

# Textual Continuity

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## ABSTRACT

While textual variation has long been understood as a defining element of the genetic process, and indeed of textuality itself, this essay considers textual continuity not as the absence of revision but as potential revision that does not occur. In the archival materials associated with Toni Morrison's and Tim O'Brien's novels, we find various instances of a text remaining meaningfully the "same" across different versions. This emphasis on continuity implies a further possible reorientation, toward a sense of works in development, with individual documents construed less as physical objects or containers and more as "temporal parts".

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"He cut, condensed, expanded; in some cases he decided the original version should stand"<sup>1</sup>

—Jorge Luis Borges, "The Secret Miracle"  
("El milagro secreto") (1998, 162)

IN BORGES'S STORY, A CZECH PLAYWRIGHT, JAROMIR HLADIK, IS about to be executed by a Nazi firing squad, but he prays for the chance to finish his work-in-progress, *The Enemies*. God grants Hladik the miraculous ability to do so: while time stops for everyone else in the storyworld, Hladik reviews the entire text of the play in his mind, revising and reorganizing until he considers it finally complete — at which point Hladik returns to the normal passage of time and is immediately killed. This is a fascinating narrative in many respects, not least from the perspective of editorial theory. As far as Hladik is concerned, *The Enemies* exists in an authorized, even definitive version, what David Greetham would call "a 'text that never was' [. . .] immutable in its Platonic ideality" (2010, 46). The problem, of course, as Greetham might well expect, is that the "final" version of *The Enemies* is not transmissible, because its Platonic ideality corresponds to no documentary instantiation (it has no existence at all other than the

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1. Omitió, abrevió, amplificó; en algún caso, optó por la version primitive.

second-hand account provided by Borges's narrator; in that literal sense it is a "text that never was" as well). The fully revised play falls literally into the sense of texts as "reports of works" in G. Thomas Tanselle's terms (1992, 69). Indeed, Borges's story eerily anticipates Tanselle's claim that "a version of a work — not just the idea for a work — can exist in its author's mind without being written down or recorded, as when an author has thought of a number of revisions for a new edition but dies before making note of them and before the new edition is called for" (1992, 81).<sup>2</sup>

Borges's story might thus serve as an interesting, albeit fictional, case for thinking through recent debates about the nature of the work in relation to texts and documents, questions to which I will return indirectly in what follows. However, I cite "The Secret Miracle" here to begin making a different case, prompted by Borges's semicolon, which implies an equivalence between textual change (cutting, condensing, expanding) and textual continuity (deciding an original version should stand). The first half of that sentence has, of course, occupied the vast majority of textual scholarship's approach to understanding the nature of the textual condition.<sup>3</sup> Hans Walter Gabler has recently concluded, for example, "One way or another: that texts are always variant is an ontological truth" (2018, 18). Indeed, the European Society for Textual Scholarship defines its journal, *Variants*, as premised on textual change, just as Bernard Cerquiglini's influential account of Italian philology comes *In Praise of the Variant*, Sally Bushell considers *Text as Process*, John Bryant emphasizes *The Fluid Text*, or Sharon Cameron understands Emily Dickinson's composition process as one of *Choosing Not Choosing*, among many other possible examples. I will not be foolhardy enough to dispute the primacy of variability as an underlying ontological condition of textuality (nor would I agree with such an absurd claim in any case). But I will be arguing for a more expansive understanding of variability, one that would encompass an absence of change, at least for the duration of some part of the genetic processes of composition and revision (including post-publication variants), as an equally significant aspect of this textual ontology. As the philosopher Nelson Goodman

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2. Peter Shillingsburg counters that "if the work is a mental construct it can only be known through its physical manifestations" (1997, 68n24). Obviously, all versions of *The Enemies* have no physical manifestations themselves, outside of the descriptions of them in the physical manifestations of Borges's story.
  3. My own work is very much included here, as I have devoted entire chapters to the presence or absence of a single paragraph in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) or the variability of a single word in Tim O'Brien's *If I Die in a Combat Zone* (1973), among various other examples (2006, 37–64; 2017, 31–58).

points out, in a discussion of music which applies to other forms of art as well, “Variation [. . .] plainly depends as much upon difference from as upon likeness to the theme” (1988, 70). Similarly, Daniel Ferrer and Marlena Corcoran identify the “phenomena of persistence” as ultimately “at work at the very heart of the process of writing” (1996, 236), insofar as textual continuity is what identifies versions of a work as related to each other, as parts of a whole.

Lately, grounded especially in work on the revision habits of Toni Morrison and Tim O’Brien, I have come to see Hladik’s second option, textual continuity, as just as meaningful as textual revision, indeed as a kind of *potential change that does not occur*, and so as an equally significant aspect of a work’s production history for editors and textual scholars. Like revision, after all, continuity represents a choice about the status of a text (made by an author and/or an editor, whether collaboratively or uneasily), even if that choice sometimes leaves less dramatic, controversial, or puzzling material evidence. To be sure, I am not suggesting that texts (or sections of texts) that exhibit continuity rather than variability along the trajectory of textual production constitute a “complete, static, coherent, self-contained, and stable literary work” (GREETHAM 1998, 206). But I am suggesting that those (relatively) invariant portions of a larger text are not necessarily best understood as contributing to a “fragmented, unresolved, diffuse, and polysemic text” (GREETHAM 1998, 206). They seem to me, instead, somewhere in between the New Critical and poststructuralist poles in Greetham’s account. For that matter, texts might remain unchanged despite authorial or other intentions to the contrary; author’s or scribe’s or compositor’s or editor’s error might retain an earlier version inadvertently; similarly, a text might remain unrevised because of an editor’s or publisher’s or other non-author’s wishes, rather than an author’s, though I will not pursue such hypothetical instances further here. Nor will I be suggesting that textual continuity implies that two distinct texts are the “same”, even when one is understood to be a copy of another (a point I return to in the essay’s conclusion, referencing a different Borges example, Pierre Menard’s “rewriting” of the *Quixote*). Finally, in a slightly metaphysical vein, textual variation is only apparent against a background of textual continuity. As these two properties are deeply and inextricably linked, not only to each other but to broader understandings of material and immaterial forms of textuality, in the sense of texts and works, local studies of continuity open onto larger questions of textual identity.

The handwritten manuscripts for Borges’s story show the kind of “muddy materiality” (BRYANT 2011, 148) one might expect, with insertions sideways along the margins organized by a series of Borges’s geometric sym-

bols (BALDERSTON 2018, 18–19). This is one of the numerous examples Daniel Balderston deploys in *How Borges Wrote* to demonstrate that “his manuscripts show him working out a poetics of uncertainty, incompleteness, possibility” (2018, 20). Balderston presents overwhelming evidence for this conclusion throughout his fascinating study. I don’t disagree (especially from a position of avowedly amateur Borgesian knowledge), except to say — not only for Borges and Balderston, but for authorial processes of composition and revision generally, and the models of textuality editorial theorists have built from those practices — that this kind of “concept of the open text” (BALDERSTON 2018, 20) is only apparent when set against, usually implicitly, corresponding degrees of certainty, completeness, or resolution.

I should note here that I will primarily be referring here to authorial revisions or the lack thereof (in concert with a wider social sphere of textual production) in relation to a text’s linguistic code, though of course continuity might apply equally to a bibliographic dimension, as George Bornstein has shown of textual change in the essays collected in *Material Modernism* and elsewhere. Nor will I be focusing on the aspect of textual stability that can result from what Bornstein thinks of as a contextual code, in which an author (Yeats, in Bornstein’s example) rearranges the order of contents in a later published volume while retaining the linguistic contents of individual texts themselves. We might also think of something like a performance code, to account for situations like a staging of Shakespeare in a contemporary setting, where the linguistic text remains stable but the context of its performance and reception necessarily and importantly changes. Bob Dylan’s infamous habit of revising his songs when performing in concert, both lyrically and musically, would also be of issue for this category. In some cases, Dylan performs lyrics that are substantially different, as in the switch from “he” to “I” in “Tangled Up in Blue” or other more extensive revisions, or in his re-imagining of a song’s production on stage, often with instruments and/or backup singers not included on an album recording. Most live versions of “Love Minus Zero/No Limit”, for example, remain stable lyrically, but present the song in a musical form that can be nearly unrecognizable at first, compared to the studio version. Thus, we see (or rather hear) Dylan setting one mode in flux against another that remains continuous.<sup>4</sup> While all these modes of variability and continuity

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4. See BROUDE 2011 and 2012. On textual variability in “Tangled Up in Blue” during the 1970s’ Rolling Thunder performances, see DENNING 2009, 37. On Dylan’s recent performance history, see THOMAS 2016, Ch. 9. Though outside the purview of my discussion here, such questions impinge on issues of artistic

seem to me worthy of further study, and in principle to follow from my argument here, I will not return to these domains.

For contemporary editorial theory, notions of textuality as premised on variability, instability, openness, fluidity, and related conceptions of change are almost so central as to need no elaboration. So I will offer just a few brief representative statements along those lines: “The textual condition’s only immutable law is the law of change” (McGANN 1991, 9); “The one true fact of editing, then, is variation” (ROBINSON 1996, 104); “Texts come in different versions, and variation in texts is inevitable” (PIERAZZO 2016, 41); “There is no doubt that texts can change over time and that they indeed change” (BORDALEJO 2013, 76); “Fluidity is an inherent condition of textuality” (BRYANT 2002, 5); “[. . .] it is necessary to understand the text in a state of process” (BUSHELL 2009, 228); “[. . .] change is as inevitable in texts as it is in language itself” (GREETHAM 1998, 208). Obviously, this selection belies many nuanced points of divergence among these theorists, but my point is the centrality of textual change (or possibility, fluidity, energy) to contemporary ideas of textuality and creativity. In coming at these ideas from the opposite direction, so to speak, I will be disagreeing in principle with Hershel Parker’s contention that “what goes unrevised to a greater or lesser extent goes unthought, unrestructured, carrying its original intentionality in a new context where that intentionality is more or less at war with the different intentionality in the altered or newly written passages” (1984, 228–9). While it may well be the case, as Parker suggests, that authors in the process of revision “routinely” leave “hunks” of a text unchanged while focusing primarily on those areas undergoing revision (1984, 228), it is also often the case that an author does reconceive of the static portions of a new version as carefully as those denoting the “author’s flare-ups of revisional energy” (EGGERT 2009, 210). In that respect, we might think of textual continuity as potential change that does not happen (but could, in principle, at another point in a text’s history). As Hannah Sullivan suggests in her study of 20th-century revision habits, an absence of revision “points to the balance between what changes and what stays the same” (2013, 4). My examination of textual continuity takes that term not in a teleological, Whiggish sense, but as cases of variation not occurring.

As an instance of meaningful continuity, consider Glenn Ligon’s photographic work *Self-Portrait Exaggerating My Black Features/Self-Portrait Exag-*

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restoration as well. See especially ELGIN 1997, 97–109, and EGGERT 2009, chs. 4–5.

gerating *My White Features* (1998), which pairs two identical images of the artist side by side. Here the “inscrutable sameness” of this dyad may at first compel some viewers to look closely at each portrait before realizing that the work “exists to critique notions of racial ‘difference’” (DELAND 2012, 507). Ligon’s subversive conflation of racialized difference and identity operates through what Janet Neary terms “representational static”, as the work “becomes a screen onto which viewers project their understanding of the racial phenotypes generally indicated in the captions” (2012, 166). Upon the viewer’s recognition that the two self-portraits are visually indistinguishable, Neary adds, “there is a reversal of object and subject, as the subject of the photograph shifts from the body depicted in the photograph (Ligon’s) to the speculative gaze of the viewer” (2012, 166). The question of continuity over time that I will focus on in relation to literary texts is compressed, in Ligon’s case, to the few moments of a viewer regarding the paired self-portraits, though of course that temporary experience is designed to open onto much longer personal and social histories premised on ostensibly ineluctable schemes of racialized difference and identity.

Turning to instances of textual continuity over time, let me offer two brief and relatively simple examples of this dynamic, before a detour on the *Ship of Theseus*, and then more detailed examinations of texts remaining the same in Morrison’s and O’Brien’s drafts and published works. Siobhan Fallon’s short story “Burning”, published in a 2008 issue of *The Briar Cliff Review*, centers on Flip Murphy, an American veteran of the war in Iraq who returns home with a severely injured foot (which he reinjures in a bar fight) to find that his wife, Helena, is determined to leave him. There we find the following exchange:

“Is your foot OK?”

“No. It’s never going to be OK. I couldn’t fuck it up any more tonight than it already is.” His eyes started to get used to the darkness and he could make out her outline by the alarm clock’s light, how she sat at the edge of her bed.

(2008, 7)

When Fallon included this story, now titled “The Last Stand”, in her 2011 collection *You Know When the Men Are Gone*, largely focused on the lives of military families, she changed Flip to Kit Murphy, though his wife’s name remains Helena, and revised his response to her question about his foot (which is linguistically identical in this version):

“No.” He wanted to say that it was never going to be okay, that he couldn’t screw it up any more tonight than it already was. His eyes started to get used to the darkness and he could make out her outline by the alarm clock’s light, how she sat at the edge of her bed.

(2011, 153)

Clearly there is a good deal of variability even in this short example, including changes in the text’s title and the protagonist’s name, a shift from dialogue to indirect discourse, with its accompanying increase in readers’ access to Kit’s consciousness, and the merger of two paragraphs into one. The rewritten second sentence in the book version seems clearly to be a local case of “horizontal revision”, in Tanselle’s terms, as it “aims at intensifying, refining, or improving the work” (1990, 53), in this case adapting Kit’s broader pattern of reticence to encompass his failure (or inability) to express the depth of his physical and emotional pain, transferring what is an angry rejoinder in the magazine story to an entirely internalized response in the book chapter.

But I also see the unchanged third sentence as manifesting a horizontal continuity, to adopt Tanselle’s taxonomy, insofar as these kinds of continuity “spring from the same conception of an organic whole as the original version manifested” (1990, 58). (I am inferring Fallon’s decision not to change this sentence on the basis of these two published documents, though the eventual availability of her archive might reveal additional layers of changing away from and then back to this version as she was assembling the collection of stories into a book.) Just as the shift to Murphy’s silence is consistent with the story’s broader portrayal of his character, so too is his perception of his wife sitting on “her bed” (she has deliberately reserved a motel room with two beds) an important element of his gradual, if begrudging, acceptance of her decision to end their marriage. Thus, I presume that Fallon here is working through the same process as Borges’s playwright, revising on the one hand and deciding to let the original text stand on the other, in both cases with an equally attentive eye to these textual moments’ standing in relation to a broader conception of the work. It could be the case, as eventual archival evidence might show, that Fallon’s revision process falls more in line with Parker’s conclusions about a lack of interest in revision in unchanged portions of a text. Fallon’s comments on the revision process for this story seem to suggest otherwise, however. In an interview with Christi Craig, for example, Fallon recalls Kit Murphy as one of the characters in the collection for whom she had a particular “soft spot”: “I’d say that I worked on his story, ‘The Last Stand,’ longer and harder than any other. Even after it was published in *Salamander Magazine*, I felt com-

pelled to keep rewriting it, to infuse it with as much genuine experience as possible” (CRAIG 2012).<sup>5</sup>

A comparison of the magazine and book versions of Souvankham Thammavongsa’s story “How to Pronounce Knife” finds a similar range of relatively minor, but textually interesting, changes and continuities, this time both at the local level of the paragraph and in the arrangement of the text itself. The story’s protagonist, an immigrant family’s child named Joy, is disciplined at school after insisting that her father’s pronunciation of “knife” without a silent “k” must be correct. In response to this incident, Joy’s teacher, Miss Choi, allows her to pick a prize from a “red velvet sack” locked in her desk, despite Joy’s earlier fear that her error has denied her this opportunity. The paragraphs in question differ in the details of their content, but also in their placement within the story.

Magazine version ( <i>Granta</i> 141, November 2017)	Book version ( <i>How to Pronounce Knife</i> , Little Brown, 2020)
<p>When the school day was over, the child gathered up her things. All that she had fit into a white plastic grocery bag. Now, for some reason, Miss Choi was waiting for her near the door and when she got there she asked the child to follow her to the front desk. There, she unlocked the top drawer and pulled out the red velvet sack. ‘Pick one,’ she said. And the child reached inside and pulled out a paper thing. It was a puzzle with an airplane in the sky (Thammavongsa 2017, 28)</p>	<p>At the end of the school day, Miss Choi was waiting for her by the door. She asked the child to follow her to the front desk, where she unlocked the top drawer and pulled out the red velvet sack. “Pick one”, she said. And the child reached inside and grabbed at the first thing her fingers touched. It was a puzzle with an airplane in the sky (Thammavongsa 2020, 9)</p>

Aside from such noteworthy differences as the absent reference to the white plastic bag in the book version, this paragraph also shifts to become the penultimate one in the story overall, just before Joy and her father share

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5. Fallon’s story “Gold Star”, in which Kit Murphy visits the widow of his former commanding officer, was first published in *Salamander* as “Sacrifice” (where his name is Flip Murphy; similarly, the widow around whom the story revolves is Josie Schieffel in *Salamander* and Jose Schaeffer in *You Know When the Men Are Gone*). The book version of that story is revised in other ways from its magazine publication as well, but not to the same extent as “The Last Stand”, so I take Fallon’s comments here as likely applying to both texts.

in the delight of her prize. The *Granta* version proceeds in chronological order, with Joy's encounter with Miss Choi following immediately from her initial disappointment that her flawless reading aloud might have earned a red yo-yo in the teacher's drawer, and before a double space to indicate the passage of time before a closing section beginning "Later that night". In the book version, the story shifts from the yo-yo remaining locked in Miss Choi's desk to the double space and "Later that night", but adds a new paragraph, in which Joy watches her father eating and "thinks of what else he doesn't know" (2020, 9), before then returning to the revelation of Miss Choi's act of kindness at the end of the school day.

Without access to a future archive, we can infer Thammavongsa's motivations for this instance of horizontal revision as a way to defer (briefly) the effects of Joy's beginning to enter into a world apart from her parents (a more "assimilated" world) through her encounter with Miss Choi. While the story concludes in the same way in both published versions, the route to that destination is subtly different in the book's opening chapter, which also signals to the reader of that volume to be prepared for other disruptions to temporal order, additional manipulations at the narratological level of the discourse. For my purposes, it's worth noting here that the differences in each published version of "How to Pronounce Knife" entail changes not only to specific words and sentences — what we might think of as the "parts" of the textual whole — but also to the arrangement of those words and sentences within the textual whole (perhaps a cousin of Bornstein's contextual code).

But alongside that nascent revision narrative, this story too exhibits a noteworthy axis of continuity. In addition to the paragraph quoted above ending identically in each case ("It was a puzzle with an airplane in the sky"), both stories conclude on the same note: "They take the prize, all the little pieces of it, and start forming the edge, the blue sky, the other pieces, the middle. The whole picture, they fill those in later" (THAMMAVONGSA 2017, 28; 2020, 9). Ferrer observes that "the point of view of the writer constantly changes during the creative process, so that what is already written must be reinterpreted from a — marginally, in most cases, but sometimes radically, new — perspective" (2016, 58), as part of his emphasis on textual variation as a critical lens that "clarifies the dynamic interaction of the versions that takes place during the creative process" (2016, 63). While in the Morrison and O'Brien examples to follow I will examine material from their genetic processes, as Ferrer does in his discussion of the development of a sentence from the "Aeolus" chapter of *Ulysses*, I would suggest

here that authorial rereading and reinterpretation can also entail Hladik's deliberate decision to "let things stand", and that such a determination *not* to revise can be just as meaningful as the introduction of a variant (on the way to becoming a variation, in Ferrer's terms).

Further, we might think of the Fallon and Thammavongsa examples as "temporal parts", as ways of indicating an overarching continuity of identity across time, despite a certain level of variability. The philosopher Matthew McGrath explains that, while "temporal parts" might typically be understood in relation to events — a set within a tennis match, a ceremony as part of a wedding — some metaphysicians also think of objects in this way, ranging from things in the world to people. As I spell out in more detail below, thinking of each version of these stories as a temporal part of a persistent temporal whole would resemble ways of positing a consistent personal identity as well. In that case, rather than thinking of the (ostensibly) distinct selves I have been at age ten or thirty or fifty, I would think of an ongoing, persistent self, with "parts" corresponding not so much to locations in space as to locations in time (see McGRATH 2007). This may well seem like a rather roundabout way of saying that the work "How to Pronounce Knife" is constituted by its three published incarnations (including the paperback reprint of the book's hardcover first edition), in addition to an unknown number of drafts, typescripts, proof pages, etc. As I hope will become clear(er) in the discussion that follows, I will be suggesting that reframing such thoughts about works, texts, versions, and documents along a temporal scale of continuity or persistence, rather than in a more object-oriented division of documents that constitute the immaterial whole of the work, will enable more helpful modes of understanding the relationships among texts and documents in relation to works, and in relation to the exchanges of variability and continuity within them.

### **When is a Version?**

As the flip side of variation, textual continuity is inherently linked to questions of how to define works and versions in relation to intentionality (and to each other). As Greetham asks of the originally published version of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* in 1900 and the "restored" edition, based on Dreiser's unexpurgated manuscript, in 1981, "there is a difference of roughly 80,000 words between 1900 and 1981. Does this difference not make a new novel and force reading and criticism to begin anew?" (2011,

274). Greetham's sense of what constitutes a "new" novel in this case is at once far removed from Hans Zeller's insistence that a "new version comes into existence through a single variant" because "variation at one point has an effect on invariant sections of the text" (1975, 241) yet also lies on the same spectrum; the difference between Greetham's position or Zeller's would derive from how much change is sufficient to produce a distinct version. As Greetham argues elsewhere, the conceptual and pragmatic implications of Zeller's account result in fragmentation and incoherence, as the dozens or even thousands of "versions" that would result from this view would ultimately lead to "the disintegrated work" (1999, 325). I am not interested in adjudicating this question here — or rather, I am interested in coming at it from the other direction, via the question of what, exactly, we might mean by the "invariant sections of the text", a category that Greetham's reading of *Sister Carrie* seems to accept unquestioningly. A quick summary of the extensive philosophical literature on the puzzle of Theseus's ship can, I think, be helpful in working through the problem of invariability.

This is necessarily a condensed summary of various long-standing debates in metaphysics, both for the sake of a more expedient return to editorial issues per se, and because I do not pretend to be a philosopher. The puzzle asks: suppose Theseus has a wooden ship and gradually replaces its planks over time, until he has eventually removed all the original planks and replaced them with new ones. Is the ship at the end of this process the same ship as the one Theseus initially set out on, or is this a different ship? (If the latter, the next question to arise would be at what point enough change has occurred to constitute a "new" ship.) Sometimes this problem involves a second ship as well, which has been built entirely from the discarded planks of Theseus's original ship; is this ship the same as Theseus's rebuilt ship? Or perhaps even more properly thought of as Theseus's original ship? A related version (so to speak) of this problem imagines a statue and a lump of clay, asking what it would mean to say that both are the "same", given that they consist of the same material but have other properties that are (or seem to be) clearly distinct. If one were to smash the statue and reduce it to a lump (or lumps) of clay, would its identity as a statue have ended? Or, if a piece of the statue breaks off while leaving the rest intact, in what respect is the resulting object the "same" statue?

While there is a considerable body of philosophical literature on these topics, Judith Jarvis Thompson's essay "The Statue and the Clay" offers one of the clearest accounts, and one that seems especially pertinent to edito-

rial concerns.<sup>6</sup> Rather than trying to determine the specific point at which *enough* change has occurred, Thomson emphasizes the relations between parts and wholes: “I will simply suppose — with ordinary thought — that artifacts can undergo replacement of a small part, leaving open how small is small, and what happens when (or would happen if) a replacement of a small part is (or if it were) part of a series of such replacements” (1998, 153–54). Thomson thus ascribes a continuity of identity to objects despite the (perhaps inevitable) changes in their particular parts or conditions: “If you get a new windshield wiper for your car, then in one way, of course, your car is not the same: it has a windshield wiper it formerly did not have. Just as if you drive your car through a puddle of mud, then in one way your car is not the same: it is dirtier than it was. But these changes are changes in it, that is, in the very car you have owned all along. We might say that the car isn’t *the same*, for it has changed — but it is *it*, the same car, that has changed” (1998, 152–53; original emphasis). Thomson’s approach to the problem of objects changing over time is to think in terms of those objects being “constituted” at particular times, so that at one time a statue is constituted (in part) by its lack of an arm that has broken off, while at another time the same statue would be constituted (in part) by the presence of that same arm, just as the car remains the same object, but is constituted in different ways at different times, by the replacement of the wiper blade, the temporary addition of mud, etc.

These kinds of questions are closely related, of course, to discussions of persistence or difference in personal identity over time. Those would comprise both issues of materiality (at the cellular and many “higher” levels, the body that is sitting at my desk now does not seem the same physical entity as the “me” of thirty years ago, or, strictly speaking, of thirty minutes ago or even thirty second ago, etc.) and of a more immaterial sense of personhood (the self I am now does not seem entirely coterminous with the self I was as an undergraduate, or before becoming a parent, or even before pausing this essay to answer an email, etc.). This is a much denser philosophical woods than those pointed at by Theseus’s ship, but works of

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6. For additional recent discussion, see: David Barnett, “The Problem of Material Origins”, *Notus* 39.3 (2005): 529–40; Catherine Z. Elgin, *Between the Absolute and the Arbitrary* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 1997; Christopher Hughes, “Same-Kind Coincidence and the Ship of Theseus”, *Mind* 106 (1997): 53–67; and Ingvar Johansson, “Identity Puzzles and Supervenient Identities”, *Metaphysica* 7.1 (2006): 7–33.

art would seem to lie somewhere in the middle of objects like ships or cars and persons. Most philosophers of aesthetics, and most editorial theorists, would at least roughly agree that material occurrences of the work of art are necessary for the work to be perceived, while the work of art itself also exists on an immaterial plane. As Amie Thomasson maintains, for instance, “works of literature are neither (purely) mental nor (purely) material; nor are they either concrete physical objects or timeless, changeless abstracta” (2006, 246).

Drafts and published texts are not exactly analogous to lumps of clay and statues, but such questions of part/whole and continuity/variability clearly apply to both categories.<sup>7</sup> Such problems often arise during an editorial reconstruction of the genetic process, for instance, when early drafts are making their way toward what will become a published text. At what point, editors would ask, does an early draft “become” (or can be seen to have become) closely enough related to the published text to be considered part of the same work? Or, when might we perceive an early version as distinct enough from the published one to think of the previous version as in some sense a manifestation of a separate work? James L.W. West’s edition of *Trimalchio* for the Cambridge Edition of F. Scott Fitzgerald considers Fitzgerald’s early draft to be “different enough from *Gatsby* to deserve publication on its own [ . . . ] as a separate and distinct work of art” (2000, xix). Of course, we find in *Trimalchio* characters named Jay Gatsby, Nick Carraway, Daisy and Tom Buchanan, Jordan Baker, and others who will also populate *The Great Gatsby*; in *Trimalchio*, too, Gatsby has long loved Daisy, Nick narrates the story of his demise, Myrtle Wilson (spoiler alert) dies when Daisy is driving Gatsby’s car, and more. As West explains, the “crucial differences” between the “distinct” works arise in chapters VI and VII of *Trimalchio*, where we find “several lengthy passages that do not appear in *Gatsby*”, with the result that Nick is less “likable”, while his affair with Jordan is “traced in greater detail” and her character is “more fully drawn” (2000, xviii). West thus concludes that the degree of difference in *Trimalchio* is enough to distinguish it from *Gatsby* as a separate work, despite the clear overlap in much of each narrative.

Or consider the case of Morrison’s early drafts for *Beloved*, which we can trace back not only to early draft versions but to more general and conceptual plans. These are often sketched on yellow legal pads (though the only access available to scholars working with the Morrison archive at Princeton requires them to view digital scans of all her papers, even

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7. As Thomson acknowledges as well (1998, 168).

her original computer files, on a dedicated laptop).<sup>8</sup> While *Beloved* (1987) eventually became the first volume in a thematic and historically chronological trilogy, with *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1994), at first Morrison envisioned the novel as the opening entry in a more standard trilogy, spanning three generations in a family's history, from the 1880s to the 1930s. The second and third volumes of this trilogy would have focused on the children and grandchildren of major characters in *Beloved*, including Beloved's daughter with Paul D; the grandson of the child Sixo conceives before his death with the Thirty Mile Woman; the granddaughter of Amy Denver, the white woman who helps the pregnant Sethe deliver her child; and even Howardine, Sethe's granddaughter named for one of her sons, Howard, who has already fled the haunted house at 124 Bluestone Road in the novel's opening paragraph. At another point, Morrison imagined *Beloved* as the beginning of a different trilogy, stretching through stories set in the 1920s and 1982, but now with the Beloved character present in all three books, as an essential witness to the female protagonists in the second and third volumes. While Morrison did not go so far as to draft any of these projected sequels — they exist only as “potential versions”, in Peter Shillingsburg's terms (1997, 68) — we might still ponder the provenance of these outlines in the genetic dossier for *Beloved*, given how radically different that novel would have become had Morrison's plans continued in these directions. This would hardly seem a controversial designation, but my claim will derive from a reorientation of the ways in which such dossiers are conceptualized, away from a largely spatial sense, as in, say, Dirk Van Hulle's description as a “physical collection of documents” (2014, 11), drawing in turn on Pierre-Marc de Biasi's definition as a “material collection of documents” (“ensemble matériel des documents” [2000, 30, qtd. in VAN HULLE 2014, 11]). That is, we might reframe Morrison's schematic outlines for what would become *Beloved* in Thomson's terms of constitution, in which the work *Beloved* is constituted at one time as being part of one or another projected trilogy, and is constituted at later times in other ways corresponding to Morrison's developing plans and the documents they produce. While the documents themselves remain central to this view of how editing and textual scholarship on *Beloved* might proceed — as Marta Werner observes, “For the textual scholar, the document and its strata of cultural and personal intervention holds the story, is the story” (2021, 26) — the telling of that story in the case of *Beloved*, and of O'Brien's novel

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8. For further discussion of the Morrison archive in its digital forms, see KIRSCHENBAUM 2021, ch. 1.

Going *After Cacciato*, as I will claim below, is more authentically told when thinking of these documents as corresponding to temporal nodes rather than only as objects in space.

## Variability and Continuity “Tk” in the *Beloved* Archive

The Princeton archive contains at least seven distinct drafts of Morrison’s novel, along with early fragments in Morrison’s notes; five or six computer files, depending on the portion of the manuscript in question; multiple production texts, such as setting copy, rough pages, and a first pass master rough draft; and proofs for later reprintings. At the same time that Morrison experimented with different global conceptions of the novel(s) *Beloved* might have become, she worked through shorter scenes in numerous drafts, seemingly isolating those portions of the work-in-progress while still developing the larger structure into which they would eventually fit. As a result, both these shorter fragments and larger drafts frequently contain the notation “Tk”, either typed or inserted by hand, a proofreading notation for “To come” that Morrison was no doubt familiar with from her years as a senior editor at Random House. Working through the archive enables a view of those aspects of the narrative that were more or less established at a given time, yielding both a synchronic view of the manuscript (how a particular segment fits into a larger whole) and a diachronic perspective (how one smaller part of a draft changes over time). The Princeton archive also offers dramatic visual evidence of the 1993 house fire that nearly destroyed Morrison’s manuscripts, along with the oddity of her misspelled name, as “Tony”, on a mockup title page.<sup>9</sup>

Morrison most often uses “Tk” (or “TK” or “MTK”) to signal a space to which she plans to fill in a sentence or paragraph. In an early draft scene focused on Sethe after she has returned from ice skating with Denver and Beloved, for example, Morrison inserts “Tk” on its own line in between paragraphs, eventually returning to flesh out that moment. But sometimes this notation takes the place of a single word. In an early description of

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9. Most notably, the Morrison papers answer the question of her decision to change a word in the novel’s closing line, “No clamor for a kiss”, at the request of Knopf editor Robert Gottlieb. While Morrison refers to this textual crux in her essay “Home” (1998) she does not reveal the original word. Prior to Gottlieb’s intervention, the sentence read “No clamor for the join”, one of many instances in which *Beloved* (the character) and the narrator use the noun form. I examine this textual history in an article that is “Tk”.

Sethe working at a local restaurant, for example, from a folder of undated “draft fragments”, Morrison writes: “But matches, sometimes a bit of kerosene, a littler salt, butter too — these things she took also<> once in a while<> and felt ashamed because she could afford to buy them; she just didn’t want the embarrassment of waiting out back of the tk general store with the others till every white in Ohio was served before the keeper turned to the cluster of Negro faces looking through a hole in his back door”.<sup>10</sup> In this case Morrison eventually names the store, so that the line reads “waiting out back of Phelps store” in the published novel. At other points Morrison uses the notation more elaborately, as in an early description of Paul D’s arrival at 124. In an early draft of this scene, Morrison writes, “A blessing, but in its place, he brought another kind of haunting: Halle’s face smeared with butter and the clabber too; his own mouth jammed full of iron and Lord knows what else he could tell her if he wanted to”, followed on the next line by “TK TK TK”.<sup>11</sup> In this instance the full details of Paul D’s traumatic past may have waited for Morrison’s additional historical research into the brutal daily realities of slavery, or for her readiness to process those details into fiction, or both.

While Morrison typically returns to the site in need of elaboration within the physical space of a subsequent draft, she seems also to work on these moments in more isolated ways. Early descriptions of Sixo telling the other Sweet Home men about his journeys beyond the plantation include such notations as “MTK (language and perception minus deduction)” or “MTK (Sixo’s language)” before Morrison eventually inserts a passage physically, taping it onto the subsequent page of a draft labeled “Robert Gottlieb’s copy”, with a notation in red pencil, “Insert attached”.<sup>12</sup> In this case the empty textual space designated by “MTK” has persisted from some of Morrison’s earliest surviving draft fragments, until finally being filled in by the point that the manuscript was ready for Gottlieb’s reading.

In working through these materials, I have been most struck by the “phenomena of persistence”, in Ferrer and Corcoran’s terms, that Morrison’s papers exhibit. The drafts and other production materials contain numerous instances in which Morrison returns to a particular scene or

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10. Toni Morrison Papers, Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 13, Folder 17–18.

11. Toni Morrison Papers, Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 13, Folder 17–18.

12. Toni Morrison Papers, Special Collections, Princeton University Library, Box 13, Folder 20; Box 13, Folder 21; Box 14, Folders 4–6.

paragraph, making gradual additions, deletions, or other adjustments, yet also leaving much of the text invariant. Given the care with which Morrison clearly treats every word, her decisions about which parts of a section or paragraph should stand, and which to cut, condense, or expand, seem to express not a lack of interest in revising the invariant portions of the text, but rather a conscious decision not to revise — an absence of change, that is, as a potential for change that Morrison considers and declines. As an extended example of this process, I will examine here the nine extant versions of the novel's famous opening paragraph, which range from a paper document labeled "*Beloved* Synopsis and Early Draft, Undated" to a computer file titled "BELOVED.doc".

Morrison's papers at Princeton contain at least six drafts for the novel as a whole, as well as Morrison's copy of the publisher's rough pages and other pre-production materials. While this collection of documents does not necessarily comprise the entirety of Morrison's composition, revision, and proofreading processes, it does offer a fairly comprehensive view of the multiple kinds of documents that resulted from those processes. We can trace in this production history the record of "conceptual hesitation, failure, writer's block, creative undoing and revision" that is common to the pre-publication stages of a work (VAN HULLE 2019, 16), though again my governing metaphor will be less a spatial "collection" of documents and more a temporal spectrum along which the developing work *Beloved* is constituted in different ways at different times. This orientation seems very much in keeping with Morrison's own apparent process of maintaining a constancy for certain aspects of a text under revision while experimenting with other local elements, all the while adjusting the larger narrative in progress, even if sometimes deferring those adjustments as "Tk". The material documents themselves would no doubt offer other kinds of insights, from the fragility of typed pages burnt around the edges to the feel of Morrison's legal paper in a scholar's hands, contributing to the ways in which Sally Bushell thinks of as the material draft "as an 'object' in its own right" (2009, 219). An unintended consequence of Princeton's preservation policy, then, is to heighten an awareness of the flow of time within and across the material of Morrison's archive, while necessarily diminishing, or even eliminating, a physical sense of her papers as non-digital objects. As Matthew Kirschenbaum has pointed out of born-digital textual materials, the "concept of a 'primary record' can no longer be assumed to be coterminous with that of a physical object" (2013, n.p.). This is self-evidently the case for the mid-1980s computer files included in Morrison's "papers", but the

remainder of the Morrison archives blurs those lines in a different way as well, by obscuring the physical boundaries and materiality of its scanned objects.

The nine pre-published versions of *Beloved's* opening paragraph occur in the following files: seven drafts, some undated and others precisely or loosely so (“1984 September 21” or “circa 1984–1987”), including editor Gottlieb’s copy of a later draft; a set of publisher’s “rough pages” for Morrison’s proofing; and a computer file from August 1986.<sup>13</sup> Given the date of “Draft 3” as September 1984 and Morrison’s dating of her first conception of a novel based on the Margaret Garner case occurring just after she had resigned from Random House in 1983 (MORRISON 2004, xv–xix), we can reasonably identify the earliest drafts, labeled “undated” in the Princeton archive, in the 1983–1984 range. These versions exhibit a fair degree of variability, not at all surprisingly, sometimes modifying and then returning to a particular word or phrase while gesturing toward its eventual form. Most notably, Sethe, the novel’s protagonist, is originally called “Rett”, though the other members of her family — Denver, Howard, Bugler (later spelled “Buglar”), and Baby Suggs — appear from the start with those names. The second draft finds “Rett” crossed through and “Sethe” inserted above, and she remains Sethe from that point forward. All versions begin the same way — “124 was spiteful. Full of a baby’s venom” — but the third sentence, which reads “The women in the house knew it and so did the children” in the published book, does not adopt that construction until Draft 6, referring instead to “~~Rett~~ Sethe and her daughter” in earlier versions. As Morrison notes in her lecture “Unspeakable Things Unspoken”, that sentence’s reference to “the house” did not appear in her initial drafts, typically reading simply “The women knew it” (1989, 32). Similarly, the early reference to Baby Suggs’s death, which arrives in the fifth sentence in the published version, is absent until Draft 6. The paragraph’s closing reference to Ohio statehood — “In fact, Ohio had been calling itself a state only seventy years [ . . . ]” — appears in slightly different form initially, as “In fact, Ohio had survived only seventy years of a troubled statehood”, before its modification to the final version within Draft 1 (actually the second extant version, following the “Early Draft” and synopsis).

But for the most part, Morrison leaves the paragraph in stable form, deciding that the original version should stand, even while rewriting (by hand) or retyping the text across these multiple instantiations. In addition

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13. Additional computer files contain portions of drafts as well.

to the opening two sentences, which Morrison notes should be grammatically combined, but which she separated as a way of “unsettling” readers right away (1989, 32), several other elements of the paragraph, both syntactic and narrative, remain consistent, either from start to finish or for most of that textual journey. From the paragraph’s second iteration on, for instance, a shattered mirror and fingerprints in a cake have sent Bugler/Buglar and Howard fleeing from the house, with their departures also occurring during the “dead of winter” from the second version forward. This tendency toward invariance within revision is hardly isolated to the novel’s opening paragraph; instead, it is itself a consistent pattern across Morrison’s years of composition and revision, as she returns at various stages to a range of paragraphs or scenes.

I will offer one other example, toward the end of the novel when Denver has decided “to do the necessary” (MORRISON 1987, 252), to find a job in order to sustain her household, when Sethe and Beloved have become incapable of bearing such responsibility. The two paragraphs outlining Denver’s attempts to find employment in Cincinnati again go through a number of revisions in the seven versions in the *Beloved* archive; initially, this passage is a single long paragraph, before Morrison eventually divides it in half. The sentence that ends the first paragraph in the published novel, “And Beloved helped her out” (1987, 252) appears in early drafts as “And Beloved accommodated her” before Morrison’s handwritten marginal question, “Is this Denver’s word?” presumably prompted the change. Other changes to language and punctuation pop up as well, but on the whole the main content of the text remains quite stable. Morrison’s practice here, as elsewhere in *Beloved*, is to produce an early draft, work through a fairly small number of changes over the next few drafts, but largely to retain the text as initially written. The greatest degree of variability, indeed, comes from those moments she labels as “Tk” initially, with the missing text to be developed at a later stage. But even in those instances, Morrison seems not so much to be changing the narrative itself as to be using “Tk” as a placeholder, as if she has not quite worked out in her mind how best to flesh out those moments. Once she is ready to fill in those gaps, the text that has come typically also remains largely stable, suggesting that, somewhat like Hladik, Morrison has worked through possible iterations mentally before (unlike Hladik) committing them to paper or disk. We might therefore think of a particular *Beloved* draft or other pre-publication stage as being constituted temporally, as exhibiting or not a chunk of text that might be added or revised later, but as always part of an ongoing whole of what will become *Beloved* as the (published) work.

## Temporal Parts and “known facts” in *Going After Cacciato*

O'Brien's composition and revision processes display similar modes of variation and continuity, but also open into his more extensive repurposing of the “same” text in different bibliographical contexts. *Going After Cacciato*, the 1978 novel that established O'Brien's career as a major literary voice to emerge from the American war in Viet Nam, works through a notoriously messy plot, as the protagonist, PFC Paul Berlin, struggles throughout to reconstruct a chronology of the deaths in his unit, with those efforts set against Berlin's squad pursuing the title character from Viet Nam all the way to Paris. While the imagined pursuit of Cacciato proceeds largely chronologically, Berlin's efforts to order the past do not; these often occur in a series of interpolated chapters labeled “Observation Post” in which Berlin imagines himself in a peaceful outpost on the coast. (This is, in fact, a double level of imagination, in addition to the impossible journey of the book's title.) Indeed, for the first eight years of the book's published life, a minor character who had been killed at an early point in the narrative's sequence was nevertheless present during a later soldier's death, until O'Brien fixed this problem when making corrections for a 1986 reprint.<sup>14</sup>

Here is an example of a small unit of text focused itself on the problems of change and continuity, two (or originally three) paragraphs from one of the later “Observation Post” chapters in which Paul Berlin is once again trying to reconstruct the sequence of events that have led him to this point. The cross-throughs here are often in thick blank pen, making it impossible to read the text underneath, even with a light shining through the page. Brackets indicate handwritten insertions.

He tried again to order ~~xxx~~ <the known facts.> Billy Boy was first<.>  
~~xxx~~ ~~xxx~~ ~~xxx~~ ~~xxx~~ And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time  
along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the  
quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie  
Lynn. Then lake country. World's Greatest Lake Country, where Ready  
Mix died ~~xxx~~ on a charge toward the mountains<. A>nd then Sidney

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14. See YOUNG 2017, 67–9. See also James Griffith, “A Walk through History: Tim O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*”, *War, Literature, and the Arts*, vol. 3, 1991: 5; and Dean McWilliams, “Time in O'Brien's *Going After Cacciato*”, *Critique* 29.4 (1988): 246–47.

Martin<.> <T>hen Buff<.> <T>hen Pederson<.> ~~xxx- xxx- xxx- xxx-~~  
~~xxx- xxx-~~ Then Cacciato.

Yes, then Cacciato, who led them away in slow motion. But how far and why? Mandalay, Delhi, Tehran<,> and beyond? Order was the hard part. The ~~xxx-~~ <facts> even when beaded on a chain still did not have real order. Events did not flow. ~~xxx-~~ <The facts> were separate and haphazard and random, even as they happened, episodic, broken, no smooth transition, no sense of events unfolding ~~xxx-~~ from prior events. ~~xxx- xxx- xxx- xxx- xxx- xxx-~~.<sup>15</sup>

O'Brien did not save the earliest drafts of *Cacciato*, so his archive at the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas dates back only to this typescript, which he later edited by hand (though exactly how much later is impossible to determine, and O'Brien doesn't remember). The typescript text as emended by O'Brien transfers to the first edition, and it remained in that form until O'Brien returned to it in galley proofs for a 1988 reprinting. At that point he encountered an unintended problem of textual ambiguity, as the line "Then Cacciato" at the end of the first paragraph may imply that Cacciato is himself dead, as indeed some early critics took to be the case (e.g. SCOTT 1991, 31). In an interview with me, O'Brien explained the "Then Cacciato" line as among the "vestiges" of earlier drafts where he was "trying out different possibilities" for the narrative, including a scenario in which Cacciato has been killed before his apparent decision to go AWOL, the moment that sets in motion the narrative as a whole. Here are O'Brien's corrections for this passage for the galley proofs of a 1988 reprint:

He tried again to order the known facts. Billy Boy was first. And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie Lynn. Then <L>ake <C>ountry. World's Greatest Lake Country, where Ready Mix died on a charge toward the mountains. ~~And then Sidney Martin. Then Buff. Then Pederson. Then Cacciato.~~ <And then Buff. Then Sidney Martin. Then Pederson.>

Yes, then ~~Cacciato, who led them away~~ <Cacciato led them away> in slow motion. But how far and why? Mandalay, Delhi, Tehran, and beyond? Order was the hard part. The facts even when beaded on a

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15. Tim O'Brien Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Box 2, Folder 6.

chain still did have ~~the~~ real order. Events did not flow. The facts were separate and haphazard and random, even as they happened, episodic, broken, no smooth transitions, no sense of events unfolding from prior events.<sup>16</sup>

When discussing this post-publication variant with students or at conferences, I have sometimes highlighted the change in a manner like this:

<i>Going After Cacciato</i> , 1978–1987	<i>Going After Cacciato</i> , 1988–
<p>He tried again to order the known facts. Billy Boy was first. And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie Lynn. Then lake country. World's Greatest Lake Country, where Ready Mix died on a charge toward the mountains. And then Sidney Martin. Then Buff. Then Pederson. <i>Then Cacciato.</i></p>	<p>He tried again to order the known facts. Billy Boy was first. And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie Lynn. Then <i>Lake Country</i>. World's Greatest Lake Country, where Ready Mix died on a charge toward the mountains. <i>And then Buff. Then Sidney Martin.</i> Then Pederson.</p>

The oscillation between versions is an interesting and productive case of O'Brien working through several different narrative options, quite in keeping with the novel's resistance to putting the "known facts" into a coherent order, as I have argued at greater length in *How to Revise a True War Story*. More broadly, this example expresses the frequent outcome for the study of manuscripts, which, as Van Hulle and Shillingsburg write, "usually reveals a plurality of intentions" (2015, 38). But, I would suggest, this revision site is not only of interest for its variants, its rewritings, but for its moments of invariance, which, after all, make up much of the passage, even in a comparison of the typescript version to the revised print version. O'Brien certainly could have revised other elements of these paragraphs, or could do so in future reprintings, but has not done so, at least so far (the novel was most recently reprinted in 2014). Indeed, the sequence of events that Paul Berlin puts together here is largely consistent across versions, starting with Billy Boy's death, followed by the "long blank time" and the

16. Tim O'Brien Papers, Harry Ransom Center, University of Texas, Box 1, Folder 2.

deaths of Rudy Chassler, Frenchie Tucker, Bernie Lynn, and Ready Mix, before alternating between Sidney Martin and Buff in either order, and ending with Pederson. While there may well be “no sense of events unfolding from prior events”, as Paul Berlin thinks, at least at the level of the text there is a partially established order, and those parts of the order that remain constant seem just as significant as those that do not, both interpretively and editorially. That Paul Berlin is able to put the “known facts” into partial order seems equally as meaningful as those places where “Order was the hard part”. Billy Boy’s death always comes at the beginning, Rudy Chassler’s always follows a “long blank time”, and so on, and the stability of this sequence not only serves as a counterpoint to the instability of the chronology elsewhere, but also generates its own sense of reliability. Hannah Sullivan proposes that “the property of ‘being unfinished’ or ‘being finished’ is not a property of any single piece of paper or a stone slab, seen by itself, but a quality that can be attributed only relationally” (2016, 97). In viewing these stages of *Going After Cacciato*’s composition, revision, and post-publication revision relationally, we can highlight those textual elements that take on the property of “being finished”, understood again not in teleological terms but as revision that has stopped, or at least paused, and is meaningful for having done so.

<i>Going After Cacciato</i> , 1978–1987	<i>Going After Cacciato</i> , 1988–
<p><i>He tried again to order the known facts. Billy Boy was first. And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie Lynn. Then lake country. World’s Greatest Lake Country, where Ready Mix died on a charge toward the mountains. And then Sidney Martin. Then Buff. Then Pederson. Then Cacciato.</i></p>	<p><i>He tried again to order the known facts. Billy Boy was first. And then . . . then who? Then a long blank time along the Song Tra Bong, yes, and then Rudy Chassler, who broke the quiet. And then later Frenchie Tucker, followed in minutes by Bernie Lynn. Then Lake Country. World’s Greatest Lake Country, where Ready Mix died on a charge toward the mountains. And then Buff. Then Sidney Martin. Then Pederson.</i></p>

This mode of visualization would imply that O’Brien’s text is constituted, as a temporal part, at least as much by continuity as by change. This way of thinking about versions and texts in relation to works, as Robin Schulze maintains, operates from a kind of “textual Darwinism”. In this

model, Schulze explains, “Each time the author adapts the text as an agent among many material agents or forces, making the text ‘fitter’ in relation to its conditions, a new version of the text emerges” (1998, 275n9). From this point of view, the “adaptations” of this portion of *Cacciato* make the narrative more amenable to readings that are not premised on Cacciato’s death (or on an inaccurate chronology for Sidney Martin’s and Buff’s deaths), while retaining those textual features that are continue to “fit” the environment of their reception.

Textual continuity is an especially apt lens through which to view O’Brien’s career, as he has frequently repurposed the “same” text within multiple works. *Cacciato*, for example, originally included a chapter titled “Speaking of Courage”, in which Paul Berlin has returned from the war. O’Brien cut this chapter from the novel, in order to maintain a tighter temporal focus, publishing it instead in *Massachusetts Review* in 1976. In 1989, “Speaking of Courage” appeared in *Granta*, with largely (though not entirely) the same plot, but this time focused on a Viet Nam veteran named Norman Bowker, and with a postscript called “Notes”. O’Brien then included revised versions of these two texts as separate chapters in *The Things They Carried* (1990). O’Brien’s readers also find considerable overlap among the essays “Ambush!” from *Boston Magazine* in 1993, “The Vietnam in Me”, from the *New York Times Magazine* in 1994, and his novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, also published in 1994. Perhaps the most complicated case of continuity and versionality in O’Brien’s oeuvre, though, comes in the story “Loon Point”, originally published in *Esquire* in 1993, and then repurposed, with notable revisions to character and plot, in two novels, *In the Lake of the Woods* and *July, July* (2002). In all three versions, a woman takes a vacation with a dentist with whom she is having an affair; while at the hotel, the dentist dies suddenly, and the woman returns to her unsuspecting husband. In the *Esquire* story and *July, July* chapter, the protagonist is Ellie Abbott, though she is thirty-seven years old in the magazine story and fifty-two in the novel. As a chapter in *Lake*, the woman is Kathy Wade, who is remembering this episode in her marriage before the present of the narrative, in which she disappears under mysterious circumstances following revelations of her husband’s presence at the My Lai massacre while a soldier in Viet Nam. I have written about these examples extensively elsewhere (YOUNG 2017, Ch. 4, 19–20, and 166–69), but there I focused primarily on the significant ways in which each text varies from the other: characters take on different names and perform different actions, rendering the *Granta* or *Things They Carried* “Speaking of Courage” non-identical to

the story as first published and written, and similarly generating three distinct versions of “Loon Point”. But defining these texts and versions largely in terms of change, I now worry risks misperceiving or misrepresenting the degree to which they are, importantly, the “same” texts. These examples are not quite analogous to Theseus’s ship, where the new planks replacing old ones carry an identical function within the ship as a “work”. While we might well think of the deleted manuscript chapter and the 1976 “Speaking of Courage” as parts of the work *Going After Cacciato*, and the 1989 “Speaking of Courage” as part of the work *The Things They Carried*, or the 1993 “Loon Point” as part of both the works *In the Lake of the Woods* and *July, July*, we might also — I would argue we should — consider the 1976 “Speaking of Courage” as part of the work *The Things They Carried*, especially in light of how much of the plot and narrative dynamics of the original story are present in its later instantiations.

### **“A kind of palimpsest”**

In contrast to Hladik, whose revised texts exist only in the divinely granted expanse of his mind, Borges’s most famous fictional author, Pierre Menard, produces “thousands of handwritten pages” from his “endless drafts” (BORGES 2018, 95) on the way to becoming “author of the *Quixote*”. Menard’s drafts, however, are equally lost to history, as he “took care that they not survive him”, leading the story’s putative author to a “vain” attempt to reconstruct the contents of these physical manifestations, and to see “the ‘final’ *Quixote* as a kind of palimpsest, in which the traces — faint but not undecipherable — of our friend’s ‘previous’ text must shine through” (BORGES 2018, 95). Borges himself, meanwhile, produced three published versions of the story, in a 1939 issue of the Buenos Aires magazine *Sur*, and then in two collections of his fiction, *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*In the Garden of Forking Paths*) in 1941 and *Ficciones* in 1956, the latter a revised version of the original, 1944 edition (BALDERSTON 2018, 207). While a draft of “Pierre Menard” was famously reported stolen to Interpol but then recovered, the through-line from this unpublished version to Borges’s post-publication variants “confirms that the compositional processes seen in the manuscripts continued when Borges revised” (BALDERSTON 2018, 208–09). Borges’s story features frequently in discussions of the ontology of the work of art, as the indistinguishable contents of Cervantes’s and Menard’s texts would seem to render them as distinct works insofar as each is produced under importantly different historical circum-

tances, and with different authorial intentions.<sup>17</sup> As Diana Pérez concludes, “if we know the manuscript in front of us was written by Menard instead of Cervantes, different interpretations occur to us” (2011, 87).<sup>18</sup>

Menard’s original yet identical excerpts from the *Quixote* return me to the questions of works, texts, and versions that follow from interlocking senses of textual variability and continuity developing through time. Joseph Grigely deploys the Menard case to bolster his claim that all material instantiations of a work are always distinct from each other: “we can no more print the same text twice than we can step in the same stream twice”, as even if “two texts are alike in all physical respects”, their “difference is instead one that is ontological” (1995, 109). Greetham notes as well that, in relation to questions of textual ontology, the “deeply problematic status of repetition” is “at the core of textuality” (1999, 34). Textual repetition, and the variation and instability that follow inevitably from it, usually manifest themselves in the (non-Borgesian) cases of the “same” work occurring across “different” texts, including those that may be linguistically identical (or very similar) yet bibliographically distinct. While Cervantes’s and Menard’s iterations of the *Quixote* are ontologically distinct due to the circumstances of their production, the multiple published and unpublished texts of Borges’s story fall under the ontological umbrella of the work, where they are distinguished by their differences and united by their overarching continuities.

I will conclude by returning to conceptions of the work in relation to the time of its productions and reproduction. From what Greetham thinks of as a postmodernist editorial orientation, works, and the texts in which they appear, would appear as in a state of “perpetual becoming”, based on editors and editorial theorists “preferring process and demonstrable incompleteness (or ‘becoming’) over fulfillment (and ‘being’)” (2007, 28). Bushell similarly emphasizes the “coming-into-being of the text” as an “organic

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17. See Arthur C. Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace: A Philosophy of Art* (Harvard University Press, 1981); Jesús Aguilar, “Can Pierre Menard Be the Author of *Don Quixote*?” *Variaciones Borges* 8 (1999): 166–77; Christopher Janaway, “Borges and Danto: A Reply to Michael Wreen”, *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32.1 (1992): 72–6; William Woof, “Borges, Cervantes, & Quine: Reconciling Existence Assumptions and Fictional Complexities in ‘Pierre Menard, Author of *Don Quixote*’”, *Variaciones Borges* 7 (1999): 191–230; and Michael Wreen, “Once Is Not Enough?” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 30.2 (1990): 149–58.

18. Pérez, who presumably has never been to an STS conference, suggests elsewhere that “there seem to be no relevant differences between the different instantiations of a given book” (2011, 81–2).

becoming” generated by “construction, revision, and return” (2009, 225).<sup>19</sup> And Eggert, in a recent discussion of the concept of the work, understands its production and reproduction by readers, in addition to authors, editors, and publishers, as an essential part of the “repeated coming-into-being of the work” as part of the “unfolding life of the work” (2019, 176). To conceptualize the work as becoming or unfolding over time, across its draft and multiply published versions and texts, necessarily entails an understanding of the work as an immaterial entity that persists, that is constituted by its continuity and its variability as these aspects of textuality engage each other. For Morrison to maintain an underlying vision of *Beloved* that maintains its invariability as she expands textual moments that were “Tk” before then letting them stand, or for O’Brien to return to “Speaking of Courage” or “Loon Point” in order to repurpose these textual foundations for what ultimately become two different works in each case, implies that these temporal and textual parts of an unfolding whole are constituted along those processes of composition, revision, and return as much by remaining the same as by remaining different.<sup>20</sup>

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19. Though Bushell tends to think of textual “becoming” as emerging from drafts rather than “the stable, completed text” (2009, 229), as the examples of Borges, O’Brien, or many other authors demonstrate, publication does not in any meaningful sense imply “completion”.

20. This paper began as a presentation at the 2019 conference of the Society for Textual Scholarship. I am grateful for comments and questions there.

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