

by Polk for the Library of America, in its subsequent editions of Faulkner's novels. Today, all copies published of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, which is still under copyright protection, end with the restored line. One hopes that the corrections will be carried forward in editions issued after the novel enters the public domain in 2035.

All editors hope to find significant variants in important works of literature. Editors want to discover variants that will alter meaning, or at least cause teachers and critics to rethink their ideas about interpretation. This is probably a legacy of the New Criticism, with its emphasis on close reading. The New Critics taught that each word carries meaning, as does each punctuation mark, and that the interpretation of a literary work can turn on a single sentence. Perhaps the New Critics were right. Some sentences in fiction bring immediately to mind the works in which they appear. ("Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!") Some capture a central image. ("The red sun was pasted in the sky like a wafer.") Some sentences prepare the work for its conclusion. ("Marlow ceased, and sat apart, indistinct and silent, in the pose of a meditating Buddha.") Some sentences tie together all that has come before. ("Reader, I married him.") Other sentences, appearing at the very end of a work, encapsulate its meaning. ("He loved Big Brother.")

The discovery of pivotal variants is rare. Many excellent scholarly editions present texts that have been emended throughout, but the emendations are not especially significant. Documentary or "versionist" editions usually offer texts that are identical to, or not very different from, earlier texts. Facsimile editions typically list emendations at the foot of the page or in an apparatus. These editions can do many good things: they can provide narratives of composition and revision, trace the textual history of the work, and provide useful historical annotations. Time schemes are sometimes straightened out; the author's accidentals are reinstated; misspellings and other demonstrable errors are corrected. These are valuable services, but they do not provide a definitive response, if there is one, to the notion that scholarly editing is essentially clerical work. All editors have heard this sort of thing. Why should an editor undertake the considerable labor of a full-dress edition if the interpretation of the work is to remain unchanged? Important variants might indeed turn up in the collations, but an editor usually does not know this when beginning a project. The editor must proceed on faith.

In the case of these three final sentences, however, we do have variants of consequence. Each of these readings falls at the very end of its novel, and each involves punctuation. These are not minor works; they are important novels, taught in classrooms and interpreted by critics. How these changes came about—from dash to period, period to question-mark, profane word to long dash—these stories can be included in lectures and discussed with students, most of whom probably think that a literary work springs immaculate from its creator's brow. With a dash at the end of *This Side of Paradise*, the journey of its hero is just beginning. With a period at the end of *The Sun Also Rises*, the narrator takes a bleak but realistic view of his future. And with the word "shit" at the end of *If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem*, the tall convict's rejection of women, and of life, is made clear.