

Introduction: Rewriting(s)

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In October 2015 the Modern Humanities Research Association (MHRA) held its first postgraduate and early career conference at Senate House, London. The topic was ‘Rewriting(s)’ and, as the Call for Papers outlined, the intention was to investigate rewriting as a literary mode that occurs across cultures, genres, and time periods, both transforming and preserving root works, whilst revealing the protean natures of text, tradition, genre, authorship, and readership. The conference began with a keynote lecture by the MHRA’s President for 2015, Professor Martin McLaughlin, entitled ‘Rewriting in the Italian Literary Tradition: Dante to Calvino (but not everything in between)’. McLaughlin traced instances of rewriting throughout Italian literature: from Dante and Petrarch to Calvino and Ken Kalfus, demonstrating how in any text we read ‘each sentence [...] may contain ten other texts beneath it’.¹ There followed fifteen papers exploring different models and functions of rewriting across a number of European languages. These were divided into categories including politicised rewritings, palimpsests and traces, rewriting and the author, and translation as rewriting. Drawing on this conference, this volume continues these investigations, with four articles examining manifestations of rewriting in twentieth-century literature, in different genres and languages, from Argentina to Austria.

In his essay ‘Highlighting Variants in Literary Editions: Techniques and Goals’ (2006), Burghard Dedner states that ‘No human author can claim to be totally original’, specifying that ‘writers who work on an historical subject do not even want to be original’.² Dedner provides a number of examples: ‘Aischylos’ *Oresteia* is probably taken from oral tradition, Shakespeare based his history plays on written chronicles, Goethe copied parts of his *Götz von Berlichingen* from the knight’s autobiography’. Last year, 400 years since Shakespeare’s death, we witnessed a flurry of interest in his legacy. Dedner highlights the fact that Shakespeare relied upon written accounts of the reigns of particular monarchs for his histories, but it is well known that Shakespeare

¹ Martin McLaughlin, ‘Poliziano’s *Stanze per la giostra*: Postmodern Poetics in a Proto-Renaissance Poem’, in *Italy in Crisis: 1494*, ed. by Jane Everson and Diego Zancani (London: Legenda, 2000), pp. 129–51 (p. 140).

² Burghard Dedner, ‘Highlighting Variants in Literary Editions: Techniques and Goals’, in *Texts in Multiple Versions: Histories of Editions*, ed. by Luigi Giuliani, Herman Brinkman, Geert Lernout and Marita Mathijsen (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), pp. 15–31 (p. 17).

also employed other texts for the plots and details of most of his plays extending beyond the histories, a common practice at the period in which he wrote.³ Might we consider Shakespeare's plays rewritings of these earlier sources? Certainly, Shakespeare's works themselves have been reinterpreted, reworked, and retold countless times: the second essay in this volume addresses Shakespeare in translation in Soviet Russia; other offshoots in the twentieth century include the classic science-fiction film *Forbidden Planet* (1956) (a rewriting of *The Tempest*), the musical *West Side Story* (1957) (a rewriting of *Romeo and Juliet*), and Disney's animated film *The Lion King* (1994) (a rewriting of *Hamlet*).

Dedner's essay evokes Roland Barthes's 'The Death of the Author' (1967), a work in which Barthes famously declares that any 'text is a tissue of quotations'.⁴ The author's 'only power', according to Barthes, 'is to mix writings', in other words, to *rewrite* through a process akin to compilation. It seems particularly intuitive to apply Barthes's claims to rewritings of established narratives, stretching across an expanse of time: from the earliest works of poetry in the ancient world, chiefly transmitted orally, in which changes to the text might be a matter of personal preference, misremembering, translation (or mistranslation), through to Angela Carter's takes on classic fairy tales in her *Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (1979). While Barthes does not appear to recognise authorial originality in manipulating (and rewriting) established narratives, his argument extends to all works of literature, regardless of the existence or non-existence of source material.

This is, evidently, an extreme view, which chimes with the works of those who have striven to establish the lowest number of plots to which all narratives adhere: for these critics, each tale is a 'rewriting', a mere embellishment of one of a list of set formulae. Such theories predate Barthes's essay. The French writer Georges Polti published his proto-structuralist *Les trente-six situations dramatiques* in 1895. The more widely cited notion that there are only seven basic plots is an idea often first attributed to Arthur Quiller-Couch in the early twentieth century; this concept has resurfaced more recently in Christopher Brooker's *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (2004). In 1949 the American comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell published *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, a work suggesting that most mythological heroes participate in narratives which share the same fundamental structure: the 'monomyth', 'the one, shape-shifting yet marvelously constant story'.⁵ Although Campbell's work subsequently received much criticism, it has recently found favour with a number of academics.⁶ William Foster-Harris, meanwhile, stated in *The Basic*

³ Shakespeare's plays for which no source for the plot has been established are few: while scholarly opinion differs, these are often held to be *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The Tempest*, a mere fraction of his surviving works.

⁴ Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana, 1977), pp. 142–48 (p. 146).

⁵ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (London: Fontana, 1993), p. 3.

⁶ Recent critical works reading narratives as monomythical cover a broad range of historical time, as well as media; see, for example: Dennis Quinn, *Edmund Spenser's Faerie Queene and the Monomyth*

Patterns of Plot (1959) that there were ‘three variations of the one universal plot’: ‘happy ending’, ‘unhappy ending’, and the more complex ‘literary plot’ to which he devotes an entire chapter.⁷ While Barthes does not attempt to split narrative types in such a fashion, his insistence that nothing is original but simply a retelling of sources that have come before it resonates with these studies. In Barthes’s mind, each ‘new’ text is built upon a foundation of all of those that have come before it. The individual author is insignificant; the text has been (re)written by culture more broadly.

An opposing attitude is explored, somewhat facetiously, in Jorge Luis Borges’s short story ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’ (1939), a work which describes a fictional writer — the titular Pierre Menard — who ‘rewrites’ Cervantes’s *Don Quixote* by copying out sections of the text and, in doing so, creates a version of the novel apparently superior to Cervantes’s original, ‘verbally identical, but [...] infinitely richer’.⁸ Borges, an author considered in greater depth in the first essay of this issue, explains how Menard seeks:

not [...] to compose *another* Quixote, which surely is easy enough — he wanted to compose *the* Quixote. Nor, surely, need one have to say that his goal was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of *copying* it. His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided — word for word and line for line — with those of Miguel de Cervantes.⁹

The text has been effectively rewritten as it is the product of a different writer living in a different time: ‘The archaic style of Menard [...] is somewhat affected. Not so that of his precursor, who employs the Spanish of his time with complete naturalness’.¹⁰ Borges also dwells upon the process of revision to comic effect. ‘His drafts were endless’, Borges relates; ‘he stubbornly corrected, and he ripped up thousands of handwritten pages. He would allow no one to see them, and took care that they not survive him’.¹¹ There is, of course, comedy in Borges’s descriptions of Meynard’s ‘black crossings-out’ and his consignment of his drafts to ‘a cheery bonfire’. These drafts, to the average reader of ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, if not to Borges or Meynard, are mere transcriptions of Cervantes’s original. There is no need to labour so long over a copy, nor to insist upon the destruction of drafts, which can only be identical to the original, each other, and the final manuscript.

of Joseph Campbell: Essays in Interpretation (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen, 2000); Donald Palumbo, *The Monomyth in American Science Fiction Films: 28 Visions of the Hero’s Journey* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014).

⁷ William Foster-Harris, *The Basic Patterns of Plot* (Norma, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1959), p. 66.

⁸ Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, in *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1998), pp. 88–95 (p. 94).

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

So, while Borges seems to consider the author and his or her cultural context as vital to an understanding of the text, Barthes elevates the significance of the reader's experience to the degree that the reader themselves might be considered a 'rewriter': 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author', he famously states.¹² These two positions thus demonstrate that there exists a broad range of practices which might also be considered 'rewriting', extending from allusion, intertextuality, and reader response to revision and translation. We can identify processes of rewriting from the earliest recorded literature (held by many to be the Epic of Gilgamesh, or perhaps the Egyptian Book of the Dead) through to works produced since the invention of print and beyond, now including ebooks and hypertexts. And as scholars have become increasingly aware of and interested in the variety of forms which 'rewriting' might take, methodologies with which to interrogate them have emerged and developed.

The field of Genetic Criticism, for example, endorses inspection of the development of the text, from its earliest origins to the final printed or electronic version(s).¹³ This approach has found particular favour with scholars focusing on canonical twentieth-century authors such as James Joyce, Ezra Pound, and T.S. Eliot, though it can, of course, be applied to any text which has undergone some form of revision.¹⁴ Often addressing earlier literature, Manuscript Studies uncovers transcriptions with differences that are frequently held to be significant, famously the variations between the Hengwrt and Ellesmere Manuscripts of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (considered, by some, to be inspired by — perhaps a 'rewriting' of — Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Decameron*). There are eighty-three known manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales*, a number only superseded by the approximately 130 surviving manuscripts of the Middle English poem, *Prick of Conscience*. The sheer number of these texts suggests their popularity, as they were regularly rewritten for those who desired a physical copy.

In more recent times, rewritings appear to be more conspicuous than ever. 2009 saw Seth Grahame transform Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) into *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* — a process which involved adapting Austen's original text, the excision of some passages, as well as the introduction of completely new sections — and in 2011 E. L. James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, developed from a work of fan fiction based on Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), found a place on bestseller lists worldwide. In university settings, students compare the original ending of Austen's *Persuasion* to the one that was pub-

¹² Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', p. 148.

¹³ Jean-Louis Lebrave has applied a genetic approach to hypertexts, demonstrating its applicability to even the most modern means of constructing, distributing, and encountering literature. See Jean-Louis Lebrave, 'Hypertexts — Memories — Writing', in *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-texts*, ed. by Jed Deppman, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), pp. 218–37.

¹⁴ There is an online journal devoted to studying the works of Joyce genetically. See *Genetic Joyce Studies*, <<http://www.geneticjoycestudies.org/>>.

lished (the only one to which Austen's readership originally had access). Both versions of Alfred Tennyson's "The Lady of Shalott" (1833; 1842) are available to those seeking to compare these texts quite literally side-by-side. The 'most significant alteration' to Tennyson's original, as Erik Gray observes, 'regards the phrasing of the curse': in the rewritten version the curse is ambiguous, and its power and legitimacy are called into question.¹⁵ Other significant changes to the poem's final stanza 'softens the harsh ironies and contrasts of the original version', which Gray speculates reflects the alleviation of Tennyson's 'anxiety concerning the reception of the poem'.¹⁶ To take another nineteenth-century example, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* exists in three versions: the version that Oscar Wilde originally submitted to *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* where the novel was first published, the version that appeared in the magazine in 1890 subsequent to J. M. Stoddard's edits, and the 1891 book edition published by Ward Lock. With critical eyes increasingly alighting upon these competing versions, one is ever more aware that rewriting is a process that can be undertaken by a range of actors: by the original author, a collaborator, an editor, or even a reader.

The essays that comprise this volume respond to burgeoning scholarly attentiveness to all manners of rewriting in twentieth-century literature, across a range of languages and cultures. The authors draw upon methodologies endorsed by Genetic Criticism, Manuscript Studies, and Translation Theory, as well as theorists including Barthes's fellow structuralist, Gérard Genette. Together they demonstrate the versatility and variety of critical approaches to rewritten texts, revealing how rewriting may be interpreted as an exploration of the self on the part of the original writer or rewriter, a reflection of the political or cultural climate in which the rewriting takes place, or an intertextual homage to the work of the author upon whom the rewriter muses.

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The lines chosen by Borges are exactly the same as those in Yeats's original poem but, cut adrift and inserted into a new context, they have the potential to be made new, made Borges's. — Grace Gaynor

Opening this volume, Grace Gaynor (University of Liverpool) sheds light on the technique of rewriting an author's work in the context of an epigraph. Examining two of Jorge Luis Borges's short stories, "Tema del traidor y del héroe" and "Biografía de Tadeo Isidoro Cruz (1829–1874)", Gaynor focuses on his epigraphs, here taken from two of W. B. Yeats's poems. She explores

¹⁵ Erik Gray, 'Getting It Wrong in "The Lady of Shalott"', *Victorian Poetry*, 47.1 (2009), 45–59 (p. 51). Also of note is Gray's assertion that there are actually 'three major re-envisionings' of this poem after its original publication in 1833: the 1842 version, 'two rewritings of the story [...] in the 1859 volume, *Idylls of the King*', and 'an unpublished poem in which Tennyson closely echoes the conclusion of "The Lady of Shalott"'; see pp. 48–49.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–56.

why such rewriting takes place, both referring to Gérard Genette's 'potential functions' of an epigraph and, moving beyond this, highlighting significant changes of emphasis that Borges accomplishes in order to use Yeats's work for his own purposes. Indeed, in examining the reasons why Borges refers not to the titles of Yeats's specific poems cited but to those of their respective poetry collections, *The Tower* and *The Winding Stair*, Gaynor explains how this was due to the associations and structures that these particular images suggested to Borges. As she continues to clarify, this not only takes Yeats's ideas out of their original context, but even affords them new titles, calling into question the authorship of these epigraphs. Finally, returning to Genette's functions and in particular the desire for 'indirect backing', Gaynor underscores how, despite Borges's frequent reference to other writers, his rewriting of Yeats and others was selective: Borges avoided unnecessary works, whilst choosing only his favoured peers to join him in the literary pantheon. Thus, through Borges and his rewriting of Yeats, Gaynor demonstrates how rewriting is, for some authors, a very deliberate technique employed to the advantage both of their work and their reputation.

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In keeping with the educational requirements for culture in the 1920s-30s, Radlova felt that the target audience should be the prime consideration. — Jill Warren

Another example of rewriting whereby one adapts the original for one's own purposes is discussed by Jill Warren (University of Nottingham) in her essay on the translation of *Othello* for the Stalinist stage. Warren here focuses on Anna Radlova's translation, which was used by her director husband, Sergei Radlov, in two highly successful productions in 1935. For a number of reasons this was not an entirely literal translation. Firstly, Warren highlights how Radlova needed to ensure that her translation conformed to the Stalinist regime in order to maintain its position on the stage. Her choice of play itself was judicious: *Othello* was one of the preferred plays in Stalin's Russia as the positive, military figure of Othello was regarded as a more suitable hero than, for instance, the philosophising Hamlet. Beyond such stipulations, however, Radlova also sought to rewrite the romanticised translations inherited from France and Germany so as to deliver a Shakespeare that she believed Russia's otherwise oppressed society needed. Exploring instances of decisions in translation, Warren clarifies, for example, how Radlova and Radlov both advocated simpler and more succinct language: requirements dictated by the needs of the contemporary audience and of the actors, with concision allowing the cast freedom in their performance of the play. Thus, despite Radlova having sought refuge in translation after causing scandal through her poetry, Warren demonstrates how this was an arena similarly influenced by the dangerous

political climate. As the title of this article asserts, Radlova did not simply translate *Othello*, she rewrote it for the Stalinist stage.

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Parallels are drawn between the ways in which the city, the text, and the self more generally are constructed as palimpsests, each conceived as myriad levels of atemporal, imbricated experiences with no one level alone able to render the complexity of life. — Rachel Darling

In our third essay, Rachel Darling (formerly Goldsmiths, University of London) explores Lawrence Durrell's complex novel, *Alexandria Quartet*. She examines not how well-known literary figures rewrite the texts of others or how translators rewrite classics, but rather how Durrell portrays a fictional author's progression through the rewriting of his own and others' ideas. With four books telling the same story, Darling examines how Durrell allows the reader to follow the development of this character, Darley, until the finale of the *Quartet* when he is ready to take up his own pen and begin with 'Once upon a time' at the end of the final book. The structure of the *Quartet* is crucial, as Darling further reveals how, through rewriting the same story four times, Durrell himself investigates the palimpsestic nature of any story, formed by the convergence of different narratives and viewpoints, and, moreover, what this means for the concept of truth. Indeed the character-writer, Darley, through his own writing and rewriting, recognises the co-existence of multiple valid interpretations of place and time: an idea that Darling explores in Durrell's image of the mirror and its ability to reflect the same subject from different angles. Finally, Darling not only brings to light Durrell's demonstration of the palimpsest as an intrinsic part of the authorial process, but further, through its obvious exposition of an author's efforts in rewriting, as a device that casts asunder any unrealistic, modernist ideas of the author as anything above human.

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What Zweig recognises in his most-prized manuscript and what the material experience leads him to figure is that with materiality comes process — a movement of writing behind a final work that constantly destabilizes the authority of any printed work through the mass of potential deviations. — Pardaad Chamsaz

Further concentrating on palimpsests, and in this case the perhaps more traditional model of corrected and annotated manuscripts, Pardaad Chamsaz (British Library and University of Bristol) concludes this volume with a study of Stefan Zweig's collection of Honoré de Balzac's manuscripts and his unfinished biography of this French novelist. Chamsaz explores how Zweig, like Durrell, afforded much significance to the *process* of Balzac's writing and rewriting.

Indeed, he even suggests that Zweig's inability to finish his own biography of Balzac due to his constant revisions demonstrates how Balzac's methods influenced Zweig's own working style. Chamsaz examines the importance of textual materiality to Zweig's thought, as he explains the significance Zweig accorded to reading Balzac's physical manuscripts, especially that of *Une ténébreuse affaire*, not least due to his belief there was almost a presence — be it authorial or divine inspiration — left behind in a manuscript. This may imply an overly exalting view of authors, yet Chamsaz further illustrates how Zweig aligns this idea of a presence with an awareness of the humanity of all manuscript creators. Again hinting at a similar idea in Durrell's understanding of rewriting noted above, Chamsaz highlights Zweig's 'moral lesson', with which he reminded his readers of the *human* struggles of rewriting made plain by the markings of a manuscript. Shifting attention from the finished product to the rewriting process itself, as materialised in manuscripts, Chamsaz reveals how it is in this stage that Zweig saw the inspiration and struggle of an author and the coming-to-being of their perpetual working draft.

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To conclude, this volume explores many of the different forms that rewriting has taken in twentieth-century literature, from Spanish short stories to Russian translations, English novels, and German biographies. Reminding us of the intertextuality of literature, authors rewrite the works of predecessors and contemporaries for many reasons, from interests of recognition to political motives. Traditions, as McLaughlin demonstrated in his aforementioned keynote address, are based on this continuity. Moreover, rewriting is not simply a technique *employed* in literature but one that has itself garnered interest *within* literary discourse, with Durrell, for example, highlighting the significance of rewriting to the authorial process, demonstrating in turn the human toil behind written creativity. In fact, whether rewriting another author or one's own previous drafts, rewriting is a process without end, rendering even completed manuscripts potential palimpsests of succeeding works. These four articles thus give an insight into many of the various manifestations of this vital literary mode, consequently revealing how literature and literary traditions would not exist as we know them without rewriting(s).