Reply:

Textual editing, whether it seeks to establish a single "clear-reading text" or to track the sequence of revisions from one version to another, is fundamentally an interpretive act, and scholars acknowledge and remind us of this condition when they call their editions "critical." That is, the "eclectic-text," or "best-text," or "single-version-text," or "fluid-text" edition is critical because editors make decisions at every level to determine what to valorize or not, and such decisions are informed by announced editorial principles that are derived from and developed for the needs and desires of interpretive communities.

But this understanding of the critical nature of editing can be forgotten, especially when an edition's clear-reading text, devoid of editorial interventions and reprinted without textual apparatus, signals to readers a textual stability that does not exist. What emerges is a kind of textual amnesia, a forgetting that texts are fluid, that differences between versions can represent authorial, editorial, and social anxieties, and that the scholarly editions we depend on are critical constructs that must tell us how they are constructed. Textual scholars, critics, students, and general readers alike face the same problem—how can the study of revision be opened to closer critical scrutiny? Fluid-text editing addresses this problem by guiding readers through multiple versions of a work. Editing is a field of discourse, and fluid-text editing is particularly discourse-based if only because a textual change is not a revision until we argue that it is a revision, not just an accidental or inconsequential change.

David Ketterer makes astute observations about the editorial decision to change "first Congregational Church" to "First Congregational Church" in Ishmael's argument with Bildad over Queequeg's religion. In doing so, he demonstrates my point. We disagree about this editorial matter, just as any two editors will disagree, and our disagreement proves the importance of the variants discussed. I argue that a British editor imposed a revision on Melville's text that undermines a little typographic joke Melville is making, a joke that is expanded in the subsequent seven comic paragraphs that (in my view) the British also removed. By contrast, Ketterer argues that the shift from "first" to "First" is Melville's correction and that the sentence containing the word "rigmarole," which replaces the eight comic paragraphs, is also Melville's revision.

Although I think it unlikely, I do not doubt it is possible that Melville rather than an editor revised the episode. But if Melville performed the revision, he also, in doing so, would have abandoned Ishmael's point that Queequeg is a "born member" of the universal brotherhood and would have adopted the standard (and I think "imperial") assumption that "savages" like Queequeg cannot be born Christians but must be "converted." Ketterer's view is that this revised position is an ironic lie Ishmael tells just to get Queequeg on board Bildad's ship. But apart from undermining Ishmael's distinction between birth and conversion as the basis for religious affiliation, the lie would have to be a "rigmarole" impossible for readers of the British edition to unpack without access to the original American edition's wording.

I could go on, and I know Ketterer well enough to know that he could go on, too, with arguments and counterarguments. But our disagreements only underscore the need for our debate to be exposed in the editing of *Moby-Dick* as a fluid text. We both propose using what I call a "revision narrative" to explain and justify our views of the matter. Ketterer would like to call it a "change narrative" because *change* encompasses intended revision, which implies a new direction, as well as correction, which mends text so that it expresses an original intention. But I would like to stick with "revision narrative" because corrections amount to a form of revision to begin with, and *change* also embraces mere typos, which can have significance in the history of a text but often do not.

In writing "Rewriting *Moby-Dick*," I also wanted to consider how digital technology can enhance the fluid-text editing of a work. Ketterer's alternative revision narrative needs to stand

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900169007 Published online by Cambridge University Press

alongside mine in a digital edition of *Moby-Dick* that gives readers immediate access to the text's revision sites. Such an edition would also provide users with tools that would allow them to contribute plausible revision narratives of their own, either in a "sandbox" for pedagogical purposes or, with editorial approval, in the edition itself. Funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Melville Electronic Library is developing a tool, called TextLab, that will follow reliable editorial protocols and enable critical discourse.

Let me conclude by addressing a point Ketterer raises in his opening paragraph. He asserts that fluid-text editing of *Frankenstein* would not be worthwhile "if it cannot conclusively determine the composition order of the two major surviving portions of the draft manuscript." My own work on the working draft of *Typee*, which eventuated in an electronic edition of that fluid text, gives me some inkling of the problem Ketterer addresses. Revisions in manuscript most surely occurred in one, and only one, way; but that historical sequencing is no longer precisely determinable. But while we cannot "conclusively determine" a particular revision sequence, we can nevertheless discuss alternative possibilities just as editors have argued for centuries the viability of one variant over another. In this regard, no critical edition—fluid-text or otherwise—can purport to be conclusive. Editing is a field of discourse, and fluid-text editing is a sphere of inquiry that enacts the discourse on texts in revision. But to discuss revision, readers need easy and reliable access to revision sites so that they can articulate possible sequences and narrate them. Only by doing so can readers gain purchase on how texts evolve.

John Bryant
Hofstra University

Fat Subjects on *PMLA* Covers

To the Editor:

On the covers of two recent issues of *PMLA*—May 2009 (124.3) and January 2011 (126.1)—you've printed images of fat subjects, but in the five years I've been a member of the MLA I have yet to see scholarship in *PMLA* or at the MLA Annual Convention that represents the emerging field of fat studies. It is a shame that while fat subjects are used to entice the reader into the pages of *PMLA*, the critical interventions that fat studies scholars are doing in the field of literature and culture, among other topics, are absent from *PMLA*.

I want to believe that *PMLA* is not using fat images as "freakery," a spectacle that titillates the reading audience, rendering the fat person voiceless, missing from engaged scholarship in literature and language. I hope that the next time I see an image of a fat person on the cover of *PMLA*, it is because the journal has devoted a special issue to fat studies.

Julia McCrossin
George Washington University

https://doi.org/10.1632/S0030812900169007 Published online by Cambridge University Press