What is Authorial Philology?

Paola Italia, Giulia Raboni, et al.
4.2 Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Poems

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The vast majority of Percy Bysshe Shelley’s poems were published posthumously, or at least without his direct supervision, a fact that has complicated the work of critics and experts who study and publish the author’s texts, and continues to have a notable impact on Shelleyan philology. Of the more than 400 compositions that are found in complete collections today, only about 70 or so were printed in Shelley’s lifetime. These can be subdivided into verses found in editions and anthologies overseen by the poet (such as, in addition to the juvenilia, the 1813–1816 editions of Queen Mab; Alastor; Laon and Cythna, 1817 and 1818; The Cenci, 1819; Oedipus Tyrannus, 1820; Epipsychidion, 1821 and Adonais, the pastoral elegy composed upon the death of John Keats and edited in 1821, too), and those published in editions which Shelley did not so supervise, as they circulated during the long periods in which he was abroad (such as the collection Rosalind and Helen, 1819; Hellas, 1822; and the famous drama in verse, Prometheus Unbound, published first in 1820 with the addition of other poems, among which was the Ode to the West Wind).

The gradual constitution of the author’s poetic canon is thus made up of different phases, and its complexity can be explained not only in relation to the adventurous lifestyle of Shelley and his circle, but also in light of the fluctuating critical appraisal of his writings throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Rossington and Schmid 2008) and in terms of the evolution of philology as a discipline across the Channel (Reiman 1972; Everest 1989; Fraistat 2000).

Proceeding in order, the first such phase is the work done by the author’s second wife, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, on the unpublished autograph manuscripts left by the poet upon his sudden death (Shelley died in a shipwreck in the summer of 1822 off the coast of Viareggio, Italy). Despite the unwavering hostility of his family members, especially his father Sir Timothy Shelley, Mary Shelley immediately put her expertise to work on her husband’s tangled manuscripts, in preparation for the 1824 publication of Posthumous Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley. Though printed in a 500-copy edition by John and Henry L. Hunt in London, it was partially withdrawn from the market upon the
insistence of the author’s father. Later, Mary’s collaboration during the
preparation of *The Poetical Works of Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats*, the first
anthology published in Paris by the Galignani brothers in 1829, was
not enough to stop other people from following in their footsteps, and
for at least fifteen years, numerous pirated editions of the poems were
published. After 1838, when some of those restrictions were withdrawn,
Mary was decidedly freer to dedicate her time to the publication of her
husband’s work. As such, in 1839 Edward Moxon managed to publish
the four-volume *Poetical Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (dedicated to
Percy Florence, the couple’s young son), enriched by Mary’s insightful
textual Notes and followed by two volumes of unpublished prose
works in the same year.

This 1839 edition (which strengthened the results of the one before it
but which also inherited its alterations, such as changes to its form and
organization, promotion to text of fragmentary lyric poems, etc.) was
so successful that it became the starting point for almost all subsequent
anthologies of Shelley’s poetry up until the twentieth century, with just
two exceptions: *Shelley Memorials* (1859), published in London by Smith,
and in Boston by Ticknor and Fields, and *Relics of Shelley* edited
by Richard Garnett (1862), both of which added new texts to the canon.

In the meantime, the marriage of Sir Percy Florence Shelley and Jane
Gibson St John resulted in the transfer of the family archive (guarded
over by Mary Shelley until then) to Boscombe Manor, purchased by Percy
Florence for his mother in 1849. It then became the home of Lady Jane,
who — in particular after the death of her mother-in-law — dedicated
herself at length and with authentic devotion to the memory (or rather
worship) of her famous relative. She issued a series of biographies and
memoirs, and perhaps most importantly managed the author’s papers,
later even donating some of them to the Bodleian Library at Oxford.

The new availability of some of the manuscripts originating from
the family’s collection at the end of the century thus sparked a fresh
wave of publications, which were, in a way, the continuation of those of
Mary Shelley and the numerous projects that Lady Jane had worked on.
The Victorian editions of the *Poetical Works* by William Michael Rossetti,
brother of Dante Gabriel Rossetti and one of Garnett’s collaborators, and
by Harry Buxton Forman are prime examples. The Rossetti edition came
out in 1870, only to be re-edited with corrections in 1878, with extensive
changes to the metre, diction, grammar and punctuation of the texts. The Buxton Forman edition, which appeared in 1876–1877, offered a significantly more conservative approach. It was, in essence, the first scholarly publication of Shelley’s poetry, not just because it scrubbed the verses of the numerous typographical/editorial corruptions accumulated over decades of unchecked dissemination and proposed a return to the author’s original versions, but also because it was based on an advanced knowledge of Shelley’s style and linguistic working methods (Buxton Forman 1876).

However, even this effort was still limited by the lack of exploration of a large quantity of autograph materials — materials that, up to the post-war period, were almost hidden from the public. As a result, the quality of the collections and comments released throughout the first half of the twentieth century was negatively impacted (like the 1911 edition from Charles D. Locock, who had nevertheless access to some of the Boscombe originals in 1903, extracting many new readings that were gathered in Thomas Hutchinson’s Oxford Standard Authors Edition, the latter becoming the reference text for Shelley’s poems for quite a long time). The Julian Edition by Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck came next, the only one collecting all prose, poetry and letters together, released in ten volumes between 1926 and 1930. It became almost immediately obsolete due to the excessively eclectic choices made by the editors and the broader access to the manuscripts that had become possible in the meantime. For the first time since Mary Shelley’s efforts, the handwritten documents finally returned as the true protagonists in the ‘third phase’ of Shelleyan philology.

Indeed, Lady Jane’s donation to the Bodleian Library (1893–1894) was followed by that of other materials, including some important notebooks, by Sir John Shelley-Rolls (in 1946), a direct descendant of the family upon the heirless passing of Percy Florence. More recently, in 2004, the library acquired the Abinger papers, which include many of Mary Shelley’s manuscripts and most of the author’s correspondence, thereby reuniting the entire Boscombe collection at Oxford. Today, these documents are available to researchers, as are the less numerous but no less significant papers scattered in collections outside of the United Kingdom, including those in the Huntington Library (California),
Given the ease of access to the sources in more recent years, textual criticism of Shelley’s work has seen rapid growth since the 1960s, all while in the absence of a complete critical edition of Shelley’s poetry (Rossington 2013; Rognoni 2018: cxxxvi-cxxxvii). The main reason for such a state of affairs is to be found in the very nature of the author’s manuscripts and in the complexity of the compositional mechanisms that Shelley’s papers reveal.

In particular, the poet’s notebooks, about thirty in total, contain drafts and re-writings that constitute different editorial states of the same works, often incomplete, or developed alongside other compositions, or even dating back to moments that are difficult to determine because they were so far apart. One further problem then concerns the speed and conditions with which the very writing of the texts took place: Shelley mostly wrote while travelling, indoors and outdoors, sitting still or even in movement, perhaps on a boat or in a carriage. The result is a notable sense of compositional disorder expressed on pages handwritten with cursive ductus and penmanship that is so broken down it is almost indecipherable, with numerous erasures, corrections, interlinear insertions or re-writings of portions of the text, one overlapping the other. And because notebooks were his favourite place to jot down ideas, they often intermingle with poetic fragments or glosses, comments, titles, quotes, calculations or even sketches of trees, mountains, buildings and faces. Moreover, the sheets of the notebooks, bound along the upper margin, were used by the author from both ends, without apparent regard for their material proximity. Quite often, different drafts of the same composition, including some clean copies, are spread across one or more different writing supports. Lastly, these issues are compounded by those deriving from the mass dispersion (or destruction) of many of the indicator-links that would have connected the first drafts or revisions of the poems to their definitive publication in printed volumes as arranged by Shelley (autograph or apograph copies, corrected drafts, etc.); not to mention that the author’s practices included the frequent use of loose sheets of paper, many of which are now lost (Everest 1989: xxii–xxvi).

Faced with such a complex situation, the greatest and longest lasting effort by Anglo-American scholars has therefore consisted in
providing the public with facsimiles of Shelley’s manuscripts (and now, in many cases, digital scans, like those that can be found on https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/divisions/carl-h-pforzheimer-collection-of-shelley-and-his-circle, or https://hdl.huntington.org/digital/collection/p15150coll7/search/searchterm/percy%20shelley). A robust forty-one volumes containing images, transcriptions and commentaries on specific parts of the text (though selective and based on widely differing standards) make up the three main diplomatic editions currently available to philologists (Shelley 1985–1997; Shelley 1986–2002; Shelley 1961–), almost all thanks to the efforts of Donald H. Reiman. These tools certainly facilitate the work to be done, as they make it possible for the reader to check the hypotheses formulated by critics for each text. However, for obvious reasons, they cannot be considered the result of a systematic, genetic-reconstructive study.

Also dating to the 1960s, at least in its original conception coming from Geoffrey Matthews, is the first veritable critical edition, in the modern sense, of the writer’s poetry, *The Poems of Shelley*, a collection that was published as part of the Longman Annotated English Poets (1989–) series. Originally divided into three volumes, today it has reached five total, though the last has yet to be released. The collection is actually one of two complete editions of Shelley’s poems currently being worked on: other than the Longman edition, another series has been ongoing since 2000, *The Complete Poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (CPPBS), published by Johns Hopkins University Press and divided into eight volumes, with only the first three having been printed.

These editions deserve a closer look. However, at least a brief mention must also be made of the Norton, the Oxford World’s Classics and the Penguin Classics anthologies, alongside the Italian publication edited by Francesco Rognoni for Meridiani Mondadori (the largest selection of texts to date). Despite not being critical editions, they do constitute the main vehicles of the widespread dissemination of Shelley’s work in recent years (often complete with optimal philological information resulting from a round of manuscript verifications).

In the Longman publication, the poems are published starting with a close-up examination of the handwritten and printed versions, and providing a systematic modernization of Shelley’s spellings. The texts are arranged in chronological order according to the first writings,
thereby abandoning the order imposed by Mary Shelley’s *Poetical Works*. Each poem is preceded by a short introduction, which provides indications on the dates and the occasions of the drafts, up to the work’s publication, information on the available sources (bibliographic and otherwise) and, where necessary, on the work’s reception. The text is then printed and accompanied, at the bottom of the page, by an apparatus that includes both explanatory notes and comments and minimal lists of substantial variations taken from the autograph manuscripts and the most important printed publications (or re-issues). Contrary to that printed in the introduction to Volume 1 of the series (Everest 1989: xxvi), it should be mentioned that manuscript readings are not ‘given in full’. Instead, they mainly correspond to the last developmental stages that can be deduced from the work carried out by the author on the drafts. Formal and punctuation variants appear here and there, but only when deemed relevant to the way the text is understood. Thus, a large number of the variants found in the originals are missing. In addition, the intermingling of critical and philological levels certainly does not help the legibility of the apparatus, and the chronological order, the true innovation of the Longman version, obviously has its own set of issues: Shelley often worked on multiple texts at the same time, interspersing long compositional pauses (weeks, even months) with corrections made to that same text. Meanwhile, the fragments are, by their very nature, very difficult to date and the writings revised later on are placed in conventional positions, seeing as they are established only by their editorial forms.

*CPPBS*, on the other hand, is quite different in its layout and textual criticism solutions, more clearly separating the handwritten text from the printed version, while reserving limited space for the former. Even the criteria that determine the presentation of the texts are different: here, the poems are first of all distinguished between published and unpublished. The published works are arranged in collections, according to the sequence of the author’s editions, while the unpublished works, private because they never went beyond the draft stage, or because they were circulated exclusively within a close circle of friends and never meant to be printed, are mostly grouped according to the moments in which the poet’s life can be sub-divided, spanning from 1803, the year of his lyrical poetry debut, to 1822. Within each section, then, the series
follows either the desire of the author as shown by the reference editions, or a more generic chronological order of composition, particularly reliable when deduced from the available correspondence. However, the element that is actually new here is the base-text, which is a snapshot of one of its editions, conceived by the poet to be submitted to readers in a certain moment in time, and reworked as little as possible by the collection’s philologists who, unlike those at Longman, opted for strictly conservative criteria in regards to linguistic form and punctuation. The result is a four-level structure: text; apparatus at the bottom of the page, limited to the different printed versions and used to justify any corrections to the text; Primary Collations with the selective annotation of authorial variants and those found in printed editions (identified through the comparison with other Shelleyan editions or with Mary Shelley’s collections, which are supposed to preserve authorial variants); and Historical Collations including the variants that can be inferred from the most important nineteenth and twentieth century editions of poetry, helpful in tracing the historic fate of the texts. The picture is completed by a few supplementary sections, or proper appendices, where different materials appear occasionally: revisions for reprints, lists of errata, alternative versions of the same composition (as is the case, for instance, of the Mont Blanc poem, 1816, and others), or partial transcriptions of autograph fragments, including vertical apparatuses which are helpful for examination of the texts. As the American edition treats the poems published during Shelley’s life in Volumes 1–3, it has the benefit of systematically documenting the printed versions, though it does not handle the manuscripts in the same way. For this reason, the Longman version is still in the lead, though the supplements to the edition remain indispensable.

The last twenty-five years seem to have marked a new era in the study of Shelley’s poetry. On the one hand, the current state of Shelleyan philology is firmly rooted in the belief that a close examination of the originals is an indispensable premise for each attempt at a critical study of the texts and, because of this the large diplomatic undertakings mentioned above are favourably received, as are those that today are multiplying in the landscape of the Digital Humanities, such as the http://shelleygodwinarchive.org/ online platform developed in 2015 by Neil Fraistat, Elizabeth Denlinger and Raffaele Viglianti, which will host
the complete digitized versions of the manuscripts of both Mary and Percy Shelley in the future, in addition to those of her father, William Godwin, and her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft. On the other hand, it seems that the manuscripts struggle to become part of the apparatuses of the reference editions, both for practical (space and problems with finding a system of representation) and theoretical reasons. The traditional dilemma (which Mary Shelley herself grappled with) between the need to respect the author’s last wishes, reflecting, in a ‘historical’ edition, the intentions that guided Shelley during each step of textual composition and revision, and the importance of guaranteeing readers a text that is comprehensible. The outcome is twofold: offering excessive freedom in altering mostly unfinished texts, and placing the available records in a hierarchal order which clearly prioritises the printed versions, thereby confirming a choice that is not exclusive to Shelley’s texts, but generally applied to Anglo-Saxon textual criticism practices, in which the field of Textual Bibliography and the critical models offered by Greg (Greg 1950) and Tanselle (Tanselle 1998) seem to dominate.

To correct that situation, for some years now, especially among the scholars connected to the CPPBS, there have been a few attempts at filologia d’autore editions. It is worth mentioning them in conclusion: in 2012, an appendix to the third volume of the series was published, containing the genetic edition of the longest of Shelley’s poems, Laon and Cythna (1817, later revised and reprinted in 1818 with the title The Revolt of Islam). The text presented on paper, accompanied by printed variants and the main collations, is followed by a supplement relative to the corrections handed down by seven Bodleian autographs, plus other rough drafts and copies that make up the history of the work (six fragments from the Pforzheimer Collection and another six from the British Library, National Library of Scotland, Trinity College in Cambridge, Texas Christian University and the University of Texas, Austin; with the addition of six more prints), even if the introduction specifies: ‘this is not a complete record of draft variants; it does not include every repeated cancellation, stray letter, or indecipherable word or phrase in these MSS. But it does reproduce large sections of Shelley’s draft material for L&C in an attempt to trace his thought process and the evolution of his language, imagery, and political, social, and philosophical ideas’ (Neth 2012: https://romantic-circles.org/reference/laon_cythna/introduction.html).
The online edition, explicitly meant to have an ancillary function with respect to the paper version does not reproduce the text of the poem, to which it refers only by adopting the same numbering of the cantos, stanzas and lines. The apparatus is vertical and explicit: the explanatory editorial interventions, in italics, are frequent, alternating with the record of the variants, mostly described topographically and followed by the complete list of the record abbreviations involved. Brackets indicate the portion of the text involved in the variant, but also conjectural transcriptions (with the addition of question marks for the indecipherable readings); underlining and deletions are rendered via marks respecting those of the author. Going from top to bottom corresponds to the passage between references, or they identify correcting phases within the manuscript itself (though here and there the apparatus is synthetic and implicit).

The following example (in which the text has been taken from CPPBS: III, 133–34) is the ninth stanza of canto I (verses 73–81, containing the representation of an eagle and a serpent engaged in an allegorical struggle between revolution and oppression). It accounts for a solid argument for a panorama of research that is more developed than in the past and finally aimed at recovering the workshop-like aspect of the compositional process that, until now, has been partially overshadowed in the field of textual criticism.

IX

A shaft of light upon its wings descended,
And every golden feather gleamed therein—
Feather and scale inextricably blended.

The Serpent’s mailed and many-coloured skin
Shone thro’ the plumes its coils were twined within
By many a swollen and knotted fold, and high
And far, the neck receding lithe and thin,
Sustained a crested head, which warily
Shifted and glanced before the Eagle’s stedfast eye.
4.2 Percy Bysshe Shelley’s Poems

73 entire line canceled in pencil Bod2
  shaft ] written above gleam and beam Bod2
  its ] it’s Bod4
  descended, ] descended Bod2
  descended Bod4

74 line preceded by From that T above [ ?The ] things Bod2
  therein— ] therein Bod2

75 Feather ] after The eagles Bod2
  scale ] scale, Bod4

77 thro’ ] thro Bod2
  through 1839 1840
  plumes ] wings Bod2
    plumes; 1834 1839 1840
  twined ] below wreathed Bod2

78 entire line preceded by Voluminously Even as a waterfall among the woods Bod2
  By ] In Bod2
  swoln and ] swoln & in pencil below fold voluminous canceled in pencil Bod2
  knotted fold, ] knotted fold below gathered fold all in pencil Bod2
  and high ] & wide high Bod2

81 stedfast ] steadfast above [ ?—ing ] Bod2
  steadfast 1839 1840

82 Around, ] Around Bod4
  around, ] around Bod2 Bod4
  circles ] revolutions above circles Bod2

83 clang ] ing of clanging written over separate word of
  scream, ] shrieks above scream Bod2
  Eagle ] eagle Bod2
Fig 9 Laon and Cythna, Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e.19, f. 14 (see Bod2; published in BSM, XIII, p. 32)