THE NEW ULYSSES AND THE CRITICS: TEXTUAL CRITICISM TODAY

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1. GABLER'S EDITION: RIGHT-HAND VERSUS LEFT-HAND PAGES.

Recent enthusiasm for Gabler's new edition of Ulysses has sprung from several sources. Gabler himself has announced that the new edition corrects the average of seven errors per page which are to be found in all previous texts. Many scholars, editors, critics, and professors of literature seem to share Gabler's optimism and would probably agree with Hugh Kenner's unqualified praise: "Here is the pot of gold at the end of a 20th century scholar's adventure: an edition of Ulysses that for the first time can claim to let us read pretty nearly what the author intended.... Computer collation and computer typesetting have helped guard the editor from introducing a whole new layer of errors. The result is as close to a definitive Ulysses as we are likely to see." Unfortunately, however, praise to the seven-year scholarly work involving textual research and editorial labour has not been unanimous. Skeptical voices such as Craig Raine's in The Sunday Times have been heard.¹

Discordant voices are disturbing in this case because Gabler's is unquestionably scholarly work developed with the help of the best techniques of present-day editing and because the result, as Hugh Kenner has observed, is as reliable as we are likely to see. Nor is there any doubt as to the significance of the new edition as a critical tool: everyone writing about Joyce's novel in the future will have to cite it because, of course, any professor or historian or critic prefers to discuss a literary work on the basis of a reliable text. Thus skeptical voices must either be dismissed as irrelevant or viewed as relevant and somehow explained from a point of view which competes with the commonsense notion of the importance of

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reliable texts. If one reads between the lines, Craig Raine's article may very well provide us with a clue as to the nature of this competing point of view. For Raine, Gabler's edition is far more significant if we read only the left-hand pages, which give us Joyce's work in progress and show additions, deletions, and re-writings. We can thus see before us "the evolving text of Joyce's masterpiece" and "follow the moves of a brilliant writer at work, however partially since not all the documents survive." In other words, the validity of the new edition lies in its power to disclose the process of writing and not its final result as presented on the right-hand pages (the final text of Ulysses). Gabler gives us a final edition, or an edition which is as final as we are likely to see, and yet paradoxically this edition is worth reading only for its power to deny finality.

Raine can tolerate a few examples of additions and corrections whenever they prove to be instrumental in evincing Joyce's imaginative power or in solving problems of interpretation. We now know, for example, that the telegram that brings Stephen back from Paris should read "Mother dying come home father," incorporating a misprint which is just typical "of Joyce's meticulous imagination," and not "Mother dying come home father," which is just typical of whoever decided to "correct" Joyce's misspelling on the fifth set of proofs. We know also that the interpretive crux in the later brothel chapter, when Stephen asks his mother about "the word known to all men," will no longer be a reason for controversy: the new edition retrieves and puts in the library episode of Ulysses the words "Love, yes. Word known to all men" and we now feel certain that the correct interpretation is "love". But Raine does not seem to feel that these corrections are terribly important or that they radically alter our reading of Ulysses. Moreover, in the case of the interpretation of the word known to all men, he believes that the words should not necessarily be admitted to the final text. "In doing so, professor Gabler has preferred the reading of an early fair-copy to a later corrected typescript... Joyce may have omitted the [words] deliberately, or he may have condoned
the typist's error." Unlike Hugh Kenner, Raine shows no enthusiasm for the final text on the right-hand page. His attitude is rather one of disbelief for at least three main reasons: He claims that (1) Gabler's choice of texts may be argued about, that (2) many corrections are irrelevant, and that (3) errors must necessarily survive any "final" edition.

The questioning of the criteria for choosing one particular fair copy among several and the persistence of errors are well-known difficulties for the textual critic. Thus in the case of the new edition "professor Gabler is too often willing to accept readings from the fair copy of the Rosembach manuscript in preference to later typescript readings" and at a certain point in volume one the replacement of a dash for an indentation leads to a new error, as the indentation continues mistakenly for the next six lines. As for the correction of irrelevant errors (for example, the addition of one extra "f" in the rendering of Bloom's fart at the end of "Sirens"), Raine is adamant in maintaining his negative view: it amounts to no more than a "trivial and unnecessary task."

This eloquent rejection of finality suggests that more is involved in Raine's account than specific criticism of Gabler's edition. In fact, it may represent a suspicious attitude directed more generally to Textual Criticism and, more precisely, to its conservative notion of text in an age that has utterly altered our views of what a text should be. What is a text? For a new critic (and for most English-language critics), a text is an autonomous verbal object endowed with meanings which are accessible to the close reading of competent and sensitive readers. Evidently, in order to be read closely, texts must be precisely fixed on the page. In this sense, Textual Criticism is very much a re-discovery of New Criticism. As Richard Altick has remarked, "although scholars had long been insisting on textual accuracy, it was the new critical stress upon close reading that focused interest as never before on the very words the author wrote."² This notion of "the text-as-object," however, is no longer unanimously accepted. It has been suggested, particularly by French critics, that a literary text is a species of the
social institution called écriture: it embodies a set of specifically literary conventions and codes and its interpretation occurs by means of a lecture which invests the marks on the page with what merely seems to be their objective meanings. If writing and reading are conceived in this way, the exactness of the text on the page as the author intended ceases to be of primary importance and close reading may be displaced by "creative" reading. Raine's article implies this second notion of text not only in its preference for writing as process in the right-hand pages of Gabler's edition, but also in its title. "Pleasures of the Text" obviously echoes Roland Barthes's Le Plaisir du Texte. Our notion of "text" seems to be evolving from "text as a finished product" to "text as process and pleasure."

2. TWO COMPETING NOTIONS OF TEXT: "WORK" VERSUS "TEXT"

We usually think of writing as a process which leads to a final product. The process is only instrumental in the achievement of the all-important final product which Roland Barthes calls "the work" as opposed to "the text." A work is a finished, concrete object the extrinsic center of which is the father-author who owns and controls his production and must therefore be protected by copyright laws. If the father is no longer present, Textual Criticism will take care of production control and of the restoration of authorial/authoritarian meaning. Thus it is not really surprising to discover that the most common metaphors used in Textual Criticism are, in the words of Edward Said, "spatial, physical, or military: the critic is "close" or "far" from the text; one reads in "slow motion" in order to "get" the sense better; there are "defenses" of reading; and prepositions like "within" and "inside" proliferate."³ The brief passage of Hugh Kenner quoted above is no exception: "we read pretty nearly what the author intended"; "computer typesetting have helped guard the editor from introducing... errors"; "the result is as close to a
definitive Ulysses as we are likely to see".

For Barthes the idea that a text has a unitary meaning injected into it by an author is intimately related to the ideology of individualism and to its political and economic implications. As Terence Hawkes has said in his introductory comments on S/Z,

the "single vision", the reduction of the world to one dimension, the notion that human beings are (or should be) separate entities, each metaphorically surrounded by an inviolable area of individuality, within which reside our individual rights, our individual psyche, our individual personality — these must rank as fairly recent, relatively modern notions. They are, it may be argued, the product of two linked forces — protestantism and capitalism — in which the individual's personal relationship to God, and his personal commitment to acquire and retain money spring from the same impulse. The twin notions of an author's individuality and of his originality come from the same source. Where modern (i.e. post-Renaissance) authors tend more and more to think of their writing as an expression — even an extension — of their individuality, medieval authors did not. Indeed, the concept of personal "authorship" (the author's name on the book he has written) has no real standing in the Middle Ages where works, stories, poems, were more likely to be seen as part of a collective enterprise, expressing no individual 'point of view' (the very phrase suggests one man's single vision) but a general outlook, the product of the culture at large.5

Viewed in the light of Barthes's notion of the accomplished work as produced by an individual and of the ideological context in which this production takes place (the context of the 'individualized' bourgeois society), Textual Criticism can no longer be innocently understood in terms of the scholarly task of producing texts without errors. As a stage in the conquest of the final truth of the individualized "work," it is an instrument committed to the maintenance and reinforcement of that very society that invented the notion of "work" in the first place. Nor is Textual Criticism a universally valid notion, as it would be meaningless in the Middle Ages. In social contexts less affected by the values of individuality
and integrity of both persons and of literary works, such as might be the case in the contemporary age, Textual Criticism as a means of producing finality would certainly be considered less relevant.

Roland Barthes, among others, has insisted that in defining a text one should avoid the objective fallacy and the metaphors of space (the text on the page). A text is a methodological field in which reader and language signs charged with meanings related to a variety of contexts (cultural, linguistic, literary) interact. There is thus a change of the level at which the "literary object" is perceived: writing and reading are conceived and defined together and what could have been a "work" is deprived of author-intended meanings and of finality. The reader of a text so defined will of course refrain from searching for final, all-encompassing meanings and read for the pleasure of establishing associations, continuities and cross references. A dispersion rather than a concentration of the reader's mind tends to occur. Evidently, one should not expect that such a reader would be very careful in his choice of reliable texts. Indeed, the unreliable text may offer some compensations, at least for a reader like Roland Barthes. In his analysis of a tale by Edgar Poe, for example, Barthes chooses to ignore Poe's most reliable text. In fact, he chooses not to use any reliable text at all: his analysis is based on Baudelaire's translation and some of Baudelaire's distorted renderings seem to be particularly interesting because, as distortions, they become the source of new possibilities of meaning that Poe could not possibly have intended.6

3. TEXTUAL CRITICISM TODAY.

F. O. Mathiessen's interpretive error in his reading of Melville's White Jacket has by now become the classic example of faulty interpretation based on an unlucky choice of texts. Mathiessen saw in the words "soiled fish of the sea" a typical
Melvillian discords concors that "could only have sprung from an imagination that had apprehended the terrors... of the immaterial deep as well as the physical." Unfortunately, "soiled" was a printer's error: Melville had actually written "coiled." In his praise, the critic has nonetheless violated the author's intention and must therefore be punished accordingly by having his error cited and commented in all manuals of textual criticism.

Mathiessen's error is so deeply disturbing because it is both accurate commentary to be accepted for its accuracy and misplaced commentary to be dismissed as irrelevant. According to Barthes, however, the charge of irrelevance would only apply to one particular kind of reader, that is, the reader of "readerly" texts. The readerly ("lisible") text is precisely that teleologically finished product essentially defined in terms of integrity (or one-ness) and intended to transform the reader in an inert consumer of pre-determined meanings. The reader of such a text reads Joyce or Melville to feel the pleasure ("plaisir") of consuming a final meaning ("love" as the word known to all men) and of rejecting unintended additional meanings such as the one derived from the change of "coiled" into "soiled." Conversely, the charge of irrelevance would not apply to the reader of "writerly" ("scriptible") texts. Being necessarily unfinished, undefined, and incomplete, writerly texts exist to be joyfully re-written by the reader as producer of meaning. The reader of such a text reads Joyce or Melville to rejoice ("jouir") in textual ambiguities and accepts the unintended additional meanings produced by mispellings even when they prove to be errors. As a supplement to Melville's text, Mathiessen's error somehow improves upon the original and gives us a hint of what might have been.

All this does not mean that Textual Criticism is less significant today than it used to be. It means rather that, to many readers, Textual Criticism may be significant in a different way. As a discipline, Textual Criticism had once, and for many readers still has, the primary function of presenting what the author intended in a final edition which carefully contrasts all
versions of an ideal, inaccessible original. Its secondary function was less significant, as it involved the revelation of the creative process of writing only: the examination of manuscripts, proofs or printed versions would then be a means of watching how a final product came into being. To many readers today this secondary function may have usurped the original task of producing finality. In the case of Gabler's edition of Ulysses, these readers may very well choose to reject the right-hand pages altogether, or to see them as simply a new interpretation of Ulysses, and rejoice in the process of production of meanings evinced on the right-hand pages.

NOTES


5 Terence Hawkes, Structuralism and Semiotics (London: Methuen, 1977), pp.119-120.
