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BETTER YET: TENNYSON'S POETIC REVISIONISM IN THE HARVARD MANUSCRIPTS

1

I won't deny the fetishistic allure exerted by a great poet's manuscripts: those creative moments' monuments offer an experience as intimately physical as any a reader can share within the symbolic order of writing. Nor will I belittle the impetus that time spent with such charismatic relics gives to textual scholarship in what must be at once its most archivally grounded and most irresistibly speculative mode. But I won't extol these things either, not here; for it is not documents on that rare order that have engrossed me on this assignment, not quite. While writing a book on Tennyson three decades ago I did turn the leaves of the chief Tennyson manuscript holdings, amid the special collections libraries of two Cambridges, and in a spirit of veneration whose memory remains auratic in a sense that still irradiates, even as it sharpens by contrast, the mechanically mediated reprise on which this chapter reports. The remarks that follow draw not on originals but on copies, primarily the sumptuous *Tennyson Archive* (1987-93) edited in facsimile those same three decades ago by Christopher Ricks and Aidan Day, and secondarily on Ricks's adept representation of textual variants in his edition *The Poems of Tennyson* two decades before that.¹ These are sources printed and bound, classic outputs of the dispensation that Walter Benjamin called the age of mechanical reproduction and that Marshall McLuhan traced back to

¹ *The Tennyson Archive*, ed. Christopher Ricks and Aidan Day (New York and London: Garland, 1987). Ricks's one-volume *The Poems of Tennyson* (London: Longman, 1969), which I cite here, was expanded to an edition in three volumes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) incorporating new reference to formerly interdicted manuscripts held at Trinity College, Cambridge.

the technological revolution wrought by the printing press.² That dispensation has partially disenchanted my cloistered and unique sources by putting them into circulation: they are now available virtually to anybody with access to a research library or, indeed, to deep pockets and a bookseller.

By the same token, the equal-opportunity consideration of facsimiles and print transcriptions we now enjoy is an experience more fundamentally – and, what’s not the same thing, more manifestly – mediated than an encounter with the very paper, ink, and graphite once actually handled by an author at work. Print has a way of cooling the whole process of manuscript study down, and thus of exposing to sober view the analytical operations that such study entails even when it takes place in the presence of the handwritten *Ding an sich*. Those operations are essentially comparative, being rooted in the appreciation of differences between what Tennyson saw into print and what he curatorially reserved in notebooks and loose papers recording initial or inserted or canceled versions of the text he eventually published. From this comparative process the published text emerges as itself a version, one located firmly if with privilege on the same spectrum of trial and error with the versions tried and ruled out in manuscript. This versioned textual condition obtains, as is now increasingly understood, right across the board. It emerges with great clarity in the case of Tennyson, who not only published distinctly different versions of works like *Poems* (1832, revised 1842) and *The Princess* (1847, revised 1850, 1851) but made a habit of introducing late changes into typeset and printed “trial editions” of his works for final tweaking just before publication. The archive reveals Tennyson’s as a species of creativity that, profoundly invested in openness to change, honored the right if not the duty to differ with oneself, and cherished the prospect of ongoing improvement. In this he was markedly Victorian. The care with which his many surviving manuscripts show him exercising such a suite of options illustrates in highly granular fashion, and across a career of seventy years, his consummate fitness to act as the Laureate of

² Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn and ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1968), pp. 217-52; McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

a widespread reading public for whom just these issues of change and choice, writ ethically large, constituted the charter of modernity.

Before resuming this nexus between moral self-correction and poetic self-editing, let me whet if I can the appetite of readers not yet acquainted with *The Tennyson Archive* by immethodically sampling its contents, drawn for expediency's sake throughout this essay from just the materials held at Harvard, which fill the first ten of its thirty-one volumes. Here are some sorts of thing that even a riffing browser of the *Archive* may expect to encounter. (1) *Illustration*. The earlier manuscripts especially are seasoned with pen-and-ink sketches, overwhelmingly of faces, chiefly male, in profile. That most of these line portraits look grave if not mournful, without evident correspondence to the verses they adjoin, points to merely one direction a manuscript comparatist might pursue, as I have not done below, in assaying this poet's characteristic melancholia. (2) *Serendipity*. Tennyson's apparently reaching for any working notebook that lay to hand, compounded by his habit of reusing a notebook by flipping it over, then writing back-to-front (and upside-down), engendered curious juxtapositions, at once merely coincidental and weirdly suggestive: between, say, school notes on farm animals' eyes and that exotic early ode "O Bosky Brook," or between a partial translation of Aristophanes' *Frogs* and passages from *The Lover's Tale*, Tennyson's most obsessive work and certainly his most obsessively rewritten.³ (3) *Philology*. There are heterogeneous, often funny lists of rhyming words; and separate alphabetic glossaries, some ambitously systematic in conception though sporadically executed, of old words in English, words in Old English, Italian, German, Welsh, and one neat half-page tabulation of Grimm's Law governing consonantal shifts among eight languages from Sanskrit to Old High German.⁴ If these

³ H.Nbk.8.fol.31v. This abbreviation, which I adopt in form for all citations from *The Tennyson Archive*, specifies the verso, or back side, of the thirty-first leaf within the eighth of the Harvard notebooks. It is reproduced on p. 130 of vol. 2. Henceforth I omit volume and page numbers as superfluous, given the continuous enumeration of notebooks and leaves throughout the *Archive*.

⁴ Rhymes may be found in H. Nbks. 14.fol.20v and 47.fol.1v, word-hoards *passim* in H.Nbks. 4, 8, 14, 18, 26, 37.

endeavors bespeak a lifelong interest in the linguistic resources that form any poet's basic tools, those from the earlier notebooks might be freshly correlated with this poet's experiments in what strike us now, and soon struck him too, as the precious compounding of adjectival diction in such a poem as the 1832 "Lady of Shalott." (4) *Format*. For pages at a clip the composition of *Idylls of the King* from either side of 1870 proceeds in rhythmical prose that now and then breaks, like an opera or a William Morris romance, into blank-verse passages eventually incorporated into the finished epic.⁵ The late tribute "To Virgil" (1882) reveals the poet counting stresses in that lengthy-lined poem with vertical marks, and in the process choosing between decameter and nonometer (which won out, happily); the early venture into quantitative prosody "Ilion, Ilion" (1830?) fits to its ancient Greek theme a full set of superscript longs and shorts, a few of them as arrestingly contrary to my ear as what we find decades later in the diacritically sprung rhythm of Gerard Manley Hopkins's manuscripts. (6) *Chirography*. At every turn this treasure of handwritten texts evinces manuscript's manual labor, by dint of the cursive hand. There are several distinct penmanships for Tennyson himself – though mainly, and to this peruser's relief, the clear accountancy of the "terse hand" in which he took some pride – but also contributions from several amanuenses, among them identifiably the poet's wife and son.⁶

Thus far the fifty-odd notebooks held at Harvard alone, with scores more of loose sheets into the bargain, where the sorts of textual curiosity just itemized call out for comparison with what the poet saw fit to set before the public. Whether Tennyson would have approved our having access to all this hoard of unpublished matter remains doubtful. True, it was he who hoarded it, or endorsed its storage by his executor son – unlike his counterpart Robert Browning, who in grooming his own legacy

⁵ Most notably the first dozen leaves of H.Nbk.38. These prose/verse drafts are described, sampled, and appreciated in the fifth of *Six Tennyson Essays* by Sir Charles Tennyson (1954; rptd Wakefield: S. R. Publishers, 1972), pp. 153-78.

⁶ See Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir by His Son* (London and New York: Macmillan, 1897), 1: 198: "he once said, not thinking of himself, that great men generally wrote 'terse' hands."

destroyed as much draft manuscript and correspondence as Tennyson left behind, lest it get in the way of readers' engagement with the finished product. Browning, dramatic masquer that he was, discountenanced above all the biographical reduction that life can wreak on art. Tennyson for his part reprehended biographical prying less than bibliographical trivialization, finding the prospect that his art might be upstaged less worrisome than the likelihood that it might be watered down. A tart late sonnet entitled "Poets and their Bibliographies" (1885) grouched that in his day of cheapened public circulation, unlike classical antiquity, "the Love of Letters, overdone, / Had swampt the sacred poets with themselves" (ll. 13-14). Fair enough. Nevertheless, that this poem was drafted – and reworked – under the title "On publishing every scrap of a writer" is a datum we possess only from a certain scrapbook leaf, unceremoniously ticketed for us as H.Nbk.47.fol.31v, whose very existence in print Tennyson both wrote the poem in order to forestall and at the same time enabled by hanging on to it. This paradox of access every user of the *Archive* should bear in mind. In that the compilation gives us thrice the Tennyson we formerly had to read, we may well feel swamped with too much of a good thing. Yet a swamp is a wetland, of all habitats most fertile, a place where you need equally to know what you're looking for and to be ready for what may turn up by surprise.

2

I went looking this time for authorial acts of *intervention*: places, in the first instance, where Tennyson recorded a change of mind with a strikethrough or insert; in the next instance, where a manuscript passage differing from the version in print shows that such a change took place, but without showing it in action. The former and more obvious sort of evidence is ubiquitous in the *Archive*: low-hanging fruit, mainly tasty and always wholesome. It offers steady master-classes in versification, whose lessons are perhaps the more impressive when it is a minor poem that hones the art. The draft lyric that became "To ----" in *Poems* (1832; given by Ricks as "My life is full of weary days") is not that

volume's only poem to indulge in passing a melancholy sweetness it overtly disowns; and one line in particular from H.Nbk.4.fol.344v epitomizes just that tension. "Plant thou no dusky cypress-tree," commands the MS, as does the published poem (line 13); but in manuscript the adjective is canceled and a fancier one written above it: "darkspired," which supplied the duskiess while twining itself phonemically with "-spired" into the sounds of "cypress" that came next. A poet's *amuse-bouche*, in short, savored for an interval but dutifully renounced on publication. Nearby, a justly obscure jingoistic sonnet on "Buonaparte" (1832) flickers up nicely in when the poet attests the French naval defeat at Copenhagen through special effects espied afar from Elsinore:

the distant sea,
Rocking with shattered spars, with sudden fires
Flamed over. (lines 10-12)

Thus the published version; but the MS first had "flying fires / Shot over," then revised "flying" to "sheeted" and "Shot" to "Flamed." At stake in these changes was less the picture than the soundtrack, which Tennyson was tuning, and pruning, for tempered alliteration. That "shattered," "sheeted," and "Shot" were ever together in any recension is improbable. We can't know, but a likelier sequence has Tennyson introducing "Flamed" first, then noting its incompatibility with "flying" and replacing the latter, but without attending, at least while this MS page lay open (H.Nbk.5.fol.4v), to the acoustically garish echo the newcomer "sheeted" made with "shattered" – which was duly muted into "sudden" at some point between this draft and the sonnet's publication.

These notebook *trouvailles* don't disclose mysteries of original creation – nothing within a reader's scope can do quite that – nor do they transport us all the way from inception to final execution. They possess instead the particular interest of the intermediate, highlighting a deliberative act that, pivoting on difference, weighs a glossy against a matte finish, and that in Tennyson's practice typically

prefers understatement to redundancy. “Demeter and Persephone” (1889) ends with an unwelcome vision of the pagan underworld to which the goddess speaking the poem remains imperfectly resigned. In manuscript Tennyson had made this scene a little too attractively musical in rendering what Demeter hopes to “see no more”:

all the sinful fires
Of torment, & the shadowy warrior fleet
Along the weary field of asphodel. (H.Nbk.53.fols.34r and 67v)

If “sinful” over-modernized the moral universe of so archaic a pagan figure, the linkages of “warrior” with “weary” and of “weary” with “fleet” with “field” by their superfluous euphony belittled the great Achilles whom the poet probably had in mind. So he consolidated the double into a single chime, promoted a complex consonance of *l* and *d* sounds over the blatant long-*e* assonance, and in the process made the doomed hero less a refugee and more a monument, letting “the shadowy warrior glide / Along the silent field of asphodel” (lines 150-51). Toward the end of the published *Princess*, the wounded narrator-prince awakens after delirium,

sane, but well-nigh close to death
For weakness: it was evening: silent light
Slept on the painted walls. (7.104-6)

H.Nbk.24.fol.2v betrays the less than suitable pictorial brilliance of Tennyson’s first coat on those painted walls, where initially “tremulous beams / Played.” As in the instances above, a too-bold alliteration was the problem: “beams” picked up “evening,” which had already picked up “weakness”; and the vowel chime of between “Played” and “painted” threatened to overdo a scene that ought to be subdued. In place of this brass section the poet offered the long *i*’s of “silent light” and a restful whisper

of consonants. And, where the anapest induced by “tremulous” had taken a fluttering pulse, the metrical steadiness in revision endowed circumstances with a solidity suited to the royal patient’s coming back to his right mind.

These changes to *The Princess* Tennyson wrote down for us to see on the manuscript page. In two comparable instances of revision, made to the draft version of passages more celebrated, it falls to us to infer the poet’s weighing of subtle rhythmic options, by collation with the printed text we know. Take first a famous crux from “Ulysses” (1842) that was there in essence on one early manuscript leaf but just half-fledged as yet:

Yet all experience is an arch thro w^h
 Gleams the untravelled world: how dull it is
 To rust unburnished, not to shine in use

(H.Nbk.16.fol.11r)

The third line survived intact into publication, preceded there by two new hemistichs (“whose margin fades,” “to pause, to make an end”) and one new pentameter (“For ever and for ever when I move”) – any one of which, squinted at in the right light, may serve as an autopoetic allegory for the process of expansive prosodic motion that brought them into being and made the finished passage sing (lines 19-23). All this revisionist glory takes its start, besides, in a more modest change that Tennyson at some point made in the first of these unrevised MS lines, whenever it was that he altered the telegraphic “thro w^h” to its synonym “wherethro.” Was it the double catch of “arch” and (short-handedly) “which” that showed the poet, as if his ear saw it first, how flat was the screen he had given his Ulysses to imagine on? The unstopped vowel that ends the revised line opened the adventurous picture into 3-D

interactivity, and with it an appetency without end, spelled out in the imagery of the great new lines that came next.⁷

A different kind of blank-verse passage that crystallized into greatness somewhere out of scholarly sight occurs in “Gareth and Lynette” (1872) from *Idylls of the King*. Arriving at the goal of their teenage road trip to Camelot, Gareth’s rustic buddies are dazzled by the spendid sculptures on the arched gateway, and for a space the incognito young lord they are traveling with is dazzled too:

And Gareth also fixt his eyes so long
 Upon them that to him they seem’d to move.
 Then came a blast of music from the town.
 Started the three back from the gate, & then
 From out thereunder came an ancient man. (H.Nbk.40.fol.13r)

It’s Merlin whom all this fanfare heralds, and an alternation of trochees with iambs in the fourth line establishes already in manuscript that Tennyson meant to allow the enchanter some special effects. But the poet’s full-dress magic show called for more preparation than this. As his grandson Sir Charles observes in a marginal note penciled on this MS page, the third line needed some advance work by “[variation of rhythm],” which it got by the time it was published: “Out of the city a blast of music pealed” (line 234) is a line that bestows an initial trochaic surprise on the acoustic stimulus before doubling it next in the boys’ response, now bettered from the manuscript into “Back from the gate started the three” (line 235). Laying the ground still further up the text, Tennyson also put some fitting wriggle into the first two lines, which as published run, “And Gareth likewise on them fixt his eyes / So

⁷ “Ulysses” has attracted more manuscript attention than any of Tennyson’s poems except *In Memoriam*. Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 60-61, for example, and Cornelia Pearsall, *Tennyson’s Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 178-204, each discuss a different set of revisions from H.Nbk.16. On the largest-scale revision to this poem, the insertion into fols.11v-12 of the verse paragraph on Telemachus, see Linda K. Hughes, *The Manyfaced Glass: Tennyson’s Dramatic Monologues* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), p. 271.

long, that even to him they seemed to move" (lines 232-33). The revised first line sustains the original's metered mimetic stupor but now rigs the enjambment to let "So long" wait a bit longer and then give way to the distinction, newly assonant and with a slight anapestic slither, that is introduced now by the word "even." Add to this prosodic rhythm the narrative rhythm Tennyson imposed by getting rid of those two limping "thens" – replacing the second, already on this MS page, with the relational "to whom" (line 235), and thereby girding for the encounter to come – and you have glimpsed something behind the scenes about the magic of blank verse.

3

It remains as impressive as ever to witness in the poet's hand changes to canonical texts one knew about already by second-hand editorial report: the emergence in "Ulysses" of the penultimate paragraph on Telemachus as afterthought, the long mosaic (re)arrangement within and among lyrics for *In Memoriam* (1850), the accretive annexations that built *Maud* (1855) from a lyric into a monodrama. These famous instances are, on differing orders of magnitude, poems open in structure while strictly observant of such local formations as meter and rhyme; and it is fair to say that each germinated from an emotional kernel that was for Tennyson nourished very early by the patterns of rhythmic resonance to which he first keyed it, and to which later additions, however generously imagined, still conformed. Written as early as the 1820s and published only a century later, "Ode: O Bosky Brook" in manuscript illustrates the young poet's play with such conformity. The formally improvisatory genre of an irregular ode, in one passage heavily rehearsed on H.Nbk.2.fol.12, both encourages him to go out on a limb by seasoning longer lines with shorter ones, and obliges him to legitimate each extemporization by finding a rhyme for it somewhere up or down the page. The result never struck Tennyson as publishable, perhaps because the multivariate prosodic calculations entailed by so free a form, while enabling a proliferation of imagery, tended to dissipate its focus. Irregular strophic composition worked better for

him when in the magnetic grip of an obsessive theme, such as drives *Maud* and was indeed present from the first in its germ “Oh! that ’twere possible.” That strophic lyric as it appears in H.Nbk.13.fols.20v-20r is considerably less regular in all respects than the published versions of 1837 and 1855, where a form more nearly (though not quite) stanzaic renders aptly the insistence of the beloved’s ghostly shape that, neither staying nor quitting, will not forgive. Absent such a curb or tether, Tennyson’s blank verse often ran the risk of self-surfeit at which Hopkins pointed a finger in a well-known letter censuring the elder poet’s “Parnassian” susceptibilities.⁸ That this risk was seldom in fact incurred is a tribute to Tennyson’s remarkable self-discipline. This virtue students of the publishing career can learn to appreciate even without manuscript corroboration; nevertheless, time spent with the *Archive*’s several MSS of *The Lover’s Tale* or “The Gardener’s Daughter” will deepen the appreciation. The pages in question both illustrate the need of such discipline and evince its detailed exercise: there was a lot of surplus verbal splendor where those poems came from, and by and large Tennyson had the tact not to swamp them with it.⁹

Where the chosen form invoked the rule of a strictly fixed formal pattern, the economy of revision entailed a zero-sum game where a new foot or line cost an old one – no more no less – and where a reader can accordingly calibrate the process of revision with more nicety.¹⁰ One emerging principle is that greater constraint within the form of a poem boosted the density and complexity of expression for which adjacent manuscript revisions strove. Paratactic formulations in first draft yield to

⁸ Letter of 10-11 September 1864 to Alexander Baillie, in *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. R. K. R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 67-70.

⁹ Trinity MSS variants of “The Gardener’s Daughter” are discussed by Hughes, pp. 75-79.

¹⁰ One presumably late addition to *In Memoriam*, which became lyric 131, shows a practiced hand taking its bearings as it parks two chosen rhyme words over on the right, to await incorporation into the deeply familiar *abba* tetrameter stanza at the end of lines yet unwritten (and on this leaf, H.Nbk.18.fol.3v, never filled in). Fortuitously, but too aptly to escape notice as a feature of this last-numbered lyric, the two words epitomize in emotional abstract the poem’s whole trajectory: from “shock” to “trust.”

degrees of syntactic subordination: the latter make an increased demand on the reader that, even where the effect sought is a certain dazzling scatter, makes it clear that miscellaneity like other poetic effects is something not just posited but *effected*.¹¹ In an early version of the prologue to *The Princess* the narrator tells how

That morning Walter show'd me round the hall
Carved stones from the Abbey ruins close at hand
Lay on the polish'd floors & mixt with these
Scaphite & annulite & ammonite
From the near quarries. (H.Nbk.24.fol.6r)

All the ampersands (in Tennyson's hand they're looped plusses) give the game of sheer accumulation away as too cheaply won. So the poet cut all but the introductory line of this catalogue and started again with imagery that pays more respect to the constituent items, even as it connects them by giving each a place within a designed ensemble:

Greek, set with statues. Out of urn & vase
Cape-lilies flamed, azaleas shone, & glow'd
Rose-balsam. On the polish'd pavement lay
Carved stones. . . .

Prepositional phrases now take pride of place, as later on the same page do "on the tables" and "higher on the walls / Betwixt." Although few of these phrases survived into the eventual *Princess*, and none verbatim, the care they manifest to convert inventory into arrangement colors much of the poet's revisionary art. Witness the passage filling H.Nbk.39.fol.3r, which was added to the 1872 *Idylls of the*

¹¹ Tennyson's management of syntax is occasionally noted but seldom systematically pursued. The most persistent study is probably W. David Shaw's in *Tennyson's Style* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1976), where index entries on "Syntax" and "Grammar" will convey something of the range of the topic (pp. 337-38, 346).

King as lines 188-94 of “Merlin and Vivien” after Tennyson had reordered, by written enumeration in the margin, what he set down first about Merlin’s wizardly case of the blues:

- He walkd in gulfs of darkness where he found
- 6 Death in all life & falsehood in all love,
 World-war of flesh against the spiritual king,
- 7 The meanest having power upon the highest,
- 8 And the high purpose broken by the worm.
- 2 A wave that ever poised itself to fall,
- 3 An ever-moaning battle in the mist,
- 4 Faint cries for him who fainted in his faith,
 And dimly felt the king who cannot die.
- 5 World-war of dying flesh against the life

The lines he wrote first and then put last render the sorcerer’s “great melancholy” (line 187) at a high level of generality; but now, as decades before in *The Princess*, Tennyson understood that poetic generalization, in order to tell, should be a function of poetic specificity. Hence the inductive priority given in revision to graphic images of wave and battle and voice over what amount to authorial endorsements of the epic’s tragic themes of life and death, falsehood and faith – and hence the symbolic fusion of theme with image in the line Tennyson saved for last (ranked 8th above, published verbatim as line 194). While stray words were changed here and there in this passage, the signal revisionary achievement remains the imposition of a secondary, subordinative logic on a primary parataxis.

Rearranging the furniture turns out, for a poet like this, to be a fine art. While Tennyson was never to become a major writer of sonnets, experimentation with the form in early notebooks shows him proving its architecture. “Conrad! why call thy life monotonous” came early but was printed only posthumously by his grandson from H.Nbk.7.fol.14v, a manuscript that lets us see how dissatisfaction

with a single line in this Petrarchan sonnet led to subtle recalibration of the whole. Hailing the addressee as a mariner slow to embark on life's voyage, the speaker asks,

Why brood above thine anchor? the wov'n weed
 Flattens the swaying waves w^h round thee spread
 Albeit the shores of life are various. (MS lines 2-4)

Evidently Tennyson thought the middle line had gotten the flotsam image wrong and thus had conceded too much to Conrad's torpor, so he replaced it with a line that imparted to the seaweed, and the versification too, a catchier sway: "Calms not but blackens the slope waterbed," two spondees now delivering a salutary shake that suits the corrected image. Moreover, to anticipate a revisionary habit shall presently take up at length, Tennyson builds into the corrected image a souvenir of its correction. "Flattens" in the first version means "calms," a meaning now expressly contradicted: "Calms not." The apparent "calm" was a merely optical illusion brought on by the weed's darkening of an inviting undulation that had been there all along and that persists now (per some of the changes discussed above), not in the easy assonantal cloy of "swaying waves," but in the trickier triple consonance of "blackens" with "Calms" and "slope." The change made here also keeps fresh the phrase "swaying Unrest" that awaits in line 12, which a second MS change requites in line 13 by substituting "calm" for "death" in the original appeal "Cleave this death to living eddies," thus rounding the sonnet on itself more tightly. Meanwhile the negation and then cleaving of "calm" have preserved within the improved text the traces of its improvement.¹²

Such integration is the more welcome because of the way the altered line 3 destabilizes the traditional Petrarchan structure of the poem as first written. Because that "Albeit" quoted above at the

¹² Students of *In Memoriam* may be struck by the resemblance between the images here and in that poem's eleventh lyric, with its litany of "Calm" and its climax in imagery of "sway," "rest," and "death." A draft of the later lyric occurs in H.Nbk.16.fol.19r.

head of line 4 was now orphaned by the new preceding line, Tennyson struck it out and took up the metrical slack by calling the shores of life “fair” as well as “various.” Admittedly a bland change in dictional terms; more important is the counterpoint the revised sonnet achieves between noncongruent structures of rhyme and of syntax. The rhyme scheme demarcates lines 1-4 and 5-8 as quatrains, but the new full stop after line 3, by adjoining line 4 to the end-stopped lines that follow, installs a rival and asymmetrical division into 1-3 and 4-8. Never again will this minor sonnet attract such lengthy notice, I dare say, but it serves here to illustrate Tennyson’s lifelong interest in the internal unbalancing of fixed form – “swaying Unrest,” if you will – as a way to impel poetic argument and compel attention. Something similar transpires in the fully Petrarchan “Alexander” (published in 1872 with “Juvenilia”), where among numerous alterations in diction a slight syntactic revision in H.Nbk.5.fol.5v contrives to tip a phrase over from the sonnet’s first quatrain into the second. The change is gratuitous as regards the plain sense of the anecdote – a Persian satrap whom young Alexander has overthrown

bled

At Issus by the Syrian gates, or fled

Beyond the Memmian naphtha-pits, disgraced

For ever – thee, thy track by sands erased

(lines 2-5)

-- but the syntactic overflow into “For ever” recapitulated, macrostructurally, this sonnet’s main formal stunt of enjambling every line in the octave, which totally lacks terminal punctuation in the first draft. There, however, “disgraced” at the end of line 4 had actually constituted an unmarked syntactic stop, since the MS line 5 had made a fresh grammatical start (“Thee, when thy track the blowing sands erased”), which the revision postponed until after the dash.¹³ This little precipitation between lines 4

¹³ Ricks’ reading of “Then” for “Thee” at the head of this MS line (*Poems*, p. 469) is unconvincing: it leaves Alexander out of the picture too long, and it leaves “Joyful” in line 7 with nothing to modify but the inscrutable serpents.

and 5 infuses the octave with that sense of proleptic glory which will engross the sestet, and which arguably attracted the bard-in-training to Alexander's moment of oracular election in the first place, "Returning with hot cheek and kindled eyes" (line 14).

In manuscript, unaltered, that cheek was "flushed" and those eyes were "brightened." At what point Tennyson exchanged these visually descriptive adjectives for the more physically felt "hot" and "kindled" is anybody's guess, but it is an kind of change we see him make throughout the notebooks, preferring corporeal or participatory images to notional or detached ones.¹⁴ As early as the schoolboy extravaganza "Armageddon," "y^e dead soul of every living thing" becomes in revision its organic "heart" instead (line IV.31; H.Nbk.2.fol.8v). "O Bosky Brook" gives the last word to sensory "watchfulness" rather than pensive "thoughtfulness" (line 112; H.Nbk.7.fol.9v). In "The Sleeping Palace" (from "The Day-Dream," 1842) a simile of "spirits dreaming in the womb" is reconceived bodily, *currente calamo* and without benefit of insertion, as "folded" there (H.Nbk.15.fol.4r). The *habeas corpus* privilege of poetic embodiment might also of course, if Tennyson chose, be waived or reversed. A case in point occurs in "Ulysses," where "this gray spirit yearning in desire" (line 30) came out first as "this old heart yet yearning" (H.Nbk.16.fol.11v). Since the uncorrected draft does not yet have Ulysses "roaming with a hungry heart" (line 12), the "heart" image may have been confiscated at a later stage of composition to let the predatory speaker growl his insatiable lust for the world thereby. Still, the conversion of "heart" to "spirit," contravening as it does Tennyson's usual revisionary orientation towards greater embodiment, tells us that his Ulysses lusts for more than the world; like Dante's Ulisse, his is essentially a transgression of the spirit, his world-hunger at last a figure for something stranger, and not necessarily more virtuous, than the early "Armageddon" change that this change runs backwards.

¹⁴ A rare and intriguing philosophical prose passage on H.Nbk.4.fol.5r dating from Tennyson's days at Trinity College, but of indeterminate origin – lecture notes? transcription of something read? original speculation? – identifies the mind's "Tendency to. . . embody" and affirms, "Ideas are not y^e question: but whatever is admitted to be *conceivable* must be *imageable* & y^e *imageable* must be fancied *tangible*."

To choose is to rank – privilege one thing, demote another – and in that sense many of the lexical and syntactic choices considered thus far consort with the systems of hierarchy to which Victorian Britain for all its modernizing turmoil still largely adhered. The poet who rose from early public acclaim to laureateship (1850) and barony (1884) had major stakes in his nation’s culture of preferment, which no doubt reinforced his affinity for iconic figures – Ulysses, Alexander, Arthur, Columbus, Napoleon – who, whatever posterity’s verdict, had won the lottery of fame. (Again a contrast with Browning is instructive, given the latter’s eccentric penchant for also-rans.) Yet the notebooks repeatedly show Tennyson zeroing in, not upon objective preferment within the corridors of power, but upon subjective preference within the mind. Time and again, when an act of deliberation between alternatives brings a speaker into psychological focus, that speaker comes as well into alignment with the deliberative poet, who as he shapes speech patterns into finer-tuned drafts seeks out occasions for a character’s critical self-editing. A tiny revision in “Armageddon” seems paradigmatic in this regard, where H.Nbk.2.fol.4r depicts “such ill-omen’d things / It were almost a sin to look on them” but then looks again and recalibrates the moral vision in the second line: “That it were sin almost to look on them.” A subjunctive verb still provides cover, but by promoting “sin” and postponing “almost” Tennyson performs a flickering quarter-retraction, less confident about the eschatological lay of the land than the first version’s but more psychologically cogent concerning its evaluation. The swap of a word here subtilizes a state of mind; in a poem nearly as early, *The Lover’s Tale*, the fixed transcript of an imagined speaker’s self-correction precipitates an act of manuscript correction on the part of his poet: “my love / Grew with myself: say rather was my growth / My outward circling air my inward sap.” This last line, crowded into the bottom of a right-hand page, is canceled and expanded on the facing verso, as if in response to “say rather” in the line above it: “My inward sap, the hold I had on earth, / My

outward circling air wherewith I breathe" (H.Nbk.4.fols.265v-266r). Then, for good measure, "had" in the first new line becomes "have," as if to retrieve through verb tense some equivalent for the way a hurried parataxis in the original line had blurred temporal categories. The entire transaction brings out a paradox inherent in any use of "rather" (which means, after all, "sooner") to mark an afterthought: the attendant conflict between two orders of priority – temporality versus authority, the latter reinforced at this particular crux by the equally curious, auto-apostrophic command "say" – is one that comes with the territory of literary revision.

Had Tennyson not relished this conflict, he probably would not have been so assiduous a self-reviser. Certainly he put it into vigorous play as he worked up a pair of later dramatic monologues, "Lucretius" (1868) and "Columbus" (1880), each in the voice of a man whose quondam authority has been sharply impaired by the passage of time. The former, speaking under the influence of an hallucinogenic aphrodisiac, knows amid his frenzy that he is not himself, and so practices a self-monitoring in which H.Nbk.37.12r-14r shows Tennyson taking an increased interest that uncannily doubles his vigilant poet-speaker's. The first notebook leaf flows with a stream of consciousness as smooth as the "atom-streams / And torrents" of the Epicurean/Shelleyan cosmos, "Ruining along the illimitable inane" word for word as in lines 38-40 of the published poem. But then Lucretius' shrewd guess that his trouble of mind is venereal in nature prompts him to address Venus, whom he cannot help acknowledging yet cannot consistently believe in either. Having affirmed that his verses will "outlast thy Deity," Lucretius checks himself in a new verse paragraph: "Deity? Nay, thy worshippers: my tongue / Trips, or I speak profanely" – tripping adroitly into a pun on the Latin *fanum* that captures his

incertitude whether he belongs inside Venus' shrine or out of it.¹⁵ All this is fairly copied on fol.13r, but reading it over seems to have tripped Tennyson into new feats of patterned interference:

But surely thee I meant not when I took
Poetlike, as the great Sicilian called
Calliope, that all-popular name of thine
To shadow forth the all-generative power.

In the third of these lines, as we should expect, Tennyson thriftily shed the redundant euphony of "all-" with a stroke of the pen. But at some later point, between this draft and the final text, he expanded Lucretius' half-dubious "But surely" disclaimer into a ten-line riot of negations that are, for our purposes, cancellations by other means: "Ay, but I meant not thee; I meant not her / . . . / Nor her. . . / Nor whom. . ." (lines 85-91). Having thus pivoted hard from apostrophic credence to apostatic rigor, in brandishing the poetic license that he shares with Epictetus the Sicilian (and Tennyson the Victorian) Lucretius still can't quite repudiate deity. For the interpolated gloss on his proem to *De Rerum Natura* swerves back into the initially drafted passage on a fresh apostrophe – "Rather, O ye Gods, / Poet-like. . . ." (line 92) – whose hovering "Rather" in effect, and in spite of what Lucretius thinks he means, constitutes a revision of the religious revisionism he has just stridently practiced.

Not that, but this: so runs the burden of the revisionary process on which manuscript study shines its headlamp, down in the tunnels that archives like Tennyson's let scholarship explore. Most of what's there remains invisible in the versions a poet brings forth into public daylight; yet a poem like "Lucretius" expresses Tennyson's will, sponsored no doubt by a sense that this was what the public also wanted, to infuse finished texts with the interest that arose from the repeated consideration of options

¹⁵ In several ways the MS registers Tennyson's labor to achieve in the finished text of "Lucretius" a set of effects analyzed by Shaw, pp. 109-12: the speaker's repetitive recourse to self-quotation "as if to fix attention," his "dissolving the ties of grammatical subordination," his atomized and "stumbling" syntax.

as such. This local discernment may have been prized the more in a culture increasingly beset by fatalistic or necessitarian intimations of a collective human doom. Tennyson suggests as much by implying that Lucretius' compulsive self-correction bespeaks a need to assert in language a control that is eluding him in fact. So too with Columbus, once Admiral of the Ocean Sea and now languishing under house arrest. At first the dying hero inclines to make peace, and declare a guarded victory, by accepting his life's trajectory as a willed *fait accompli*: "I have accomplished what I came to do." But this line (64 as published) ends only the first fourth of the poem, in a false summation from which the next line decisively breaks, with a decisiveness whose exact formulation the poet had trouble deciding on. "Not all. Last night I dream'd to sail" had not so much as fulfilled its pentameter before the last four words were ruled out in favor of "there came a dream – I saild": an abrupt line, which between these versions in H.Nbk.45.fol.21r and the printed one became abrufter still: "Not yet – not all – last night a dream – I saild" (line 65). Each installment of the line requires more attention to the condition of the speaker than the one before it, and less to the dream he is about to share. The dream narrative, a prophetic reprise of Columbus' first American landfall but with an apocalyptic difference, is likewise riddled with corrections on the *not. . . but* model: "Guanahani – but I changed the name" (line 74); "but no!" (line 89); and spectacularly, in the midst, a manuscript intervention that replicates the speaker's interruption of himself. From his dreaming prow Columbus beheld the light of dawn

over – not those alien palms
That Indian isle – but our most ancient East
The Mount Moriah with Jerusalem. (H.Nbk.45.fol.21v)

Between the first and second of these lines Tennyson inserted in the margin a new one – "The miracle of that great new nature – not" – so deepening, by negation, the difference between memory and

prophecy on which it seems Columbus cannot insist enough.¹⁶ Pathetically, which is to say dramatically, it is the insistence and not the vision that claims notice, a circumstance registered obliquely, perhaps, when H.Nbk.47.fol.5v adds in the poet's hand new lines on the treason of the ship's compass, "like an old friend at most need / Shy of the pole." Not for the first time Columbus figures as a man who has lost his compass and who, for that very reason, is determined to take charge where he can, and to declare his alienated condition by picking his gainsaying way among what words remain.¹⁷

To gainsay it, say it again with a difference. It was in *Maud* that Tennyson, in counterpointed sequel to *In Memoriam*, most sustainedly expressed the alienation that the earlier poem had healed – or, on some readings, suppressed. If *In Memoriam* emerges for many readers more credibly as a doubter's poem than as a believer's, in *Maud* the great preponderance of cultural critique over eleventh-hour reconciliation lies beyond dispute. One juncture at which the manuscripts show Tennyson buttressing the nay-saying of his speaker is the poem's most beautifully accommodated lyric, the eighteenth section of Part 1, "I have led her home." As it appears in H.Nbk.30, this ode of erotic bliss sets its heart on continuity – "And never yet so sweetly ran my blood / So like a sunwarm river on & on / Calming itself" (fol.2r) – tempering all to an even pulse that before long has synchronized the very stars to its rhythm, and taken in stride the existential dread their "Cold fires" once aroused. Having sustained this rare mood, however, across forty masterfully irregular lines, here as in "Lucretius"

¹⁶ By the time Hallam Tennyson transcribed these lines in H.Nbk.47.7r, one more change had deepened this Nature/Revelation divide: nature had become not "great" but "fair," its "miracle" demoted to a mere worldly "marvel" (line 78).

¹⁷ Words about words especially appealed to the self-reviser in Tennyson. Two of the most heavily worked passages from the full draft in H.Nbk.13 of that lover's discourse "The Gardener's Daughter" concern, respectively, when it is right to tell one's love (fol.4r) and what it is right to say, or not say, about it afterwards (fol.5v). See also "To the Marquis of Dufferin and Ava" (1889), where receiving afresh his son Lionel's last (written) words, and fitting them responsively into the *In Memoriam* stanza, posed challenges with which Tennyson grappled in revising H.Nbk.55.fols.104r-105r.

Tennyson took pains in the manuscript to divert his speaker's monodramatic stream of consciousness into the rapids of self-inquisition.¹⁸

On fols.3r and 4r, the poem runs right from the ecstasy of line 650 as published ("A purer sapphire melts into the sea") to the confident valediction that begins at line 672 ("my ownest own, farewell"). This was the paradisaical contentment into which Tennyson inserted repeated, increasingly salient interruptions, which constitute much of strophes 6 and 8 and the entirety of stanza 7. Fol.4r contains only the first of these, and the gentlest. Seven draft lines from the end of strophe 8 at the top of this MS sheet are crossed through, and after a space the draft resumes, "The clock within strikes twelve, the silver knell / Of twelve sweet hours." This intrusion of profane and mechanical enumeration sounds a note alien to the astral, organic, and Biblical-mythic language that has prevailed hitherto. Yet once we reach it in line 662 of the published text, the line seems scarcely striking at all, because so much desultory activity has intervened by that point – in the ode, and in the process of its composition. It is as if the chime punctuating the early draft's seamless flow awoke the temporarily entranced poet to his larger plan for *Maud*, which as I have argued elsewhere entailed grounding the speaker's profoundest lyric impulses in the classed and gendered mandates of mid-Victorian culture.¹⁹ The poet's retroactivation of this plan at earlier points in his initially smooth draft occurs in a notebook not at Harvard but at Trinity College, Cambridge (where volume 14 of the *Archive* lets us pursue it). T.Nbk.36.fols.26v-27r picks up the speaker's claim that he "would die / To save from some slight shame

¹⁸ As Christopher Ricks put it in *Tennyson* (New York: Collier, 1972), p. 257, "the extraordinary thing about this section is the way it can incorporate into its delight a mature sense of what still threatens the delight."

¹⁹ *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 406-30. For discussion of the pertinent Trinity MS, see pp. 455-56. To what my book said about the intertextual conscription of Keats, I would now add the chain of changes on H.Nbk.fol.4r that led Tennyson's line 674 from "firth and fell" through "fold and fell" towards a final formulation, "moor and fell," that clearly alludes to the star's-eye-view of earth from Keats's "Bright Star" sonnet: "snow upon the mountains and the moors" (line 8).

one simple girl” by having the speaker pick up on it, in what is less an alteration than an extrapolation from what he just claimed:

Would die; for sullen-seeming Death may give

More life to Love than is or ever was

In our low world, where yet 'tis sweet to live.

(lines 644-46)

That minute-minding, second-thoughted “clock within” has yet to chime at this point, but the priorities of poetic revisionism let the consciousness of time (evident also in the vigilance of “is or ever was”) pre-verberate here as the thought of death.²⁰ Still prodigal with the euphoria of requited love, the speaker now takes on death in strophe 6 as he did destiny in strophe 4, finding life sweet not in spite of those adversaries but on account of them. And yet already the inserted lines feel less like the expression of happiness than like its theory. “It seems that I am happy” (line 648), in this new context, appears not a joyous discovery but an opinion or perhaps hypothesis; that it is, as such, subject to amendment is a point Tennyson’s next MS revision drives home, in the flat contradiction of strophe 6 (as quoted above) that opens strophe 7: “Not die; but live a life of truest breath” (line 651). “Would die” / “Not die”: the speaker may have ears a few lines later for the striking clock because he has started beforehand listening so judiciously to himself. The dialogue of the mind with itself, as Matthew Arnold called it, has recommenced in *Maud* after a temporary recess. Furthermore, the speaker’s attentiveness seems to have prompted the poet to attend for his own part to Keats. It was through the textual cruxes introduced during manuscript revision that Tennyson doubled the self-communing of his speaker by an

²⁰ Hallam Tennyson’s *Memoir* cites the poet on his “backwards” composition of *Maud* (1:379), which Paul Turner summarily traces across the Trinity MSS in *Tennyson* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976), pp. 133-34.

interpoetic encounter with the “Ode to a Nightingale,” whose tolling bell and “rich to die” / “not born for death” dialectic became crucial to this unlabeled but unmistakable ode.

As a genre the ode foregrounds problems of address, often by executing changes of address apostrophically as it goes. The version of this ode provided by H.Nbk.30.fol.3r shows Tennyson making such a change, on the spot and it seems unwittingly, as he wrote out what would become strophe 4. There the speaker, saving his climactic apostrophe to Maud for later in the poem, follows a gorgeously protracted invocation of the still Edenic cedar of Lebanon growing non her lawn by peering up, Keats-like, through its verdurous glooms at the stars. The MS strophe goes on addressing the cedar (“thy long branches”) at the top of the page; but after eight lines that recruit as playmates the stars who used to be his tormentors, the speaker turns out to have forgotten the cedar and to have been talking not *about* the stars but *to* them, addressing them now as beings caught like him in “the boundless plan / Which is the despot of your iron skies.”²¹ This Hardy-esque moment pits the indifference of “Innumerable, passionless, pitiless eyes” against the personifying fellowship of the second person, in whose favor love tips the scales – a favor Tennyson went on to reinforce in revision by dropping the first-line nod to the cedar and warming up the new apostrophe right away in the line that follows, changing “watch the stars” to “you fair stars.”

To calibrate subtleties of personal address forms a challenge that quickens another genre Tennyson favored, the familiar verse epistle, thanks partly to the firmness with which that genre resolves in advance the question of fickle address that an ode tends to keep in play. But the genre’s reliable generic security collapsed in 1883 when the poet, having begun to write “To E. FitzGerald” as a seventy-fifth birthday gift, learned of his old friend’s sudden death. That breakdown became the subject of the finished poem, published two years later in the form of a dead letter that must now be delivered

²¹ Buckley, pp. 144-45, cites H.Nbk.30 to set off by contrast the fresh intensity of the published version.

as an elegy instead. The generic conversion is even more affecting in manuscript, where the handwritten format so closely resembles a personal letter's that Tennyson himself rounded the epistle off, in three drafts filling H.Nbk.46.fol.9r, with a valedictory (and clinchingly *b*-rhymed) "Yours." That second-person offer of oneself was precisely what the death of the addressee invalidated, or distinctly threatened to. If I am yours, what becomes of me once you are gone? Yet are you gone indeed (conversely) so long as I still subscribe myself yours? Whether Tennyson should proceed to address "Old Fitz" and "My Fitz" (lines 1, 51) in second person as a presence, or in third person as a memory, was a choice that entrained dilemmas, older than *In Memoriam* but best known there, about the survival or extinction of the soul. These were the twinned themes that engrossed him when he turned over the leaf of H.Nbk.46.fol.9 and worked out on the verso a sequel to the intercepted epistle that had been.

The epistle was to have accompanied a gift copy of Tennyson's long since composed but still unpublished "Tiresias," which "To E. FitzGerald" faithfully enclosed in his 1885 collection.²² The epistle's elegiac sequel begins with a friendship knot that entails a temporal complexity: the poet remembers anticipating that FitzGerald would not only fault the magniloquent coda of "Tiresias" as too "diffuse and opulent" (line 60), but would cogently rebut any defense Tennyson might offer in rejoinder. Corrective criticism emerges as the very medium of truest friendship between poets – and within poets, too, as they loyally pursue their calling.²³ The MS practices such revisionary loyalty in numerous changes surrounding the characteristically foregrounded verbal correction on which the entire sequel hinges. FitzGerald has

²² Fols.8r and 9r despatch the poet's son ahead of us into the materials that form the *Archive*, scavenging "In some forgotten book of mine / With sallow scraps of manuscript" where he, in a densely rewritten line, either "found this poem" he had gone looking for or more casually happened to "hit on this," the "Tiresias" MS. Anna Barton correlates the FitzGerald-Tennyson friendship with manuscript culture – poetry drafts as well as correspondence – in the final chapter of *Tennyson's Name: Identity and Responsibility in the Poetry of Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 129-52.

²³ Already in this spirit on fol.8r Tennyson had composed, and then slightly moderated, a passage (lines 33-34) that superlatively praised FitzGerald's "version" of Omar Khayyám "done / In English rhyme." On these changes see Buckley, pp. 224-25.

past, in sleep, away
 By night, into the deeper night!
 The deeper night? A clearer day
 Than our poor twilight dawn on earth –
 If night, what barren toil to be! (lines 74-78)

Thus the published poem; but line 76 originally read, “Night? If it be not broader day / Than our poor twilight here on earth, / Woe to this race and that to be!” of which the first line then became “The deeper night? – a larger day,” of which the first syllable then was changed once again from “The” to “Oh.” More important than any of these substitutions is the sheer substitutive energy, persisting across another half-dozen minutely altered lines, that went into Tennyson’s repudiation of “Pagan Paradise” (line 64, with nods alike to Omar and to Ovid) in favor of a transcendence, however provisionally strained across the poet’s agnosticism, where spirit itself might perdure after the body’s death.

Craning to look past the limits of mortality emboldened Tennyson, as he transvalued his manuscript epistle, to reclaim with the second person FitzGerald’s ongoing presence as an interlocutor. It was in the course of reworking, so as to reject it, the expression of an existential despair at the prospect of death’s bankrupting finality that a marginal revision hailed “my Fitz” back into the poem – an act of direct address that preempted an under-motivated, subsequently canceled address to “you” that had filled a fairer-copied quatrain just down the page. The terser hand of this marginal insertion filled out fol.9v with a version of the published poem’s last lines (81-88) that lurched with poignant interlineation back and forth between third-person reference to FitzGerald and second-person address (“dear friend”), until “him” and “his” became “you” and “your” at last. Yet it’s never over, in manuscript study, till it’s over. The printed poem shows that this resolute epistolary life-support, hard though Tennyson had fought for it in manuscript, was not determinative after all. The poem addressed “To E.

FitzGerald” that Tennyson gave the world in 1885 reinstates the third person in every reference to the deceased that follows the break at line 56 (and the death notice it stands for). The impersonality of print, it seems, would not finally support the tenderness of familiar surmise to which the medium of manuscript had proved – and proves for us who study it – so welcoming.

Tennyson’s manuscript bequest to posterity, as I cautioned at the outset, was less cordially welcoming than it was neutrally permissive. He left us to help ourselves, having posted at the archival threshold that growling watchdog “Poets and their Bibliographies,” even as his archivally saved work on the sonnet rehearsed several themes and types of revision that this paper has considered. The poem gets underway by praising Virgil and Horace, respectively, for a scrupulous regimen of perfecting ten lines per diem and for a patient incubation of “the nine-years-pondered lay” (line 6) – praise that, to say the least, incites curiosity as to just what the old masters’ perfection and pondering may have consisted in. About the Roman masters there’s no way to know; but about Tennyson there is, thanks to the *Archive* his retention of manuscripts made possible. What difference does it make when H.Nbk.47.fol.31v discloses that Virgil’s ten lines used to be “five” and Horace’s nine years “ten”? That Tennyson rebuilt the syntax of lines 5-6 to tighten the poem up with a linking enjambment? That the MS line 12, “You must be joyful that you did not live,” traded Saxon flatness for a Latinate diction – “You should be jubilant that you flourished here” – befitting the glory, and the exclusively manuscript culture, of ancient Rome? That the modern poet groomed out of his first draft an old man’s rhythmically kinky snarl “At this third planet from a third-rate sun,” in order to speak earth metrically fair as “the kindly sphere / That once had rolled you round and round the Sun” (lines 9-10)? In one sense these little differences make no difference to speak of; in another sense they foster our recognition that the impression of inevitability characterizing so much of Tennyson’s published output springs from countless instances of creative choice, themselves innumerable reconsidered. The last word on this MS leaf is, set off by commas like foils, “overdone,” and it caps a freshly worded line (13) that got Tennyson’s initial

irritant, “the critic,” out of the picture for the sake of a worthier topic, “the Love of Letters.” Here lives an ethic of care: the best way to save our literary efforts from being overdone, be they creative or critical, is to make once more the effort of going back and doing them over.