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Review

The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text. Edited by J. A. Leo Lemay and P. M. Zall. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981. Pp. lxiv, 288. \$28.00.

There is rarely unanimity of opinion about how manuscripts should be edited. Some argue for a literatim transcription, others for silent emendations made for reader utility. But what of texts where the process of composition is as important as the finished product? The editors of *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin: A Genetic Text* have had to face this question, and their solution will be of use to us all.

In those rare instances where we are fortunate enough to have an author's working copy (usually a manuscript) for a printed work, this earlier form of the text allows us to see the author's mind—and often his literary skill—during the act of artistic creation. The editor of this type of manuscript usually has two choices: he may present a clear text with textual notes, or he may provide a running commentary or genetic text. (A photo-facsimile text is not a useful solution, both because it is prohibitively expensive and because it does not of itself fully explain the compositional process.)

Placing the textual information in notes appended to a clear text (usually the first stage of the text or the last level of revision) is perhaps the easier solution. For simple revisions, a prose description is sufficient: 'Herman' inserted before 'Melville', for example. But when the revision is complicated, the prose summary often becomes confusing and needlessly long. For example, in the published text of Emerson's essay on "Thoreau" (1862) appears the sentence "But he, at least, is content." In the manuscript, Emerson wrote 'But lie there the'; deleted 'lie there the'; interlined 'he can'; wiped out 'can'; continued interlining 'at [over where 'can' was] least, is content.'; and added a comma after 'he'. One way to handle this is to adopt a formulaic system employed by Fredson Bowers in the William James edition and described in

"Transcription of Manuscripts: The Record of Variants," *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 212-264. In employing Bowers' system, the quoted text is usually the final revised manuscript reading while the process of revision is described within square brackets. All bracketed readings are cancels and have been cancelled in the manner indicated by the italicized description. An asterisk before a word indicates that the inscription of the word(s) and punctuation immediately following was done in a manner described by the bracketed information coming after; all words and punctuation between that asterisk and the square bracket are part of the described material. In cases where further revision takes place within described material preceded by an asterisk, a double asterisk is employed before the first word of such intermediate material. Thus, the formulaic rendering of the Emerson passage is 'But [~~lie there the~~] *he, **at [*over wiped out* 'can'] least, is content.' *intrl.*; *comma after* 'he' added. Bowers' system, which I have employed in my "Emerson's 'Thoreau': A New Edition from Manuscript" (*Studies in the American Renaissance* 1979 [Boston: Twayne, 1979], pp. 17-92), does take some getting used to, but repays the effort by its careful attention to the exact stages of composition.

The major drawback to a clear text with notes is that the reader must reconstruct the revisions in a separate effort. The genetic text—in which the notes are incorporated into the text—does not have this problem. Perhaps the best-known genetic text is the long-running *The Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. William H. Gilman et al., 14 vols. to date (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960-). In this edition, cancellations are indicated by angle brackets (< >) and insertions by up-and-down arrows (↑ ↓). Write-overs are indicated by having the closing angle bracket flush with the initial letter of the word written over the cancelled word, as in '<good> well'. Thus, in the first example I gave, we would have '↑Herman↓Melville'. The second example is more complex: 'But <lie there the> ↑he↑, ↓<can> at least, is content.↓'. This form of genetic text allows the reader to see the original reading, the process

of revision, and the final reading in one motion and in one place.

However, the more complex the manuscript, the more strain is placed on the system of reporting. One of the most intriguing examples is Melville's *Billy Budd Sailor (An Inside Narrative)*, ed. Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts, Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), wherein eight stages of the text (with twenty-nine substages) have been identified, the manuscript is inscribed in ink or pencil (or both), and the revising process is described using some dozen editorial symbols. The genetic text is sometimes hard going, but the result is eminently useful, especially when read in conjunction with the "reading text" (that is, a technically uniform text such as a publisher would prepare for the general reader).

Lemay and Zall have chosen to present a genetic text similar to that used in the Emerson *Journals*, with two additional symbols. Angle brackets and arrows still indicate, respectively, cancellations and insertions, but braces now surround "material written over by the following material." Because Franklin wrote "in only one column on each page, leaving the other half of the page blank for later additions or revisions, "double arrows (↕ . ↕) are employed around these columnar additions. A section of textual notes elaborates on material

not fully described in the genetic text. The result is an easy-to-read genetic text which accurately presents the growth of Franklin's *Autobiography*.

In addition to the genetic text, the editors' introduction discusses the four stages of composition; the manuscript (now at the Henry E. Huntington Library) in terms of its physical properties (type of paper and watermarks), foliation, and pagination; gives a history of the manuscript's provenance; describes four other contemporary copies of the manuscript; and gives a history of the early printings of the *Autobiography*. A detailed index to the introduction and Franklin's text completes the book. One surprising finding of this edition is that the 1964 Yale University Press edition (edited by Leonard W. Labaree et al.) was prepared from "a photocopy—not the original manuscript," and "perpetuates more than fifty substantive errors from previous editions" while failing to report many of the cancellations in the manuscript.

We should be grateful to Lemay and Zall for giving us this detailed study of how Franklin wrote his *Autobiography*. It should become, as the editors say in their introduction, "the basis for every future conscientious edition of a clear text . . . of the autobiography."

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