

Tennyson and *The Golden Treasury*: A Rediscovered Revision Copy

MICHAEL J. SULLIVAN*

In 1971, Philip Larkin made a rare excursion into academic writing, while editing his *Oxford Book of Twentieth Century English Verse*. His subject was the most successful lyric anthology in literary history: *The Golden Treasury*, compiled by Francis Turner Palgrave and Alfred Tennyson. Published during his time at All Souls College, Larkin's article described A. E. Housman's no less than forty-one neat deletions in his copy of the anthology, alongside Housman's heavy aesthetic interventions.¹ Three years later, it was revealed that T. S. Eliot had used *The Golden Treasury* in his years as an extension lecturer on Modern English Literature.² The anthology was extensively annotated by its many poetic owners, beginning with Thomas Hardy and stretching well into the twentieth century, offering a link between Victorian and Edwardian literary tastes. Yet for all its importance, no proof, trial or revision copies have previously been revealed, either in Palgrave's hand, or in that of Tennyson.

This article presents a rediscovered revision copy of *The Golden Treasury* in Tennyson's library, and excavates its significance for the anthology's textual history. By considering the copy's annotations, the article sheds new light on Tennyson's poetic influences, and on his aesthetic control over the formation of a Victorian literary canon. Of the nineteenth century's great versifiers, Tennyson was among the least prolific of literary critics.³ What survives in *The Golden Treasury* is his most prolonged and revealing judgment on the full span of English verse.

I

On 10 August 1860, Alfred Tennyson, dining at Burlington House with Thomas Woolner and Francis Turner Palgrave, contemplated some great journey: to the East, Brittany, or perhaps the West Indies.⁴ Only days later, having lowered his sights to

*Michael J. Sullivan, Trinity College, Cambridge CB2 1TQ, UK. E-mail: mjp90@cam.ac.uk. I am grateful to the AHRC for their support in funding this research, and to Christopher Ricks for his advice and encouragement in the final stages of preparing this article.

¹Philip Larkin, "Palgrave's Last Anthology: A. E. Housman's Copy," *Review of English Studies* 22 (1971): 312–16 (312, 314).

²Ronald Schuchard, "T. S. Eliot as an Extension Lecturer, 1916–1919," *Review of English Studies* 25 (1974): 292–304 (300–1).

³Christopher Ricks, "The Making of *The Golden Treasury*," in *The Golden Treasury: of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1991), 446–47.

⁴*The Journals of Walter White: Assistant Secretary of the Royal Society* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1898), 151. Also quoted in *The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), ii. 261.

Cornwall and the Scilly Isles, and heeding William Gladstone's advice to continue his *Idylls of the King*,⁵ Tennyson was preparing to visit the Arthurian cliffs and castles that would feature in his great legendary work.⁶ From Tintagel, traveling *incognito* to escape the crowds,⁷ he journeyed to Penzance, where he was joined by Palgrave, Val Prinsep, and William Holman Hunt. It was in this company, in the wild scenery of Sennen and Treryn Dinas, that Tennyson and Palgrave discussed an idea that would revise not only the Victorian, but the entire lyrical, canon.⁸

By summer's end, plans had been set in motion for *The Golden Treasury: of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*. From its publication in 1861, *The Golden Treasury* became an introduction to the poetic tradition, a touchstone for the most ornate and songful examples of English verse. The most significant anthology in English literary history, the volume continued to sell in full force for the next one hundred years.⁹ Of great importance to poets as diverse as Thomas Hardy, Robert Frost, Louis MacNeice, and Anne Stevenson,¹⁰ the anthology established tastes and preconceptions about the nature and meaning of lyrical verse: its formal features and its emotive modes; the ways in which it could be categorized, and the senses in which the lyrical might evade single definitions. During the Great War, its use in the trenches offered a gateway to the aesthetic realms of poetry. And for the inter-war years, when the "reaction" to the nineteenth century had allegedly reached its height, the anthology's popularity resisted the neatness of declinist narratives.

Tennyson's involvement in the selection of poems was sustained and attentive.¹¹ William Holman Hunt later described Tennyson's "advice and assistance", which "continued throughout the day, at times on the heights of a cliff or on the shore below, while we painters were loitering".¹² Between 22 and 28 December,¹³ and again in January and February 1861, Tennyson and his wife, Emily, tested Palgrave's chosen shortlist by

⁵*The Journals of Walter White*, 151.

⁶Cambridge, Wren Library, Adv.c.16.69-72, Hallam Tennyson, *Materials for a Life of A. T.: Collected for my Children* (Privately Printed, [1895]), ii. 304-305.

⁷William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London: Macmillan, 1905), ii. 213. See also *The Journals of Caroline Fox*, ed. Wendy Monk (London: Elek, 1972), 229-31, quoted in *Tennyson: Interviews and Recollections*, ed. Norman Page (London: Macmillan, 1983), 76-78.

⁸William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 205.

⁹Michael J. Sullivan, "Tennyson and *The Golden Treasury*," *Essays in Criticism* 66 (2016): 431-43. See London, British Library, Macmillan One-Volume Editions Book, uncatalogued, 218, 923; also the multi-volume Macmillan Edition Books, post-1892: British Library, Add. 55909-55930.

¹⁰Dennis Taylor, "Hardy's Copy of *The Golden Treasury*," *Victorian Poetry* 37 (1999): 165-91; Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry: A Personal Essay* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938), 41; Anne Stevenson, "Why Palgrave Lives," *Victorian Poetry* 37 (1999): 211-14. R. S. Thomas was also "heavily influenced by Francis Palgrave's *Golden Treasury*": see, for instance, Sam Perry, "'In Search of Something Chance Would Never Bring': The Poetry of R.S. Thomas and Edward Thomas," *Review of English Studies* 59 (2008): 582-603 (583).

¹¹Michael J. Sullivan, "Tennyson and *The Golden Treasury*" 431-43.

¹²William Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism*, 205.

¹³Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, Emily Tennyson's Diary, TRC/M50, vol. 1, fol. 209^f.

reading its poems aloud.¹⁴ Beyond devoting the anthology to Victoria's laureate, Palgrave had expressed his literary debt explicitly in the wording of his dedication, dated May 1861. "Your encouragement", he addressed Tennyson, "led me to begin the work; and it has been completed under your advice and assistance."¹⁵ In a Foreword in the anthology's manuscript, Palgrave went further, stating that all the poems "had been gone through by Alfr. Tennyson during ten days at Xmas 60". Tennyson, Palgrave writes, read "almost everything twice over generally aloud to me", "his opinion" being "the final verdict".¹⁶ In 1897, he called it Tennyson's "final judgment", and for most of the nineteenth century Tennyson's verdict was indeed characterized by its seeming finality.¹⁷ For twenty-two years, and over fifteen printings, the anthology would remain substantially unchanged. Palgrave, so the story goes, had little desire to refine the selection of poems until at least 1883, and no proof copies have so far resurfaced.¹⁸

II

Stored in the dome of Lincoln Central Library are two textual artifacts which together tell a somewhat different tale. The first is an overlooked revision copy of *The Golden Treasury*, containing Palgrave's and Tennyson's suggestions for a revised edition that never emerged. The volume had been forgotten after being gifted to Audrey Boyle, the *fiancée* of Tennyson's son Hallam, and was later catalogued as among Hallam's books: one of at least three copies of *The Golden Treasury* in the Tennysons' libraries.¹⁹ The second item is a manuscript letter from Palgrave to Hallam Tennyson,²⁰ which mentions his desire to revise the *Treasury* earlier than has previously been acknowledged. This letter, of October 1883, testifies to the enduring power that Tennyson exercised over the anthology's creation, a power that has previously been questioned.²¹ The find reveals Tennyson's later artistic judgments of his poetic predecessors, and his relationship with the Romantics. Why, though, did this revised edition never come to fruition?

¹⁴"In the evenings he read aloud the proofs of the Golden Treasury, Homer, Shakespeare's Sonnets [...]": Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, Manuscript of *Materials for a Life of A.T.*, vol. 5, fol. 17^r, uncatalogued.

¹⁵*The Golden Treasury: of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (Cambridge: Macmillan, 1861), Dedication.

¹⁶London, British Library, Add 42126, fol. 2^v.

¹⁷Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1897), 500.

¹⁸It is known that Palgrave kept a short list of additional poems to insert: Megan Jane Nelson, "Francis Turner Palgrave and *The Golden Treasury*", Ph.D. thesis (University of British Columbia, 1985), 108, 153, 155.

¹⁹Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, TRC/HT/3035. See also TRC/AT/1739 and TRC/HT/3034.

²⁰The letter has been catalogued in the Tennyson Research Centre, Lincoln, but not matched with the textual history of *The Golden Treasury*. TRC/LETTERS/6082.

²¹David E. Latané, Jr., "Treasure Sub Rosa: An Introduction," *Victorian Poetry* 37 (1999): 135–44 (140).

Dated three months after Tennyson's discarding of the revision copy, Palgrave's letter helps to piece together this tangled textual history. On 24 October 1883, Palgrave wrote to Hallam Tennyson to solicit a response from his father regarding some "select pieces" from the work:

You will remember that when I was at Aldworth we looked over together my proposed additions to the *G. Treasury*, & took out about 15 of the very best: – as I proposed to follow your Father's judgment against seriously altering the book, & planned to do nothing more than add these select poems as an appendix.

These select pieces you kindly proposed to read or show to him, that I might have the advantage of his opinion on their decisive eligibility. [...] I should make no omissions within the book as it stands; but I think I shall, in almost all cases, remove my own conjectural emendations. [...] There is no immediate pressure to print: but I should like to do so by Xmas.²²

This letter explains why Palgrave's 1884 edition of *The Golden Treasury* contains a small number of additional poems, grouped at the end as an appendix.²³ More importantly, however, it suggests that Tennyson's aesthetic taste of the "best songs and lyrical poems in the English language" remained unchanged between 1861 and 1883, a suggestion corroborated by a number of annotations in the revision copy.

The revision copy of *The Golden Treasury*—hereafter named the *Lincoln Revision Copy*—can be dated firmly to between 1881 and 30 June 1883. Many of Palgrave's suggested revisions are expressed as questions—possibly to himself, probably to Tennyson—and are written into a copy of the 1881 imprint.²⁴ On the volume's half-title page is inscribed, in pencil, "Tennyson from", followed, in Palgrave's hand and ink, by "F.T. Palgrave | for revision". By 30 June 1883, having advised Palgrave against any revisions, Tennyson gifted the anthology to his future daughter-in-law, confirmed by his handwritten note on the first page: "Audrey Boyle | from | A Tennyson | June 30th — 83".²⁵ The next year, Audrey's name changed to Tennyson, following her marriage to Hallam in 1884, and her change of name corroborates this manuscript date.²⁶ What is most remarkable about this copy, however, is that Hallam Tennyson's hand, possibly in addition to Alfred's, records numerous answers to Palgrave's suggestions.²⁷ In the

²²Francis Turner Palgrave to Hallam Tennyson, 24 October 1883, Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, TRC/LETTERS/6082. With thanks to the Palgrave family for permission to reproduce this letter.

²³*The Golden Treasury*, ed. Francis Turner Palgrave (London: Macmillan, 1884).

²⁴Palgrave's hand, and his characteristic pigment of blue ink used in many of his letters to Tennyson, confirm that these pages were annotated by the anthology's editor. See, for example, Francis Turner Palgrave to Alfred Tennyson, 23 December 1868. Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, TRC/LETTERS/6074.

²⁵The scrawl is characterized by Tennyson's usual use of a large lower case "a" instead of the normal capital "A."

²⁶Suzanne L. G. Rickard, "Tennyson, Hallam, second Baron Tennyson (1852–1928)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/57219> (accessed August 15, 2016).

²⁷An untitled copy of Walter Savage Landor's poem, "Rose Aylmer," is also written in pencil on the paste-down endpaper, in Hallam Tennyson's hand.

original fair copy of *The Golden Treasury*, it was Palgrave who had recorded Tennyson's verdict on the poems, taken from Tennyson's reading of the poems aloud.²⁸ By 1875, Hallam had forsaken his place at Cambridge to become his father's "secretary",²⁹ and it was to Hallam that Palgrave wrote regarding his suggested alterations. It is therefore consistent with *The Golden Treasury's* original compilation that Hallam should have recorded Tennyson's responses, and it is only when read alongside Palgrave's letter that Tennyson's agency becomes clear.

Together, these two textual finds reveal new insights into Tennyson's late influences and literary tastes. Several of the annotations, for instance, amount to a defense of Shakespeare. Inexplicably, Palgrave had the astonishing bravery to "Omit" Shakespeare's Sonnet 60 ("Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore | So do our minutes hasten to their end"), whose speaker declares how "my verse shall stand" in the face of death.³⁰ "[N]ot very striking", Palgrave justified. The suggestion is then expunged, replaced with the word "beautiful". Shakespeare's Sonnet 94 ("They that have power to hurt, and will do none") elicited a similar response, scored out and replaced by "Very beautiful".³¹ By Shakespeare's Sonnet 104 ("To me, fair Friend, you never can be old"), Palgrave suggests "Omit – rather personal than general in interest – & not of the finest beauty". A wobbly pencil scores through Palgrave's comment, reiterating Tennyson's preference, from 1860, to include the poem; the sonnet remained in subsequent editions.³²

III

The most important moments of divergence between Tennyson and Palgrave, however, relate to Wordsworth, and the strength of Tennyson's defense of Wordsworth compels a reconsideration of his relationship with the Poet Laureate in later life. Several accounts imply that Tennyson had an early obsession with the Romantics, coming more to disagree with their styles and ideals as his life progressed.³³ In Herbert Tucker's *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism*, a great deal of Tennyson's life reads like a struggle with Wordsworth, ultimately allowing him an uneasy but fading presence in Tennyson's later voice. Certainly, in 1883, Tennyson had a long conversation with William Gladstone regarding English poets. Wordsworth, for instance, was to be admired for certain poems, but "He is often too diffuse and didactic for me", even though the line "Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns", from *Tintern Abbey*, was, he said, "almost the grandest in the English language, giving the sense of the abiding in the transient."³⁴

²⁸London, British Library, Add MS 42126.

²⁹Hallam Tennyson, *Materials for a Life of A.T.*, iii. 328.

³⁰*Lincoln Revision Copy*, 18–19.

³¹*Lincoln Revision Copy*, 19–20.

³²*Lincoln Revision Copy*, 9. The capitalization is taken from Palgrave's edition.

³³Herbert F. Tucker, *Tennyson and the Doom of Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³⁴Hallam Tennyson, *Materials*, iv. 49–50.

As for *The Golden Treasury*, Palgrave told Wordsworth's brother in 1861 that Tennyson wished to admit to the anthology "nothing which did not exhibit his honoured predecessor in his fullest strength & glory".³⁵ Of course, the quotation allows for the possibility that a great deal of Wordsworth's work might not exhibit this "fullest strength & glory". Yet Stephen Gill posits a later drifting away from Wordsworth, observing that, had *The Golden Treasury* been influenced by the later Tennyson, its limit on Wordsworth's poems "might have been still stricter".³⁶ In fact, *The Golden Treasury* devoted more poems to Wordsworth than to any other poet, and the *Lincoln Revision Copy* further complicates Gill's speculation that the late Tennyson would have curbed Wordsworth's presence in the anthology. It is true that Wordsworth's "Simon Lee," with his ankles, "swoln and thick", is a rare example in the *Lincoln Revision Copy* of a poem Tennyson wanted to be dropped from the *Treasury*: "And he is lean and he is sick, | His little body's half awry | His ancles they are swoln and thick; | His legs are thin and dry." Fittingly, the description "*Thick-ankled*" became Tennyson's own description of Wordsworth: his way of expressing the poet's inconsistency of style, ranging, at his weakest, from the brilliant to the banal.³⁷ In the *Lincoln Revision Copy*, "Simon Lee" bears Tennyson's instruction "Omit as prosaic", a statement which lends credence to Gill's conclusion that seeing Wordsworth's "thick ankles enabled him to know the more confidently his own place as Wordsworth's proper successor as a great poet, as Poet Laureate, and as Victorian cultural icon."³⁸

Nonetheless, the *Lincoln Revision Copy* also captures Tennyson's respect for Wordsworth, voiced most profoundly in these later years. To his son, he said that "You must not think because I speak plainly of Wordsworth's defects as a poet that I have not a very high admiration of him. I shall never forget my deep emotion the first time I had speech with him. I have a profound admiration for 'Tintern Abbey.'" ³⁹ Tennyson and FitzGerald may have competed to invent "the weakest Wordsworthian line imaginable" ("A Mr Wilkinson – a clergyman").⁴⁰ Yet his son wrote of how "He often quoted from Wordsworth" in his final years, "and was always greatly moved by 'Yarrow Revisited'".⁴¹ On 1 November 1888, Tennyson "repeated emphatically" to Palgrave his "constant estimate of Wordsworth as the greatest of our poets in this century", and the *Lincoln Revision Copy* corroborates the view that Tennyson remained, as Seamus Perry puts it, "quite genuinely stirred" by the deceased poet.⁴² Next to Wordsworth's "Thought of a Briton on the Subjugation of Switzerland" appears the

³⁵Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 103; Robert Woof, *Tennyson 1809-1892: A Centenary Celebration* (Grasmere: Wordsworth Trust, 1992), 43-44.

³⁶Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 104 n. 42.

³⁷See Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, ii. 404-5; see also Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 193.

³⁸Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, 195.

³⁹Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, ii. 70.

⁴⁰Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, i. 153. See also Seamus Perry, "Two Voices: Tennyson and Wordsworth," *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 8 (2002): 11-22.

⁴¹Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, ii. 421-22.

phrase, “One of the most Splendid sonnets in English”,⁴³ implicitly of the same order as Shakespeare, whose *Cymbeline* would lie open on Tennyson’s deathbed in 1892.⁴⁴ Another poem of Wordsworth’s—entitled “London, MDCCCII” in *The Golden Treasury*—is marked for omission by Palgrave: “this is also in an exaggerated vein – England was not really like this in 1802, at any rate”. A line scores through the entire comment, replacing it with a more muted, but still appreciative, “all the same[:] fine”.⁴⁵ Scattered across the edition are additional pencil markings, which draw attention to suspiciously Tennysonian moments—such as a poem by Wordsworth, entitled “By the Sea” (“And doth with his eternal motion make | A sound like thunder – everlastingly”). This new evidence in the *Lincoln Revision Copy* confirms a point corroborated throughout his verse: that a poet as important to the young Tennyson as Wordsworth, so significant in adulthood that Tennyson was crushed when Wordsworth did not show him more warmth in their first meetings, and so clearly present in his poetry, could hardly come to be rejected entirely in Tennyson’s old age. Criticism of Wordsworth, for Tennyson, did not equate to denunciation.

IV

Collectively, then, these finds illuminate not only Tennyson’s enduring respect for Wordsworth, but also Tennyson’s importance in the continuing development of *The Golden Treasury*. When read in combination with Palgrave’s letter to Hallam Tennyson, the *Lincoln Revision Copy* suggests that Palgrave maintained his selection for twenty-two years not purely out of pragmatic publishing decisions, but owing to Tennyson’s lasting satisfaction with their choice of what he considered “the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language”. Moreover, this hitherto unknown revision copy offers new Tennysonian judgments about specific literary works, dated to the final decade of his life. Such comments provide fresh evidence that Tennyson, rather than rejecting the Romantics, remained often appreciative of their merits in these closing years. Nine autumns after this revision copy, in 1892, Tennyson’s funeral licensed Palgrave to begin his next chapter in the anthology’s history: a much enlarged and expanded edition of 1897, in which Tennyson’s poems dominated its final pages. What emerges most strongly from the *Lincoln Revision Copy*, and from these poems of the laureate’s own selection, is Tennyson’s continuing affection and admiration for the lyrical tradition that he was already poised to enter.

⁴²F. B. Pinion, *A Tennyson Chronology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1990), 168; Seamus Perry, “Two Voices,” 17.

⁴³*Lincoln Revision Copy*, 206.

⁴⁴Hallam Tennyson, *Memoir*, ii. 427–29.

⁴⁵*Lincoln Revision Copy*, 207.

Transcript of Letter

F. T. Palgrave to Hallam Tennyson, 24 October 1883
Lincoln, Tennyson Research Centre, TRC/LETTERS/6082

My dear Hallam

You will remember that when I was at Aldworth we looked over together my proposed additions to the G. Treasury, & took out about 15 of the very best: – as I proposed to follow your Father's judgment against seriously altering the book, & planned to do nothing more than add these select poems as an appendix.

These select pieces you kindly proposed to read or show to him, that I might have the advantage of his opinion on their decisive eligibility.

If he should be graciously disposed to go through this now, I should be glad to arrange for the printing. I have found one since, in a selection of very varied merit, by a W. Linton,⁴⁶ which I think of adding. I will copy & send it when I hear from you.

Please when you return the set of MS., mark clearly with a T those which, – on the plan mentioned, – he would elect for the appendix. I should make no omissions within the book as it stands; but I think I shall, in almost all cases, remove my own conjectural emendations. I should also propose to reprint the notes: – as to which, I should be thankful for any hints from him or you. They read to me now somewhat dogmatic & fanciful, in some cases.

I was astonished when, in a wild village of Carnarvonshire named Nevin (the most primitive place I ever dwelt in, as well as one of the most picturesque) I read of your voyage: – fancying you both at S. David's, which on a clear day, was visible, or seemed visible, from one of the hills close to us.

But <you> T must have greatly enjoyed the trip: – at least, if it gave as much pleasure to you as the Gladstones seem to have received from it – &, not least, from your & your Father's company. Thus much, with a few amusing details, I gathered from Mrs Gladstone, who kindly came over to Chester, where we were on a visit, to tell us the news.

Their visit to Knowsley, by bad luck for us, coincided with ours at Chester, & thus prevented us from accepting their invitation to Hawarden; where I had hoped to have heard everything from Mr. Gladstone. That the intercourse with him, & indeed with all of them, strengthened your impression <...> ^as ^to their personal charm & interest, I do not doubt.

Lionel, whom I saw on Sunday looking, I thought, uncommonly well, promises to let me know if you come to Town. Perhaps, if such a visit is likely, you might bring up the MSS with you & talk them over with me. There is no immediate pressure to print: but I should like to do so by Xmas.

⁴⁶In 1878, William James Linton, the polemicist and poet, published his anthology *Poetry of America* (London: G. Bell, 1878); in 1882, he followed this anthology with further volumes of English metaphysical and seventeenth-century poetry: *The Golden Apples of Hesperus* (1882) and *Rare Poems of the Seventeenth Century* (1882). See John Murdoch, "Linton, William James (1812–1897)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2013, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16745> (accessed August 15, 2016).

My best regards to your Father & Mother. The remembrance of my day with all of you is very pleasant to me: – I hope you may renew your London visit next spring; as I am now bound hand & foot in official bonds.

Ever very truly your's

F. T. Palgrave

We have begun a little study of Welsh, which seems to me one of the most beautiful < . . . > but less than one of the most interesting languages that I know of. But it is tolerably hard work.