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CHARLES HARPUR AND HIS EDITORS

CHARLES HARPUR'S FRUSTRATION at the way in which his work was edited is notorious. His wife reports that he would positively stamp with rage at the botched form in which his poems appeared in the journals and newspapers of the day. Spelling, lineation and sense could be so mangled by Sydney's version of the Grub Street hack that the poet had difficulty recognizing his own pieces in print. Harpur, despairing of adequate local publication and reception, eventually set his sights on an English publisher and confided to Henry Kendall, in a letter dated 10 June 1866, his intention to turn his back on the local press:

I do not continue to send you the 'rag' you wot of — having become tired of publishing my 'things' in it, even with the view that I think I told you I had in doing so. — I should like, had I the means, to publish (as you once suggested) a vol: for the English Critics: for I know well enough, that I have long left all my Australian critics — many a year ago — standing hopelessly behind me, and mostly, too, upon the lowermost ledges of Parnassus. But this, in one sense, is my misfortune. I have not the means, however, to publish on my 'own hook', as a gold-digger would phrase it. (M. 191)¹

Predictably, the poet succeeded in neither resolve. During his last years he culled through his verse, selecting, transcribing, and denoting with 'final copy' those works upon which his hopes of future fame rested. But he also continued to publish and to revise particular poems. The work of future editors was thereby complicated as well as facilitated; and it was left by default to those very Australians who, Harpur felt, acknowledged the dictates of Mammon and utility before those of enduring cultural and individual worth.

The treatment of Harpur's writings at the hands of successive generations provides at once a representative and an individually arresting study of how local publishing and editorial practices may combine to distort and, at times, retard the reception of significant Australian literature. Harpur was never able to arrange a

supervised and representative collection of his writings. His most sustained selection was the comparatively early *Bushrangers: A Play in Five Acts and Other Poems* (1853) of 127 pages, which attracted much contemporary notice and became the focal-point of an acrimonious debate on his poetic standing.² The poet, in turn, substantially emended and often expanded these pieces, as may be seen in his work-copy of the text, held in the Mitchell Library, Sydney. Moreover, he published further works in broadsheet or leaflet-form. The most important of these was 'The Tower of the Dream', which appeared first in the *Australian Journal* on 25 November and 2 December, and then as a pamphlet in 1865. The majority of his poems, in what he regarded as their definitive or near-final form, remained in manuscript — small wonder that he despaired of reaching a fit audience, no matter how few. Fifteen years after his death, a 321-page edition was produced largely through the efforts of his widow and family. The unspoken aim of this 1883 text, however, was primarily to save Harpur from the fate of an archival living death, and to win him a contemporary readership; but not to present his work faithfully, as we shall see. Nevertheless, this remained the standard text on the poet and the source of critical assessments until the Second World War, when C.W. Salier began to examine the Harpur manuscript collection in the Mitchell Library. His researches highlighted the need for new authoritative editions based scrupulously on the manuscript material: a need met first by Adrian Mitchell's selection from the poetry and prose, entitled *Charles Harpur* (1973), and most recently by Elizabeth Perkins' monumental edition of *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* (1984), already widely acclaimed as a standard work. Yet were Harpur able to survey these three major editions, he might recognize a common strand of economic and editorial incursion which renders them lineal descendants of those printed texts which so soured his poetic endeavours.

The 1883 edition holds a crucial place in the history of Harpur reception. Bearing his widow's imprimatur of approval, its self-professed task was to fulfil the poet's desire for a definitive 'volume of three or four hundred pages' (M. 196), and to claim for him a place in the larger world of English letters.³ Mary Harpur failed to fulfil the latter wish, but she did succeed in creating a text which held sway in Australia for nearly seventy years. The operative word, however, is 'creating'. For her assisting editor, H.M. Martin, was responsible for revising the bulk of the edition's material, often to the point of rewriting. His preface mentions only the need 'to supply those final revisions which the author had been obliged to leave unmade';⁴ and glosses over the apparent editorial intention of bringing his work more in line with current fashions. By the 1880s, it would have been reasoned, the Australian colonies bore little resemblance to the scattered settlements of Harpur's formative years. The national mood had altered; literary vogue had shifted. Romantic and Augustan traditions, so dear to the poet, had been replaced first by the major Victorians and then by a new sense of what should constitute a distinctively Australian literature. Harpur therefore needed to be updated. The changes, like Dryden's recasting of Shakespeare's plays, were well-meant but disastrous. In the words of C.W. Salier,

it is clear that the gravest suspicions engendered by the prefatorial reference to editorial 'final revisions' are fully justified, and that the so-called *Poems by Charles Harpur* published in 1883 is not an accurate and reliable text, even within its inherent limits as a selection of the poems of our first great native-born Australian poet.⁵

Martin, in justifying some of his decisions to the widow, argued that 'It is very undesirable to have lines printed which may serve as a handle for carping criticism'.⁶ In effect, however, he was creating a poet for the closing decades of the century. A pictorially sweet, more smoothly flowing Harpur emerges from this edition, and one whose passing has been regretted by some readers steeped in the mellifluous cadences and swelling splendours of nineteenth-century verse.

From a bibliographical point of view, Martin took inadmissible liberties with the text, and simply recast Harpur in his own favoured mould. Editorial incursions range from rephrasing single lines to the total alteration of texts and titles: none of which is of course acknowledged. His preference for the excursively pictorial is everywhere evident. From 'The Slave's Story' he reprints only section I, under the title 'Description of a Tropical Island'; while 'Ideality', retitled 'The Ideal', is transformed wherever possible into a weak imitation of eighteenth-century descriptive verse. The poem, for instance, contains a paean to woman's heightened beauty as the work of ideality, which concludes:

And she outshines the very Moon of heaven!
This light how glorious! — a God-woven robe
Wrapping in living warmth the fruitful globe:
Even so — and yet, thy thaumaturgic ray
Additional brilliance poureth o'er the day!
Lovely this prospect! Yet thy presence here
Doubles each glory of the golden year!
Breathes but thy influence o'er a pasture plain
And lo, 'tis flushed with Eden-glows again! (E. 318)

In Martin's text, the lines following 'Moon of heaven' are recast to read:

Lovely this prospect! Yet thy presence here
Doubles each glory of the golden year!
Breathes but thy influence o'er a pasture plain,
And lo! 'tis flushed with Eden-glows again.
This light, how glorious! a sun-woven robe
Wrapping in living warmth the fruitful globe:
But if thy touch lend vision to our eyes,
We see celestial radiance flood the skies;
The common light burns with diviner flame,
'It is the light of God!' our awestruck souls exclaim.⁷

Here the elevation of the phrase 'lovely this prospect' betrays the editor's discursive intent. Whereas Harpur stresses the magic of the transformative process and links the whole with a metaphysical and scriptural dimension through the last line, Martin produces the stock formulae of the prospect poem. Images are

naturalized, and the vista expanded until it culminates in a trite rendition of the sublime. Key Harpur concepts, embodied in 'God-woven robe' and 'thaumaturgic joy', are replaced by weak echoes of Thomson and Young; just as a pallid deism is substituted here, as elsewhere in the work, for the poet's independent projection of human experience in terms of Edenic mystery. With these massive emendations recognized, the implications of Martin's euphemistic phrase 'final revisions' become clear. A hopelessly corrupt text was elevated into the canon of Australian culture. Future anthologies, right down to the current *Penguin Book of Australian Verse* (1972), would base their texts on Martin's; and this unimpeded transmission of error provides a bleak commentary on the dearth of genuine scholarly interest in our early writers.

These changes, both in their extent and degree, are representative of Martin's manipulative strategies. In particular, they blight the edited texts of Harpur's most ambitious poems, such as 'The Tower of the Dream', 'The Witch of Hebron', 'A Storm in the Mountains' and 'The Creek of the Four Graves'; though shorter works are also affected. As Salier notes, 'A Storm' and 'The Witch' are shortened by a quarter, respectively from 201 to 146, and from 1656 to 1219 lines.⁸ Similarly but more strikingly, the shorter poem 'A Coast View' is reduced from the 106 lines of the 'final copy' to a truncated stump of 23, editorially revised lines; while Martin, nothing loath, silently transposed lines from 'Autumnal Leaves' to conclude his selections from 'Genius Lost'. But quoting such figures, no matter how alarming in themselves, gives only the faintest impression of the damage done by Martin's 'improvements'. These works are also heavily rewritten, usually with profound incomprehension both of Harpur's deeper effects and of the traditions within which he was working. The interested reader, for instance, need only examine the opening section of 'The Tower of the Dream', condensed from its original 78 to 45 lines. Harpur's densely textured paragraph on the psychology of dreams and their relationship to art is thereby trivialized almost beyond recognition; and the sweep of his discourse, which interlinks normality, science, truth and famous spiritual questers, is shrunk to the sentimental notion that dreams can evoke deeply-felt personal losses. The poet's maturest thought, his climactic vision of the place of art in the universe, is lost: ironically reduced to a level befitting, in his own words, 'the pygmies of the passing hour', and not Australia's future 'sons of power'. Wherever possible in this edition, the sternly Miltonic line and the speculative temper of a poem are omitted or limited to the merely descriptive and plainly orthodox. Yet Martin, though crude and reprehensible in his editorial practices, was not far amiss in his market judgment. For decades, literary histories, based solely on these 'improved' texts, would lament Harpur's debt to English tradition, and see him dismissively only as one of those 'on the way to becoming an Australian'.⁹

With Salier's revolutionary discoveries in the Mitchell Library Harpur again became an object of editorial interest, but one hedged round with considerable difficulties. Although the would-be editor is fortunate in having a large collection

of manuscript material at his disposal, he is faced with a bewildering variety of texts. The manuscript booklets in the Mitchell contain drafts, newspaper clippings, some of them revised, miscellaneous prose-pieces, verse collections of other poets used as commonplace books for all manner of jottings, and a number of dated entries marked 'final copy'. Most of these works, however, are undated, the sequence of variants unclear, and the authenticity of hand-writing unestablished. The clean-copying of Harpur's poems is at times continued in another hand, though not always as clearly designated as in 'The Slave's Story', where transcription is taken up at line ten of section II by a hand identified in a marginal note as that of Washington Harpur. Furthermore, emendations can abound at any stage in the genesis of a poem, as we shall see in the case of 'The Creek of the Four Graves'. An editor, then, is faced with far-reaching decisions. Does he publish only the poetry, and if so which version? Even 'final copy' texts can be revised. If he wishes to publish poetry and prose, does he take that version of the poem to which a note is attached, given that together they form a composite piece; or does he take a revised and better version of the poem, even if the early variant exists in that form to complement the note? And the notes themselves raise other though related difficulties, to be discussed later. Moreover, how does an editor cope with the problems arising from changes in handwriting? Does a text, for example, copied by the son Washington, have the same status as one transcribed by his father, or do the revisions in a crabbed hand to the final copy of a poem take precedence over the original clear copperplate text? Harpur himself, in response to Kendall's suggestion that he over-worked his texts, claimed that every revision was defensible.¹⁰ He also restricted himself to preparing only his selected verse for English publication; though a modern reader could be struck by the critical and historical interest of his prose. Salier's work made a pilgrimage to the manuscripts mandatory for any responsible editor. He appended descriptive tables of content to each booklet: sign-posted the way, but did nothing to rid it of the pitfalls and dangers that awaited the unwary.

The first major modern edition to confront these problems was Adrian Mitchell's *Charles Harpur*, which broke new ground in offering a selection of the Australian's verse, prose and correspondence. Mitchell, having assimilated some but not all of the lessons conveyed by Salier's commentary on the 1883 edition, went directly to the manuscripts. In his introduction he states that 'texts copied out by Washington Harpur' have been rejected and that, wherever possible, he has 'used the latest manuscript version in Harpur's own hand, keeping his sometimes idiosyncratic spelling habits. This has meant that sometimes an inferior version has been preferred' (M. xxxi). The implication of these remarks is that textual authenticity was his prime concern — a supposition reinforced by the use of bracketed editorial emendations to render Harpur's spelling or meaning clear. Mitchell, however, offers no precise manuscript location for each source text, thereby rendering scholarly authentication of his texts difficult in the extreme, and at times even conjectural. For a reader would have to locate first as many variants as possible of a given work, and then attempt to establish which has been used by Mitchell — no easy task given the voluminous and chaotic state

of the Harpur manuscript material, for which no cumulative index exists. Yet a detailed manuscript search does reveal important editorial shortcomings, and instances of textual manipulation which, to the best of my knowledge, have gone unnoticed.

The main weakness of the Mitchell edition is a failure to deal satisfactorily with genuine textual problems. Doubtless some of these shortcomings arise, in part, from publishing constraints, which may have made something as basic as brief, accompanying editorial notes or specific source references to each work impossible. But one result is a fairly arbitrary and unacknowledged omission of important information. At its most rudimentary this takes the form of failing to state that a given work forms part of a larger sequence: for instance, that Harpur intended a number of poems published here to appear in a group entitled 'Bits', or that the reprinted version of 'The New Land Orders' appears in its source ms. C376 as one of 'Two Political Sonnets', the second of which also appears in Mitchell.¹¹ The next level of omission occurs when the place of a sonnet in a series 'Dedicated to Australian Senators' is noted, but the reprinted text represses the integral and carefully chosen epigraph to each poem. More serious still is the reprinting of prose notes, to which I shall return, in a highly reduced form — again without acknowledgement. Within the individual pieces there are minor and avoidable errors of transcription. These normally concern punctuation or capitalization, although there are apparent major lapses, such as the retitling of 'Modern Poetry' 'Modern Poems'. Finally, the straightforward, unannotated printing of texts glosses over a host of editorial cruxes, ranging from the unresolved status of revisions to 'The Creek of the Four Graves', to the reprinting of 'Evening Haunts'. This is an earlier version of 'The Angel of Nature', preferable in some ways to the later variant, but rendered problematical by the deletion in manuscript of its two concluding lines. The Mitchell collection simply reprints the early manuscript poem, including the deleted lines; and the stated editorial principle of selecting later, even if inferior, variants is tacitly ignored in practice.

These shortcomings are at their worst in the Mitchell selection of Harpur's notes, which highlights major problems associated with editing his prose. Unlike the poetry, the prose was never carefully worked through by the author, arranged in sections and clean-copied for definitive publication. Instead, it presents a virtual pathless wilderness. There the reader encounters a variety of newspaper cuttings, some of them altered by hand, as well as notes of differing lengths, often revised and in varying scripts. These, in turn, are scattered through the manuscripts, some of which have been bound in ways that divide single texts; and are further complicated by additional notes, placed occasionally at a distance from the main text. The highest levels of bibliographical care and competence are therefore required; but these are not to be found in the Mitchell selection. Instead editorial shortcuts and apparently straightforward oversights abound, rendering texts which should mark a milestone in Harpur reception inadequate for the general reader or undergraduate, much less for the scholarly researcher.

Here as elsewhere in this edition, detection of error, be it in the form of alterations, omissions or sophistications, is rendered problematical by the failure to cite manuscript locations. These difficulties, moreover, are increased when, as with the piece entitled 'Note to "The Poet"', there are two quite distinct poems with this title; or when, as in the case of the note to 'The Poet's Wife', the text is inexplicably retitled here 'A Confession'. Moreover, despite attempts at textual authenticity, evidenced by adherence to the author's idiosyncratic spelling, editorial treatment of manuscript cruxes is inconsistent and, at times, mystifying. In the note to that version of 'The Poet' beginning 'Blissless am I, except in this', for example, Harpur twice revised the final sentence. The first revision is squeezed above between the lines. A second and clearly later, as well as more complete, variant follows immediately below what was the original conclusion to the note. The Mitchell text represents an unsuccessful attempt to make sense of the heavily deleted first stage of revision. There is no evidence that the final revisions were consulted, though at least a question mark in editorial brackets indicates a conjectural reading (M.128). Textual problems, however, are not always treated so scrupulously. In 'My Own Poetry' the only indication of a reading difficulty is a 'which' in brackets to help the sense, whereas the real problem occurs in the following phrase, reprinted here as 'foisted away' (M. 125), but in fact discernibly written as 'twisted awry'. Also in Harpur's note to 'The Poet's Wife', a five-word insert, difficult to decipher, follows the phrase 'I know, by my own experience'. The Mitchell edition solves the problem by ignoring its existence, and simply runs the text on to the next phrase 'that men in general' (M. 140). Certainly sense is achieved, but at the high cost of giving inaccuracy a transmittable form.

Unacknowledged omissions or alterations also occur on a larger and totally inadmissible scale. The Mitchell 'Note to "Charity"' represents only approximately forty per cent of the original note on ms. C376. The six omitted paragraphs are found sixty pages later, but without any break in calligraphy or sense. Also the note entitled 'A Confession' represents a little over half of the note to 'The Poet's Wife' (ms. 387). It takes up the text at the top of one manuscript page midway through a paragraph, leaving the reader to puzzle out how Harpur can glibly transform a single comment of less than two lines into the matter for a prolonged biographical meditation beginning 'I have been led into these remarks'. The foregoing page has been silently omitted, presumably because an important part of it appears in another context, reprinted here under the heading 'Final Note to the Miscellaneous Poems'.¹² The status of these and other textual corruptions remains unclear.¹³ At best, some may arise from oversights, such as those appear to be which mar the note to 'The Fate of Poetic Genius in a Sordid Community'. There, in addition to occasional errors of transcription, a line following 'as it were into one another' in the final paragraph is omitted (M. 133); as are two addenda, one of them incomplete, which are preserved on ms. A92. Of course it is not impossible that some of these prose-pieces exist in other forms, either within or, more disturbingly, outside the source material cited in the editor's introduction. A reader, for instance, would search

there in vain for the Mitchell text of Harpur's 'Epigraph', which is preserved elsewhere: namely in the papers of N.C. Stenhouse and reprinted in J. Normington-Rawling, *Charles Harpur, An Australian*.¹⁴ The Mitchell edition, then, despite its introductory references to Salier's findings, still manages to duplicate editorial decisions for which the 1883 edition was arraigned; and Harpur's prose, which ranks amongst the best and most informative pre-federation writing, still awaits a responsible publishing house.

The most recent and by far the most scholarly attempt to present a reliable text of Harpur's writings is Elizabeth Perkins' edition of *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur*. According to the editor, the Harpur manuscripts have been exhaustively consulted, and a list of the individual source-text of each poem is printed in an accompanying Supplement. The poet's own groupings of his works for English publication are adopted, and the principle of selection on the basis of latest variant is followed except where dating is uncertain, in which case the longest version of a given poem is selected. The vexed issue of editorial evaluation is thereby avoided; while many images and ideas are preserved which would otherwise only be accessible to the reader sufficiently dedicated to pore over thousands of frames of microfilm. Exemplary also is Dr. Perkins' attitude to the manuscript text:

Harpur's punctuation is reliable, and an editor usually need only compare different texts when in doubt about a reading. Harpur's spelling is sometimes archaic, but unlike his wife's and his son's, it is almost always justified by the dictionary, and his correct spelling is retained. (P. x)

Given the apparent impossibility of publishing a variorum or highly annotated edition of Harpur's verse, such procedures are readily defensible. The poet should at long last be able to speak for himself, the reader to form an independent judgment based on reliable texts. Yet, as the Perkins edition illustrates, the formulation of responsible editorial principles is no guarantee of their adequate implementation.

What this edition offers, in fact, is not a collection of latest texts drawn from a given source, but a standardized version of 'almost every poem written by Charles Harpur' (p. vii), produced by an unacknowledged process of variant compilation. A necessarily random check of some major and minor printed poems against their stated source revealed that versions have been compared to clarify not only spelling, but also apparently to establish syntax, punctuation and, in effect, the whole poetic text. The effects of this practice, and the kinds of editorial problems it raises or on occasions glosses over, can be illustrated briefly in three works. According to the Supplement, 'The Bush Fire' is based exclusively on the variant found in ms. A87¹. In fact, however, it draws a number of important details from another clean copy in A95. I found twenty-one instances in which the punctuation of the Perkins poem was based definitely on the A95 text, one case of omitted and one case of entirely altered punctuation: the latter in the line 'At once are these in flight. But from above' (P. 178). In A87¹ the full-stop is an exclamation mark, in A95 a dash. Similarly, spelling and capitalization are

emended on the basis of these texts, though not always consistently. For example 'ocean' (P. 174) has a capital 'o' in A87¹, a small in A95; but 'Fathers' (P. 180) is based on the capital in A87¹, not the small 'f' in A95. Also the use of exclamation marks, drawn from either variant, seems based purely on editorial instinct, as is the decision to favour 'Was *there* sole theme' (P. 174; my italics, A87¹) over 'their' in A95. This 'standardizing' procedure emerges throughout the edition, although not always on this scale. For instance, the brief poem 'Finish of Style' is based almost entirely on the given source in ms. A87¹, except for the penultimate line 'Yea, perfect form is the consummate flower' (P. 353). No comma appears in A87¹, but it does in the A89 text. Yet why was only one variation taken from A89, and not the other six? Finally, and again very briefly, 'A Political Gospel' is based on the A98 variant, but owes four minor and unacknowledged details to the A90 text of the poem. The two versions are very close — however, the A90 has been copied by Charles Harpur, the A97 by his son Washington. Why then employ the son's copied text? The apparent reason lies in the refrain

Not to that cheatery—Royal Display!

And that blood-drinking Juggernaut—National Glory! (P. 451)

In the A90 version Harpur has crossed out the original reading 'trumpery' and written 'cheatery' clearly above it; but 'trumpery' remains unaltered in the refrain of stanza two. Both Washington Harpur and Elizabeth Perkins have apparently assumed that the refrain was meant to be repeated exactly; and so the A90 text, copied by the son, is used as the source text. Yet I know of no evidence in Harpur's own hand of this intention. Standardization, of course, has its place in certain circumstances, though to be acceptable it must be conducted according to stated and scrupulously maintained principles of selection, such as the frequency with which a specific variant is used, or the extent to which it reflects an author's thinking at a given time — in this case the years during which he compiled the 'final copies'. This, however, is neither the avowed aim or methodology of this edition, nor is it implemented consistently according to discernible principles. Instead, many of the decisions in the Perkins collection seem intended to provide a readable and contemporaneous text, and so are related in kind, though certainly not in degree or extent, to those of the 1883 edition.

At times, moreover, this covert adjustment of Harpur's text glosses over real interpretative cruxes, and so effectively circumvents the analytical work which may be properly expected of a reader. An interesting illustration of this appears in the following sentence from 'The Temple of Infamy': 'Oaths and threats, like bombs / Exploding, tell that in full force and feather / March the Squattocracy, with their bell-wether!' (P. 590). In the given source ms. A93, 'lomes' stands in place of 'bombs', and this is the word which appears in the two versions of the poem which I have been able to consult (ms. A87¹ and ms. A93). Apparently 'bomb' was silently substituted to harmonize with 'exploding'. But had the edition followed its stated prefatory belief that 'Harpur's spelling is sometimes archaic, but ... it is almost always justified by the dictionary' (P. x), it would have been discovered that lome is an archaic form of lamb (*O.E.D.*). The image this

conjures up is extraordinary, though not out of keeping in a visionary poem which can use word-play to savage satirical effect and to identify a particular class with its objects, as in the reference to the political opportunist Wentworth as a 'bell-wether'. Too often in the past Harpur's work has suffered from well meant editorial incursion or from dismissive attacks on his strange choice of diction, such as the notorious 'conglobing' or 'death-charged tube' in 'The Creek of the Four Graves'. But if the poet's opus is to be allowed to speak for itself, then we must be willing to acknowledge phrases which link his vision either to the teleological perspectives of *Paradise Lost*, or to the surrealistic, and scurrilously fantastic world of Pope's *Dunciad*; and to judge them on their effectiveness in each new context. Similarly, although the desire of this edition to modernize or correct Harpur's spelling is admissible, the ease with which it can get out of hand is evident. Sophistications are introduced which almost inevitably carry us further away from, and even obscure, the author's intentions, and make access to precious manuscript material still essential for any careful literary treatment of the poetry.

Finally, as a review of these editorial practices and as an illustration of scholarly response to an acknowledged textual crux, I wish to examine briefly the publishing history of one of Harpur's most famous poems, 'The Creek of the Four Graves'. The work first attracted considerable comment after its appearance in *The Bushrangers: A Play in Five Acts and other Poems* (1853). At this stage it had an unbroken narrative structure of 252 lines.¹⁵ This version was revised, divided into three sections, and expanded to the 470-line variant, found in its 'final copy' form in ms. 87¹. This clean-copy, however, contains occasional emendations in ink and the same hand, made presumably at or near the time of transcription. A further fourteen important revisions were made in pencil at an unspecified date; and their authority is open to question. D.M. Martin responded to the poem in his characteristic fashion. At first his sense of the work's weakness prompted him to suggest publishing it in extract-form. Frustrated in this by the widow's veto, he summarily truncated it to 270 lines, producing a picturesque adventure narrative, devoid of its original metaphysical and prophetic dimension. An important step was thereby taken in creating the Charles Harpur enshrined in literary histories as a poet chiefly noteworthy for his descriptive passages; and the vital stage of authorial revision between the 1853 and 1867 texts, which produced one of the masterpieces of Australian literature, was completely undone.

Recent editions have done much to restore this work to its true stature, but the conflicting readings which they offer faithfully reflect the failure of local scholarship to establish and to transmit authoritative texts. Harry Heseltine unaccountably reproduces Martin's bogus text in *The Penguin Anthology of Australian Verse*, more than twenty years after Salier had published his revelatory findings on the poem in 'Charles Harpur and his Editor'. Adrian Mitchell reprints the clean copperplate 'final copy' and omits the pencil corrections; whereas the text in G.A. Wilkes' edition of *The Colonial Poets* (1974) incorporates this further stage of revision. Elizabeth Perkins, following a compilation

procedure, cites as usual only one source, in this instance A87¹, but actually draws on the variant in ms. A95 for approximately thirty readings of punctuation or minor details. It, too, provides the source for a number of syntactical changes, ranging from the alteration of line eleven from 'And cut with marshes' in A87¹ to 'Or cut' from A95, or in Part II, line seventeen, the substitution of 'its' from A95 for 'her' in A87¹; to a 'composite' phrase, such as 'long-flagged swamp-grass' (P. 170), which represents an amalgamation of A95, where only 'long-flagged' is hyphenated, and of A87¹, where only 'swamp-grass' has a hyphen. This lack of a discernible policy of selection continues in the edition's treatment of the pencilled revisions. Eight are incorporated while six are omitted; and the vagaries arising from seemingly random choices between variants are compounded in the lines at the beginning of stanza three:

Before them, thus extended, wilder grew

The scene each moment — and more wilder. (P.162)

In the A87¹ manuscript, the clean copperplate version of the second line reads, 'The scene each moment — beautifully wilder!' The last two words, however, have been subsequently cancelled and 'and more beautiful' written above. The Perkins variant consists of half the original and of half the revised phrase: a textual corruption in the tradition of the editors of Harpur's day.

Despite this self-evident bibliographical confusion, the only guide-lines available to editors on the status of revisions are those enunciated by Salier in 1951. He maintained that Martin or an unknown assistant, referred to in the editor's correspondence with Mary Harpur as 'my critic', was their author; but his arguments for attribution are not fully persuasive. Nevertheless they merit a detailed hearing, both because of his thorough acquaintance with the Harpur manuscripts, and because his views have been influential. Salier argues that some pencilled changes indicate 'a lack of perception for Harpur's image', or destroy double-endings used to obviate rhythmic monotony; that the poet 'invariably made his emendations in ink'; and that in thirteen instances Martin adopts the pencilled readings.¹⁶ But neither singly nor collectively do these points carry conviction. The first two, without the aid of authoritative data and thorough critical readings of Harpur's opus, must remain conjectural. Similarly, we know almost nothing about Harpur's habits of revision. It is possible, even probable, that these changes could have been made under quite different conditions to those pertaining when the text was clean-copied. Physical debility, the change from nib to lead, holding the manuscript at a different angle and other factors could account for divergencies in calligraphy, although the pencilled script itself contains Harpur characteristics such as his distinctive backward sloping; looped 'd'. It is also much closer in appearance to his rough manuscript writings than to the definitive copperplate texts. Furthermore, Martin's general acceptance of the pencilled readings is inconclusive evidence; and it was not his practice to make emendations on the original manuscripts. It could be argued just as plausibly that the disputed corrections are Harpur's, for they retain or strengthen the original meaning, avoid redundancies, and are the sort of changes one might expect from an author determined, to the very end, to pass his work on in its best possible form.¹⁷ Yet

the Salier case enjoys unqualified sway, as is evident in recent textual commentaries by Leonie Kramer and Adrian Mitchell.¹⁸

Even a brief survey of major Harpur editions reveals serious shortcomings in scholarship and editorial technique. Repeatedly texts are arrived at through unacknowledged procedures, and editorial information is often frankly misleading. While some of these decisions may be related to publishing stringencies, their apparent general acceptance or, perhaps more accurately, their ability to go undetected, suggests an alarmingly low level of scholarly competence and serious commitment in the field of early Australian literature. Here editorial standards persist which would be unthinkable in the treatment of comparable period-literature from England or America; and our colonial culture is left to languish in virtual darkness. Admittedly, the Harpur manuscripts raise textual problems requiring the highest levels of bibliographical skill, but scholarly response to them has been, at best, inadequate. Bibliographical discussion is in its infancy; and market forces, dominated by a purely 'trade' mentality, dictate that Harpur should be known to his own people in truncated form; that the greater part of his prose should survive only in manuscript; and that even his poetry should be unavailable both in its entirety and in a textually comprehensive format.¹⁹ Moreover, Harpur is not alone. A host of significant early figures like Lang, Wentworth, Deniehy, Caroline Atkinson and Mrs. Vidal remain inaccessible; and a whole society is thereby deprived of its birthright. Responsible editing and publishing is long overdue, if these local sons and daughters are, in the words of Charles Harpur, 'To brighten the source of Australia's broad story', and to achieve full recognition for their part in shaping a young nation's destiny.

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NOTES

¹ Quotations from Harpur's writings are from M: Adrian Mitchell, ed., *Charles Harpur* (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1973) and P: Elizabeth Perkins, ed., *The Poetical Works of Charles Harpur* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1984).

² For the history of this see Vijay C. Mishra, 'Charles Harpur's Reputation 1853-1858: The Years of Controversy', *Australian Literary Studies*, 8 (1978), 446-56.

³ The dedication of the book expresses the belief that 'it will be found not unworthy to take a place in the literatures of every English-speaking community'.

⁴ Charles Harpur, *Poems* (Melbourne, Robertson, 1883), p. xvi.

⁵ C.W. Salier, 'Harpur and his Editor', *Southerly*, 12 (1951), 53-4.

⁶ The phrase appears in a letter of 9 December 1882, which is reprinted in part in 'Harpur and his Editor', p. 49.

⁷ *Poems*, pp.95-6.

⁸ 'Harpur and his Editor', p. 52.

⁹ H.M. Green, *A History of Australian Literature* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1961), I. 98.

¹⁰ Letter of 10 May 1865 (M. 190).

¹¹ The other sonnet is 'On the Proposed Recurrence to Transportation', about which see n.13.

¹² The duplicated passage concerns the mind's sovereignty over circumstance, a view illustrated in both cases by Satan's famous remarks from *Paradise Lost* on making 'a heaven of hell'.

¹³ There is evidence that the editor was well acquainted with the manuscript material and used this knowledge to establish texts. For instance, I have consulted variants of the sonnet 'On the Proposed Recurrence to Transportation' in five manuscript locations: C376, C382, A87¹, A90 and A95. In C376 it appears as one of 'Two Political Sonnets', but only the first of them on 'The New Land

Orders' is reprinted here (M. 146-7). The Mitchell text on transportation, which has a completely different note to that appended to the poems in C382 and C376, seems to be based on A95 (dated 1843); but to draw one important reading of poetic punctuation from C376, and the phrasing as well as word-order of l.14 of the note from the version on A87¹.

¹⁴ Charles Harpur, *An Australian* (Sydney, Angus and Robertson, 1962), p. 297.

¹⁵ On the successive versions of the poem see Leonie Kramer, 'Imitation and Originality in Australian Colonial Poetry: The Case of Charles Harpur', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 13 (1983), 122-8.

¹⁶ 'Harpur and his Editor', p. 48.

¹⁷ Of particular relevance here is one pencil revision which, together with the line in which it occurs, is omitted in the 1883 edition. The opening of Part II contains two uses of Miltonic phrase: 'and now the Moon / Up from behind a giant hill was seen / Conglobing' and 'her great orb conglobed'. In A87¹ the second is deleted in favour of 'arose'. In the 1883 text both disappear, and the pencilled reading is transferred to become 'and now the moon arose / Above the hill'. Why, if Martin intended to delete the second passage, would he uncharacteristically leave the first Miltonic phrase and only alter the second? And is there any reason why Harpur may have altered the second? The text itself provides an answer to this. The original double use adds emphasis only. The first appearance of 'conglobing' ensures that Miltonic allusion effectively transforms the scene into a re-enactment of primal marvel, while the revision to 'arose' stresses the ascendancy of the presence which created order in the abyss, and whose operation is now figured forth in the ensuing lines as a struggle between doubt and Truth. For a more detailed reading of this passage see Michael Ackland, 'God's Sublime Order in Harpur's "The Creek of the Four Graves"', *Australian Literary Studies*, 11 (1984), 355-70.

¹⁸ See 'Imitation and Originality in Australian Colonial Poetry', p. 118, and Mitchell's review of the Perkins' edition in *Australian Literary Studies*, 11 (1984), 544.

¹⁹ The problem is, of course, more widespread than this. For the general details see 'Report of the BSANZ Subcommittee on Standards for the Editing of Australian and New Zealand Literature', *BSANZ Bulletin*, 8 (1984), 1-21.

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