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Single-Editor Editions from Manuscript: The Journals of Theodore Parker

CAROL JOHNSTON

For at least a quarter century, and possibly longer, Theodore Parker recorded his daily thought and study, the details of a life of controversy and public achievement in his journal. Within the bulky journal volumes which once lined the shelves of his study, and which now rest in no less than a half-dozen libraries and private collections, is contained the history of one man thinking and acting in mid-nineteenth-century New England, the documentation of a life which was in almost every detail a fulfillment of Emerson's concept of the American Scholar. An abolitionist and reformer, Parker's career spanned the New England Renaissance: he contributed to the *Dial*; preached in West Roxbury; was a regular visitor to Brook Farm; attended most of the meetings of the Transcendental Club; edited the *Massachusetts Quarterly Review*; and numbered Ralph Waldo Emerson, George Ripley, William Henry Channing, Convers Francis, Margaret Fuller, Amos Bronson Alcott, and Elizabeth Palmer Peabody among his acquaintances. His *A Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity* was the great trauma of mid-nineteenth-century Unitarianism; his lectures in the Boston Melodeon in the 1840s and 1850s drew audiences of thousands; his stand on the Anthony Burns affair almost led to violence on the steps of Faneuil Hall.

There is, as yet, no growing awareness of Parker's importance in mid-nineteenth-century America, no consensus on the value of his work or the influence of the various controversies in which he was involved. In the late nineteenth century, when most of Parker's biographers fingered through his journals, the time was simply not ripe for an understanding of all that he had said and done, nor for a full appreciation of his personal failures and triumphs. For this reason, much more remains of the Parker journals than has been used. As a contribution to the biography of this reformer whose literary and social views markedly influenced the Boston of his day, the journals have a recognized importance; but they make other demands on the scholar as well, demands which are perhaps only as yet vaguely or partially perceived.

Anyone who undertakes to edit a text must necessarily make some basic decisions about the nature of that text and the purpose of the final edition. The editorial plan on which this edition is based was derived from a series of premises on the nature of the Parker manuscripts and on my purpose

in editing them. The journal manuscripts are massive, encyclopedic documents rendering Parker's thought coherently, if not always according to strict grammatical usage. They are private, unpublished documents written in a hand that is cramped and difficult to read, and the manuscript pages are complicated by unformed words, slurred endings, and an extensive use of personal abbreviation. In editing this document, my primary concern is to make the Parker journals available as rapidly as is consistent with the most elementary requirements for a scholarly edition—accuracy and completeness. My second concern is to present the text in a manner that will retain rather than obscure the inevitable nuance of the rough texture of the journal. The final product will be an unmodernized, critical, genetic-text edition. It will be unmodernized in the sense that spelling and punctuation will not be altered to conform to recent usage, critical in the sense that it will incorporate certain kinds of editorial emendations dictated by the editor's judgment, and genetic in the sense that cancellations and insertions will be noted directly in the text.

Theoretically, editorial policy and procedure were an outgrowth of my understanding of the nature of the manuscript—and not an imposition of editorial preconception; still, I find that the series of editorial decisions which I have made in the course of this project have been at times subjective, and this has led me to make certain conclusions about the nature of the editorial process and about the need for constructing working manuals for single-editor editions.

Like the stage-director, presented with the task of interpreting a script in a given production, the editor—after studying the documents to be edited—must decide *how* the material can best be presented to his audience. Like the stage-director, the editor's final product will not be a simple reproduction of that document, but an interpretation of it.

This idea is neither new nor unusual; as early as 1949 W. W. Greg defended his "Rationale of Copy-Text" as an attempt to uphold the essential "liberty of [editorial] judgement." Sometimes the decisions made by an editor are so thoughtless as to be hardly recognized as decisions at all; more often than not, however, they are the result of a painstaking, occasionally agonized study by the editor of his author and his text. Whereas the stage-director rightfully disguises the scaffolding of his production, it is the

responsibility of the editor to reveal as much as possible about the decision-making process in which he has been involved. I think this is best done, not in the limited confines of a textual introduction, but by constructing a working manual which describes in detail not only the history of a project, but pre-transcription procedures, transcription procedures, and editorial procedures. Although the need for such a manual as a means of assuring consistency in editions requiring the attention of numerous editors is obvious, the need for such a manual in projects involving a single editor is often overlooked. This is unfortunate since the formulation of consistent transcription procedure and editorial policy is as important to the single editor as it is to groups of editors. Additionally, a manual of this sort serves functional and historical purposes: (1) it insures a consistent transmission of editorial policy throughout the stages of the project, and (2) it provides scholars with a working knowledge of the problems involved in preparing a critical text of a specific document. The Parker journals offer several instances of textual problems and solutions which could be treated in such a manual.

In comparison to many editorial projects, the editing of the Parker journals appears to be a relatively easy task. The textual evidence is limited to a single holograph document and is not troubled by confusing or multiple readings. The editor's purpose, simply enough, is to determine as accurately as possible *what* is in the manuscript, and by imposing a limited yet consistent editorial policy on that material, to construct a readable but scholarly edition. For this reason, much of the Parker journals manual discusses the specific transcription procedures to be used in editing the manuscript.

Parker's handwriting is difficult, but not impossible; still, it poses some interesting problems. Of greatest concern to me was Parker's tendency to resort, in the haste of his thought, to unformed letters and words. Letters, word parts, and word endings seem to give up their individuality and become absorbed in the general form of a word.

There can be no question that what the reader intuits as "Young", when transcribed with photographic exactitude must be rendered "Youg", or that Parker's "ing" endings are often no more than a hump with a tail, or that his "ed" endings look remarkably like unformed "d"s. It would be inaccurate to transcribe these otherwise. Yet the mere proliferation of these unformed endings and word parts on each page does more than retain the "rough texture" of the journals; rendered in typescript and ultimately in print, it seems not so much the ill-formed product of a moment of inspiration as it does the uninspired fumbling of an illiterate.

My first thought was to expand these word forms; however, this solution did not seem viable for several reasons: (1) it would create an unwieldy apparatus, and (2) it did not validly indicate Parker's intent. Obviously, I needed to make a decision about Parker's handwriting; but just as obviously, I needed to be able to justify that decision. My first

step was to create a card file of Parker's letters—initial letters, medial letters, and final letters. I blew-up Xeroxes of several manuscript pages and snipped out various letters, letter groups, and word endings that were troubling me. The file not only helped familiarize me with the nuances of Parker's hand, but provided me with a tool for objectifying my own transcription procedures. Next, I transcribed the manuscript pages with photographic exactitude. This provided me with the data needed in the decision-making process. Reviewing the transcription, it was easy to see that nearly all of Parker's word endings were somehow slurred—in other words, that the appearance of these shortened forms was more a matter of a trick of the eye or the wrist than it was of authorial intent. In editing the manuscript, I decided to restore these endings, without emendation, much as a transcriber who discovered that he had been transcribing an author's small "c" as a capital "C" would on recognizing the author's intent go back and perfect his transcription.

Clearly, some editors would agree and others disagree with my final decision. Whatever the case, they should be given some kind of formal statement as to the reasoning behind this and other editorial decisions made in the course of the project. In terms of time, money, and energy, I have come to believe that it is no longer feasible to undertake any long-range editorial project without the construction of a working manual.