

## **The Beinecke's *Tragic Muse***

Housed in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University is what appears to be a unique copy of Henry James's novel *The Tragic Muse* (BEIN Tinker 1275), first published in two volumes in 1890 by Houghton Mifflin in the United States and by Macmillan, in three volumes, in the United Kingdom. The Beinecke copy (hereafter B) is a two-volume, 1892 reprint of the Houghton Mifflin first edition.<sup>i</sup> What makes B apparently unique is the presence of what the Library's Orbis catalogue describes as the "author's manuscript [i.e. autograph] revisions". A handwritten index card, inserted in the flyleaf of volume one, describes the book as containing "Corrections and alterations by the author throughout". The Tinker catalogue describes it as "[e]xtensively annotated and corrected (in pencil) by James" (250). These corrections appear to have been made in preparation of the novel's publication, revised and with a preface, as volumes seven and eight of *The New York Edition of Henry James's Novels and Tales* (hereafter NYE) by Charles Scribner's Sons in 1908. If these revisions are indeed by James they are additionally significant in that they exhibit a number of revisionary practices that are different to, or not detectable in, extant revised proofs of other texts that are known to be in his hand.

The forthcoming publication of the *Complete Fiction of Henry James* by Cambridge University Press, a scholarly and critical edition that will contain (inter alia) complete lists of variants to the first editions of James's texts, has occasioned renewed interest in James's practice of revision, as well as the authority of manuscript, typescript and revised copies. It seems timeous, therefore, to consider the authority of the handwritten revisions in B.<sup>ii</sup>

Both volumes of B have Yale University bookplates attached to the front pastedowns, inscribed with the words "Gift of Chauncey B. Tinker, 1951". Handwritten pencil emendations, apparently in the same hand, occur in both volumes on approximately 570 pages (out of a total of 882). Corrections to or insertions of single words, phrases and short sentences are made in the margins; longer revisions are not present, but appear to be indicated by a caret and the abbreviation *cf*, both of which suggest the existence of a (lost) document in which extended revisions were recorded. Words that are changed or omitted in the NYE are lightly struck through, underlined or placed within parentheses in B, occasionally accompanied by a delete symbol in the margin.

The corrections marked on B are carried through without exception to the version published in the NYE, although the NYE is revised even more extensively and contains a number of changes not present in B. Some of these are hinted at by carets in B; yet other changes made to the NYE are not indicated in B at all, suggesting that B may contain James's initial or preparatory revisions, undertaken more thoroughly and extensively at a later date.

The verso back flyleaf of volume one reveals manuscript notes in pencil, in what appears to be the same hand as that which made the emendations to B's text. At the top of the page is written "Eye of Sculptor – p 4. personal [?] now". Below this is written a list of verbs common to James's reporting clauses (such as "hesitated", "exclaimed", "murmured" and "remarked") – set alongside a list of words by which they have been "superseded", such as "had a pause", "dropped", "broke out" and "professed". Across the middle of the same flyleaf is the comment, "gter [greater] emotion cf 421". On the back flyleaf of volume two, further notes have been added: the word "art" with two page references, and "769 – no longer [?] 'burst out laughing' – cf again and again in American".

The bookplates tell us that B was owned by Chauncey Brewster Tinker (1876–1963), appointed Keeper of Rare Books at the Yale University Library in 1931. The index card for B in the Beinecke Library contains the information "Oct. 46 / Brussel", which tells us that Tinker acquired the book from Isadore ("Ike") Rosenbaum Brussel (1897–1972). The reference "Oct 46" could indicate either the date of purchase or the date B was obtained by the library; it would seem the former, as B's bookplates record 1951 as the acquisition date. The provenance of B prior to its acquisition by Tinker from Brussel is not known.

The question is, then, did B belong to Henry James, and are the pencil emendations indeed his? The authority of B is supported, in the first instance, by Tinker's description. Tinker's stature as Keeper of Rare Books at Yale speaks to his scholarly *bona fides*; in addition, he claimed ownership of the corrected proofs of at least three works by James ("Glasses", "New England; an Autumn Impression" and the essay on the "American Volunteer Motor Ambulance Corps", (Tinker 249–50)). Tinker would have been well positioned, therefore, to compare B with other evidence of James's autograph revisions and find it authoritative. Brussel, from whom Tinker acquired B,

was a well-respected book scout (as he styled himself) who “earned the bulk of his living by finding stock on all subjects for public, school, and research libraries” (“I. R. Brussel”, web). His “infinite pertinacity and his wide acquaintance in the trade” prompted John Carter to proclaim that “if anybody could dig up a copy of some obscure rarissimum, it was Ike” (2096). Brussel seems to have had some success in obtaining rare copies of James’s texts: in an obituary, William White tells the story of Brussel finding

in a shop on Fourth Avenue ... Henry James’s *Roderick Hudson*, marked down because some pages were scribbled on. A James specialist, Ike suspected the annotations might have been by the author himself making revisions, and he bought the book. Leafing through it, he discovered a letter to the novelist from his brother William James. Such luck doesn’t come often.  
(75)

The accuracy of this account cannot be established, as the whereabouts of the annotated copy of *Roderick Hudson* (if it indeed exists) are unknown.

Second, a correlation of variants between the Macmillan and Houghton Mifflin first editions of *The Tragic Muse* suggests that James used the Houghton Mifflin edition in preparation of the text for the NYE. In addition, we know that James was in habit of asking publishers for copies of his books for the purposes of revision.<sup>iii</sup>

However, there are a number of issues that place the authority of B into question. First, it shows James (assuming for the moment that the emendations are in his hand) revising in a way that is not evidenced elsewhere. We have two important sets of evidence of James’s method in revising his novels: a facsimile edition of *The American* containing James’s emendations, and a corrected copy of *The Princess Casamassima*, preserved in the Houghton Library. As *The American* facsimile demonstrates, sheets from the first edition of the novel were pasted onto larger, A4 sheets the better to accommodate James’s extensive revisions. (Significant sections were rewritten or retyped, although this practice seems to have been abandoned soon after James completed his revisions to *The American*, one of his earliest novels and the first to be reworked for the New York Edition). This practice of revising on paste-ups was applied to most of the early novels, such as *Roderick Hudson* and *The Portrait of a Lady*, which James corrected extensively. However, by the time he came

to review *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), just prior to his revising of *The Tragic Muse*, he was no longer using paste-ups: instead he would receive copies of the first edition in sheet form, and insert corrections and revisions into the adequately ample margins provided. In the case of both *The American* and *The Princess Casamassima*, all the corrections and additions are made in ink. Text that James wishes to have omitted is heavily scored through. New text that needs to be inserted is circled and linked to the insertion point by a trailing line.

B reveals none of these revision practices; nor do we have similar evidence of James working provisionally on a copy of a novel in preparation for a second, more thorough bout of revision. It seems unlikely that he would have paid attention to *The Tragic Muse* at the same time as revising any of the earlier novels: his deadlines for Scribner's were pressing, allowing little time for other work. Moreover, he makes no mention in his letters of working on different texts simultaneously.

The evidence of the commentary on the endpapers of B could be the work of an early reader or collator. We can only speculate about whether or not James is likely to have made notes about his own revisions (such as the way he changes the vocabulary of reporting clauses), or comment on the effect of revision (for example, the evaluative "gter emotion", mentioned earlier). However, these observations are quite conceivably those of a reader of B, and not necessarily its author. This possibility is supported by the exclamation mark that accompanies the annotation *cf* on page 421: "cf!" The passage in question describes a moment of intimacy between Nick Dormer and Julia Dallow: "The epithet apparently had an endearing suggestion to Mrs. Dallow; at any rate it led her to allow him to kiss her on her forehead" (421). In the NYE, the passage is changed to: "The epithet apparently had an endearing suggestion for her; it at any rate led her to let him possess himself of her head and, so holding it, kiss her" (8:15). While it is possible that the marginal exclamation mark could be an authorial ejaculation (along the lines of "Dreadful! This must go!"), it is as likely to be an indication of a reader's surprise (or despair) at James's revision of the scene.

The presence of a collator is also suggested by the way in which emendations in B are consistently reflected in NYE, almost without exception. If B's marks are James's provisional revisions, it seems reasonable to expect that at least one or two of them would *not* carry over to NYE – the author might think better of a change, for example,

or revise it further. However, this is not the case. The high degree of consistency between B and NYE suggests that B's marks are a record of variants subsequent to the publication of the NYE.

Of course, we might expect a comparison of the handwriting in B with confirmed evidence of James's handwriting to render conclusive proof of B's authority (or otherwise), but matters are complicated by the fact that the emendations in B are made in pencil (most of the evidence we have of James's handwriting is in ink);<sup>iv</sup> the margin space allowed for annotations in B is very small, thus possibly constricting the writer's usual style; and the style of James's handwriting (especially in his corrections to *The American*) is known to be erratic.

Nonetheless, a few observations might be ventured. In general, the handwriting in B is more upright than the forward-leaning style of James's letters, although it must be noted that revisions in the facsimile of *The American* also reveal a handwriting that is upright, at least until page 109, after which we can discern James's more familiar, sloping style. Certain letters in B are distinctively different from their representation in *The American* facsimile: most notably the minuscule *p*. Throughout B, the bowl of the minuscule *p* is consistently closed on the base line, often crossing (sometimes with a loop) the descender, giving it an uncial appearance (for example, the word *plastic*, 89). In *The American* facsimile, the bowl is consistently open at the base line and written in the cursive form (for example, *pure*, 149); I could find no evidence at all of B's *p* in *The American* facsimile. The descenders of the minuscule *y* and *g* in B are regularly curved and thinly looped, giving the appearance of an elongated 8 (for example, *gravity*, 101), whereas in other examples of James's script they are usually (although not always) unlooped, with a foot angled to the right (for example, *very terribly*, in *The American* facsimile, 218). The majuscule *N* in *The American* is presented with a flourish, distinctively angled and leaning to the right (see *Newman*, 149); in B the majuscule *N* is rounded, resembling a minuscule *n*, and upright (see *Nick*, 337). In the first pages of *The American* facsimile, the ascender of James's *d* is an extension of the bowl, often curving substantially to the left, and sometimes looping all the way around to cross itself and join with the following letter (see *demand*, 9); this style is not to be found in B. In B, the ascender of the minuscule letter *l* at the beginning of a word often begins with a loop to the right, then crossing back over itself to make the downward stroke, after which the hand is lifted (see

laboring, 452); this style is absent from *The American* facsimile. In James's emendations to *The American* and *The Princess Casamassima*, en-dashes are written as =, upper case letters are often underscored twice, and end-points are often circled; none of these features appears in B.

The Beinecke copy of *The Tragic Muse*, then, reveals a handwriting that demonstrates some inconsistencies with James's style elsewhere, as well as observations that are as likely (if not more so) to originate from a reader of the novel, or early collator, as they are to come from James himself. In addition, there is little in B that is in keeping with James's standard practice of revision. At best, the attribution to Henry James of the emendations and comments in the Beinecke's copy of *The Tragic Muse* is questionable.

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<sup>i</sup> A digital version of this book is available on the Beinecke Library's Digital Image Online database (interested readers should follow the links at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/bibid/1217243>).

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<sup>iii</sup> In 1908, James wrote to Charles Scribner's Sons: "But will you very kindly ... dispatch to me by book-post a Copy of your two-volume *Wings*, and the same of the *Golden Bowl*? I blush to say I am possessed of neither (having repeatedly dispossessed myself for ingratiating friends); and the one-volume English edition is in each case much less convenient for revision" (James, *Letters* 485).

<sup>iv</sup> A notable exception can be found in some of the 1907 entries to James's diaries and appointment books, housed in the Houghton library. A correlation of the handwriting in B with these entries fails to be conclusive, not least because they were made during James's nervous breakdown, and the handwriting therein might well be seen to reflect graphically James's emotional disarray; they do not, therefore, provide a reliable template against which to compare the handwriting in B. That the emendations to B are made in pencil whereas it was James's practice to revise in ink might cast further doubt on B's authority.

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