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INTERPRETATIVE AIMS AND TEXTUAL-CRITICAL DECISIONS: SOME HISTORICAL CONSTRAINTS IN THE DISCRIMINATION OF TEXTUAL VERSIONS

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I want to start with a tribute and an explanation. I assume that I am not the only participant who found himself impressed, daunted, even awed, by Peter Shillingsburg's recent taxonomy of textual versions [in the 1991 *Studies in Bibliography*]. At the end of this paper, I want to take up his key thesis, where he argues that "version" is not an intrinsic textual property but an analytical or critical category (p. 67). I can say now that I agree with this thesis, in the context in which he puts it forward, as I think anyone would do who has themselves struggled with Victorian poetic manuscripts. Because of my suspicion of speech-act theory, it's an article that I'm still coming to terms with, but I would be a fool to take issue on broad theoretical questions at this point.

What I want to do in the body of this paper instead, therefore, awed and daunted as I am, is to defer direct engagement with Professor Shillingsburg's taxonomy, and turn to some specific Victorian version-texts, in the simple and untheoretical way that best suits my interests and talents. I've been a bit puzzled by how briskly the *Studies in Bibliography* tradition has been able to recuperate from the cogent socio-historical critique mounted by Professor McGann and others in the mid-nineteen-eighties. More and more, scholarly interpretation of Victorian texts is socio-historical in perspective, and the result is a gap between editorial practice and interpretative practice. My examples will be taken from canonical works by Tennyson and Newman, the kind of thing we all teach, about which the production facts are well-known and long known, but for which the standard editions simply don't fit with the way the works are being read.

First, Tennyson. From Churton Collins onwards -- indeed, since the early reviews --, everyone has known that Tennyson rewrote his poems. By and large, conveniently for editors, Tennyson himself was Whiggish about this rewriting, viewing his early texts as simply discarded early stages in a purposeful evolution. Indeed, in my early work on Clough, I got used to contrasting Tennyson's convergent revision patterns with Clough's divergent revisions. Tennyson's editors, even his best editor Christopher Ricks, have almost always followed the poet's lead in privileging late authorial texts. The paradox is that critics and teachers overwhelmingly sequence their discussion of Tennyson's work biographically or historically, based on the chronology of first publication, and should, therefore, be examining the earliest production text.

For instance, I've never met a teacher or read a critical book that does not discuss "The Lotos-Eaters," first published in 1832, as a poem of Tennyson's early or Cambridge period, yet every teaching text I use prints the less-coherent 1842 version, where Tennyson added sections 6 and 8 to the Choric Song and pushed his finger on the scales on the side of social responsibility. The "Choric Song" is a classic case for illustrating the anti-historical bias of the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle-Thorpe commitment to final authorial intention. It also might be used a a classic instance to support Hershel Parker's psychologically-based critique of such temporally-distinct revisions, though I should prefer to argue for the 1832 version, not on psychological-aesthetic grounds, but on historical grounds--the need to choose the right text for the critical conclusions being drawn.

Of course, Ricks has in his footnotes all the variants from 1832, and he even prints in full the cancelled first version of section 8. Most Tennyson scholars have the main contrast between the two versions in their heads. There's certainly no question of suppressing textual evidence; indeed, the

very footnote-collation format in which we learn of the difference foregrounds the fact of rewriting over *either* version of the text. The point is the *inconsistency* of the available version for the critical context in which the work is most commonly discussed.

Or take the text of *In Memoriam.* All the teaching texts, just like Ricks and the Clarendon editors, Shatto and Shaw, print a final authorial version, Eversley or 1889. Yet there isn't a classroom in the country, or a critic in the profession, who doesn't view *In Memoriam* as a mid-century text, a work of 1850, just before Darwin, just before the laureateship, just before matrimony. By contrast with the "Choric Song," Tennyson's post-publication revisions to *In Memoriam*, and even his insertions, were fine-tuning, rather than reconceptualization. Few interpreters would like to give up the late insertion "Old warder of these buried bones," written in 1868, and useful for conjuring thematic cohesion from a self-consciously fragmentary work. But it surely does make some difference to the reader whether what we now call the Prologue is part of the main text (as in most modern editions) or a physically-distinct post-compositional retrospective preface, separated from the first poem by the dedication page, as in the early editions. The relatively-limited nature of the *In Memoriam* revisions makes it all the more absurd that practical editors have not printed the right text for the historicist questions nearly all Tennyson interpreters ultimately want to ask.

It was, however, a third Tennyson example that drew my attention back the problem of versions, when a few years ago Susan Shatto published her *Maud, A Definitive Edition.* For her text, Shatto, of course, reprints without emendation Tennyson's final version of 1889. Of all Tennyson's poems, *Maud* is the one about which he was most prickly and defensive, and not coincidentally it was also the one where he had fiddled most after publication. The basic story of the revisions was told by Professor Shannon in the 1950s, in his

study of the early reviews, though Shatto's introduction and collation fills it out. Suffice it to say that for all its early readers, *Maud* was one long poem, with gaps in the story it narrated. It was only bit by bit that Tennyson added stanzas to plug these gaps; it was not till four years after publication that Tennyson divided *Maud* into two parts, and not till 1865 that the familiar three-part structure was introduced.

The difference between the two versions (the 1855 first edition and the final authorial text) has usually been described (for instance by both Shannon and Shatto) as Tennyson clarifying and strengthening the structure of his poem. That surely begs the whole question. The 1855 *Maud* is not self-evidently a poem of which the structure *should* have been clarified or strengthened, and certainly such clarification and strengthening must give a misleading picture of what 1855 readers were reading.

And then there is the specific question of the poem's ending. It was only in 1856 that Tennyson added the last six lines, on which nearly every interpretation of *Maud* rests, with the protagonist's proud claim that "we are noble still / And myself have awaked . . . to the better mind." As Warwick Slinn has recently pointed out, for Tennyson's readers, and reviewers, in 1855, *Maud* ended not with conscious moral self-analysis, but with the lurid "deathful-grinning mouths" of Sebastopol and "The blood-red blossom of war." In closing his interpretation with the earlier, rather than the later, ending, Slinn foregrounds image-based or psychological cohesion as an aesthetic trait, but any implied aesthetic claim for the 1855 text is surely open to just the same objections as Shannon's and Shatto's structural claims for the later one. I'd prefer to base an argument for the 1855 text on historical grounds, on the need to use an 1855 version to draw critical conclusions about 1855 writing and response.

It would be easy enough to multiply examples from Tennyson. An obvious

example of the version-work overlap is "Armageddon" (1824) which was reworked as the prize poem *Timbuctoo* (1829). Though Tennyson never published the earlier poem, and though so much of the second poem is identical in wording with the Trinity manuscript of the first, they are evidently different in date, function, and even title, and Ricks is surely right to print the two versions as separate works.

But consider, for instance, the *Idylls*. These pose special problems for any chronologically-sequenced edition, because their ultimate arrangement bears no relation to the chronology of their composition or publication. In the case of the final Idyll, "The Passing of Arthur," published for the sequence in 1869, there is not only the early version of the work, and early separate publication in 1842, but a distinct early title "Morte D'Arthur" and a distinct early poetic frame. Ricks quite properly deals with this problem by printing the differently-titled early and late versions in full as distinct works.

But the logic of such a decision would lead one also to make separately available the four idylls about marriage and betrayal, first published together, as a distinct volume, in 1859. The text, of course, remained pretty much the same, as the remainder of the idylls were deployed around this initial group of four, yet the meaning of the text was changed by the new arrangement. As Kathleen Tillotson long ago argued, for certain historical purposes, to see certain historical cross-linkings, it is important to disentangle this marriage-betrayal group as a separate work. The four first appeared with none of the later supporting mythic framework and uninterrupted by religious or other tales. One sees different thematic elements in the four idylls is they are read against such contemporary or near-contemporary marriage-texts as *Madame Bovary*, *Modern Love*, Patmore's *The Victories of Love* and Clough's *Mari Magno*. But it is not the thematic possiblilities that justify picking out these for idylls for separate treatment. If I may begin

to give away my case, it is the facts of chronology and publishing history, not just the thematic usefulness of the grouping, that might for many interpretative purposes *necessitate* treating the 1859 four-book *Idylls* as a work distinct from the final twelve-book version.

When one turns to Newman, the issues become clearer and my impatience with dominant editorial practice all the greater. Newman, even more than Tennyson, devoted his later life to the rewriting of his works, almost the rewriting of himself, and each of these rewritings has its biographical and critical interest. As has often been pointed out, almost all Newman's writing except the *Grammar of Assent* was occasional, and often his rewriting is an attempt to decontextualize his thought, to separate his text from the occasion that first wrote it, or, to put it another way, to transmute rhetoric into philosophy.

Two influences have encouraged Newman's editors to collude in this self-rewriting. On one side, a whole generation of literary scholarship aimed to prove that Victorian non-fiction prose was really an art form worthy of New Critical attention; on the other, a whole generation of Second Vatican Catholics desired to show the Cardinal, not just as a mid-Victorian controversialist, but as a Doctor of the Universal Church, whose teaching articulated truths of eternal import. For both groups, a dehistoricized and decontextualized Newman, transcending his originary circumstances, fitted an interpretative agenda.

Now those agendas are no longer the agendas of either literary criticism or historical theology. I can't imagine, for instance, anyone teaching Newman's *Apologia* and not commenting on its complicated interplay between Newman's long-term autobiographical self-fashioning and the particular fight Newman had picked with Charles Kingsley over his review in *Macmillan's Magazine*. Newman's first book version of the *Apologia* (1864), like the original pamphlet series, opened by printing Kingsley's review and the three-way correspondence that had ensued between himself, Kingsley, and Macmillan. But in 1865 Newman replaced the two

opening sections, and changed the titled from *Apologia Pro Vita Sua, being a Reply to a Pamphlet* to the quite different *History of My Religious Opinions*. As he explained in his new Preface, "Did I but consult my own feelings, I should do my best simply to wipe out of my Volume and consign to Oblivion, every trace of the circumstances to which it is to be ascribed." He omitted from the 1865 version "nearly a hundred pages . . . which I could safely consider of merely ephemeral importance," and, even though in 1873 he bowed to public opinion and compromised on the title *Apologia Pro Vita Sua, being a History of My Religious Opinions*, he never restored this deleted material to the text.

Of course, no modern scholar has attempted to repress the *Apologia's* controversial origins. Both Martin Svaglic in the Clarendon edition and David DeLaura in the Norton reprint the original openings as appendices. But both the Clarendon and the Norton are final authorial texts, not that of 1864, with its foregrounding of the biographical and historical context against which almost any conceivable reading would now be set.

The other great Newman work from the teaching canon, which we know as *The Idea of a University*, has pretty much the same textual story and has got the same editorial treatment. Here, of course, the motive for decontextualization is not so much aesthetic or ecclesiastical as academic, the mid-twentieth-century professoriate's need for a mythology of intellectual transcendence, to resist social and institutional self-understanding. The work again has three forms, and again it has three titles.

As most people are aware, Newman originally wrote this book to fit Archbishop Cullen's quite specific prescription, as a series of ten promotional lectures for the projected Catholic University in Dublin. The ten lectures were rhetorically planned to placate or enthuse very varied constituencies, though in the course of writing, and especially in those lectures later in the series, which were written, not for oral delivery, but

only for publication, Newman seems to have been developing arguments chiefly to resist the audiences he was meant to reassure. The 1852 pamphlet-series and book-form publication print all ten lectures, and title them to emphasize the original rhetorical exigencies as *Discourses on the Scope and Nature of a University Education addressed to Dublin Catholics.*

When Newman next reprints the lectures, in 1859, he had founded and for some years administered the Catholic University, had come to distrust Cullen as an academic patron, and had resigned the Rectorship. In the 1859 text, Newman cuts out two lectures, and drops *Discourses* from the title, to refocus the work as a theoretical treatise, *The Scope and Nature of University Education, or University Teaching considered in its Abstract Nature and Scope.* And Newman's third reworking, in 1873, even though it restores one of the deleted chapters, and adds in some of the discipline-based addresses he had given as Rector, emphasizes still further this refocussing with the well-known Platonic title, *The Idea of a University.*

In all three versions, the work is ridden with interesting self-contradictions. As Wilfrid Ward long ago recognized, from these contradictions would soon stem Newman's theological resistance to the dominant Ultramontane tendencies of his contemporary coreligionists. Even if Newman had managed, in revision, to make the book more coherent, which he really didn't, that would still be no reason to choose a later version, when the book chiefly has value as a conflicted document, written out of the strain between Anglican, Ultramontane and Benthamite cultural understandings. For most critics, the later versions have only a footnote value, as evidence of how Newman covered the tracks of his developing theology.

Now, if Bowers or Tanselle were here, --and how strange it is to think that Bowers is dead when he has been the dominant spirit of editorial theory for all our working careers: how much we owed him, how strange is the absence,

yet how lingering the way of thought--; if Tanselle were here, he would presumably respond, with the sweet reasonableness of an experienced Ptolemaic astronomer explaining epicycles to a disagreeable Copernican, that there's nothing in any of my examples to preclude an orthodox copytext editor from taking the critical or meta-editorial decision to establish the earlier text, the 1855 *Maud* or the 1852 *Discourses*. But no editor of Victorian texts ever seems to take that theoretical option.

We are not going to get reedited editions of any of the works I have discussed any time in my probable career, but there are some practical things the average working Victorianist can do about all this. The first is to use the apparatus and textual history sections of the major editions, rather than relying on the reading text; unfortunately, we all know, very few PhDs in English seem capable of reading a collation. The second is to read Victorian works in appropriate early editions; the old green Tennysons, for instance, are present in most library stacks, and, in any case, from *Maud* onwards, they are still fairly cheap. The third is to treasure the odd commercial reprints that, for quirky reasons, once used the unrevised texts of Victorian works; I'm not just thinking of eccentric or serendipitous modern reprints, like the 1959 Collins/Fontana *Apologia* that without even a textual note reprinted the 1864 text, but much more about late Victorian and Edwardian series like the Canterbury Poets or Everyman's Library that, for copyright reasons, reprinted the early texts of Arnold, Clough, Browning and others. Even the 1970s reissues of the Everyman series commonly sandwiched the original plates between their new introduction and annotations. Horrifying though it is, until this year I had always read Newman's ideas about university education in my uncle's old Everyman, which reprints not a final authorial text, but the eight-discourse version of 1859. There must be hundreds of early texts available in such reprint form, once we recognize them.

I have been offering, of course, a very practical, empirical low-level response to the very ambitious theoretical question Professor Gattrell has posed us, about Versions and Works. Of course, too, I have simplified the problems still further by sticking to published versions, production texts, and to examples where in most instances the author had himself signalled through a change or expansion of title the distinctness of the revision from the first published work. But I believe these simple examples should lead to a broader truth, and it is here that I return, still daunted, awed, and uncharacteristically tentative, to Professor Shillingsburg's article and his thesis that a "version" is not an intrinsic textual property, but an analytical or critical construct. I see what he means, and what he's arguing against, in the context in which he says it, and the next time I'm confronted with a naive essentialist textual editor, I shall cite his thesis approvingly.

But I don't meet many naive essentialists nowadays, and I would argue that the kind of criticism most of us are doing puts or should put real constraints on the concept of version we can legitimately utilize. As long as we are posing socio-cultural or psycho-biographical questions about a text, we are or should be constrained to choose an appropriately-constructed version. As long as we read literary texts as the product of complex interactions between author, medium, culture, and audience, we are or should be constrained in most instances to work with production texts, just as Professor McGann has long argued. I don't see my examples as arguing against the conceptual distinctions that Professor Shillingsburg has taxonomized, but I do think that the recent post-structuralizing of the textual-bibliographical vocabulary has so far had disappointingly ahistorical effects on the actual business of editing or of textual choice. We need to seek some kind of consistency or congruence between our critical approach and our choice of the version that we will use for a work.