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 edit -ial 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 pradoxically 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 "Nother 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 mispelling 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 Bartles'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."[4] 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 commited 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 **discordia 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."[7] 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

[1]Craig Raine, "Pleasures of the Text," **The Sunday Times**,
12 August 1984, p.39.

[2]Richard Altick, **The Art of Literary Research** (New York:
W.W. Norton & Company, 1975), p.55.

[3]Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in **Textual
Strategies**, ed. Josué V. Harari (Ithaca, New York: Cornell
University Press, 1979), pp.73-81.

[4]Edward Said, **Beginnings** (Baltimore and London: The Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1975), p.195.

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

[6]Roland Barthes, "Análise Textual de um Conto de Edgar
Poe", in **Semiótica Narrativa e Textual** (São Paulo: Cultrix,
1977), pp.36-62.

[7]Fredson Bowers, **Textual and Literary Criticism**
(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), pp.27-30.