)

Remember: the point is not to locate “Joy to the world.” It is to confront a complex textual situation in which each of these *is* “Joy to the world,” and yet

12. Given that I am not seeking an “authentic” text, it may seem odd to claim the existence of “glaring errors.” To suggest otherwise, however, naively assumes no corruption of the text intended by whoever put it in the hymnbook—seeing it through the printing process without flaw. Many of the oddities in transmission—an eccentric harmony within a source that otherwise duplicates another exactly—can be explained by an error in typesetting. The completely misplaced staff system seems the most obvious case of an indisputable error; for it, see no. 182 in *The Voice of Thanksgiving*, ed. D. B. Towner (New York: Fleming Revell Co., 1913), 168, (<https://hymnary.org/hymn/VoT11913/page/168>). In that instance, the second half of MENDEBRAS (complete with plagal Amen) supplants the first half of ANTIOCH.

none of them is it completely. Although not directly related to the textual variants, you may wish to consult the commentary on this tune in *The New Oxford Book of Carols*, ed. Andrew Parrott and Hugh Keyte (Oxford University Press, 1992/1994), pp. 273–74. It is on reserve for this course at the library.