1.3.2 Revision

Rereading, reliving, rewriting

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Understood in its broadest sense, as the amelioration or improvement of an earlier textual state, revision is a universal compositional practice. At the same time, authors' ideas about revision, their capacity for making changes, and the changes themselves are strongly influenced by both the material circumstances of writing and by broader cultural ideas about originality and the ontology of artworks. In addition, the study of revision informs very different intellectual disciplines and methodologies: creative writing pedagogy; editorial practice; traditional biographical criticism; and genetic criticism. This chapter provides a basic typology of different types of revision and comments on the complex types of evidence with which critics have to contend.

Keywords: revision, creative writing, writing pedagogy, editing, typescript, manuscript, intentionality, revision history, modernism, Henry James, *Mansfield Park*

Improvement is one of the constant goals of human activity. In her most serious and philosophical novel *Mansfield Park* Jane Austen allows the word, and its cognates, to describe many kinds of changes in state: a garden being laid out anew, a country house being remodelled, a young woman's complexion becoming more attractive, a mind being improved by reading. But, if the aim of improvement is gradual and beneficent change, by altering something's qualities without changing its essence, the risk is that it either goes too far, destroying the original entirely, or is simply impossible. In the latter case, improvement is seen, in Austen's subtly conservative novel, as potentially wasteful, unnecessary, or illustrative of personal vanity: a nuisance.

> Three years ago the Admiral, my honoured uncle, bought a cottage at Twickenham for us all to spend our summers in; and my aunt and I went down to it quite in raptures; but it being excessively pretty, it was soon found necessary to be improved, and for three months we were all dirt and confusion, without a gravel walk to step on, or a bench fit for use.
>
> (Austen 1816: 117)

Revision is one of these practices. It describes changes made to a text that, in some important sense, already exists, changes sufficiently substantial to alter the meaning of that text, and sufficiently limited to allow the ontology of the text to be preserved. In this sense, it produces *new versions* of an original text, not a new text entirely. And, like other kinds of improvement, it is often regarded – by both writers and readers – with a mixture of hope and suspicion: hope that a secondary process might turn a humdrum or conventional or otherwise flawed piece of writing into something better, suspicion that revision might not alter a work's essential quality,

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thereby wasting time that would be better devoted to new work. The motivating factor is often disappointment. Jane Austen's nephew said that, on finishing *Persuasion*, "her performance did not satisfy her. She thought it tame and flat and was desirous of producing something better" (Austen-Leigh 1870: 218). This disappointment is not necessarily an objective judgment of the work as it is, but an expression of some felt gulf between conception and realisation, as if the accomplished text is only a poor imitation of the real art-work, conceived as metaphysically primary. On "finishing" the first complete draft of the *Prelude* in 1805, Wordsworth found that he was "dejected on many accounts: when I looked back upon the performance, it seemed to have a dead weight about it, – the reality so far short of the expectation" (Wordsworth 1851: 310).

In this most general sense, the desire to revise crosses all period and genre boundaries. Since the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in the early twentieth century, scholars have almost universally accepted that the text of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was produced through collaborative composition in performance. The first written texts, now lost in turn, postdated the period of composition by some hundreds of years. Textual difficulties in the surviving manuscripts (the earliest complete texts are medieval) therefore have to be regarded as the result of scribal corruption, not authorial revision. However, as Lord was at pains to explain, oral composition is always already revisionary, for the individual poet "remakes its form each time he tells it; each time the configuration of the themes may be somewhat different and their expression in formulae will fit the requirements of the moment, metrical, melodic, psychological" (Lord 1962: 186).

In much more recent periods, some poets have continued to compose "in their head" or aloud, completing a first version before committing the text to paper. The German term "Kopfarbeiter" (Scheibe 1998) is sometimes used to describe this process; in fact, Wim Van Mierlo suggests that, rather than being unusual, "we tend to see poets mainly as Kopfarbeiter who think their poems into existence before committing them to paper" (Van Mierlo 2016: 22).[1] What is required for revision is not a written text, but a fixed one. Wordsworth is often at pains to emphasise that his shorter poems were produced *ex tempore* and orally, often requiring little correction. But his descriptions also admit that the process of "writing down" (often via dictation) gives space for retrospective criticism, both by the poet and his small initial audience, and so the two-stage process is also, at least in principle, inherently revisionary. He describes writing (his word) "We are Seven" as follows:

> I composed it while walking in the grove at Alfoxden. My friends will not deem it too trifling to relate, that while walking to and fro I composed the last stanza first, having begun with the last line. When it was all but finished, I came in and recited it to Mr. Coleridge and my sister, and said, "A prefatory stanza must be added, and I should sit down to our little tea-meal with greater pleasure if my task was finished". (Wordsworth 1854: 356)

1. It is much more difficult to imagine doing this for a complete work in prose, but the distinction between *Kopfarbeit* and *Papierarbeit* is forced, if it suggests that the two are mutually exclusive activities. Any writer might form a sentence or some part of a sentence as a phrase in mind, reconsider it, and revise before beginning to write or type.

In general, the act of remediation involved in shifting from one medium to another – oral composition to manuscript, manuscript to typescript, typescript to first proof, first proof to page proofs, first edition to second edition, and so on – encourages revision, first by providing writers with an opportunity to read their work over with fresh eyes, and secondly by making the possibility of a new and improved text possible. Paul Valéry describes this kind of rereading as "reading after forgetting", and reading "without tenderness, without paternity; rather, with coldness and a sharply critical eye" (Valéry 1992: 73; my translation).

Consequently, although the desire to revise may be universal, writers' actual ability to do so is strongly situational, dependent on a variety of economic and cultural factors. In the twentieth century, cheap paper, longer lifespans, longer protection of works by copyright, closer relationships between writers and their publishers (enabled, in part, by greater mobility and more rapid methods of communication) and the technology of, first, the typewriter and, later, the personal computer have conspired to produce a textual environment materially conducive to revision. At the same time, the emerging idea of the writer not as jobbing hack, moving swiftly from one work to the next, or romantic genius subject to intense, but fitful, outbursts of creativity, but as a trained, committed *professional* with a distinctive and carefully honed skill set has promoted revision's importance, even its necessity.

Problems of definition

In some ways revision is like obscenity; hard to define and delimit precisely, but easy to recognise in practice ("you know it when you see it"). And the English word refers to a wide variety of retrospective activities – not only making textual corrections but studying for an exam, adjusting proposed spending (upwards or downwards), altering an architectural plan, etc. Even within literary studies, it is used to refer to a variety of materially and categorically different things, and the boundary between revision and adjacent textual operations – fresh composition, on the one hand, and corrective editing, on the other, isn't always easy to observe. There is also a subtle but important difference between "a revision" and "revision".

"A revision" refers simply to the difference between two versions of the same text: it is a measure of a gap. It carries the implication, without specifying any details, that this gap is the result of an authorised process of intentional change. Wikipedia's "revision history" for example, documents the changes made to a Wikipedia article since its creation and the source of those changes, without necessarily making it clear *why* the changes were made, or whether they have persisted into the final document (that is, whether the revisions were felicitous or infelicitous).

In the second sense, "revision" refers not to a single change or even set of changes, but to the larger, intentional process of *revising* – a process whose goals might be well-defined ("make the argument clearer", "condense the opening") before the particular strategies for achieving those goals are discovered. In theory, one could undertake a process of revision, in this second sense, and find nothing that needed altering, that is without effecting any revisions. Monica Ali,

for example, describes her ethic of revision as follows: "I revise constantly, every day I revise and revise, although I don't always change a great deal" (Sullivan 2013: 2).

In this second sense, revision is closely associated with intellectual property; anyone might make a small change to the text, but only the original author can undertake the process of revision. Everyone else edits. In reality, as Jerome McGann, Robert Darnton, and many other late twentieth-century scholars have detailed, writing and rewriting are not usually done in splendid isolation. Within Anglo-American editing, the term revision is therefore usually extended to describe practices of "voluntary collaboration" (Tanselle 1976: 190), where the original author is seen as "inviting" a collaborator at some later stage in the compositional process to make changes of their own: Percy Shelley's work on Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, and Ezra Pound's editing of *The Waste Land* drafts are two often cited examples.

The mere fact of textual variance allows us to talk about revision in the first sense but, to discuss revision as a process, we need some further descriptive biographical or contextual information (the kind of information that Monroe and Beardsley found illicit in their influential and dogmatic 1946 essay "The Intentional Fallacy"). In the case of *The Waste Land*, for example, we have Pound and Eliot's correspondence about the poem from the winter of 1921–1922, as well as the now-published facsimile of the original manuscript and typescript pages, and various comments made in later life by both men. Taken as a whole, this widely available body of evidence details the anguish and uncertainty of a process of extreme excision – Pound's maieutic operation. When this information is scanty or altogether absent – a state of affairs possible at any period, but more likely for texts written before the eighteenth century – then a revision practice (revision in the second sense) can be deduced only after the fact, as a possible explanation for a single text presenting in more than one significantly different form. At the same time, revision is rarely the only possible explanation for variance. In the early 1980s, scholars such as Michael Warren, Gary Taylor, and Steven Urkowitz enthusiastically promoted the idea that all significant differences between the Folio and Quarto texts of *King Lear* were due to Shakespeare's own careful and deliberate revision rather than a confused and random process of corruption. But, as Sidney Thomas points out, in a measured critique, this is an argument in danger of proving only its own premises, with the result that "every variant in the Folio, whether of addition or omission, is not only taken as supporting that belief, but is subjected to an Alexandrian subtlety and sophistication of analysis, so that even brief phrases are weighted down with suppositious meaning" (Thomas 1984: 507).

Types of revision

In the simplest, synchronous, model, revisions can be, at the level of an individual sentence:

1. Substitutions: in the most minimal case, one word or phrase swapped for another; in a poem, some relineation or change of form (such as modification of an abab rhyme scheme to abac); in the extreme case, the sentence is rewritten entirely.
2. Additions: a sentence is extended with an extra clause, a lengthier description, an extra example, etc; at the limit case, it is merged with another complete sentence.

3. Deletions: some part of the sentence (a superfluous adjective or adverb, an extraneous clause) is trimmed; at the limit case, the sentence is deleted entirely.

Can we also use this model for thinking about the revision of a text as a whole? In a purely theoretical sense, only revision by addition could operate as the single revisionary mode of an entire text. An entirely additive process would involve the joining of a first draft to some additional material (further chapters, an epilogue, an extra act in a play) to create the whole. If the entire text were swapped out or deleted, so that none of the original sentences remained, the writer might, in some sense, be engaged on the same writing project, but we would not call the new text a revision of the first: revision always implies some continuity, as well as some change.

In fact, most writers make use of all three modes in revising their work, but it can still be useful to depict a *general* process of textual change as being primarily substitutive, additive, or excisive. In some cases, the preferred type of revision will be intimately related to the genre and nature of the document. Substitution is more straightforward, more local, and more common in literary texts than revision by extreme, length-altering deletion or addition. By the principle of the old editorial rule *lectio difficilior potior* [the more difficult reading is preferable] substitutions also blur more easily into corrections and edits made by other hands. Marianne Moore's reduction of "Poetry" from thirty or so lines in 1919 to three in 1967 is a textual decision so peculiar, so ascetic, that no editor would venture it. The epigraph to her – ironically titled – *Complete Poems* makes this point overtly: "Omissions are not accidents".

We can also think about revision diachronically, as an activity that may begin at the same time as fresh composition while also extending far past the initial publication of a work. Here the main distinction to be made is between revision occurring:

1. During the process of first-draft composition, before a full draft is yet complete; in this case, the writer is almost always revising alone, in private, and the revisions may have an exploratory purpose.
2. During the process of editing after completion of a first draft; here editors, agents, readers may be asked for their opinion.
3. After initial publication; this may be rapid, as in the case of a serialised Dickens novel printed for the first time as a book, or after the elapse of some significant period of time.

Although it may be useful to make some distinction between revisions made while still writing (these might be thought of as changes, borrowing an old scribal term, made *currente calamo*, with a running pen) and those made after the completion of a first draft, the primary and most important distinction is that between *pre-publication* and *post-publication* revision. Pre-publication revision happens almost entirely in private. Post-publication revision is, inevitably, public. Completing a revision process successfully requires demoting all prior versions of a text to the level of a draft, a document *towards* a finished product rather than the finished product itself. But, once a text is already published and circulating, read, reviewed, and discussed, this becomes impossible in any straightforward way. Readers are always at liberty to prefer the earlier version.

In the preface to *The Golden Bowl*, first published in 1904 and reissued in 1909 as the 23rd volume of the New York Edition, Henry James gives considerable analytic thought to the question of what revision is, explaining that "what rewriting might be was to remain – it has remained for me to this hour – a mystery." Instead, he describes his process as based primarily on the act of rereading and, in doing this he returns the word to its etymological source: the Latin *re-visere* means, literally, "to see again": "To revise is to see, or to look over, again – which means in the case of a written thing neither more nor less than to re-read it" (James 1909: xvi).

In fact, this is somewhat disingenuous. When James reread his earlier novels for the New York Edition he wasn't merely turning the published pages. Had he done so, his revision process would, necessarily, have been less extensive; the original pages did not have enough space for alterations more extensive than simply transpositions, deletions, or the swapping in and out of individual words. Instead, his agent James P. Pinker pasted the published text on to large wide-margined pages and it was on these revision documents – with their additional space for new writing – that James's process of "re-reading" was enacted. James Joyce made a similar request when he wrote to John Quinn 1920, "I must stipulate to have three sendings of proofs (preferably a widemargined one must be pulled)" (qtd in Groden 1977: 179). For these fastidious writers, the ideal revision document is one enabling both reading and writing; like Freud's mystic writing pad, it is a surface which retains all traces forever, without ever running out of space. As such, it is also a document that subtly positions the revised artwork within the literary field, sacrificing obvious economic gain for prestige and symbolic capital. Bourdieu argues that artists committed to autonomy "have to accept all the consequences of the fact that the only remuneration they can count on will be necessarily deferred" (Bourdieu 2018: 82). For modernist writers, in fact, revision became a guarantee of literary value; they "revised overtly, passionately, and at many points in the lifespan of their texts", embracing "large-scale transformations of length, structure, perspective, and genre" (Sullivan 2013: 2). And, in accordance with Bourdieu's argument, their incomplete manuscripts and proofs were often sold at some later, "deferred" date for far higher prices than the finished product was able to achieve at the initial moment of publication.

Moreover, even when the claims of the revised version are obvious, readers almost always prefer textual singularity to multiplicity. And this problem arises not only when writers make post-publication revisions, but whenever any new material relating to the text comes into print; in this way, paradoxically, the *avant-texte* becomes *après*. The academic study of modern literature – where earlier complete versions of major texts are available for study alongside the published version – increasingly requires a diploid reading process of this kind. Christine Froula, for example, has described the 1971 publication of *The Waste Land* facsimile as leading to readings that "cross easily between the 1921 and 1922 texts" (Froula 1996: 313). T. S. Eliot made very minimal changes after initial publication to the text of *The Waste Land*. But, by publishing the pre-publication drafts, Valerie Eliot inevitably complicated our reading of the poem; like a process of post-publication revision, more material was now in view. And here a kind of paradox emerges: if revision begins with a desire to finalise, to fix absolutely, to render perfect, to pick one correct version and render the others null, it always leads (unless all of the documen-

tation can be destroyed) to a textual condition that is messy, imprecise, and ambiguous, the final version haunted by the various roads not taken.

Evidence

In this way, genetic dossiers tend to be both too complete and too meagre. Our linear language-processing systems make it hard, if not impossible, to read with understanding in a facing-page edition, skipping between two undecidable alternatives. In some sense, more than one reading is one too many. At the same time, we very rarely have *all* of the information we would like about a text's genesis. Some key piece of paper is always missing, as two rather different authorial examples – Henry James and James Joyce – will indicate.

In the case of James's novels (the majority) and tales (many) revised for the New York Edition, we usually have three different versions of the text: the initial magazine publication, the first book publication, and the New York Edition. The full history of James's revisions after initial publication is relatively easy to construct, even if we often remain puzzled about *why* certain changes were thought necessary. In the 1881 edition of *Portrait of a Lady*, James described Ralph Touchett's reaction to becoming an invalid as an embrace of passivity: "A certain fund of indolence that he possessed came to his aid and helped to reconcile him to doing nothing; for at the best he was too ill for anything but a passive life" (James 1881: 47).

In revising for the New York Edition, James turned passivity into "sacrifice", and then turned the description into something paradoxical – now Ralph isn't too ill for an active life, he's too ill for anything but a self-sacrificing one, the sacrifice now considered an "arduous game". More peculiarly, "a certain fund" was transformed into "a secret hoard" ("certain" begetting "secret" phonologically, rather than semantically, perhaps), and this new noun was then qualified with the extravagant and peculiar metaphor of a "thick cake":

> A secret hoard of indifference – like a thick cake a fond old nurse might have slipped into his first school outfit – came to his aid and helped to reconcile him to sacrifice; since at the best he was too ill for aught but that arduous game. (James 1908: 52)

Many of James's New York Edition revisions increase the complexity of the text by adding a previously unthought-of metaphor but *why* this should be the case, and how James reworked the wide-margined pages to insert the metaphors, remains unclear: most of the documents have not survived. In addition, we know almost nothing about his original manuscript drafting process (by the beginning of the twentieth century he had begun dictating). The types of documents that have traditionally constituted the material for genetic criticism are almost entirely absent, but the fact of extensive revision remains. Is the apparent privileging, in some cases, of phonology over semantics, as if James was revising the *sound* of the word rather than some fixed narrative meaning, related to his relatively new practice of creating fresh composition by dictating to an amanuensis? In the short story "The Middle Years", "he lived once more into his story" (1893, 1895) becomes "he dived once more into his story"; "manful enough" becomes "painful enough"; in *Portrait of a Lady*, "general herd" becomes "of the world", and "had suffered a marked matura-

tion" chimes into "had become another person". This aspect of James's revisionary practice has yet to be studied; in general, criticism has given little attention to the possibility for revisionary interplay between aural performances or recitations and a written text.

The 63-volume *James Joyce Archive* is, by contrast, brimming with scrawled marginalia, additions, deletions, lacunae and paralipomena: it presents in facsimile the massive, unwieldy, unmasterable collection of documents relating to the composition of Joyce's major works. Hugh Kenner called it "an assault on chaos" (Kenner 1980). But it is also haunted by the figure of scarcity. The evidence is uneven in general, and unevenly distributed across the different episodes; in general, the last stages of the book's genesis are better recorded than the earliest. New material has come to light since the Archive's publication: writing on *Finnegans Wake*, Luca Crispi explains that the "draft code will be disrupted in all those cases when it allocated a place for only one set of page proofs when, as was usually the case, several sets (and multiple copies of these sets) were printed and revised" (Crispi 2002).

How to study revision in texts produced in digital environments (even when those texts are intended to be realised as printed books) remains obscure: authors may leave their computers to university libraries, but the hardware has a finite lifespan and the software they composed in is soon outdated. Some process of remediation is necessary to make the original files available to scholars, but in this process significant information may be lost. The question of what *counts* as significant information is also vexed. Authors do not copy out whole manuscripts to make a few tiny changes; publishers are not willing to create proofs infinitely: each textual stage, in manuscript and typescript, represents in itself some significant intentional process. But, because there is almost no cost to creating a new version in digital environments, the significance of these versions is diminished. If a writer saves the working file of a book at the end of every day, as a matter of habit, the long daily log of these files may obscure rather than reveal key shifts in a creative process.[2]

Analysis

This brings us to the most difficult question of all: what are we looking for, when we look at revisions? What kind of evidence is most useful and what methods should we use to analyse revision histories? Beyond informing our understanding of individual works, is it possible to study revision comparatively, either across authors, genres, or periods? Antoine Compagnon acutely notes that it has never been entirely clear whether genetic criticism is a set of analytical skills or a theory: "is genetic criticism a theory of criticism or just helpful advice, something like: keep in mind that manuscripts can also contribute to the understanding of literature" (Compagnon 1995: 395). How ambitious are we going to be?

The sometimes fractious relationship between different schools of textual critics, as well as, more generally, between textual critics and those "general" literary critics who regard textual problems with indifference has made these questions more charged than they need to be. Is

2. See also Chapter 1.1.6 in this volume.

genetic criticism nothing less than "a linguistics of the written utterance" (Hay 2017: 533), a discipline broader and more extensive than literary scholarship itself? Or is it an illegitimate intellectual activity? Reviewing Alice Quinn's edition of Elizabeth Bishop's "uncollected poems" in 2006, Helen Vendler made a clear, forthright, and immediately disputed argument: most of the "maimed and stunted" poems included should, she argues, never have seen the light of day; this was not Bishop's intention. In an interview with *The New York Times* elaborating on her "scathing review", Vendler made a compelling case for authorial final intention, not as an editorial heuristic but on ethical grounds as a contractually binding interpersonal commitment: "If I had asked somebody to promise to destroy something of mine and they didn't do it I would feel it to be a grave personal betrayal. I wouldn't care what I had left behind. It could have been the 'Mona Lisa'" (Donadio 2006). This is a difficult argument to counter, particularly for living and recently deceased authors whose work is still protected by "moral right".[3]

In reality, there are several different, mutually exclusive (but potentially complementary) *modes* of intellectual enquiry to which revision is relevant; each has a different interest, a different purpose, and, accordingly, will focus on different parts of the textual history.

The first mode of enquiry, which we might call "practical", interrogates the genesis of great works to discover, in a craftsmanlike way, the tricks of the trade. Revision is a major topic in the Creative Writing curriculum and students study early versions to improve their own revisionary skills, learning how particular effects might be achieved after a first draft. The nonfiction writer and creative writing professor Louise DeSalvo began her career by editing and publishing the draft of Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (as *Melymbrosia*). In a recent book about "slow writing" she explains that the longwinded process of hand-copying more than a thousand pages was personally very instructive: "I learned how to revise by studying what Woolf deleted, added, or changed" (De Salvo 2014: 60).

The second mode is editorial. If a novel was printed in two or more different versions, which should we read? The American textual critic Thomas Tanselle proposed in 1976 that we should make a difference between "vertical revision" which "aims at altering the purpose, direction, or character of a work, thus attempting to make a different sort of work out of it" and "horizontal revision" which "aims at intensifying, refining, or improving the work as then conceived" (Tanselle 1976: 193). The first of these, in his account, represents an "altered programmatic intention" while the second does not and so, he argues, "vertical revisions" need to be treated by editors as separate texts, while horizontal revision can be dealt with according to the rules of final-intentionalist editing, by printing an author's final version. But, although attractive as a theoretical model, this binary is not a useful device for classification. Given that authors' intentions in revising are never fully or clearly known to us and have, in fact, to be retrospectively reconstructed from an interpretive reading of variant texts, "vertical" and "hor-

3. Elizabeth Bishop died in 1979, within the last 50 years, and so her work is still protected by under the Berne convention, which defines moral right as: "the right to claim authorship of the work and the right to object to any mutilation, deformation or other modification of, or other derogatory action in relation to, the work that would be prejudicial to the author's honor or reputation" (https://www.wipo.int/treaties/en/ip/berne/summary_berne.html).

izontal" soon bend into a hermeneutic circle. In addition, editors of modern texts have never strictly applied the rule of final intention and often prefer earlier versions, either for their perceived aesthetic merits (freshness, spontaneity) or because these are the historically actual texts that received a contemporary reception. In the case of Henry James, for example, all standard modern editions reprint not the New York Edition, as final intentionalism would dictate, but the text of the first book publication. And how, if at all, should the edition then represent the fact of revision? More scholarly editions of James's novels will often contain an appendix with a list of significant (that is, editorially selected) variants: these documents contain a great deal of information in a compressed space, but lack the immediacy of a manuscript page covered with alterations and crossings out. With texts where the reasons for textual variance are less clear (Shakespeare's plays, for example) the editor may create a synthetic text from two separate versions, trying to balance the possibility that some differences in the texts are intentional with the certainty that others are not (that is, that some are introduced errors).

The third mode is biographical and/or historical, understanding the revision process for a particular text as part of an author's larger creative practice and working habits; trying to relate genetic processes to writers' intellectual thought; or comparing the revisionary practices of a number of different writers to build up a sense of compositional and print culture at a particular moment in time. This may simply be a case of a biographer detailing how a text was written, how long it took, and how easily it was finished. It is hard to imagine a biography of Flaubert or Joyce that didn't dwell on the subject's commitment to revision as part of a larger passionate commitment to style in and of itself. But some of the most extended and subtle literary readings of whole revisionary processes are also psychological, even psychoanalytic: Stephen Gill's account of Wordsworth's belief in continuity as the foundation of personal identity (Gill 2011: 1–12); Philip Horne on James's wavering between self-possession and self-confidence (Horne 1990: 48); Dirk Van Hulle on Beckett's "extremely ambiguous attitude to progress for the sake of progress" (Van Hulle 2004: 6).

Genetic criticism makes its investment in psychoanalysis more explicit, even as it rigorously dissevers the text from the author. In his influential book *Le texte et l'avant texte*, Jean Bellemin-Noël explained that his aim was to show "to what extent poems *write themselves* despite, or even against, authors who believe they are implementing their writerly craft" (Bellemin-Noël 1972, qtd in Deppman et al. 2004: 8). In fact, as all poets know, poems do not write themselves: you have to sit down and write them. At the same time, there is clearly an unconscious, unpredictable and mysterious element in this; the poem you mean to write is never the poem you do write, and the poem you have written is, therefore, always a surprise. If creative writing programs insist too firmly that revision is *always* a beneficent tool, allowing the better realisation of an author's well-framed and explicit intention, some genetic critics are fanciful in their willingness to lend agency to inanimate documents. And perhaps all of us are too easily tempted by teleological narratives, as if the process of working through versions must inevitably lead to the writer improving the text and making it "more itself", or to some process of the repression or bringing to light of painful material. Although narratives of a text being "cured" (or curing itself) and improved (or becoming self-improving) are attractive, some revi-

sion patterns are oscillating rather than linear, as a writer chooses *a*, then not *a*, then *a* again. In other cases, different aspects of the text move in conflicting directions and writers do not always act in their own best interests (Sullivan 2016: 94). Born out of disappointment, even as it expresses hope for the future, revision is not always a practice that finds or seeks resolution. Trading certainty for uncertainty, it intrinsically flouts narrative closure; there is never a need, while the author remains alive, to write *FINIS* for the final time; and the field of available information, particularly for modern texts, is unstable, always potentially subject to further expansion. It remains a challenging object of study.

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