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A Review

The Theory of Editing

CHARLES L. ROSS

Devils and Angels: Textual Editing and Literary Theory. Edited by Philip Cohen. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991. Pp. xviii, 212. \$29.50.

In what ways does literary theory, as filtered through textual criticism, enter into editorial practice? That is the central question addressed in this stimulating collection of essays by editors, textual critics, and literary theorists. The critical discourse is diverse. Several contributors, sounding like philosophers or semioticians, mull over the "ontology" of the work; others explore the rhetorics of different sorts of edition. Some promote sociological, new historical, or German hermeneutical approaches to "text-construction," while others refine the more traditional conception of the eclectic text based on an author's final intentions. Almost all share Hans Walter Gabler's belief that there is a "crisis" in Anglo-American textual criticism and that editors ought to be more resourceful in using critical theory. A recursive structure, in which three of the eleven contributions begin as "responses," provides a measure of coherence.

The general editor, Philip Cohen, asserts a common theoretical ground for textual criticism and editing: "Textual criticism is a theoretical activity. Moreover, since different editorial approaches are based on different theoretical assumptions that are probably not susceptible to logical or empirical proof, no single method of text-constitution will satisfy all of the different factions in this our contentious age" (xiv). This torturous sentence blends the old-fashioned and new-fangled. Though chiding editors for neglecting theory, Cohen believes that theory aims at "logical or empirical proof." Yet most theorists in *Devils and Angels* not only deny a sharp separation between theory and logic or evidence but also agree with Peter Shillingsburg in substituting "coherence" for "truth" as the goal of schol-

arly editions (24). Theoretical assumptions persuade by their plausibility, which stems from their bringing into prominence certain literary "facts." As Jerome McGann says in the first essay, "All editing is an act of interpretation" (7).

In "Literary Pragmatics and the Editorial Horizon," McGann argues that eclectic editing à la Fredson Bowers is "ahistorical." Yet Bowers did uncover and analyze a great deal of history in introductions and massive tables of variants. What McGann perhaps means is that Bowers viewed history as largely a hindrance to the expression of an author's artistic intentions, as a corrupting force against which the editor and author must fight. All authorial collaborations or compromises in the process leading to publication are assumed to have resulted in textual "corruptions" which must be eliminated from the reading text of an eclectic edition. On the other hand, Bowers assumed that an author will always be capable of reasserting authority or renewing inspiration during the otherwise corrupting process of transmission; that, in short, the author perfectly knows his work and himself not only throughout its gestation but also throughout revisions to subsequent, often widely spaced editions of a work. Hence an author's final artistic intention is synonymous with his last act. Bowersian theory reduces history to biography while conceiving the "work" to be an ideal, supra-material entity which has been damaged in its necessary "fall" into print but which can be "reconstructed" from all its more or less corrupt physical embodiments. Such is Bowers's myth of creativity.

McGann supplies a countermyth, complete with a straw man in the "editor-as-technical-functionary" (18) and a "sudden and catastrophic revolution" in the recent past that inaugurates a new day of "literary pragmatics." McGann wants to show how limited and limiting, in terms of meaning, is the eclectic edition or "single authoritative production" (11). To McGann, editing one work is more like selecting works for an anthology, where the choice is obviously "meaning-constitutive" (12), than like refining a single text. McGann's example of a "work" is Dante Gabriel Rossetti's sonnet-sequence, *The House of Life*, which raises questions of number, sequence, and different "authoritative" formats. This choice allows him to redefine textualist nomenclature: "Work" becomes the whole

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sequence of physical embodiments, not an ideal entity to be reconstructed from its physical traces; “text” becomes the linguistic part of the creative performance, as distinct from the “bibliographical code”; and “poem” becomes the structural embodiment of a moment in the “work.” Thus the Bowersian nomenclature is de-idealized and the biographical link is severed. For McGann, the construction of an edition is never “pre-interpretive” because a particular editorial format “privileges” certain interpretations—formal or socio-historical or intertextual.

Peter Shillingsburg, in “The Autonomous Author, the Sociology of Texts, and the Polemics of Textual Criticism,” believes that “Literary critics need to understand more about unstable texts; textual critics need to understand more about unstable meaning” (22). He disparages the notion that editors purify the text. Though the general editor of the Garland Thackeray, which has earned seals from the Center for Scholarly Editions, Shillingsburg relishes pointing out that current principles of textual criticism are incompatible and “cannot be melded into one” (26). Not only are “emended, abridged, and reshaped texts . . . inadequate for access to the work of art in its original context” (28), but “any single-text edition . . . is capable of distorting it and hiding its possible meanings by privileging one context over others as the determiner of meaning” (39). Consequently, the editorial goal should be “rich” rather than “correct” editions, editions that “foreground multiple, unstable texts about which much is known but upon which little dogmatic confidence can be placed” (42).

Shillingsburg’s witty skepticism rests partly on the unexamined idea that “author,” “production crews” (shades of Hollywood!), and “reader” are stable entities: “If the text belongs to the author, let us edit the author’s final intentions. . . . If it belongs to the reader, any reprint will do” (26). These answers are reductive. Each entity has varying capacities and needs. An author may need to be saved from himself or from the production crew or from both at different times in the lengthy process of creation. A production crew may assist or hinder or both. A reader may want one text or another or the capacity to reconstruct a text different from any hitherto printed.

Can the ideal of an eclectic, “critical” edition represent or accommodate these diverse needs? The implied answers seem to be “no” or “poorly.” Yet here a discussion of computer technology would have been in order. Will the computer come to the aid of the reader by bringing into interpretive play all the laboriously compiled variants which now languish at the back of printed editions? Does hypertext provide the remedy for the theoretical indeterminacy Shillingsburg anatomizes? And can hypermedia programs meet the

theoretical need of McGann and the New Historicists to include the bibliographical code in any interpretation of meaning? Alas, no answers to such questions are hazarded in *Devils and Angels*.

In response to McGann and Shillingsburg, T. H. Howard-Hill defends the role of the editor as a purifier, distinguishing sharply between the choice of authorized texts, which is a “literary” (i.e., theoretical) concern, and the method of presentation, which is practical. Unlike theorists of the socialized text, Hill asserts that “the textual facts are not altered by the form in which they are presented to a reader” (47) and that, since the same edition sponsors different readings, McGann has not proven a causal connection between editions and critical readings. Here Hill uses “fact” to cover a fluid state of affairs. It is hardly a provocation to say that editorial facts are often fictitious—that is, they depend as much on the plausibility or coherence of variants as on undisputed evidence of transmission.¹ Hill warns that an editor who agrees with Shillingsburg about the determining force of interpretation may edit a text to justify an interpretation. This risk, however, is unavoidable. Editions do not come into existence in a state of innocence. Editors set out to solve interpretive problems. *Caveat lector*. A greater danger may be posed by an editor who does not recognize his interpretive bias or who makes choices seem inevitable through what Paul Eggert wittily calls “the rhetoric of strenuous inevitability.” On the other hand, Hill is right to complain about the paucity of discussion in *Devils and Angels* of how “literary theories might generate distinctive editions as well as readings” (48) and to predict that the next challenge will be “to learn how far an edition that [has] been prepared under the influence of any particular literary theory might differ from an edition prepared according to a different theory of literary criticism” (55). Alas, none of the contributors take up this gauntlet.

Several contributors test the “ideology” of textual criticism by reading through the prism of a disjunctive terminology. In “The Manifestation and Accommodation of Theory in Textual Editing,” D. C. Greetham practices what the Sophists called “epideictic rhetoric,” stressing the relativity of what we can know. He undertakes a “misprision” of textual criticism from the perspective of psychoanalysis à la Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Julia Kristeva. By personifying the text and considering editing on the analogy of “dream work,” he hopes to reveal the hidden ideologies of ed-

1. Charles L. Ross, “Civilization and Its Discontents in the Editing of Lawrence,” *Documentary Editing* 12, no. 3 (September 1990): 42–43.

iting as a prelude to liberating the “repressed” stages of composition in some utopian editorial format. The essay is part of an ambitious project of “rereading [textual criticism] through the other ideologies (structuralism, phenomenology, and the rest)” (98).

Paul Eggert also aims to demystify the ideology of “product” implicit in the eclectic edition. In “Textual Product or Textual Process” Eggert skillfully debunks both the rhetoric of eclecticism that privileges final product over process and the poststructuralist and historicist rhetoric that displaces the author. The curious effect, however, is to reinforce the teleology of the eclectic edition. While arguing against Hans Zeller’s structuralism, for example, he assumes that final revisions must be accepted because of the “obvious effort on the author’s part to get that idea out right” (72). To reveal editorially the process of composition, Eggert believes, would reinstall the author, deposed by poststructuralists, as the primary agent of textuality (66). That is, Eggert subscribes to the reigning ideology of the author-centered, Ptolemaic universe of eclecticism. Though he says that “literary works usually consist of multiple, often competing, texts in all of which the author may have been intimately involved” (66), he discusses neither the divided mind of an author at work nor the collaborative aspects of authorship. And it is precisely when author and conditions intersect, as they must in publishing, that the differences between choice and chance or voluntary and coerced become more problematical than the theory of the eclectic edition has been willing to admit. One may share Eggert’s belief that the author remains “the most significant textual agency” without undervaluing, as he does in a one-paragraph survey of the production history of D. H. Lawrence, the benefit of an author’s collaboration with the agencies of production. It is reductive to call Edward Garnett “a publisher’s reader” and to portray his role in cutting the manuscript of *Sons and Lovers* as merely obstructive. In practice, then, Eggert does not use authorial agency simply as first among equals but rather as the exclusive vantage from which to devalue the contributions of other agencies in the creative process. Consequently, Eggert also slights the inferential nature of “authors.” For example, he approves the Cambridge method of rejecting revisions in cases where Lawrence worked on a corrupt text and, therefore, “did not have the opportunity to revise his own work” (71). On the other hand, he approves Cambridge’s retention of the same sort of “impure” revisions where they are “linked thematically to other changes” (71). This separation of revision and corruption into different classes, however, depends on a self-confirming interpretation. After all, when can a thematic link between revisions *not* be found or, conversely, *not* be denied?

In “Issues of Identity and Utterance: An Intentionalist Response to ‘Textual Instability,’” James McLaverty takes up the issue of versions, generally neglected in Anglo-American textual criticism. He ties the work to a moment of utterance or publication, arguing by analogy that a writer, like a potter, achieves final intentions by progressively destroying early attempts. That is, “authors do not mean anything at all by the history of their work, but they do mean something by the text published in 1892 or 1989” (144). Hence Hans Gabler’s synoptic edition of *Ulysses*, which aims to present the process of the work, contains “a very great deal that is not *Ulysses* at all” (141–42). In fact, the same could be said of an eclectic text that assembles variants from diachronically distinct versions, thereby severing the reading text from publishing history. The limitation of McLaverty’s theory of versions is revealed in a joke: “most readers,” he quips, “are interested in the author’s meaning, not that of his nephew or compositor” (148). True, but that’s not an argument for leaving out of account the author’s collaboration with the agents or means of production, a history which has been preserved, unlike the potter’s early forms.

Hans Walter Gabler also believes that the “concept of the version” lies at the “epicenter” of current upheavals in textual criticism. Gabler briefly surveys German notions of a version, finding their “text-related” historicity superior to the “author-centered” notions of Bowers or Hershel Parker or, we may add, McLaverty. McGann, he believes, exaggerates the amount of variance stemming from social collaboration and underestimates the preponderance of authorial variance evident in “texts upon texts” of the same work (155). Gabler would replace “error” with “variance” and the teleology of copy-text editing with a structuralist notion of many synchronic versions slicing up the diachronic progress of the work. The German critics, according to Gabler, are united in viewing authorial revision as creative variance rather than “error.” In fact, Gabler’s synoptic edition of *Ulysses* attempted to wed Anglo-American and German methods by presenting a reading text on the recto pages and a genetic apparatus on the verso. By privileging a structuralist concept of version, moreover, the Germans have effectively neutralized the concept of final intention. Instead of “authority” and “intention,” key words among Anglo-American textualists, the Germans speak of “authorization.” This purely formal notion has the advantage of including the social/collaborative facts that have troubled the Anglo-Americans, but the disadvantage of being “peculiarly document-related” (163). So, Gabler predicts, the next stage in German text-criticism must consider how to treat “error” in structurally authorized versions. It is surely an irony that German textualists

have rediscovered what Greg called the "tyranny of copy-text," an allegiance to one documentary form of the text. By a commodious vicus (as James Joyce might say) of recirculation Gabler's German colleagues have reinvented the problem that the Anglo-American school set out to solve.

I have not done justice to the richness of *Devils and Angels*. For example, I have skipped Joseph Grigley's outline in "The Textual Event" of a "phenomenology" of textual production as a branch of what he hopes will become the "philosophy of textual criticism." I shall conclude by pointing out two aspects of editing and theory that might be explored.

First, collaboration between the author and all the agents or agencies of transmission is a strangely neglected topic in *Devils and Angels*. As Steven Mailloux observes, even McGann's demarcation of the author-publisher collaboration cannot escape appearing as "arbitrary" as Bowers's or G. Thomas Tanselle's of the author. Why? Because "the publishing apparatus is just as enmeshed in material and ideological social formations and networks of power as the author is" (130). Mailloux calls for the "theoretical practice of editing" as a way of reconceptualizing the political question of agency. What might be a productive theory of agency in the aftermath of poststructuralism's undermining of the autonomous individual and the unified self?

Second, as William Cain remarks, the essays in *Devils and Angels* "do not take up the relationship between textual studies and pedagogy" (197). Only McGann ventures a brief example of a graduate editing project, but even he does not mention the potential of the computer to empower students. Nor is there any discussion of the readerly limitations of new formats. Gabler's facing-page apparatus, for example, is quite unreadable in its present form but possibly the basis for an electronically layered text. Could editions constructed by computer present a readable archaeology of the work in all its textual versions?

Finally, I counted twenty typographical errors, including one missing footnote and a cross-reference to the wrong version of an essay. There is, as yet, no theory of proofreading.

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Members who wish to use this service should send ten copies of a résumé (not to exceed three pages) and include a covering letter with additional information for the placement officer.

NHPRC Recommends Thirty-seven Grants

The National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) met on 16 June 1992 and recommended \$73,100 for two continuing documentary editions projects, \$48,000 for four subventions to university presses, and \$1,205,500 for twenty-eight historical records projects. The commission also recommended \$75,000 for three fellowships in historical editing. The grant recommendations were made in response to more than \$4,250,000 in requests.

J. Franklin Jameson and the Development of Humanistic Scholarship in America (American Historical Association, Washington, D.C.) received a grant of \$50,000, and *Race, Slavery, and Free Blacks: Petitions to Southern Legislatures and County Courts, 1775-1866* (University of North Carolina at Greensboro) received a grant of up to \$23,100.

Subvention grants of \$12,000 each were awarded to the University Press of Kentucky for *The Papers of Henry Clay*, the University Press of Virginia for *The Papers of George Washington, Colonial Series*, volume 8, and Fordham University Press for *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant*, volumes 5 and 6.

Fellowships in Historical Editing (jointly funded by the NHPRC and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) of \$25,000 each for ten months were awarded to James R. Tracy (Ph.D. candidate at Stanford University) at *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Stanford University, José Ignacio Avellaneda (Ph.D., University of Florida, 1990) at *The Journals of Diego de Vargas*, University of New Mexico at Albuquerque, and Gregory D. Massey (Ph.D. candidate at the University of South Carolina) at *Naval Documents of the American Revolution and The Naval War of 1812*, Naval Historical Center, Washington, D.C.

During its meeting, the reappointments of Senator Paul Sarbanes and Charles Palm were announced. In addition, the commission heard from its Records, Publications, and Long-range Planning committees.

The next meeting of the commission is scheduled for 17 and 18 November 1992. The next deadline for application submissions or proposals is 1 October 1992.

Application materials for records or publications projects may be requested by phone or by mail:

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