

The Second Story

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For a long stretch of years, if I had been asked to name an edited text that had made a particular impression on me, I would have answered without hesitation, *The Murder of Charles the Good*. As some of you may know, that is the title of a published translation of an account of events surrounding the assassination of the count of Flanders in the year 1127. I still have the Harper Torchbooks paperback that was on the syllabus of a class on medieval Europe that I took as an undergraduate many years ago. From this account by Galbert of Bruges, I saw, almost at first hand, disruption, fierce action, and the restoration of order in a world that was supposed to be, in so many respects, about seemingly eternal continuities. *The Murder of Charles the Good* was not the only primary account of historical events that I encountered as a college student, but it seems to have made by far the deepest impression on me.¹

At some point, I realized that another text from the past had left its mark on me even earlier. I remember passing time in the library of Monterey High School in Lubbock, Texas, during a study hall period and encountering what, according to my hazy recollection, was a primary account of the expedition of Francisco Vázquez de Coronado into the southern Great Plains. The Coronado expedition, in the early 1540s, constituted the earliest venture—in Spanish, the first *entrada*—by Europeans into the corner of the universe that was my home. Monterey High School's fiercest crosstown rival at the time, Coronado High School, bore the conquistador's very name, just as another of Lubbock's high

schools, Estacado, took its name from the Llano Estacado, or Staked Plains, the historic and geographical designation for that great elevated plain edged by escarpments known as the Caprock. Coronado was not just any conquistador, he was *our* conquistador.

While I cannot be entirely sure what narrative I pulled from the shelf in that school library, it was likely a version of the *Relación* of Pedro de Castañeda, a member of Coronado's expedition. My recollection is of reading a few pages somewhere in the middle of the book, and it was not a very exciting narrative. I think that what I read involved, to be honest, some uneventful and seemingly endless trekking across a scruffy plain. Yeah, that's about right for the Llano Estacado. But that was interesting stuff. The route of Coronado's journey across the Llano Estacado has long been a subject of intense debate. The expedition, which at its outset included about 300 Spanish soldiers and friars, perhaps 1,000 or more Native Americans, and maybe 1,500 horses and mules, was truly and actually lost for a while, perhaps somewhere not too far, at least in western terms, from my home city.

The Llano Estacado, with an imperceptibly slight tilt, is one of the flattest regions on the planet. Coronado's people, and many who came after, characterized it like the sea, with featureless shortgrass prairie in place of water, stretching to the horizon in every direction. Encasing everything is an amazing azure-blue, often cloudless bowl of sky that, indifferent to the wanderer's plight, provides limited guidance. Misled by a duplicitous native guide, Coronado and the members of his expeditionary force were initially searching for, yes, cities and kingdoms of gold: first Cibola and then Quivira, a rumored locale far away over the plains that in the end proved to be some Native American communities in the legendary place we now call Kansas. Make no mistake, though—this was no silly quest by a bunch of misguided Don Quixotes but the first venture by armed agents of an imperial power into the heart of a continent they knew nothing about, and this was only a little more than twenty years after the invasion of Mexico by Hernan Cortés. This, to me, at the remove of four centuries, was amazing material, even if nothing exciting occurred in the pages that I perused in the school library.²

In both cases, with Galbert's narrative of the events in twelfth-century Flanders and with the Spanish exploration account, I felt a connection to voices spanning across centuries. It is as if I had stumbled into some grand,

eternal, continuous stream of records of the human experience. Indeed, the first publication of *The Murder of Charles the Good* in 1959 was in a “Records of Civilization” series put out by the Columbia University Department of History. That aura of continuity and seamlessness can be deceptive, however. As editors know, historical records such as Galbert’s and Castañeda’s accounts are constructions. The creation of such a primary source could be a process of fits and starts, or of a long, energetic flow. All of them are snapshots that capture mere moments of time: even the longest letter or narrative is but a succession of grabs at the writer’s fleeting thoughts.

The dynamic quality of *The Murder of Charles the Good* that appealed to me derives in large part from the segmented, episodic nature of the narrative. Thomas Jefferson’s correspondence appears in the Princeton edition as a single stream, a seemingly unified tributary to that vast narrative river, but it was actually an uneven, off-and-on, unconnected series of dialogues, one-time exchanges, and unanswered communications with a great number of individuals and entities. There are networks within it, to be sure, but its creation by Jefferson and his correspondents in real time was in no sense a unified construction. The written record is herky-jerky and full of holes, incomplete even when all the component pieces of paper are somehow still extant. In the front matter of the first volume of the Jefferson Papers, Julian Boyd quoted a letter from Jefferson to Joel Barlow in 1802 about the history of the American Revolution: “a great deal of the knolege of things is not on paper,” Jefferson wrote, “but only within ourselves.”³

A year and a half after he wrote that letter, Jefferson attempted to capture fugitive moments of spoken communication when a delegation of Choctaw Indians, whose homes were in what are now Alabama and Mississippi, called on him in Washington. Homastubbee and Puckshunubbee, two senior leaders of the Choctaw nation, addressed the president in that meeting. Each of them spoke in turn, in the Choctaw language, and, in keeping with the style of their council meetings, each speaker paused after each sentence or statement. Judging from an unusual set of notes that Jefferson made of the meeting, a translator spoke each sentence in English during the pause and Jefferson hastily scrawled an abbreviated version of the translated statement, perhaps as the speaker made his next statement in Choctaw. Here is just a sample of Jefferson’s record of what was

said by Homastubbee, the principal chief of one of three major divisions of the Choctaw nation:

the land they now offer is the last they can spare
must now turn in to work.
begs we will not incroach on land, but protect it
this is what he has long wished to say, face to face
little land many people hunting done, must work
individuals want to buy land.
will be reduced to poverty without assistce & protection

And these lines from the address of Puckshunubbee, chief of the Choctaws' Upper Towns:

consider them as poor & love them.
are red, surrounded by whites.
has no thought of turng eyes but to us.
hopes we will extricate from poverty
. . .
a man loves his chdr. hopes we will love & assist them⁴

We could read it as free verse—

This is what he has long wished to say, face to face
A man loves his children
Hopes we will love & assist them.

Jefferson's notes of what the visitors said that day were an imperfect, extraordinary attempt to catch a transient event, a series of spoken lines that tell us not only the gist of what was said, but how it was said and what it could have been like to hear it on that day in 1803.

There is a story of the construction of a document—even if we don't always know the story, or know all of it.

Galbert of Bruges was a notary, in effect a specialized type of witness and recorder. He composed his record of the shocking murder of Count Charles of Flanders in the church at Bruges—and of the aftermath of the killing, in which nobles and the communities of Bruges and Ghent joined forces against the assassins—in three phases, two of which were contemporary with the events they described in 1127 and 1128. Significant portions of the manuscript of Galbert's

account are lost, and the narrative we have now is a composite of manuscript pieces and old published versions of the missing parts.⁵

We know little about Pedro de Castañeda, but he was no cleric and professional scribe such as Galbert. Castañeda lived on the northern frontier of Mexico and enrolled as a soldier when Coronado assembled the expedition in 1540. Again unlike Galbert, Castañeda did not write his account as events unfolded, but twenty years after the end of the expedition. His manuscript has not survived, but a copy from 1596, in the collections of the Lenox Library, now in the New York Public Library, is the source text of this fundamental narrative of early European exploration of the southern plains.⁶

To be sure, I did not encounter Castañeda's and Galbert's accounts in their original manuscript form. I saw published versions, which are products of a second construction of a text. There is always a second story about a published primary text, and it always involves at least one textual scholar or documentary editor (whether or not so-called), plus often a publisher, plus always some means of supporting the scholar's work. Consumers of published primary sources—and I'm not specifying a particular medium or delivery system when I say "published"—may not know much about the first story I have described. They are all too often oblivious to the second story. (At least this tends to be the case with published historical sources; scholars and students of literature and classics have customary practices that place greater emphasis on textual scholarship than historians do.) As far as the users of the texts are concerned, the second story is often invisible, and its creators—those who constructed the actual thing being used—are anonymous.

I have been guilty of this myself. Until recently, I paid no attention to what lay behind the text that played such an important role in my encounters with published primary sources, *The Murder of Charles the Good*. The translator and editor of the book wrote extraordinarily helpful annotation to explain references in the text and give it context, and furnished maps and plans of key locations. That translator-editor was James Bruce Ross, who, judging from that name and from the erudition of the introduction, notes, and scholarly apparatus, was some tweedy, pipe-smoking Oxford don, or maybe a scholar at Edinburgh. Imagine my puzzlement when I finally had the wit to look at the blurbs on the back of my paperback copy, where I saw James Bruce Ross referred to as "Miss Ross." *Miss* Ross. So much for assumptions based on forenames. The bearer of her father's

name, James Bruce Ross was indeed a woman, and she hailed not from Scotland or anywhere in the British Isles, but from Independence, Missouri; her older brother became Harry Truman's press secretary. She was known as "J.B." to her friends but "Miss Ross" to her students and within the academic circles of her day, despite the fact that she received a PhD from the University of Chicago in 1934. She had a long career as a member of the history faculty at her undergraduate college, Vassar. She possessed a formidable background in classics and history along with the white-hot language skills needed to do immensely detailed, firmly grounded scholarly work on medieval Flanders and Renaissance Florence. She could more than hold her own with the tweedy dons.

There is still more to that second story of Galbert's narrative. In the summer of 1936, soon after joining the faculty at Vassar, "J.B." Ross chanced to be on vacation in Spain with a friend from the college's art department when the Spanish Civil War suddenly exploded around them. For nineteen days the two young women academics from the United States were trapped in the city of Granada as Nationalist forces loyal to General Francisco Franco laid siege. Their hotel was bombed. They had no communication with the outside world. They witnessed destruction and death and could only get out after the attacking army took the city. As Constance Hoffman Berman has noted, although Ross may not have thought in these terms, it is difficult to believe that her first-hand experience with the terrible chaos and uncertainty of violent conflict in Spain did not influence her translation and annotation of Galbert's account of the events triggered by the assassination of Count Charles in the chapel at Bruges in March 1127.⁷

The second story behind Castañeda's narrative of Coronado's journey is less dramatic but still compelling in its own right. George Parker Winship stands as the key figure. In 1891 the Harvard historian Edward Channing pointed Winship, an undergraduate student, toward the 1596 manuscript in the Lenox Library. Winship undertook a translation and study of the narrative, receiving support from the Smithsonian Institution Bureau of Ethnology. Winship's work with Castañeda's account laid the foundation for scholarship on Coronado's expedition. Winship became, at the age of twenty-four, the librarian of the then-private John Carter Brown collection, and oversaw its transformation into the renowned research institution at Brown University. He was subsequently the director of the Widener collection and a rare books curator at Harvard, and a significant

contributor to rare books and manuscripts scholarship. His translation and analysis of Castañeda's text continue to be an important reference, even though others since him have also translated and annotated the text. The second story of Castañeda's narrative continues, for there are differences between Winship's translation and those of other scholars regarding Spanish terms in the original that provide essential clues to the route that Coronado took across the almost featureless Llano Estacado.⁸

If Galbert's and Castañeda's writings live on as part of a great stream of human record, and in a form that modern Americans can access and use, it is due to the work that makes up the second story surrounding each text. Without J.B. Ross, without Vassar College paying her salary and supporting her research, without Columbia University to publish the first edition of *The Murder of Charles the Good*, without George Parker Winship and the Bureau of Ethnology or other institutionally supported scholars of the Castañeda narrative who followed him, this address would be about something else, if I were making it at all.

For any original text to be published—again, “published” in any medium—and thus made available to students, researchers, and readers, the second story is critical. Textual editors are essential to that big ongoing stream of the human record. Permanence, after all, has been at the foundation of how we frame our work. In the original feasibility study for what became the Jefferson Papers edition, which served as the model for much of what followed in the editing of historical documents, Julian Boyd wrote of the “urgent need . . . for an edition of Jefferson's writings so extensive in the number of documents it embraces and so accurate in presentation that the work need never be done again. It is believed that such a body of Jefferson's writings would be of permanent value.” The edition was to be “definitive,” Boyd wrote, and “so complete, so accurate, and so dependable that it will stand for all time.” The project, Boyd advised, “should be so complete in its inclusiveness, so scholarly in its presentation, so carefully edited in all its details, and so well presented in physical format as to constitute a worthy and enduring memorial” to Jefferson and “a constant beacon for the American people.”⁹ In 1951, Lyman Butterfield, who at the time was working under Boyd as an associate editor of the Jefferson Papers, referred to “our stated aim of doing this job so well that it will not have to be done again.”¹⁰

Contrary to what some may believe, however, knowing that our work needs to stand up in the long run does not mean that documentary editors want our work to go on forever. Boyd stated early in the life of the Jefferson edition that as much as he loved editing Jefferson's papers, he had "no intention . . . of making this a life work" or of becoming mired in an endless quest for what he called "an impossible perfection." He wrote in the front matter to the first volume of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* that "'completeness' as applied to this or any other attempt at an exhaustive edition is a relative term, theoretically possible but practically unattainable and in some respects undesirable."¹¹ But as the late Warren Zevon once reminded us in a song, "Time treats everybody like a fool."¹² The second construction of texts, like their first construction, can be an uneven set of events. Boyd could not know at the outset that the term "exhaustive edition" would have multiple meanings for his edition.

The Jefferson editorial project began collecting documents in 1944. Volume 1 appeared in 1950, so did Volume 2, and publication then continued at the rate of two volumes per year through Volumes 11 and 12 in 1955. Even before the first volumes came out, Boyd, who felt under pressure from the edition's sponsors, tried to institute a plan that would produce *four* volumes a year and was convinced that the project's team should actually be able to put out *five* 700-page volumes a year. Butterfield, with one foot out the door, warned Boyd that he would grind himself and his staff into oblivion and undermine the edition's standards of scholarship. Butterfield feared that if he stayed, he would be like Charlie Chaplin on the assembly line in the silent movie classic *Modern Times*.¹³ Butterfield left, and Boyd, unable to maintain the pace of two volumes a year, let alone four or five, and finding the scope of the endeavor to be much larger than he could have foreseen at the beginning, did end up spending the rest of his life on the Jefferson edition. Such, perhaps, is the lot of the first conquistador to venture onto uncharted, trackless plains.

Years later, after Butterfield left, Boyd in Princeton and Butterfield, then at the Adams Papers, despaired together when federal funding agencies pressed documentary editors to, in Butterfield's words, "lower our sights." They had begun their editions without federal assistance, but by the mid-1970s, documentary editions, rather like the Choctaws in Jefferson's administration, found themselves having to negotiate new relationships with the US government. Comprehensive

scholarly editions on the model that Butterfield and Boyd had created were no longer in favor. Apparently “what we need,” Butterfield summarized bitterly, “is not definitive editions of last resort but lesser, quicker, and cheaper editorial products for a more general readership.” He need hardly have added (but did), “I cannot agree.”¹⁴

On the face of it, creating an edition is a straightforward matter of following the King’s injunction to the White Rabbit in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: “Begin at the beginning, . . . and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”¹⁵ Of course it is never really as simple as that. We must continually educate the world, however, about the importance of the second story of a text. No matter how rich its contents, a text is not really part of that big, seemingly eternal stream of human narrative without the second act of construction, the editors’ part of the formula, which moves the source from a state of simple existence to a state of true availability as a resource for researchers and students—and for unplanned encounters such as mine with the narrative of the Coronado expedition when I was sixteen or seventeen years old.

Jefferson’s in-the-moment record of what the Choctaw leaders Homastubbee and Puckshunubbee said to him in December 1803, as they spoke as their forefathers had in the great councils for time immemorial—not reading from notes on paper but saying what was in their minds and hearts—is presently, as it has been for more than 200 years, but a piece of paper in the Jefferson collection now at the Library of Congress. An image of the manuscript can be found on the library’s American Memory website, but its scrawled lines are overlooked. Only when the text and annotation of the document prepared for Volume 42 of *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson* appears in 2016 will what the Choctaws spoke to the president on that day in 1803 be part of that great meganarrative. Only then, after we have done *our* jobs, will someone in a distant future, perhaps a young person of Choctaw heritage in Oklahoma, or someone curious about the history of the lower Mississippi Valley, or a receptive student in a college class on Native American history, experience a connection to the words of a long-gone Choctaw leader to the president of the United States:

this is what he has long wished to say, face to face.

Notes

1. Galbert of Bruges, *The Murder of Charles the Good, Count of Flanders*, trans. with intro. and notes by James Bruce Ross, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); originally published 1959 by Columbia University Press and Oxford University Press.
2. John Miller Morris, *El Llano Estacado: Exploration and Imagination on the High Plains of Texas and New Mexico, 1536–1860* (Austin: Texas State Historical Association, 1997), 20–21, 43, 46–49; George P. Hammond and Agapito Rey, *Narratives of the Coronado Expedition, 1540–1542* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1940), 7–8.
3. Julian P. Boyd et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 41 vols. to date (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1950–), 1:vii; 37:401.
4. Notes on speeches of Homastubbee and Puckshunubbee, December 13, 1803, Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress (to be included in Vol. 42 of the *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*).
5. Galbert of Bruges, *Murder of Charles the Good*, 63–75, 321.
6. Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 46, 118, 367n3; Hammond and Rey, *Narratives*, 191n.
7. Constance Hoffman Berman, “James Bruce Ross (1902–1995) and the Sources for Medieval and Renaissance History,” in *Women Medievalists and the Academy*, ed. Jane Chance (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), 575–84.
8. Morris, *Llano Estacado*, 37–39, 50, 70–72, 118, 119, 126, 129; Hammond and Rey, *Narratives*, 31–33; Kenneth E. Carpenter, “Winship, George Parker,” *American National Biography Online* (February 2000), <http://www.anb.org/articles/20/20-01137.html>.
9. Julian P. Boyd, “Report to the Thomas Jefferson Bicentennial Commission on the Need, Scope, Proposed Method of Preparation, Probable Cost, and Possible Means of Publishing a Comprehensive Edition of the Writings of Thomas Jefferson,” typescript, September 25, 1943 (copy in Seeley G. Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University), 10, 14, 16, 31–32.
10. Lyman H. Butterfield to Julian P. Boyd, January 8, 1951, Box 12, Julian P. Boyd Papers, Collection C0392, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

11. Boyd to Butterfield, June 29, 1950, Boyd Papers, Princeton University Library; Boyd et al., *Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 1:xiv.
12. Warren Zevon, "Roll With the Punches," copyright 1992, Zevon Music (BMI).
13. Boyd to Butterfield, June 29, 1950, Butterfield to Boyd, August 29, 1950, and Butterfield to Boyd, January 8, 1951, Boyd Papers, Princeton University Library.
14. Butterfield to Boyd, March 23, 1976, and Boyd to Butterfield, September 24, 1974, Boyd Papers, Princeton University Library.
15. Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition. Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*, intro. and notes by Martin Gardner (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000), 121.