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Pope's 1723–25 *Shakespear*, Classical Editing, and Humanistic Reading Practices

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In his 1756 Proposals for a new edition of Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson writes that "the observation of faults and beauties is one of the duties of an annotator." However, he goes on to add, "I have never observed that mankind was much delighted or improved by . . . asterisks, commas, or double commas; of which the only effect is, that they preclude the pleasure of judging for ourselves."1 Johnson's target here was Alexander Pope's 1725 Works of Shakespear, in which Pope had employed an elaborate set of typographical symbols to mark what he saw as the "Beauties" and "Faults" in Shakespeare's plays. Marginal inverted commas distinguished Shakespeare's "most shining Passages," while stars appeared at the heads of the most noteworthy scenes. On the other hand, lines that Pope judged "excessively bad" were removed from the text altogether. These so-called "degraded" passages, which Pope implied were non-Shakespearean interpolations, appeared, in small type, at the bottom of the page.² "Low" scenes — often comic dialogues between minor characters-likewise received Pope's "mark of reprobation": three obelisks or daggers, set at the head of the scene.³ Pope explains what this meant at its first appearance in *Two Gentle*men of Verona, act 1, scene 1:

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This whole Scene, like many others in the Plays, (some of which I believe were written by *Shakespear*, and others interpolated by the Players) is composed of the lowest and most trifling conceits, to be accounted for only from the gross taste of the age he liv'd in; *Populo ut placerent*. I wish I had authority to leave them out, but I have done all I could, set a mark of reprobation upon them; throughout this edition. †††. (1:157)

Critical opinion of Pope's *Shakespear* since the eighteenth century has almost universally followed Johnson's judgment. Writing in 1906, Thomas Lounsbury called Pope's editorial interventions "the most unwarrantable liberty . . . ever . . . taken with the text of a great author."⁴ Richard Foster Jones likewise assessed Pope's *Shakespear* against the norms of twentiethcentury editorial method. Jones's narrative of Pope editing Shakespeare is accordingly one of failure — failure to collate against the oldest editions, refusal to follow proper editorial practice, and, finally, a basic inability to edit a text to scholarly standards.⁵ David Nichol Smith encapsulated this Whig approach to editorial history when he called Pope "a man of genius pursuing a wrong method," in contrast to his editorial successor Lewis Theobald, who was "a man of very moderate capacity striving towards the right" one.⁶

More recent criticism has placed Pope's efforts to distinguish between the faults and beauties of Shakespeare in the context of eighteenth-century ideologies of taste. In the words of Margreta de Grazia, Pope's *Shakespear* was an attempt to direct the "aesthetic and moral sensibility" of the British reading public. Pope's asterisks and inverted commas were, then, a signal, expressed through typography, of literary and moral worthiness.⁷ Indeed, as de Grazia shows, the marginal quotation mark had had a long history as a typographical marker of sententiae or commonplaces.⁸ Those lines marked in this way were, as Robert B. Hamm, Jr. has recently put it, a series of Shakespearean "highlights"—"the passages a reader of taste needed to know."⁹ The Shakespeare that emerged, winnowed of his faults, and with his virtues marked for commonplace-book appropriation, was a "respectabilized" one, suitable for eighteenth-century genteel consumption.¹⁰

On the one hand, then, Pope's editorial interventions have been seen as merely eccentric. Colin Franklin encapsulates this position when he remarks that "nothing . . . was more whimsical than the appearance or absence of Pope's commas in the margin, or his very rare award of a star to the scene."¹¹ On the other hand, the observation of faults and beauties in Pope's *Shakespear* has been treated as part of a specifically *contempo*- *rary* cultural movement—the cultivation of "eighteenth-century bourgeois taste" (de Grazia, "Shakespeare," 65). There has, however, been surprisingly little comment on Pope's typographical symbols themselves. Where, if anywhere, did Pope get them? What was he trying to achieve by using them? How do they compare with earlier editorial systems? What links, if any, are there between the symbols used in the 1725 *Shakespear* and Pope's own reading and annotation practices? It is these questions that I want to turn to now.

At the end of his 1725 preface, Pope defends his new system of stars and commas for marking the beauties of Shakespeare. This is, he writes, "a shorter and less ostentatious method of performing the better half of Criticism (namely the pointing out of an Author's excellencies) than to fill a whole paper with citations of fine passages, with general Applauses, or empty Exclamations at the tail of them" (I:xxiii). A number of scholars have seen this as a "slur" aimed at Charles Gildon, whose 1710 edition of Shakespeare's poems contained a long series of miscellaneous extracts from Shakespeare.¹² However, Pope's wording here recalls an earlier passage, from the headnote to the commentary on his Iliad translation, where he upbraids Madame Dacier for her failure to perform "the better half of criticism" adequately: "Madame Dacier . . . has made a farther attempt than her predecessors to discover the beauties of the Poet; though we have often only her general praises and exclamations, instead of reasons."13 In contrast, Pope claims that his own notes on Homer provide an appropriate remedy. Here, he implies, is the "reasoned" account of "the Beauties of the Poet" supposedly lacking from Dacier's commentary. In the first note on book 1 of the Odyssey, Pope is similarly explicit about his critical intentions: "We shall proceed in the same method thro' the course of these Annotations upon the Odyssey, as in those upon the Iliad; considering Homer chiefly as a Poet, endeavouring to make his beauties understood, and not to praise without a reason given."14 Pope's "Observations" on Homer-mainly, in fact, written by collaborators and only revised by Pope-are grouped at the back of each book. Set in smaller type than the poem itself, and given less ornate headand tailpieces, they draw on the writings of about two hundred authorities, although Dacier and the Byzantine scholiast Eustathius of Thessalonica are the scholars most often referred to.¹⁵ Although Pope relied on his associates Parnell, Broome, and Fenton to supply the bulk of these, Pope's Correspondence shows that he was fully engaged in the process.¹⁶ Notes were sent to him by post, and Pope read and commented on them, amending them for

style before sending them on for publication.¹⁷ The instructions that Pope gave to Broome on what he wanted extracted from Eustathius illustrate his intentions for the whole: "Be so kind as to take this method: translate such notes only as concern the beauties or art of the author—none geographical, historical, or grammatical—unless some occur very important to the sense" (*Correspondence*, 1:225–26). These comments show how central to the editorial project Pope believed critical evaluation to be. Yet by the time of his Shakespeare edition, Pope seems to have abandoned his belief that commentary alone was adequate for the task. If, in 1715, he had wanted to outdo Madame Dacier in composing notes that would venerate Homer's "beauties," by 1725, the act of annotation itself had become somehow "ostentatious," an indecorous or imperfect means of conveying critical judgement.

Peter W. Cosgrove, Evelyn B. Tribble, and Howard D. Weinbrot have all traced Pope's changing attitude toward the critical note between his Homer translations and the *Dunciad Variorum*.¹⁸ A form of beautification in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, or, at least, a necessary if inferior part of the apparatus, in the Shakespeare edition and the *Dunciad*, the note has migrated to the bottom of the page.¹⁹ Here, as what Cosgrove calls the "anti-authenticating footnote," it becomes the domain of the trivial or inauthentic. Pope's *Dunciad* footnotes slyly invert the logic of the Bentleyan scholarly edition, extracting and reproducing the nonsense—rather than the wisdom—of commentators. In his *Shakespear*, he degrades "suspected passages" to the base of the page. By doing so, he is, as Tribble has pointed out, able to exploit the footnote's lowly position in the implied visual hierarchy. Their type size and position on the page both quarantine these passages from the text and embody their moral and stylistic "lowness" (Tribble, 241).

We can see in Pope's annotations to Homer both a keen awareness of the importance of evaluative criticism, and, perhaps, a certain unease about annotation itself as a medium for expressing it. However, I shall argue, we can also see in the Homeric commentary hints of the critical solution, which he would devise to solve the problems he faced in editing his 1725 *Shakespear*. At various points in their remarks on Homer, Pope and his collaborators invoke the memory of an older form of textual criticism. In the "Essay on . . . Homer" in the first volume of Pope's *Iliad*, Thomas Parnell gives a brief account of Homer's ancient critical reception. "The *Ptolomies*," writes Parnell, "trained up their princes under *Gracian* Tutors; among whom the most considerable were appointed for revisers of Homer." Among these was Aristarchus, who, Parnell says, "restored some verses to their former readings, rejected others which he marked with obelisks as spurious, and proceeded with such industrious accuracy, that . . . antiquity has generally acquiesced in it" (1:cxviii). Similar accounts appear in the commentary. A note to book 5 of the Iliad cites Eustathius saying that "the ancients marked this place with a star, to distinguish it as one of those that were perfectly admirable" (2:206n). Conversely, in book 5, verse 64, of the Odyssey, the "Observations" record that "some ancient Critics mark'd the last verse . . . with an Obelisk, a sign that it ought to be rejected" (2:43). Similarly, in the remarks on the *Iliad*, book 15, line 298: "We are told that the ancient criticks . . . gave [these] verses two marks; by the one (which was the asterism) they intimated, that the four lines were very beautiful; but by the other (which was the *obelus*) that they were ill placed" (4:175n). As Parnell's "Essay" makes clear, the "ancient criticks" referred to were the Alexandrian textual scholars who developed an array of critical symbols for denoting editorial judgements in the second and third centuries B.C. Aristarchus is supposed to have used six of the signs in his recension of Homer, including: the *obelos* [--], a horizontal stroke in the margin indicating spurious verses; the *diple* [>], the ancient ancestor of the quotation mark, which signaled noteworthy passages; and the *asteriskos* [*], used to indicate misplaced lines.²⁰

The resemblances between the account of the ancient critical symbols in Pope's Homer and the typographical regime that he would later impose on Shakespeare are striking. The 1725 *Shakespear*'s critical apparatus was, I believe, a conscious attempt to emulate the ancient editors through typography so as to turn Shakespeare into a classic author. Pope would also have found in ancient Homeric scholarship a precedent for revising and retrenching the work of other authors, manifested here in his desire to rid Shakespeare of the material he believed had been added by "the players."²¹ This was the practice of *athetesis*, or the rejection of spurious lines. Pope was clearly aware that the ancients had "athetized" passages in Homer on subjective grounds. Moreover, he seems to have believed that this had involved literally "cutting out" verses from the text. A note to book 9, line 586, of the *Iliad* reads: "I have taken the liberty to replace here four verses which Aristarchus had cut out, because of the horrour which the idea gave him of a son who is going to kill his father; but perhaps *Aristarchus*'s

niceness was too great" (3:117–18n). Yet there are also some obvious inaccuracies in Pope's account of Greek textual scholarship. In particular, the balanced antithesis between stars and obelisks—marks of beauty and signs of reprobation—that he attributes to the ancients in fact has no ancient exemplar. None of the Greek critics ever used the *asteriskos* to denote poetic beauties.

Most of the confusion in the "Observations" to Pope's Homer can probably be attributed to the state of early eighteenth-century knowledge about the history of ancient scholarship. The system of signs that the Alexandrians devised largely fell out of use in late antiquity, and later accounts of it were generally either corrupt or very brief.²² The most famous Homeric manuscript that deployed the ancient critical symbols, the Venetus A *Iliad*, remained unpublished until 1788.²³ It is not surprising, then, that the information available to Pope about the history of Homeric editing might be misleading. There was, however, one source readily accessible to eighteenth-century readers that precisely anticipates both Pope's understanding of Homer's ancient textual transmission and the critical symbols that he used in his *Shakespear*: the *Adagia* of Erasmus.

Among the mass of sayings that Erasmus collected in the *Adagia* is one apparently taken from ancient Greek proverb collections, entitled "Stellis signare. Obelo Notare. To mark with stars. To brand with an obelus."²⁴ Erasmus explains the proverb in this way:

To mark with an obelus . . . means to affix a marginal sign shaped like a spit for confutation or condemnation. It is taken from Aristarchus, who . . . reject[ed] by means of "obeli" or small dagger-signs prefixed to them the . . . counterfeit and substituted lines which did not . . . have the true feeling of the Homeric vein. Those, on the other hand, which seemed outstanding and genuine he marked with asterisks, little stars. (31:435-36)

Erasmus's own preoccupation with authenticity is well known. In the second edition of his Seneca, he made a sustained attempt to differentiate between the genuine and spurious letters of Seneca, placing the latter at the end of the volume under the heading "falso Seneca tributo."²⁵ In the preface to his edition of Saint Jerome, Erasmus used the example of Aristarchus to justify his own campaign of purging Jerome of nonauthorial interpolations, noting that "Aristarchus purged [Homer's] poetry of foreign elements, marking outstanding verses as genuine and clearly worthy of Homer's authorship by means of asterisks, and on the other hand delivering the death blow with obelisks to counterfeit and spurious verses" (61:71).

Pope's own copy, now lost, of Erasmus's works, which he bequeathed to Bolingbroke, would have included the *Adagia*.²⁶ According to William Kupersmith, Pope may have drawn on the "Adages" for folklore about donkeys when devising the *Dunciad* illustrations. Elsewhere, Pope records his reverence for Erasmus in several places, most famously in the "Essay on Criticism," and he even considered writing a biography of Erasmus, in Latin.²⁷ If, as I am suggesting, Pope knew Erasmus's account of the ancient editors, this might explain why, in the 1725 *Shakespear*, he registers the antithesis between Shakespeare's faults and beauties with "small dagger-signs" and "little stars."

As a history of ancient textual scholarship, however, Erasmus's account is quite seriously misleading. (As, of course, was the commentary on Pope's Homer, and for many of the same reasons.) The *obelus* was not, in antiquity at least, a "dagger-sign," and Greek and Roman scholars never used the asterisk to adorn beautiful passages. However, Erasmus's account of these marks *does* accord with humanist reading practices. Anthony Grafton records that some late seventeenth-century readers marked the "best things" in the books they read with "a little star" in the margin.²⁸ This Grafton attributes to the long survival of the systems of readerly annotation that existed in medieval and early modern Europe, and that were popularized by Erasmus in *De Ratione Studii*.²⁹ Indeed, it is Pope's position within this humanist tradition of readers writing in books that, I think, best explains what Pope was trying to do in his edition of Shakespeare.

Studies by R. D. Erlich, Felicity Rosslyn, and Maynard Mack reveal the extent to which Pope was accustomed to annotating the books in his own library. The marginal inverted comma that Pope used to flag "shining passages" in Shakespeare, for instance, has a manuscript counterpart performing the same function in Pope's personal copies of the works of Chaucer, Dryden, and Jonson, among other authors.³⁰ Pope's copy of Thomas Tickell's 1715 translation of book 1 of the *Iliad* contains a detailed numerical index, which Pope used to classify what he saw as the imperfections in Tickell's work.³¹ Pope also used a small upright cross to indicate what he perceived to be ill-conceived archaisms, and marked Tickell's interpolations with a special marginal symbol (Rosslyn, 52). In his copy of Chapman's *Iliad*, meanwhile, Pope drew brackets around lines of Chapman's own invention and wrote "interpolatio" in the margin.³² These marginalia obviously reveal a certain degree of continuity between the markings in Pope's own books and the printed symbols that he would eventually inscribe on Shakespeare.

What Pope was attempting to do in his Shakespear, I suggest, was to blur the boundaries between print and manuscript, to present the printed page in some way as manuscript. By deploying the "asterisks" and "commas" that Johnson dismissed so summarily, Pope was providing his audience with a privileged glimpse at the private annotations of a sophisticated reader. His adoption of the ancient critical symbols gave him an elegant means of "managing readers," anticipating and guiding their aesthetic responses to the text. By applying them to Shakespeare, Pope was giving him the "dignity of an ancient," presenting Shakespeare in the same textual form that Pope thought the ancients had reserved for Homer. Just as Bentley, in his Amsterdam Horace, clothed an ancient author in modern philological dress, Pope in his Shakespear was applying an ancient mode of editing to a modern author. In doing so, Pope was able to achieve something else. By projecting Shakespeare back into an idealized classical past, he was able to distance his own editorial project from the modern scholarship whose application to classical literature he so despised. By providing a point of contrast-or resistance-to philological commentary, the ancient critical signs allowed Pope to bestow upon himself the dignity of an ancient editor. If Pope had to edit literature, in other words, he would rather do so as an Aristarchus than as a Bentley.

Notes

I. Johnson on Shakespeare, ed. Arthur Sherbo, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1968), 7:57.

2. *The Works of Shakespear*, ed. Alexander Pope, 6 vols. (London: J. Tonson, 1723–25), 1:xxii.

3. See John Butt, *Pope's Taste in Shakespeare* (London: Shakespeare Association, 1936), 20.

4. Thomas Lounsbury, *The First Editors of Shakespeare: Pope and Theobald* (London: D. Nutt, 1906), 94–95.

5. Richard Foster Jones, *Lewis Theobald: His Contribution to English Scholarship* with Some Unpublished Letters (1919; rep. New York: AMS, 1966), 62–64.

6. David Nichol Smith, *Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1928), 38.

7. Margreta de Grazia, Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 197.

8. See Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare in Quotation Marks," in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, ed. Jean I. Marsden (New York: St. Martin's, 1991), 57–71. De Grazia draws much of her information about the marking of sententiae in printed books from G. K. Hunter, "The Marking of *Sententiae* in Elizabethan Printed Plays, Poems, and Romances," *Library* 5th ser., 6 (1951): 171–88.

9. Robert B. Hamm, Jr., "Shakespeare Bound: The Tonson Editions and the Making of a Literary Classic" (unpublished PhD diss., Univ. of California, Santa Barbara, 2004), 91.

10. Michael Dobson, The Making of the National Poet: Shakespeare, Adaptation, and Authorship, 1660–1769 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 130. See also Marcus Walsh, Shakespeare, Milton, and Eighteenth-Century Literary Editing: The Beginnings of Interpretative Scholarship (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ., 1997), 128, and Trevor Ross, The Making of the English Literary Canon: From the Middle Ages to the Late Eighteenth Century (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Univ., 1998), 236.

11. Colin Franklin, *Shakespeare Domesticated: The Eighteenth–Century Editions* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1991), 178.

12. See Austin Warren, *Alexander Pope as Critic and Humanist* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1929), 1491119, and Peter Dixon, "Pope's Shakespeare," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 63 (1964): 195. The essays in question are the "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear" and "Remarks on the Poems of Shakespear," in *The Works of Mr. William Shakespeare* [1710], ed. Charles Gildon, vol. 7 (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1999), 257–464.

13. *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. Alexander Pope, 6 vols. [1715] (London: C. Rivington, 1760), 1:5n. For the relationship between these two passages, see Peter Seary, *Lewis Theobald and the Editing of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 55.

14. *The Odyssey of Homer*, trans. Alexander Pope, vol. 1 (London: B. Lintot, 1725), 35.

15. Howard D. Weinbrot, "Annotating a Career: From Pope's *Homer* to *The Dunciad*: From Madame Dacier to Madame Dacier by Way of Swift," *Philological Quarterly* 79 (2000): 460.

16. See, for example, Alexander Pope, *The Correspondence of Alexander Pope*, ed. George Sherburn, 6 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 1:270–71; 1:297–98; 2:19–20, 2:247–48; 2:264–65.

17. For the experience of one of Pope's assistants on the project, the Cambridge classicist John Jortin, see Joseph M. Levine, *The Battle of the Books: History and Literature in the Augustan Age* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ., 1991), 197.

18. Peter W. Cosgrove, "Undermining the Text: Edward Gibbon, Alexander Pope, and the Anti-Authenticating Footnote," in *Annotation and Its Texts*, ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York: Oxford Univ., 1991), 130–51; Evelyn B. Tribble, "Like a Looking-Glas in the Frame': From the Marginal Note to the Footnote," in *The Margins of the Text*, ed. D. C. Greetham (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1997), 240–42; Weinbrot, "Annotating a Career," 459–82. 19. For commentary as a form of beautification, see Cosgrove, "Undermining the Text," 138–39.

20. On the Alexandrian symbols, see R. L. Fowler, "Reconstructing the Cologne Alexaus," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* no. 33 (1979): 24–28; H. D. Jocelyn, "The Annotations of M. Valerivs Probvs (II)," *Classical Quarterly* n.s. 35 (1985): 154; L. D. Reynolds and N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of Greek and Latin Literature*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 10–11.

21. For this tendency in Pope, see James R. Sutherland, "'The Dull Duty of an Editor," *Review of English Studies* 21 (1945): 213, and Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ., 1999), 69–70, 72.

22. Jocelyn, "Annotations," 152; Nigel Wilson, "Scholiasts and Commentators," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 47 (2007): 43–44.

23. See Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship: From the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 214; Anthony Grafton, "Prolegomena to Friedrich August Wolf," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 44 (1981): 111–12.

24. For the source of this adage, see Desiderius Erasmus, *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, trans. Margaret Mann Phillips, vol. 31 (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto, 1982), 434.

25. Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1993), 134–36.

26. Maynard Mack identifies Pope's copy of Erasmus as the ten-volume Le Clerc edition of 1703–06. See Mack, *Collected in Himself: Essays Critical, Biographical, and Bibliographical on Pope and Some of His Contemporaries* (Newark: Univ. of Delaware, 1982), 32014.

27. William Kupersmith, "Asses, Adages, and the Illustrations to Pope's *Dunciad*," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 8 (1974–75): 206–11. For Pope's intention to write a biography of Erasmus, see Pope, *Correspondence*, 1:119. The importance of Erasmus to Pope as a religious and literary exemplum is considered more generally in Chester Chapin, "Alexander Pope: Erasmian Catholic," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 6 (1973): 4–30; Thomas Woodman, "Pope: The Papist and the Poet," *Essays in Criticism* 46 (1996): 219–33; and Flavio Gregori, "Introduction: Pope on the Margins and in the Center," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 38 (2005): xi–xiv.

28. Anthony Grafton, *Commerce with the Classics: Ancient Books and Renaissance Readers* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan, 1997), 154.

29. Grafton, *Commerce*, 154. See also Grafton, "Is the History of Reading a Marginal Enterprise? Guillaume Budé and His Books," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 91 (1997): 148.

30. For Pope's practice of marking significant passages in his books with marginal inverted commas, see Austin Warren, "Pope and Ben Jonson," *Modern Language Notes* 45 (1930): 87; R. D. Erlich, "Pope's Annotations in his Copy of Dryden's *Comedies, Tragedies, and Operas*: An Exercise in Cryptography," *Restoration and Eighteenth-Century Theatre Research* 10 (1971): 14–24; Mack, *Collected in Himself*, 180–92, 318; and Maynard Mack, *Alexander Pope: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1986), 83, 85.

31. See Felicity Rosslyn, "Pope's Annotations to Tickell's *Iliad* Book One," *Review of English Studies* n.s. 30 (1979): 50–55; Mack, *Collected in Himself*, 443–56.

32. Alexander Pope, *The Twickenham Edition of the Poems of Alexander Pope*, ed. John Butt and Maynard Mack, 10 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ., 1961–67), 10:481.