

T E X T

Transactions of the Society
for Textual Scholarship

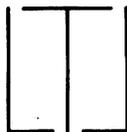
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Edited by

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The Text as Process and the Problem of Intentionality

HANS WALTER GABLER

For well over a decade now, I believe, we have seen a productive process of critical reorientation of editing. This has been a reorientation towards the foundations of textual studies and editorial practice in criticism, and a critical—or meta-critical—reflection on the definable—or perhaps not always so easily definable—concepts of ‘work’, ‘author’, ‘text’ or ‘intention’ in their implications for the pragmatic operations of our discipline, and their results. Seen as problematical, these concepts have gained in critical contour, although the complexity in which they stand revealed as relevant to textual analysis and editing has not necessarily made them easier to handle—and not at all easy to handle, it would seem, within the framework of the conventional model of the critical edition, hierarchically structured and designed, on a copy-text basis, to establish a stable reading text of unquestioned privilege. Hitherto, this model has been least affected by the process of critical reorientation, understandably so, for its assumed inviolability has provided the heuristic stepping-stone in the restructuring of the conceptual background of critical editing that we have been engaged in. Yet the point may now have been reached when our conceptions of the nature, the aims, and the potential of a critical edition, as well as those of the functional relationship of edition and editor, come into question. In this context, I venture to offer some reflections on the text as process and the problem of authorial intention.

Jerome McGann’s *Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* of 1983, as we are all aware, is quite specifically a critique of the high functional role assigned to ‘authorial intention’ and ‘final authorial intention’ in current Anglo-American textual thinking.¹ Recognising that role as a post-Greg ramification of the methodology erected on

the foundations of Sir Walter Greg's "Rationale of Copy-Text," McGann insists on severing again the connection, meanwhile fairly ingrained, between Greg's reasoned recommendations of how, in the face of divergent textual materials, to arrive pragmatically at editorial decisions, and the subsequently-positd ideal of the critical edition as the global fulfillment of an author's intention. Thomas Tanselle, in his 1976 essay in *Studies in Bibliography* entitled "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention," assumes a general agreement on this ideal.² "Scholarly editors may disagree about many things," he opens his essay, "but they are in general agreement that their goal is to discover exactly what an author wrote and to determine what form of his work he wished the public to have." The statement falls into two parts. Following McGann's cue, we may consider that the second part ". . . and to determine what form of his work [the author] wished the public to have," if it means "to determine what form of his work, *so as to establish it as the critically edited text*, the author wished the public to have," does not follow inevitably from the first. Observance of the public form of the work and the intentionality implied in the act of publication carry considerable weight with McGann and Tanselle as, perhaps, with most theorists in the field. Implied in my subsequent argument is the contention that the published form of a work need not categorically be an editor's main, and overriding, point of orientation. Under given conditions, rather, a critical edition *qua* critical edition may legitimately claim the privilege of bringing into focus a form or forms of the work not attained in publication.

My immediate point of departure, however, is the first part of Tanselle's statement. Holding that the goal of editors is "to discover exactly what the authors wrote," it addresses the editorial problem of establishing a text in every single and individual detail. Specifically, it would seem, 'to discover exactly what the author wrote' involves considering intention when what the author wrote in fact needs to be discovered because it is not evident, that is, when what he wrote is not at all, or at best mediately, documented. This, clearly enough, marks the point of entry of the notion of authorial intention into the methodological rationale of critical editing as we currently know it. To assess and determine the author's intention is deemed necessary or desirable, basically, in respect of individual readings. Here, in passing, and unless we hold it an axiom that the whole of a text is merely, and nothing but, the sum of its textual parts, we may

well concede to McGann's critique the point that to raise the notion of authorial intention from such basic application to the level of an overriding editorial principle is, at the very least, fraught with theoretical difficulty.

On the basic level of constitution of critical texts, to assess and determine authorial intention in respect of individual readings may be recognised as a rule of editorial procedure analogous to Greg's rule of following the copy-text for indifferent readings. For indifferent variants encountered in an editorial situation, follow the copy-text; for invariant, yet suspect readings, follow the author. Thus paired, these rules are designed to avoid or eliminate potential or manifest transmissional error when establishing a stable critical text from documents that, however manifestly or inferrably corrupt, essentially provide only a single substantive basis.

At a further level, authorial intention is invoked in situations where, according to current editorial practice, two or more substantive bases call for procedures of eclectic editing. What defines each basis as substantive is the manifest or inferred fact of authorial revision. The variants relevant to the act or acts of revision stand opposed no longer as 'erroneous' and 'correct'—that is, 'wrong' and 'right'—but as 'invalid' and 'valid.' Thus it is here that the extended notion of 'final authorial intention' properly comes into play. Yet since the editorial concern remains with 'exactly what the author wrote', the 'final authorial intention,' too, is assessed properly only in respect of individual readings in pairs or series of authorial variants.

It should also be noted, however, that the construing of 'authorial intention' as a common point of perspective seems to overshadow the appreciation of a difference in kind between authorial variants and transmissional errors: the common manner of dealing with authorial variants reveals no fundamental change, even hardly a ripple of adjustment, in editorial thinking and procedure. 'Valid' and 'invalid' become subsumed under the categories 'correct' and 'erroneous' (or 'right' and 'wrong'). In establishing a critical text, the final one among revisional variants is admitted as the right reading because it would—obviously—be wrong to retain its antecedent, thereby annihilating the act of revision. What is near-to-annihilated instead in the established critical edition is the superseded authorial variant, relegated as it is to apparatus lists in footnotes or at the back of the book, together with the bulk of rejected transmis-

sional errors. This mode of editorial procedure is naturally furthered by the circumstance that revisional situations to be dealt with in acts of eclectic editing appear always embedded in surroundings from which the critical text must be established against transmissional corruption. The editorial approach levels out the categories of variants that differ in their nature, and the desired result remains the stable critical text.

An edition that, in providing a stable reading text, relegates superseded authorial variants much as it rejects transmissional errors may in a sense claim to be modelled on the result of an author's endeavour to arrive at the form of the work he wishes the public to have, in a text of "final authorial intention." That result is always the result of revision, and revision—from the author's point of view—implies rejection. But authorial rejection cannot be equated with editorial rejection. Authorial revision and rejection spring from willed, and essentially free, choice. Editorial rejection, by contrast, results from critical assessment and is pre-determined by the textual materials on which the critical sense is exercised. What the editor rejects—what it is an important part of his critical business to reject—are extraneous elements of textual corruption. Under this category, however, authorial rejections—that is, superseded authorial variants witnessing to the authorial acts of writing and the text's development—cannot properly be subsumed. Yet they are tendentially so subsumed in a type of edition that emulates a text of final authorial intention in the form of a stable critical text. It appears, therefore, that the underlying edition model does not answer adequately to the process character of the text under the author's revisional hand.

What the edition model implicitly posits is an editor vicariously assuming an authorial role. This shows as much in his trained focus on a stable text (oftentimes termed an 'ideal text') as it does in his claim to be fulfilling the author's intention. To attempt, in search of a viable alternative edition model, to recast the editor not in an authorial, but in a properly editorial role involves therefore trying to define a specifically editorial perspective on the questions of textual stability and of authorial intention.

A work revised in successive stages signals the author's free intentional choices at any given textual stage, and the aggregate of stages may justifiably be considered to embody his final intentions with regard to the work as a whole. Yet, since the author's choices

are in principle free, the aggregate of stages is also always in principle open to further modification through continued revision. This means that the text of a work under the author's hand is in principle unstable. Instability is an essential feature of the text in progress. Nevertheless, the author who is always free to continue to revise is also free by an act of will to close the process of revision, which he does by publishing or otherwise leaving the text. This may appear as an achievement of textual stability by a performative act of final intention. However, the stability achieved—barring transmissional corruption by which it remains threatened—is strictly that of a specific textual version. It does not cancel out the instability of the text in process, which the author can at most set aside, but never undo. Nor can the editor undo it, and, regardless of the author's attitude, he may choose—indeed, he has the freedom—not to set it aside. Since the instability of the text in process is not cancelled out by the final or any other authorial textual version, it can and should not be editorially neglected—though this is what happens in a critical edition hierarchically oriented towards a stable critical text.

Yet textual instability that is an expression of free intentional choice from the authorial angle takes on a different aspect under editorial perspective. Whereas for the author the text is open and indeterminate, for the editor it is determinate. Its instability is confined within the complex, yet closed system of the words and signs on paper that convey the author's revisionally stratified text. The author's rejections and revisions are in the nature of events. They leave a record when, though only in so far as, committed to paper. As events they are tied up and ramified in contexts, yet as records they appear particularized and localised as variant readings. The variant records thus do not constitute the authorial acts of rejection and revision themselves. Rather, they represent them as written deeds of textual invalidation and validation. It is these localised written deeds that the editor is confronted with and that he—and the critic to whom he ministers in preparing an edition—must in turn analytically read. The text in the determinate record of its instability falls to the editor therefore not for the fulfillment of its real or assumed teleology, but for the description and analysis of its documentary existence. It is because the record is determinate that it becomes amenable to editorial scrutiny and treatment at all. Yet underlying the text recorded are the intention-guided processes that cause its instability. The process-character of the text is thus

ultimately due to the process-nature of authorial intention. Hence authorial intention cannot rightly provide a constitutive basis, statically conceived, for editorial performance. Instead, being the constitutive base of the text (as is implied in the record of willed textual changes), authorial intention, as the dynamic mover of textual processes, requires to be editorially set forth for critical analysis. So viewed, authorial intention is not a metaphysical notion to be fulfilled but a textual force to be studied.

It were a task beyond the scope allowed me today to pass at this point from the general to the specific and to develop in all its relevant features of design an edition model that would answer to the theoretical demand. It is likely, indeed, that no single model would answer, but that, with the shifting of 'authorial intention' from an absolute to a relative position in the theory of editing and, hence, within the conceptual design of a critical edition, one would look to different forms of editorial realisation to present, and be capable of presenting, authorial intention as a textual force to be studied.

I will refer only very summarily to the critical edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* as an edition realised on the theoretical assumptions I have outlined.³ Its innovative synoptic apparatus notation analysing the genetic progression of the work is designed precisely to lay open the records reflecting the operation of the author's intentions in the making of the text. But it also draws editorial critical conclusions from that operation. As a consequence—and this should not be overlooked—the edition provides a reading text, extrapolated from and, as it were, merely accompanying the synoptically notated edition text, whose shape and apparent stability are explicitly of editorial critical making. What it makes explicit, however, has always been implicit in the acts of editing. The stability of a critical text conceived and presented wholly as a reading text is equally of editorial making. Hence, too, a critically edited text can never claim to be definitive; indeed, the notion of 'definitiveness' would seem logically incongruous with the precepts of scholarly critical editing.

These realisations may appear daunting, and it might be considered 'safer' in their light not to aim at providing reading texts at all, but instead to define apparatus formats only as properly equivalent to the process-character of texts. This is a concept quite seriously entertained by some theoreticians and practitioners of editing for example, in Germany.⁴ It emphasises the presentation of textual matter over the critical establishment of text, or texts. If ultimately

untenable, in my opinion, for the editing of texts from a multi-document basis (“Textedition”), it is arguably justifiable in the specialised field of “Handschriftenedition,” i.e., the editing of manuscripts as manuscripts. Here, in specific editorial situations, presentation may well be given precedence over critical editing, and editorial judgement firmly relegated to apparatus sections devised for the purpose. An extremely interesting case in point has been developed by the Brecht scholar and editor Gerhard Seidel, who in a recent article has offered an apparatus model expressly designed for the study and discussion of Brecht’s shifting intention in the course of versions of a poem reacting to the implied political stance taken by the poem’s addressee, Karl Kraus, toward the coming into power of the Nazi regime. The salient feature in this apparatus model is a discursive apparatus section explicating the contextual implications of the authorial rejections and revisions as displayed in the sequence of discrete versions—each a text to be read, but none the edition’s reading text—that make up the textual section itself of the edition.⁵

The devising of a discursive apparatus section is a telling indication that an edition opening up ‘authorial intention’ as a subject for study is itself situated at the systematic point of intersection of editing and literary criticism. It is a point of intersection that ‘critique génétique,’ such as it has been developed in France—and into which the contributions of Dr. Hay and Dr. Lebrave give further insights, approaches from the critical angle. Critical discourse and editorial presentation always run close, and are often interdependent. In the extended version on my 1981 STS paper recently published in *TEXT* 1,⁶ as you may recall, I develop a critical discourse from the synoptic notation of a passage in *Ulysses* for which I might not have found the critical clues had I not first edited the text. To end my paper today, I wish, on a mainly descriptive level, to sketch out a ‘critique-génétique’-type of approach to some textual materials for which an editorial presentation format has not yet been developed. The work concerned is Ezra Pound’s *Canto LI*, whose preserved manuscript materials I have quite recently happened to encounter. They permit some fascinating glimpses of authorial intentions in progress.

Two or three segments into the published text, we get involved in a section concerned with fly-fishing. It culminates:

as a form cleaving to it
 from “possibilis et agens” is the intellect adept,
 est intellectus adeptus compositus
 Deus similis modo, and to know what all desire,
 this is felicity contemplativa.

On several separate sheets of typescript, whose temporal relationship is not readily discernible, variations are played on this collocation of ideas, while on other sheets, and independently, as it seems, the fly-fishing motif is elaborated. In the draft fluidities, then, the two complexes at some point merge, most remarkably so perhaps in the amalgamation achieved in these lines from one draft fragment:

Das Endlich, said Hess, a means of understanding
 together
 shd be found between nations. Toiling over the booty
 Fish to be caught with cunning;
 small or fly
 dry hackle. etc

Here the contextual yoke permits us to recognise a significant transposition to metaphor of the fishing image. The explicit directness is transitory, as the printed version shows. But it holds a clue to the background of intentions and meaning governing the wording as well as the juxtaposition of segments in *Canto LI*. A marginal note added in ink to the incantatory (first?) draft would appear to signal the impulse from which the poem’s meanings changed direction. It reads: “Follows lgty murder of Dollfuss.” The act of *Realpolitik* perpetrated in late July 1934, by which Nazi Germany callously turned the course of neighbouring Austria’s politics to its own ends, dampens the enthusiasm with which the invocation of an understanding between nations was first greeted. The public phrases stand revealed as baits of oratory cunningly held out to the unwary. Implicit in the work, then, is political meaning, and evident from the fragments of the work’s genesis are the dramatic shifts of intention that control the utterance in the recorded endeavours to infuse such meaning into the poetry.

An edition of Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* is nowhere yet in sight. If and when it is undertaken, it cannot merely aim at establishing a text. It can hope to be an adequate response to the work only if it lays open the text in process as moved into multiple directions and dimensions of meaning by force of developing and shifting authorial intentions.⁷

NOTES

1. Jerome J. McGann, *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983.
2. G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intention." *Studies in Bibliography*, 29 (1976), 167-211.
3. James Joyce, *Ulysses. A Critical and Synoptic Edition*. Prepared by Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior. 3 vols. New York & London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1984.
4. See especially Gunter Martens, "Textdynamik und Edition." in: Gunter Martens und Hans Zeller (eds.), *Texte und Varianten*. München: C. H. Beck, 1971, pp. 165-201.
5. Gerhard Seidel, "Intentionswandel in der Entstehungsgeschichte. Ein Gedicht Bertolt Brechts über Karl Kraus historisch-kritisch ediert." *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 101 (Sonderheft: *Probleme neugermanistischer Edition*), 1982, 163-188.
6. Hans Walter Gabler, "The Synchrony and Diachrony of Texts: Practice and Theory of the Critical Edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*." *TEXT* 1 (1984 for 1981), 305-326.
7. Interest in text processes and their exploration through critical theory are beginning to make it possible to think of editing Ezra Pound's *Cantos*. A preliminary discussion, though not often very close as yet to the hard, if elusive, textual facts, is gathering momentum. A recent installment is the "Coda" to Jerome J. McGann, "*Ulysses* as a Postmodern Text: The Gabler Edition." *Criticism*, 27 (1984-85), 283-306. Highly stimulating in its theoretic implications is the monograph by Christine Froula, *To Write Paradise: Style and Error in Pound's Cantos*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1984.

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