

9 Creative Writers and Revision

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In this chapter I shall explore several related questions concerning the ways “creative” or “imaginative” writers shape and revise their work. Following a brief survey of creativity and revision, I consider the testimony of writers of poems, plays, short stories and novels regarding revision, inspiration and their own professional practices, both with conventional writing technologies and the computer. A discussion ensues of authorial changes to proofs and galleys, the role of collaboration and editors and revision after publication. I then turn to process criticism—one of the techniques literary scholars have developed to study revision—and conclude with an overview of the implications for the study of literary revision of parallel texts, poststructuralism and hypertext.

The very categories or “types” of writing need to be questioned since all writers face the same fundamental issues. Are essays, for example, to be considered “creative writing”? If not, why not? One might invoke here the writer’s originality, style, or force of personality in distinguishing a “creative” essay from a more pedestrian effort. And when we consider the question of “genre” and the purposes of various forms of writing, it is obvious that the author of a scientific paper or a newspaper article and a poet are after rather different things. The scientist and the journalist presumably seek to convey “objective” facts about the world as concisely and accurately as possible. On the other hand, the poet, novelist, playwright are after lovely, terrible, intangible, interior, “subjective” truths about the human mind and heart: truth is beauty, beauty truth, as John Keats sang.

CREATIVITY AND REVISION

It is precisely this valorizing of the artistic, aesthetic aim that has led to the “romantic” view of literary composition. The activity of the creative writer in antiquity as well as in the Romantic period became linked to a kind of sacred divine mission to reveal resplendent spiritual realities: in Latin, *vates* means both poet and prophet. And *The Gospel According to Saint John* begins: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” Ancient Greek “logos” is word, the divine word (*Oxford Companion to the Bible* 463). Because of this sacralizing connection of the word and writing to the divine afflatus, discussions of creativity have often been reverential. If the poet is an inspired being who makes contact with a transcendental realm in the act of composing then it follows that literature springs—like Athena—directly and perfectly from the head of Zeus. No revision is necessary because the work, like the creation of the cosmos, has in a sense a divine origin.

The Romantic conception of inspiration thus tended to ignore or minimize revision as the central locus of creative activity because composition presumably comes effortlessly to geniuses. However, the documentary evidence suggests otherwise. While inspiration undoubtedly exists, revision is just as much a part of the practice of creative writers as of journalists, scientists, diarists, letter writers and mundane composers of e-mail messages. But exactly how do writers make a work of art? What words, ideas, images, paragraphs, chapters do they add, delete, revise, move around and in what sequence? The actual behavior of writers suggests that the dividing lines between initial idea, drafting, letting the material “incubate” and revision towards a final published work are often blurred. Each step of the process leads forwards and backwards. Perhaps by understanding the revision process we can begin to fathom the mystery of literary creation.

Indeed, when we study revision, are we studying a discrete activity, or are we confronting the actual genesis of the work of art? One might well argue that the initial “bolt from the blue,” the moment of inspiration is the easy, given part and the hard work of revision is the real creative act. Anyone who doubts that revision is creative should examine the drafts of *Finnegans Wake* by James Joyce. Joyce’s astonishing manuscript is a maze of crossed-out words, bold scrawls, huge Xs splayed across the page, squiggly lines, scratches, a labyrinth, a mas-

sive, splendid, messy, outlandish display of genius. Indeed, examining Joyce's mad pages one might well ask the frequent question about the dividing line between genius and insanity: these outpourings appear to be the ravings of a psychotic. Yet out of that chaos, Joyce made his own unique order. It is rather like Michelangelo shaping his *David* out of a huge block of marble, chipping away by hand slowly at his gargantuan marble slab to reveal the lovely precise shape conceived by his imagination's eye hidden in the stone.

Furthermore, in writing a draft, writers often speak of finding what they have to say in the process of trying to say it. They find their way to their true thoughts about a subject only through wrestling through the fierce struggle of putting words down on paper. The Romanian essayist and aphorist E.M. Cioran remarked wittily: "Perhaps we should publish only our first drafts, before we ourselves know what we are trying to say" (65). In the search for expression, one finds out that to which one is really committed. And there is often great surprise for the writer as he/she discovers in the act of writing what lies dormant within the self. The starkness of black typed words on the white page—and as we shall see, subsequent page proofs and galleys—compels a new encounter with the complexities of self-expression. It is significant that W.H. Auden, when rejecting some of his poems for inclusion in his *Collected Poems*, declared they were not "authentic." Since writing them, he had moved on, or was able with time to see in them a falsity which he had not previously apprehended. One revises until one achieves the most stylish presentation of the self, or—as Vladimir Nabokov thought—until the words have yielded the writer as much pleasure as they can.

The question of revision did not arise in preliterate, oral cultures in which myths, ritual activities and epic poetry were improvised/memorized and passed on from generation to generation. There was of necessity variation in the multiple versions of each performance of the work. Creativity was demonstrated in the process of continual "revision" of a primal version of a myth or poem. However, slowly and gradually, humans shifted from oral to written culture. One of the immediate practical problems in attempting to understand the history of revision is the fact that the classics of antiquity are mute. How was the Sumerian epic *Gilgamesh* composed? That is, how did the version we have inscribed on clay tablets in cuneiform script happen? And Homer, if he/she existed, left no blotted pages of the *Iliad* and *Odys-*

sey for us to study. These are oral compositions, recited by *rhapsodes*, but at some point a single or several human beings (I say “human beings” advisedly—Robert Graves argued in his novel *Homer’s Daughter* (1955) that the “author” of *The Odyssey* was a woman) wrote down an actual text. We possess no manuscript drafts of poems in process by Sappho, Catullus, Horace or Virgil. And we are in the same ignorant situation with respect to the great dramatists Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. It was not until several versions of the same text on clay or papyrus proliferated that the question of an “authentic” text arose. And it was not until Gutenberg’s movable type and the conception of an “authoritative” version of a literary work that the multiple issues and problems of revision have preoccupied scholars.

As we move toward our own times, the complexity brought into the question of revision with the advent of the printing press led to the rise of textual criticism in which the scholar in a sense “revises” the work of another author. The ancient *palimpsest*—a piece of parchment or a tablet on which one or more earlier erased texts can be discerned—is an apt symbol for the problems confronting the student of revision: what is the relationship between all the various drafts of a literary work? Which one may lay claim to greatest “authenticity”? During the development of Classical and Biblical studies, scholars attempted to discover the most accurate form of texts through a study of the manuscript tradition. Modern researchers then continued this tradition of “textual criticism” with reference to literary works.

The textual critic attempts to establish a “definitive” version through minutely checking what the author “originally” wrote, searching for typographical errors and possible mistakes by earlier editors. The subsequent printed editions must then also be studied and checked against what are believed to be the author’s original “intentions.” They may make “emendations” to the text (from Latin *emendare*: “to remove lies”) and often provide an *apparatus criticus* at the bottom of the page which contains variant readings. One can immediately see the problems which arise during this process, since a great deal of second-guessing and intuition is required of the scholar in establishing a putative authentic text. Indeed, as we shall see at the conclusion of this essay, the whole procedure raises the question of whether such a thing as a “true, original, authentic, original” text even exists. Fredson Bowers at the University of Virginia (a great deal of textual criticism has been published by the University of Virginia Press) defined the four

functions of the textual critic in the following ways: “(1) To analyze the characteristics of an extant manuscript, (2) to recover the characteristics of the lost manuscript that served as copy for a printed text, (3) to study the transmission of the printed text, and (4) to present an established and edited text to the public” (Holman 475). The activity of the textual critic may thus be said to be the study of revision in all of its possible permutations.

During the rise of Romanticism and the beginnings of the twentieth century the psychology of creativity began to preoccupy philosophers and psychologists. Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, C.G. Jung, Jacques Maritain, Ernst Kris, Johan Huizinga, Albert Rothenberg and Howard Gardner have all explored the creative process. How do writers, musicians, artists, scientists get their ideas and what happens to these ideas once they appear? One can see immediately the connection of revision to this question, since it is rare that the initial inspiration does not require some—or considerable—reworking and elaboration. In some cases, vague ideas lie fallow in the subconscious for a time and then seem rather suddenly and mysteriously to take tangible shape. This corresponds to what Isaac Asimov termed the “Eureka Phenomenon.” What has *seemed* to be a sudden burst of “inspiration” (“eureka”—“I have found it!”—is what Archimedes exclaimed when he discovered in his bathtub the law of the displacement of bodies) in this view is actually a long, submerged process of silent shaping by the powers of the unconscious which only *appears* to be a sudden implosion of energetic creative force. Yet great artists seem to get their ideas from nowhere, and the belief in inspired, spontaneous, untutored genius has become a familiar commonplace in the popular imagination.

A frequently cited paradigm of the creative process introduced by G. Wallas in *The Art of Thought* (1926) also informs the work of later theorists such as Catherine Patrick’s *What is Creative Thinking?* (1955) and Silvano Arieti in *Creativity: The Magic Synthesis* (1976). Arieti summarizes Wallas’s conception of creativity as involving four stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (15). This paradigm mirrors the testimony of writers who prepare through thinking about their project and gathering materials; the second stage of unconscious silent activity; the third “eureka” or inspirational moment and finally verification or revision. Yet as we shall see, many writers experience revision itself as an essential aspect of creating a work of

art and “inspiration” is only one stage which they encounter during a long, involved process.

WRITERS ON REVISION

In the next five sections, I shall discuss several major aspects of revision: writers' own reports of their revision practices; revision and computers; the role of collaborators and editors; revision of proofs and galleys and revision after publication. When we turn to the testimony of authors themselves, we find a number of individual revision practices. Our sources for this information are writers' manuscripts, printed computer sheets, proofs, galleys, published texts, letters, notebooks, diaries, journals as well biographical studies. A good deal of documentary evidence and scholarship on literary revision has appeared in the past twenty years. David Madden and Richard Powers's *Writers' Revisions* is an excellent bibliography of articles and books about literary revision. Interviews are another important source and the series begun by George Plimpton—*Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews*—provides valuable insights regarding the composing process. The University of Mississippi Press has also brought out more than thirty interview volumes in their *Literary Conversations* series, while William Packard, the editor of the *New York Quarterly*, has edited two volumes of interviews with poets, *The Craft of Poetry* and *The Poet's Craft*. Thirty-one profiles from *Writer's Digest* containing additional insights concerning revision have been published under the title *On Being a Writer*.

John Kuehl's *Creative Writing and Rewriting: Contemporary American Novelists at Work* includes drafts and published versions of work by Eudora Welty, Kay Boyle, James Jones, Bernard Malamud, Wright Morris, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Philip Roth, Robert Penn Warren, John Hawkes and William Styron. *Writers on Writing*, edited by Robert Pack and Jay Parini contains essays by contemporary American writers on their working habits. *A Piece of Work, Five Writers Discuss Their Revisions: Tobias Wolff, Joyce Carol Oates, Tess Gallagher, Robert Coles, Donald Hall* includes manuscript pages along with the commentary by the writers themselves concerning their revisions. Kenneth Koch's *The Modern Library Writer's Workshop: A Guide to the Craft of Fiction* includes a chapter on literary revision while Mike Sharple's *How We Write: Writing as Creative Design* has a section on revision which ex-

plores Wordsworth's working methods during the composition of *The Prelude*. The most frequent question posed in these studies may be summed up: "How does the writer do it?" That is, what is the process, the alchemy that allows him/her to make a poem, story, novel or play *ex nihilo*?

In particular, the writers are asked repeatedly about revision, as if this information might provide the clue to their creativity. When we hear a symphony, contemplate a painting or sculpture, see a play or read a literary work, we are experiencing the finished product, and thus we do not have access to the messy changes and jagged evolution of the ideas which have laboriously been shaped into harmonious form. Thus we must look "behind the curtain" to observe the metamorphosis of the ungainly draft/caterpillar into the glorious artistic butterfly.

Fortunately, most writers are eager to describe their revisions, however an exception is Vladimir Nabokov (a distinguished lepidopterist as well as novelist of genius) who did not relish the idea of sharing his literary larvae with the public. When asked by an interviewer if he would allow him to see his revisions, Nabokov replied haughtily: "I'm afraid I must refuse. Only ambitious nonentities and hearty mediocrities exhibit their rough drafts. It is like passing around samples of one's sputum" (*Strong Opinions* 4). Expensive sputum however: famous writers' manuscripts sell are expensive items on the collectors' market. One need only consult the catalogues of antiquarian dealers or visit eBay on the Internet to see the exorbitant prices fetched by literary manuscripts. Generally, the more revisions the writer has made, the more costly the manuscript: additional testimony to the abiding curiosity of the general public as well as literati regarding creative genius.

Invariably the *Paris Review* also reproduced manuscript pages of the writers interviewed indicating numerous deletions, additions, substitutions and crossed out passages. Good writers are as concerned about the mundane aspects of revision or "editing"—punctuation, semicolon or colon, is this paragraph too long?—as they are about whether the Muse will visit them that morning or not. Rhythm, phrasing, tone, word choice, euphony: manuscripts are frequently a labyrinth of ideas accepted and then rejected, proof of the intense pursuit of the ideal, the seemingly endless trial-and-error process at work. These pages perhaps are included as the evidence we seek as readers of the joys, agonies and mystery of the creative process. One of the most fa-

mous comments on revision is contained in the *Paris Review* interview with Ernest Hemingway concerning the ending of his novel *Farewell to Arms* (1926): "I rewrote the ending to *Farewell to Arms*, the last page of it, thirty-nine times before I was satisfied." The interviewer then asked: "Was there some technical problem there? What was it that had stumped you?" Hemingway: "Getting the words right" (*Writers at Work*, Second Series 222).

There is a wide range of revision practices recounted by writers: there are as many kinds of revisers as there are writers. Each has a personal set of habits, rituals and techniques which include a variety of individual, idiosyncratic approaches. Many report that the practical "nuts and bolts" aspects of composition—what type of pencil or pen to use, buying paper and expensive cartridges for the printer, getting situated happily and comfortably at one's desk, having hot coffee nearby and J.S. Bach on the radio—are equally important parts of the process. Many writers speak of the role of the "technology" of writing in the writing/revision process. Some write in longhand with a pencil, some with pen, some with typewriters, many with computers. Others have secretaries who transcribe their work or ask family members for help—Jim Harrison relies on his daughter as editor. Eudora Welty cut up her texts with scissors and pinned them together, allowing her to move sections of her stories around to see how they would best fit together. Vladimir Nabokov composed and revised his novels in pencil on index cards and was fastidious about his tools: "I am rather particular about my instruments: lined Bristol cards and well sharpened, not too hard, pencils capped with erasers" (*Writers at Work*, Fourth Series 101). And as we shall see, the computer has further influenced how writers revise. Yet all authors have two things in common: they experience writing and rewriting as organic, "natural" parts of an ongoing process which involves mysterious cognitive, emotional and spiritual areas of the self and they all revised their work before publication. Some, such as W.B. Yeats, W.H. Auden and Robert Lowell, revised it extensively even after publication.

We are dependent upon the narratives writers themselves supply concerning their craft, but in many cases we also have manuscripts and drafts which allow us to compare what writers say they do against what they do in reality. My sense is that virtually all of the accounts I have read are fairly reliable concerning the writers' actual practices, but the only way to verify this would be to make a case by case study of

each author, comparing his/her accounts of the revision process with accounts of colleagues, friends and fellow professionals and comparing these accounts with the actual manuscripts and corrected galleys or typescripts. And although as we leave antiquity and the Middle Ages and come closer to our own times we know much more about compositional practices, we must however often rely on the testimony of the writers themselves and sometimes this information is suspect. John Livingston Lowes in *The Road to Xanadu: A Study of the Ways of the Imagination* suggested that Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous account of the genesis of "Kubla Khan" in an opium dream is doubtful and that Coleridge had in fact developed his great poem from a number of books he had read which supplied his unconscious with the materials for inspiration (Perkins 11). Thus we must proceed with caution when we attempt to make generalizations regarding how "creative writers" go about their work

In terms of psychological types, writers fall into basically one of two categories: Dionysian or Apollonian. I take my terms from Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he characterizes ancient Greek culture as being dominated by two powerful gods in dialectical opposition: Dionysus the god of wine, ecstasy and unconscious instinctive power and Apollo, the god of reason, light, wisdom and consciousness. The Dionysian writers generally place their faith in the dark forces of the instinctive side of the mind, while Apollonian writers are devoted to reason and logic. When we turn to the authors' descriptions of their own behaviors, it can be clearly seen that they tend to fall broadly into one of these two categories. However, the fact that they are artists in the first place may suggest that they have a more direct relation to their unconscious, to the materials of dream, imagination, invention and fantasy. I do not mean to suggest that these are in any way hard and fast structures of creative activity. Of course writers constantly move back and forth between the two poles of expressive abandon and rational control, between romantic and realist, between flow and restriction, between Dionysus and Apollo—as we all do in our daily lives. Yet general personality types or structure do dominate the development of the creative self and we should not ignore this when we attempt to study revision.

The creative process many of the writers discuss follows the general outlines of the stages of creativity formulated by G. Wallas in 1926 in his seminal book *The Art of Thought*: preparation, incubation, illumi-

nation and verification. Malcolm Cowley, who edited the first volume of the *Paris Review* series, remarks in his "Introduction":

There would seem to be four stages in the composition of a story. First comes the germ of the story, then a period of more or less conscious meditation, then the first draft, and finally the revision, which may be simply 'pencil work,' as John O'Hara calls it—that is minor changes in wording—or may lead to writing several drafts and what amounts to a new work. (7)

Here we observe Wallas's four categories of creative activity, but Cowley omits Wallas's third stage—"illumination"—or what authors throughout history have called "inspiration." Cowley tells us "first comes the germ of the story" but he does not explain where this seed or kernel or "germ" idea originates.

In the following, I will survey the testimony of writers themselves regarding their revision practices. In general, they may be divided into three large categories: writers who claim "inspiration" (and thus compose some passages which require little revision), heavy revisers and writers with idiosyncratic or atypical techniques. No writers I have studied claim that they do not revise at all. However these categories obviously often overlap: many of the writers who are "inspired by the Muse," such as Henry Miller and William Faulkner also revised extensively. Faulkner once described the hard work of revision: "A great book is always accompanied by a painful birth. Myself, I work every day. I write entirely by hand. I know what the 'flash' of inspiration is, but I also try to put some discipline into my life and my work" (*Lion in the Garden* 72). For every comment of a writer describing his/her methods, we may find other comments which do not contradict the statement, but rather demonstrate that the writing and revision process can not be described in neat categories. Writers may also revise differently depending on the literary genre they are composing: a play may come more easily than a novel, or a poem more readily than a short story.

Poets, novelists, playwrights and short story writers all have insisted that some of their ideas come from inspiration by the Muse. These passages (which according to my research occur relatively rarely) are sometimes later published with little or no revision. Henry Miller spoke frequently of writing the exalted passages in his books as if tak-

ing “dictation.” An interviewer asked him: “You speak in one of your books of ‘the dictation’ of being almost possessed, of having this stuff spilling out of you. How does this process work?” Miller responded: “Well, it happens only at rare intervals, this dictation. Someone takes over and you just copy out what is being said. It occurred most strongly with the work on D.H. Lawrence” (*Writers at Work*, Second Series 171–72). Miller says that he was obsessed and could not sleep during this “dictation” process.

His experience recalls Plato’s dialogue *Ion*: “The poet is a light creature, winged and holy, and is unable to compose unless he is possessed and out of his mind, and his reason is no longer in him” (Murray 18). Plato’s ideas on creativity greatly influenced subsequent literary theory regarding how writers get their ideas and would also shape the ways revision was considered. Miller’s account also suggests C.G. Jung’s idea of “possession” by a transcendent force or the “Muse” who speaks to the artist: the writer simply takes down the “dictation” (as Miller says). Homer (“Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending”), Virgil (“I sing of warfare and a man at war. [. . .] Tell me the causes now, O Muse [. . .]”) and Milton (“Of man’s first disobedience [. . .] Sing Heav’nly Muse [. . .] I thence invoke thy aid to my advent’rous song”) all begin their great epic poems by asking the Muse to help them compose poetry.

Miller also compares this experience of inspiration to Zen Buddhist practice:

If, say, a Zen artist is going to do something, he’s had a long preparation of discipline and meditation, deep quiet thought about it, and then no thought, silence, emptiness, and so on—it might be for months, it might be for years. Then, when he begins, it’s like lightning, just what he wants—it’s perfect. Well, this is the way I think all art should be done. But who does it? We lead lives that our contrary to our profession. (*Writers at Work* 172)

Miller’s description here corresponds exactly to the stages of creative thinking—preparation, incubation, illumination—which we have outlined above. Furthermore, the artist prepares himself/herself in a manner reminiscent of religious apprentices to the holy life: only when the writer—like the Zen devotee—is ready will he/she be vouch-

safed a vision. Igor Stravinsky memorably said of the way he composed music: "I can wait as an insect waits." The artist must learn patience, silence and emptiness in order to allow the work to find its own direction.

Miller declares that he frequently revises only after allowing his draft to "rest" for a while before he returns to work on it. When asked "Do you edit or change much?," he responded: "That too varies a great deal. I never do any correcting or revising while in the process of writing. Let's say I write a thing out any old way, and then, after it's cooled off—I let it rest for a while, a month or two maybe—I see it with a fresh eye" (*Writers at Work* 170). Miller revised his typescript by pen, then retyped the draft which possessed at this point a kind of maze-like, complex, lovely messiness like a manuscript by Balzac. Thus the revision process often includes shifting from one type of writing technology to another. "Writer's block" may be relieved by the fresh approach afforded by a different means of actually getting the words down on paper. Miller also comments on his physical, visceral relationship to his typewriter which he says acts as a "stimulus" to his writing: he enters into a "cooperative" connection to his machine (170). Just the act of touching the typewriter keys appears to "sharpen" his thinking. Like William Saroyan and Charles Bukowski, Miller's volcanic connection to the typewriter and the physical act of typing also had a significant impact on his revision techniques.

In his autobiographical text *My Life and Times* Miller speaks of his enjoyment of revision as an intense, engaging, creative activity:

Some men write line by line, stop, erase, take the sheet out and tear it up, and so on. I don't proceed that way. I just go on and on. Later, when I finish my stint, I put it, so to speak, in the refrigerator. I don't want to look at it for a month or two, the longer the better. Then I experience another pleasure. It's just as great as the pleasure of writing. This is what I call 'taking the ax to your work.' I mean chopping it to pieces. You see it now from a wholly new vantage point. You have a new perspective on it. And you take a delight in killing even some of the most exciting passages, because they don't fit, they don't sound right to your critical ear. I truly enjoy this slaughter-

house aspect of the game. You may not believe it, but it's true. (54)

It is interesting to note the aggressive nature of the metaphors Miller uses here to describe the act of revision: "taking the ax to your work," "killing some of the most exciting passages," and finally "this slaughterhouse aspect of the game." Yet this revision takes place only after he has put his work away for one or two months and returned to it with a fresh eye. Due to the intense familiarity the writer has with his/her work, they literally seem not to "see" their errors, repetitions, infelicities of expression, or structural, organizational or developmental problems. Time and distance allow re-vision. And there is pleasure in now being able to see more clearly. For Miller, revision is a reengagement with his earlier self which in a sense he attempts to clarify or "purify" by cutting away any material which does not express his new vision. Again, like Michelangelo with his sculpture, there is delight in carving away excess words, polishing the style, making the phrasing and rhythm of sentences gleam beautifully. What was potential becomes actualized as the ideas emerge into their proper form.

The Beat writers Jack Kerouac, Allen Ginsberg and William Burroughs often wrote in rushes of drug-aided euphoria (Benzedrine, ether, marijuana, LSD, alcohol, etc.). Kerouac typed his manuscripts in machine-gun-like rapidity nonstop through the night on huge continuous teletype rolls. Ginsberg was influenced by Kerouac's doctrine of "no revision" which for Ginsberg became "first thought, best thought." Ginsberg remarked that his poem "'Sunflower Sutra' is almost completely untouched from the original. It took me a long time to get on to Kerouac's idea of writing without revision. I did it by going to his house where he sat me down with typewriter and said, 'Just write a poem!'" (Mahoney 54). However, Ginsberg's most famous poem "Howl" clearly underwent extensive revision, as evidenced by the publication in 1986 of *Howl: Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript and Variant Versions*. "Howl" of course is a much longer poem and this again suggests that usually it is only brief lyric poems or passages in longer prose works which are written relatively effortlessly.

The Argentinean short story writer, poet and essayist Jorge Luis Borges also experienced writing as a form of "revelation." In a 1968 interview he remarked:

When I feel I'm going to write something, then I just am quiet and I try to listen. Then something comes through. And I do what I can in order not to tamper with it. And then, when I begin to hear what's coming through, I write it down [. . .] So, I try to interfere as little as possible with the revelation, I believe, no? I believe the author is actually one who receives. The idea of the muse [. . .] Of course, I'm not saying anything new. (77)

As we noted at the beginning of this essay, the experience of religious "revelation" has been from antiquity conflated with the experience of artistic inspiration. The Muse speaks through the poet and the "secular" act of writing a short story becomes assimilated to sacred experience. Borges conceives of himself as *receiving* something from above or beyond: he strives not to get in the way of the messages which come to him. Yet Borges insists "there's nothing mystical about all this. I suppose all writers do the same" (77). And composition for him was not a easy thing: Borges remarked that when writing a story, the beginning and end were revealed to him, but he had to then go on to invent the middle of the story, discovering his way as he went along in the composition process (235).

In addition to novelists and short story writers, some playwrights report rapid writing. Eugene Ionesco, for example, says he composed his plays in three weeks or a month and did not do several drafts: "They came out very quickly. A few tiny details I changed, but I wrote them like that. Then I read them over. And when I had a secretary, I dictated to her at the typewriter. I hardly ever change it" (Weiss 96). Ionesco remarked that his plays take shape as he writes:

I have no preliminary idea when I write, but as I write my imagination completes it. So the second half or more of the play takes shape in my head. Then I know how I'm going to end it. Though I must say that spontaneous creation does not exclude the pursuit and consciousness of style. (96)

Here we see again that inspiration also includes perspiration, or what Ionesco calls "the pursuit and consciousness of style."

The American poet and novelist Charles Bukowski speaks of the act of writing as an act of seizure, in which he is almost involuntarily led to write. At first he will

play footsy with the goddamn chair and typewriter and table. Finally I sit down, drawn to the machine as if by a magnet, against my will. There's absolutely no plan to it. It's just me, the typewriter, and the chair. And I always throw the first draft away, saying 'that's no good!' Then I enter into the act with a kind of fury, writing madly for four, five, even eight hours.
(85)

Descriptions of “inspiration” by writers are fairly consistent. The writing seems to take place almost “against the writer’s will”—it is “automatic” in a sense, or autonomous. Notice Bukowski’s analogy above: “Drawn to the machine as if by a magnet.” There is a sense in which the will becomes passive, and some seemingly alien force seizes hold of the writer.

D.H. Lawrence writes in his “Preface” to his *Collected Poems* about the difference between the first poems he wrote at age nineteen, and his poems written the following year: “Any young lady might have written them and been pleased with them; as I was pleased with them. But it was after that, when I was twenty, that my real demon would now and then get hold of me and shake more real poems out of me, making me uneasy” (27). Lawrence’s “Foreword” to his *Collected Poems* speaks instead of a “demon” of a “ghost” which possessed or “haunted” him as a young man and inspired “incoherent” poems (849). For Lawrence, the inspired poems (as opposed to the competent but unoriginal earlier poems which “any young lady might have written”) he wrote seemed “incoherent”: he himself did not fully understand them or where they came from. One recalls here Arthur Rimbaud’s “Je est un autre” (I is another) and Jorge Luis Borges, “Borges Y Yo”: “Borges and I.” The writer is the caretaker of an indwelling genius, an inner daimon/demon which speaks in riddles like an oracle—speaks sometimes seemingly unintelligibly but in the pure language of the poetic unconscious. However in all writers’ subsequent work these “messages from the gods,” these transcendent words later undergo the revision process, although some of the “inspired” passages may remain virtually unchanged in the final publication.

Lawrence's friend Aldous Huxley corroborates Lawrence as "possessed":

And then he would get the urge to write: and then write for eighteen hours a day. It was very extraordinary to see him work, it was a sort of *possession*; he would rush on with it, his hand moving at a tremendous rate. And he never corrected anything; because if he was dissatisfied with anything he would start again at the beginning. (Bedford 212)

Huxley also commented on the "cleanliness" of Lawrence's manuscripts: "The script runs on, page after page, with hardly a blot or an erasure" (Powell x).

When Lawrence did revise, he often started from scratch and wrote a whole new version of the text. His final novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (original title, *Tenderness*) was rewritten three times, from start to finish. Lawrence was an amazingly prolific writer, producing novels, poems, stories, letters, plays with seemingly effortless ease. He wrote in longhand, and the words seem to come quickly, flowing from his subconscious depths in a way unequalled by the other writers studied in this essay. One need only examine E.W. Tedlock's edition of *The Frieda Lawrence Collection of D.H. Lawrence Manuscripts* to be moved by the quick, lively, spontaneous outpouring of ideas which characterize Lawrence's genius. Here we find the passages described by Huxley above: long, pristine, seamless paragraphs which appear to have been written effortlessly. Lawrence's quest for a mystical communion with the world is evident in his prose and poetry: it courses on inexorably as if coming from an unquenchable and integral primal source, from a submerged fountain of creativity. But there is also, as Tedlock remarks, the "intense revision, the untiring rewriting" as evidenced by the reproduced corrected manuscripts in Lawrence's neat cursive hand of the stories "Odour of Chrysanthemums" and "The Blue Moccasins" (xxxvi, 34, 68).

Robert Graves claimed that only when the poet is possessed by the "White Goddess," by the Muse, does he write authentic poetry. However for Graves as for Lawrence, inspiration does not preclude revision. He writes that he will "revise the manuscript till I can't read it any longer, then get somebody to type it. Then I revise the typing. Then it's retyped again. Then there's a third typing, which is the

final one. Nothing should then remain that offends the eye” (102). Graves’s manuscripts—some of which are located at Southern Illinois University—began as “rough holograph drafts” and after heavy revision would be transformed into “a maze of lines, blots, and inserts” (Robert Graves Papers). Graves’s amazing productivity—he published more than one hundred books (novels, poetry, plays, essays, translations, children’s books) during his career—was clearly not impeded by his meticulous revision methods.

Some writers write rapidly in one genre and more slowly in another. For example, Samuel Beckett composed his play *Waiting for Godot* in only four months, while he labored much more intensively on his novels. Enoch Brater notes that

Beckett began the *Godot* project methodically, writing only on his school book’s right hand pages; when he ran out of space, he backed up to the verso sides he had skipped before. [. . .] Unlike most of his manuscripts, the text for this play was written clearly, almost, it seems, without hesitation. ‘It wrote itself,’ he [Beckett] told Peter Lennon, ‘with very few corrections, in four months.’ (Brater 10)

However, Beckett’s manuscript of his novel *Malone Meurt* is replete with revisions, deletions, and doodles (49). Again, we notice the passive aspect of creativity: Beckett says the play “wrote itself.” Like several other writers, Beckett’s relation to writing in longhand and typewriting were complementary aspects of the revision process: “First he wrote in longhand, then he typed them, using the hunt and peck system, which he demonstrated by fingering the air. Things change between longhand and typing; the typewriter was his ‘friend.’ I suggest, ‘collaborator’” (Gussow 41). This is a model we see repeated in many writers, the shift between writing by hand or by typewriter (and now computer). The writer perceives his/her work differently during the shift from pen or pencil, to typewriter/computer, to proofs and galley and ultimately the finished publication in book form.

Sometimes a writer’s approach to revision differs depending on the work they are creating. For example, Leslie Marmon Silko produced three or four versions of her novel *Almanac of the Dead* which required a great deal of revising. She could not begin the revision process until she had completed two-thirds to three-quarters of the novel. How-

ever, her novel *Ceremony* was created in a very different way: “I wrote *Ceremony* just like you’d write a short story. Each sentence was perfect before I went on to the next one. So there was no re-writing; there was very little editing” (Silko 116–17).

Other writers such as Sinclair Lewis, Aldous Huxley, and Vladimir Nabokov have emphasized the hard work of revision. For example, Sinclair Lewis declared that “Writing is just work—there’s no secret. If you dictate or use a pen or type or write with your toes—it is still just work” (Lindemann 11). And Aldous Huxley wrote: “Generally, I write everything many times over. All my thoughts are second thoughts. And I correct each page a great deal, or rewrite it several times as I go along.” Huxley would begin with a vague idea of where a project was going and develop his ideas as he wrote. He sometimes would produce a large manuscript, find out it was not working, and throw it away. Huxley found writing and revision “a very absorbing occupation and sometimes exhausting” (*Writers at Work*, Second Series 197).

Vladimir Nabokov concurs: he once revealed that he rewrote every word he had ever published several times and wore out his erasers before his pencils (Boyd 374). Nabokov did not compose to communicate a “message” about life but rather to refine and polish his words until they brought him aesthetic joy: “I have no purpose at all when composing my stuff itself except to compose it. I work hard, I work long, on a body of words until it grants me complete possession and pleasure” (*Strong Opinions* 115). Thus he finds pleasure—like Henry Miller—in revision, in working intensively to extract from writing its ultimate pleasures. In his essay “Inspiration,” he wrote: “The words which on various occasions, during some fifty years of composing prose, I have put together and then canceled may have formed by now in the Realm of Rejection (a foggy but not quite unlikely land north of nowhere) a huge library of scrapped phrases, characterized and concorded only by their wanting the benison of inspiration” (*Strong Opinions* 311). Again like Henry Miller, Nabokov does not consider inspiration and the rigors of revision to be mutually exclusive: he is unashamed to delight in the ecstasy of inspiration, or to confess that he works hard at his writing.

Writers such as Eudora Welty and John Berryman revised in peculiar or idiosyncratic ways. Welty is perhaps the most “physical” reviser,

using “scissors and pins” as she readies a manuscript for publication. When asked whether she used the typewriter, she responded:

Yes, and that’s useful—it helps give me the feeling of making my work objective. I can correct better if I see it in typescript. After that, I revise with scissors and pins. Pasting is too slow, and you can’t undo it, but with pins you can move things from anywhere to anywhere and that’s what I really love doing—putting things in their best and proper place, revealing things at the time when they matter most. Often I shift things from the very beginning to the very end (Welty 89).

Welty got the idea of using pins from working on a newspaper and thus used the delete and paste method before the proliferation of computers and achieved a similar result: the ability to test how various sections of her composition appear in relation to one another and thus better choose how to organize and develop her stories. She could in this manner shift her dialogue, characters, descriptive passages, until they fell into the proper place. Revision may be said on one level to be a constant process of trial and error in which writers try out various possibilities, rejecting, accepting, rejecting again and finally arriving at the proper form which lay dormant within the “mind’s eye” from the beginning of the work’s conception.

The American poet John Berryman also revised in a curious manner: he placed his manuscripts beneath glassine to study them. Berryman began composing three stanzas daily of his poem *Homage to Mistress Bradstreet* but discovered that was too much to try and accomplish so he “got one of those things that have a piece of glassine over a piece of paper, and you can put something in between and see it but not touch it.” He would then make a draft of just one stanza and place it beneath the glassine. This allowed him to study the draft and make notes but he would not touch the manuscript itself until he thought he was ready—usually not for several hours. He would then remove his draft, make corrections, put it back beneath the glassine and re-study his text. When he felt satisfied with the draft he would remove and type it and the revision process was complete. He would only write one stanza a day. If he finished in the morning, he would still not look at the stanza again until the following morning. Berry-

man found the time waiting for his next contact with his manuscript very difficult and would drink whiskey to fill up the time (*Writers at Work*, Fourth Series 314).

For Berryman, making the manuscript physically inaccessible by covering it with a transparent sheet forced him to contemplate his work at a kind of psychological distance which made later revision easier for him. The critical aspect for many writers in the act of revision is *time*: they require the distance that time away from their work allows in order to perceive it in a fresh light. In this respect, many creative writers sometimes may have an advantage over academic writers or journalists who must meet deadlines and thus do not have the luxury of being able to “remove” themselves sufficiently from their work. On the other hand, as we shall see, this time element can also be a liability since authors are tempted to continue to tamper with their work interminably, even after publication. Indeed, it may be wondered sometimes (this point has been raised with regard to W.H. Auden’s continual revisions of his poems) whether the earlier versions of a work are ultimately more successful: revision may not always improve.

Thus we can see in the comments of writers themselves the myriad ways they undergo the revision process. It is likely that they are so willing to talk about their individual approaches to revision because in many ways it forms the central aspect of their creative activity. As we have seen, achieving the initial inspiration is in fact the easiest part of their jobs: the hard part is returning to the lonely typewriter or computer screen and facing the long hours of intense labor which revision entails. Examining the drafts of Dylan Thomas’s late poem “Elegy” for the death of his father, I was astonished that Thomas—a poet I had always assumed composed easily and in a state of beer-inspired euphoria—had written rows of rhyming words (testing out possibilities) all over the manuscript, had crossed out passages, had begun over and over and over again.

REVISION AND COMPUTERS

With the advent of word processing and computers, the ways scholars study the revision process has dramatically changed. The tracks of revision, so to speak, will now be covered because much of the process will be “erased” by the fact that the writer can now make immediate changes to the text on the computer screen and the corrections will

normally not be saved unless the writer saves the computer document, prints it and subsequently revises it by hand (as Charles Bukowski did). For many writers, the change over to computers seemed also to be an abandonment of their devotion to the “old way” of doing things. The shift from pen to typewriter also clearly was momentous for writers and of course brought into being all sorts of changes in style—from e.e. cummings playful use of typographical riffs to perhaps even the staccato dialogue of writers like Ernest Hemingway.

William Burroughs, Charles Bukowski, and Gloria Anzaldua have documented their relationship to word processors. Burroughs, at least in 1987, was still not won over to computers: “Right now word processors seem just too complicated to get into. I guess they would be helpful, save a great deal of time undoubtedly, but at this point the effort involved in learning how to use them just doesn’t seem worthwhile” (Burroughs 186). However, both Charles Bukowski and Gloria Anzaldua—although I would consider both to be “Dionysian” “natural” writers whom one might think would abjure technology—wrote and revised their work on the computer. Bukowski actually was initially skeptical regarding the computer, but once he began using the word processor he found it a real spur to writing and used it to compose virtually all of his late work. He told Robert Gumpert in 1991: “The writing’s not bad for an old guy I guess and, yeah, maybe now I fear the loss of my soul. When I wrote my first computer poem I was anxious that I would be suffocated by these layers of consumerist suffering. Would old Dostoyevsky have ever used one of these babies? I wondered, and then I said—‘hell, yeah!’” (275).

Thus Bukowski voices one of the concerns about the “technologizing” of the writing process. Will the computer take away the “sacred,” “natural,” elemental aspect of writing, turning what used to be a profound solitary communion with one’s soul into another sterile technocratic transaction? Bukowski ended up preferring the computer and found that his output was greatly increased. His typical early practice was to make copies with his printer which he would then revise by hand, sign, and send in for publication. A late four-page manuscript poem entitled “talk” recently offered for sale on eBay illustrates Bukowski’s working methods: the poem printed from the computer is heavily revised, including eighty-eight individual handwritten corrections in black marker.

Gloria Anzaldua was asked by Andrea Lunsford: “Do the words seem to come out as well from the ends of your fingers typing as when you were scripting?” Anzaldua responded:

Yes. I prefer writing directly on the computer, especially the first few drafts when I’m still imagining the story or if I’m writing nonfiction, discovering what I’m trying to say and trying out different directions. With electronic writing I can try out different points of view, scenarios, and conflicts. I like to edit on the computer too, though I need to do the last few edits on paper. When I was at the Norcroft writer’s retreat my hard drive crashed and I had to resort to hand-writing for four weeks. I was surprised to find that I could achieve a smoother flow by writing on paper. I’d gone there to revise *La Prieta*, *The Dark One*, a collection of stories. I had nineteen of the twenty-four stories in hard copy, so I was able to revise on paper, but the rest of the time, much to my surprise, I wrote poems and worked on my writing guide—exercises, meditations for writing, the elements of writing and fictive techniques. I also spent a lot of time thinking and writing about composition, composition theory and creativity—things I hadn’t planned on doing. I just wanted to do the stories but not having a computer forced me to switch over. Basically I’m a several-projects-simultaneously type of writer. (259)

Anzaldua underscores the differences between writing “on paper” and composing on the computer. She edits with the computer, but then changes to paper for the final revisions. As we have seen with many writers, there is a natural movement from one writing technology to another during the process of receiving the initial idea, drafting, revising and publication. It is quite usual for writers like Anzaldua to move from the computer (where she does her initial writing and revision) to paper for what she terms “the last few edits.” Because the computer is still a relatively recent form of writing technology, we do not yet have a complete understanding of the ways it has altered creative writers’ revision methods, but it is clear that the influence of computers has been extremely important in the ways imaginative writers do their work

today. With spell check, grammatical interventions, thesauruses and other helps to the composition process, we may now never be able to know whether a great writer—like John Keats for example—was in reality a terrible speller (as Keats in fact was) or not.

THE ROLE OF COLLABORATORS AND EDITORS

Is the “solitary genius” actually the model which emerges when we study revision, or is it more complicated than that? The issues involved in revision expand when we go beyond the idea of composition as a solitary act and consider the roles of friends, collaborators and editors. Gustave Flaubert wrote in a letter to Louise Colet [July 22, 1852]:

I am in the process of copying and correcting the entire first part of *Bovary*. My eyes are smarting. [. . .] A week from Sunday I shall read the whole thing to Bouilhet, and a day or two later you will see me. What a bitch of a thing prose is! It is never finished: there is always something to be done over. (682)

Thus Flaubert showed his work to others and wanted their response in order to gauge the effectiveness of his writing and to aid in the revision process. Frequently a close colleague or fellow practitioner takes on the symbolic role of “midwife,” helping during the maieutic process of birthing the literary baby. Anais Nin read the typescript of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer* and suggested many substantive changes which Miller implemented.

T.S. Eliot’s *The Wasteland* was significantly changed during the revision process due to the influence of Ezra Pound. Pound’s revisions and comments can now be studied because *The Wasteland: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound* was published in 1971, edited by Eliot’s wife Valerie. In passage after passage, Pound makes incisive comments on the typescript. For example in “The Fire Sermon” section, Pound writes on the first page: “Too loose [. . .] rhyme drags it out to diffuseness” (39). Along the first stanza of part 4 of the same section, Pound scribbles “verse not interesting enough as verse to warrant so much of it,” and along the second stanza “inversions not warranted by any real exigence of metre” (45). Eliot revised his manuscript accordingly and the book documents incontrovertibly that *The Wasteland* would probably not

have become the classic twentieth century poem it did had not Eliot received Pound's help. It is perhaps no accident that Eliot dedicated the poem to Pound—*il miglior fabbro*—"the better craftsman."

An unlikely collaboration developed between the American Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton and Evelyn Waugh. Merton asked for Waugh's help in revising his autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Waugh's biographer reports that "Merton allowed Waugh freedom to cut the text and he relished the task; not simply as an exercise of professional skill but as an act of homage; the more he cleaned up the prose, the brighter shone its significance. It took him just a week. He removed about a third, polished what remained and later produced a Foreword" (*Evelyn Waugh* 222).

Once the manuscript has left the writer's study, it often goes to a professional editor, who also may have a role in the revision process. Maxwell Perkins had a deep influence on the shape inchoate massive manuscripts such as Thomas Wolfe's *The Web and the Rock* would ultimately assume. Just as a composer needs instrumentalists and conductors to realize his/her musical score, so too few writers brings a poem, story, novel or play to completion alone. Authors such as T.S. Eliot, as we have seen, acknowledged the central role of Ezra Pound—who in a sense was both collaborator and editor—by dedicating *The Wasteland* to him. In the prefatory acknowledgement pages of many books we witness the omnipresence of collaboration in the commonly expressed words: "And I would like to thank the following people for all the help they have given me in the writing of this book."

REVISION OF PROOFS AND GALLEYS

The omnipresence of the computer during the revision and editing process in modern publishing has minimized the significant moment of proofs and galleys which were important stages for several of the great modern writers such as Joyce, Hemingway and Proust. Once their texts had been set up in galleys, the revision process might—and often did—continue. Ernest Hemingway described the proofs as yet another "chance" to revise following the earlier stages of composition: "I always rewrite each day up to the point where I stopped. When it is all finished, naturally you go over it. You get another chance to correct and rewrite when someone else types it, and you see it clean in type. The last chance is in the proofs. You're grateful for these different

chances” (*Writers at Work*, Second Series 222). Seeing his text “clean” in type form allows a kind of distance which as we have seen many writers find extremely useful.

Some writers labor intensively to send off to the printers a correct text. J.R.R. Tolkien, for example, was a perfectionist:

Nothing was allowed to reach the printer until it had been revised, reconsidered and polished—in which respect he was the opposite of C.S. Lewis, who sent manuscripts off for publication with scarcely a second glance at them. Lewis, well aware of this difference between them, wrote of Tolkien: ‘His standard of self-criticism was high and the mere suggestion of publication usually set him upon a revision, in the course of which so many new ideas occurred to him that where his friends had hoped for the final text of an old work they actually got the first draft of a new one. (Carpenter 154)

There is naturally a powerful psychological element in the varying ways authors revise their work. Perhaps Tolkien’s unwillingness to send off anything but the most polished and sparkling manuscript speaks to a powerful superego which fears criticism and which sets a high bar for performance. Other writers also may simply be under a myriad of personal or professional pressures which make it impossible to revise their work as thoroughly as they might have hoped.

James Joyce entered into a titanic creative struggle when he received the proofs of *Ulysses*. Richard Ellmann described Joyce’s work during 1918–1919 on specific episodes of his great novel:

He was encouraged to make great progress with *Ithaca* and *Penelope*. At the new flat, on June 10, he received from Darantiere the first galley proofs, and by Sept. 7 he had read them through *Scylla and Charybdis*. With Joyce the reading of proof was a creative act; he insisted on five sets, and made innumerable changes, almost always additions, in the text, complicating the interior monologue with more and more interconnecting details. The book grew by one third in proof. Darantiere’s characteristic gesture, throwing up his hands in despair, became almost constant when the type had to be recast time after time, and Sylvia Beach was much tried; but Joyce won his point. (527)

Joyce turned proofreading itself into a “creative act” and thus made life thoroughly miserable for his typesetters. Of course, it is an expensive proposition to revise a text once it has been set up in galleys, yet this has not deterred many famous authors from having second thoughts. (Marcel Proust was wealthy enough to afford extensive revisions to the proofs of *A La Recherche du Temps Perdu*). *Ulysses: A Facsimile of the Manuscript*, published in 1975, illustrates the immense problems encountered when the printer Maurice Darantiere of Dijon and his twenty-six non-English-speaking typesetters had to continually reset the text to include Joyce’s additions and in the process made additional errors at each stage of the resetting.

Joyce’s other gigantic masterwork—*Finnegans Wake*—was an even greater nightmare of revision. David Hayman describes how—beginning in 1924—Joyce revised *one sentence* in *Finnegans Wake* over a fourteen year period: “A study of the thirteen-odd stages of its development should give us a reasonable number of insights into the artistic method and into the meaning of Book III, the section of *Finnegans Wake* to which this sentence belongs” (257). The text appeared in the avant-garde magazine *transition* and Hayman points out that “the second of the above-treated drafts dates from April 1928. During the four years that had elapsed since 1924, nine revisions had been made. Joyce was already working from *transition* magazine page proofs” (275). Hayman methodically follows the revision process and astonishes us with the labors Joyce lavished on a single sentence:

The sixteenth draft, completed in 1936, is the end product of several minor revisions undertaken over a period of seven years. Consequently, these *transition* pages are generously annotated in a variety of Joycean scripts. (Joyce’s handwriting varied with the state of his eyesight). [. . .] With the inclusion of Joyce’s additions to the second galley proofs of *Finnegans Wake*, our passage lacked but one syllable (‘leaves’) of the published sentence. (285, 287)

Not only was bringing the book to publication a superhuman labor of revision, but *Finnegans Wake*—composed in Joyce’s multi-lingual, pun-filled, lyrical, allusive, fiendishly complex, portmanteau style (“riverrun past Eve and Adam’s, from swerve of shore to bend of bay, brings us by a commodius vicus of recirculation back to Howth Castle and Environs”)—of course may pose the most insuperable problems of any book in history for scholars attempting to establish an “error-free” edition (*Finnegans Wake* 3). It’s hard enough for a typesetter to work

from texts in the English language: the Joyce language of the *Wake* is the most amazingly bizarre and elaborate tongue yet invented.

Henry Miller published a revised version in 1956 of his book *The World of Sex* which includes photographs of his corrections and revisions. In rereading the original text (which had appeared in 1940 and had gone out of print), Miller informs us he “began (quite involuntarily) making changes and corrections, never dreaming what I was letting myself in for. If the reader will turn to the reproductions in this volume, he will see for himself with what almost diabolical enthusiasm I plunged into this work of revision” (9). As we have seen, Miller in fact found the revision experience pleasurable and thought that readers might be curious about the ways writers compose. Although he wrote many of the passages of his books in an “inspired” state, it is also clear that his keen enjoyment of revision underscores the creative nature of this stage of the composition process. It appears that it is at this moment—after the work has lain fallow for a period (or in the present case, a sixteen-year interval between original and revision!)—that there is intense joy in finding the right words, style, phrasing or punctuation for what one really wants to say.

It is clear that the added objectivity of seeing the text in printed form allows the writer yet another chance to “re-see” or “re-vise” his or her work. As we saw earlier with the shift in perception occasioned by writing with pen, typewriter or computer, so too the complex process of bringing a manuscript through the galley and proof process create time and distance from the original conception and thus allows and often *forces* a new awareness of the writer’s aims and intentions. It may well be that the setting up of the work in type is the final objectification of the work, the final distancing of the live plasma of the artistic organism created in the artist’s heart and soul. Now it is *out there*, alive and kicking, the text itself, the hard clean shape of print: cold, objective, almost as if it had been created by someone else. A last chance to say goodbye, to assure a happy delivery to the literary baby, now bravely out there all alone in the world.

REVISION AFTER PUBLICATION

However, some writers—in particular poets such as Robert Lowell, W.H. Auden, W.B. Yeats and Robert Graves—took one *more* chance and extensively revised their work even after publication. The fact that

most lyric poems are relatively short may allow poets the luxury of returning to their printed texts to tinker with them in ways which would be prohibited to the novelist or playwright. Robert Lowell “endlessly” revised his published work (*Writers at Work*, Second Series 350). Lowell also moved lines from one poem to another. A passage at the end of the poem “Cistercians in Germany” from *Land of Unlikeness* was rewritten to form the last lines of “At the Indian Killer’s Grave” (349). Lowell revised his poem to John Berryman in four different printed versions: the original version and then subsequent variations were printed in the volumes *History* (1973) and the two editions of *Notebook* (1969, 1970). “Beyond the Alps” is another poem Lowell ceaselessly revised even after publication. He reshaped the poem obsessively over a twenty-year period, altering the original rhymed couplet structure, and deleting it from *Life Studies*. Lowell then revised eight of the forty-two lines of the poem he had omitted and rewrote them into another poem “For George Santayana” (Moore).

Again, we must take into account psychological aspects in this context: Robert Lowell suffered from manic-depression throughout his life and had to be repeatedly institutionalized. He was ultimately treated with lithium which considerably relieved his symptoms (Hamilton). Certainly a good deal of his extreme behavior with respect to revision may be linked to the cycles of his illness. The relationship between psychological types and revision practices should be kept in mind when we study writers’ composition practices. Poets throughout history of course have tended to both extremes of bi-polar experience: either ecstatic highs or depressive, suicidal lows. John Berryman—who as we have seen suffered through the revision process by drinking whiskey and observing his poems beneath glassine—was a suicide, as were Hart Crane, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton and (most likely) Randall Jarrell. A study of the actual manuscripts of these poets reveals the intense psychological struggle involved in their revision practices. The effort to “get it right” was ultimately a life-or-death struggle.

W.H. Auden also “drastically” (according to his literary executor Edward Mendelson) revised his poems after publication (Spender 249). Auden’s obsessive revision practices have been studied by Joseph Warren Beach in *The Making of the Auden Canon*. Beach studied Auden’s “textual alterations made in the poems as they appeared in earlier collections and/or in periodicals; excision of passages of some length in the poems reprinted; elimination of entire poems published in earlier

collections and/or periodicals” (3). Beach demonstrates Auden’s anxious desire to get his poems right, often returning over and over again to rework them. Auden remarked: “I do an enormous amount of revising. I think of that quote from Valéry, ‘A poem is never finished, only abandoned.’ Some people feel revisions have ideological significance. I revise if I feel the language is prolix or obscure. Your first idea is not always your best” (*The Poet’s Craft* 3). Auden here neatly contradicts Allen Ginsberg’s formulation, “first thought, best thought.”

Auden’s *Collected Poems* contained many poems that had been thoroughly revised. An interviewer asked about one of his most famous poems: “In ‘September 1, 1939,’ you revised one line (‘We must love one another or die’), and then omitted the entire stanza in which this line occurs.” Auden replied:

I have scrapped the whole poem. I took out that section, then I decided the whole thing had to go. I will put it this way: I don’t think a writer can decide how good or bad something he writes is. What he can tell, though, is whether the poem is authentic, really written in his own hand. I decided this poem is unauthentic as far as I am concerned. It may have certain merits but I should not have written it. (*The Poet’s Craft* 3)

When the interviewer asks about the relationship between rejecting whole poems and Auden’s conception of his own style, Auden replied:

You can see in the *Collected Short Poems* what I have removed. It is different from revising poems. When one revises, one is not revising emotions, but reworking the language. But the poems I decided were unauthentic went out. There was something false about them. The others which I have revised a great deal had more a question of language. (*The Poet’s Craft* 3–4)

Auden raises an interesting question here regarding the revision of a single poem and the removal of one or more poems from a collected edition. In the second case, the author is “revising” the whole shape of his oeuvre, creating a legacy, making the form in which he wants his

work preserved. He is not deciding the aesthetic success or failure of a single line or two, but rather removing entire poems from his *oeuvre* because they no longer adequately represent the self he wishes to pass on to posterity. The ongoing altering and reconceptualizing of a poet's entire corpus can also be seen in Walt Whitman's multiple versions *Leaves of Grass* which he revised as a whole volume several times throughout his career. Yet Auden's revisions were not always considered improvements and many of his admirers ironically preferred the earlier versions of his poems: the writer has satisfied himself, but left his readers unhappy (Carpenter 417–18). As we shall see, this curious situation may be obviated by the possibility of parallel texts which allow the reader to choose his/her own favorite version.

SCHOLARS STUDY REVISION: PROCESS CRITICISM

As we have seen, the emergence of printing opened up the question of revision to students of creativity. Now there was a multiple trail to follow: not only the original manuscript with its myriad corrections, but the typewritten text (also frequently heavily edited), followed by galleys and proof sheets. And the process did not even cease there, for poets often revised their works *even after they were published*, thus further complicating the idea of a pure, unalloyed absolute text. Modern writers thus have left a tantalizing trail for scholars to follow in their efforts to understand the creative process. For example, Regina Fadiman in her *Faulkner's Light in August: A Description and Interpretation of the Revisions* defines what she calls "process criticism":

The manuscript provides a clear record of the techniques Faulkner employed to revise the novel. His alterations during the process of composition resulted in a significant shift in the ultimate meaning of the work, for its new form shaped its new content. In a larger sense the manuscript contains a record of the work habits and methods of revision of the artist who is considered by many to be the major American novelist of the twentieth century; it offers, therefore, valuable insights into Faulkner's imaginative genius and into the creative process itself. (ix)

Faulkner's manuscripts demonstrate revisions at each stage of the writing process, from small stylistic details to the rearrangement of entire chapters in his novels. As Faulkner looks again at the draft of his novel, new ideas begin to take shape as he sees new relationships

between themes, characters, style, metaphors. New patterns emerge as one reconsiders the work and the writer is then compelled to incorporate these fresh ideas into his new draft: the novel thus undergoes a metamorphosis—a “re-vision”—in the very process of reading one’s own words again. It is as if a hidden pattern emerges which heretofore had been obscured. There is a synergy between the text and the author: unexpected connections form in the mind during the contemplation of the work and demand different modes of expression, different ways of solving the problem posed by one’s own earlier self.

Helen Gardner in *The Composition of Four Quartets* seeks clues to T.S. Eliot’s creativity through a close study of his manuscripts. Although Eliot did not approve of preserving his manuscripts, he donated the drafts of *Four Quartets* to Magdalene College, Cambridge University. Gardner, in her study of the drafts remarks:

Manuscript and typed drafts display both major, substantial changes and minute alterations in phrases, words, and pointing; and, up to the very last moment, in corrected proofs, he can be seen changing his mind, sometimes finding a new word, sometimes reverting to a word he had earlier rejected but now found more satisfactory than its substitute. (3)

Thus just as Fadiman studied Faulkner’s multiple revisions, so too Gardner attempts to fathom revision and creativity in Eliot’s poetry. Thus throughout his career Eliot both relied on collaboration (as we saw above with Ezra Pound’s help with *The Wasteland* published in 1922) and later engaged in extensive revision of *Four Quartets*, the four parts of which were published separately between 1935 and 1941.

Charles Ross has explored D.H. Lawrence’s revision methods in the various versions of *Women in Love* in his study *Women in Love: A Novel of Mythic Realism*. Between 1913 and 1919, Lawrence composed a long novel with the tentative title “The Sisters” which eventually was broken up into the two novels, *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. Censorship also affected the revision process: following its publication in 1915, *The Rainbow* was deemed “obscene” and suppressed by the police. Lawrence would ultimately censor and “revise” the proofs (6). Other modern writers including James Joyce, Henry Miller, Charles Bukowski, William Burroughs and Vladimir Nabokov had to “revise” their work in order to have it published and to conform to legal standards of propriety. However, they fought and won their cases in court.

Censorship is revision in its most unpalatable form: compelled by the “authorities.”

Curtis Bradford studied W.B. Yeats’s drafts in order to fathom his ability to create such flawless verse. According to Bradford,

Yeats’s manuscripts and typescripts are extremely interesting to any student of the writing process, for it is nearly always possible to reconstruct from them at least the external aspects of how a poem, play, or essay was put together. One can also watch lines of poems and single sentences of prose emerge from the inchoate as Yeats achieves with immense labor the expression he wants. For Yeats the construction process usually meant adding on: his works accumulated slowly, as a coral reef accumulates. (x)

For Bradford, Yeats’s drafts reveal the ways Yeats created his work in a number of genres—poetry, plays and essays. Bradford makes the analogy to a coral reef: so too Yeats’s work was built up very slowly over time through a process of accretion and involved substantial and hard revision.

Thus scholars who employ process criticism in their studies of writers such as Faulkner, Lawrence and Yeats attempt to uncover the tracks of the creative mind. They seek to discover the ways revision reveals to us the hidden elements of artistic expression. The author himself/herself clearly often does not know where the trail will lead as they embark on a poem, play or novel, but we can try to reconstruct the process through a careful study of the available manuscripts or printed versions. The manuscripts reveal a constant struggle of give and take between the writer and his/her work, a continual “separating of the chaff and the grain.” This process provides a deep sense of accomplishment: order is being brought out of chaos. Yet the fascinating thing is that the writer at the outset may not yet fully (or even partially) know what this order is: it is only through the process of revision that he/she discovers that pattern and structure which was implicit (but not yet fully formulated) in the conception from the beginning.

WORDSWORTH, PARALLEL TEXTS, NABOKOV,
POSTSTRUCTURALISM, HYPERTEXT AND BEYOND

A final complexity which emerges from a consideration of literary revision is the question of parallel texts. William Wordsworth affords an intriguing example of the problems involved with a text which exists in various versions. Wordsworth completed *The Prelude: Growth of A Poet's Mind* in 1805–6. He continued to revise the work throughout his lifetime and it was published not long after his death in 1850. Because some readers have preferred one version over the other, Penguin decided to publish both versions in a parallel text format with the 1805–6 version facing the 1850 text so the reader can make a line by line comparison. And the situation gets even more intricate. The editor J.C. Maxwell points out that in addition to the 1805 and 1850 versions we must take into account other variants:

But if we are thinking in terms, not of revisions but of radically different forms of the whole poem, we must further distinguish three versions; a two-book form completed by 1800, a proposed five-book version which Wordsworth had almost completed early in 1804, when he decided to expand it still further, and the full text as we have it both in 1805 and 1850.
(17)

Such a situation illustrates the problems involved when an author leaves alternate versions of his or her work. In this case, the reader can compare and contrast the two alternate versions and in a sense create a *third* version of the text by choosing one version or another at various points in the reading process. The two versions may be said to “cancel each other out” and compel us to become an accomplice in creating the meaning of the work. From here, “reader-response” criticism is not far away: this is a text which cannot exist without the reader.

Vladimir Nabokov's novel *Pale Fire* can be read (at least on one level) as a marvelous parody of the problems of “collaboration,” literary interpretation and parallel texts. The novel contains a four part poem entitled “Pale Fire” by John Shade, preceded by a “Foreword” and followed by a “Commentary” and “Index” by his “friend” Charles Kinbote. Kinbote “rewrites” the poem. He invents a preposterous parallel story (concerning the faraway land of Zembla with himself as its

exiled King) to serve as his own interpretation of the meaning of the poem: he does not serve the author's text, he bends the text to suit his own preconceived idea of its meaning. Kinbote, the mad editor of Shade's poem, uses the vocabulary of textual criticism and revision—"manuscript," "corrected draft," "fair copy" throughout. He even includes variant readings of "Pale Fire" which he claims Shade has not included, yet we suspect he has himself composed the alternate lines. Thus we as readers must often decide whether Kinbote's readings and emendations are correct or whether he has "revised" the text to suit his own purposes. Nabokov thus has created his own kind of parallel text: he plays with the reader's struggle in interpreting a literary work and sets into motion a number of simultaneously contradictory readings, leaving the ultimate decision concerning the meaning in the reader's hands. To interpret the poem, we may be at every turn relying on the unreliable textual emendations of a madman.

It can be seen how the questions of parallel texts, meaning and authorial intention can quickly turn into philosophical quandaries which remind us of the now old, *passé* debates about poststructuralism and the new, lively debates about the Internet. Structuralism, which evolved from the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, held that there is no necessary connection between word and thing, and that language is essentially arbitrary: we call a tree a tree, but we may as well call it an orange. Thinkers such as the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss held that meaning does not exist in some abstract ideal realm, but emerges only from the interrelations of items within a given structure: it is their place in the system which gives them meaning, not any putative significance inhering essentially within the words/objects themselves.

Poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida have gone a step further and believe that a text "deconstructs itself" and that the systems of oppositions—male/female, good/bad, heaven/earth etc. which the structuralists posit in fact "privilege" one element of the "opposition" in an arbitrary fashion. The poststructuralists end in a place beyond relativism: some call it nihilism, some prefer to see it as a playful game of interpretative activity. Thus with regards to the "correct" text and its myriad revisions and transformations, the poststructuralists might claim that the whole question is a perfect description of their philosophy: there is no final text, no final meaning, no *ousia*, *telos*, *arche* (being, end, beginning) as Derrida would have it. "Original text" and

“revision” is yet another opposition which deconstructs itself. How can there be revision if there is no text? And how can there be a “stable” text if it can be endlessly revised?

Wordsworth, Nabokov and poststructuralism may make us think of the idea of hypertext. Hypertext is “a document retrieval network that permits the user to access any of a group of linked documents by clicking on a jump maker, or link structure. Each of the documents contained in this network appears in full-text form on the computer screen; once users access one document, they can jump to other documents at will” (*Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* 205). It is now possible to construct a labyrinth in cyberspace of millions of different versions of a text, or of a story with alternate endings reminiscent of Jorge Luis Borges’s “The Garden of Forking Paths” in which an infinity of possible plot lines proliferate in an infinity of possible directions. And hypertext has also become another tool by which scholars can study revision: they can now link “textual editions and textual variants, not only with one another but also with contextual (including visual) materials” (205). Revision has come a long way indeed. Theseus, the Minotaur and the Labyrinth are perhaps the main figures of postmodern mythology.

We may with justice conclude that revision touches virtually every aspect of the activities of creative writers from ancient times to the advent of cyberspace and the debates of contemporary philosophy and literary theory. Revision dominates the lives of professional authors from the initial inspiration, through incubation and drafting, editing, collaboration and even following the actual publication in printed form and is intimately connected with the creative process itself. Indeed, one might legitimately claim that revision *is* the creative process. Writers are undoubtedly sometimes struck by an initial “inspiration” but just as undoubtedly they must labor long and hard to render their inspiration into coherent, aesthetic and readable form. In literary studies, perhaps we would do well to honor the re-visionary as well as the visionary.