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THE SOCIALIZATION OF TEXTS

I

[Several] years ago G. Thomas Tanselle published an influential essay for scholars, 'The Editing of Historical Documents'. This paper was written as a strong, if also a friendly, critique of postwar work in historical editing. Tanselle argued that historical editing had, in general, been based upon an inadequate understanding of the nature of text. In this regard, according to Tanselle, many distinguished historical editing projects lagged far behind analogous projects undertaken by literary scholars. The problem was that historical editors, in contrast to their literary counterparts, had been too 'apt to neglect the physical form in which the evidence on which they subsist has been preserved'.¹

This judgment must have come as a surprise to most historical editors, since the nature of their principal material – its documentary character – forces them to encounter the physique of their texts in ways that many literary editors do not experience. But Tanselle showed that historical editors were making excessive interventions into the documents being edited, changing text in misguided and often contradictory efforts to deliver the material in more efficient or accessible ways.

Today few people – certainly not I – would disagree with Tanselle's plea that editors should give the greatest respect to the physical integrity of the documents. Most of what I wish to argue here will involve an extrapolation of Tanselle's plea. But to the extent that Tanselle's essay focussed on the editing of manuscript-based materials, his representation of the problems confronting literary editors can be misleading.

The heart of his theoretical argument rests in his insistence that no sharp distinction should be made in the editorial policy applied to historical and to literary texts: 'No clear line can be drawn between writing which is "literature" and writing which is not' (495), Tanselle says, and he adduces various examples, all very much – so far as they go – to the point. He then adds, however, that 'a distinction does need to be made, not between literary and historical materials [but between] works intended for publication and private papers' (496). Tanselle gives about one-third of a single page to a discussion of this important matter – his essay is fifty-six pages long – and then proceeds

to say that 'this is not the place to explore' the distinction he has drawn. 'The point here', he remarks, 'is to contrast that situation [i.e., text involved in a publishing venue] with the very different one which exists for private documents' (497).

When Tanselle rejects the distinction between a historical and a literary document — between informational and aesthetic works — he sets a gulf between himself and a textual theorist like Hershel Parker. Parker is aware, I am sure, that a historical work can be pursued or considered within an aesthetic horizon. Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* is probably as much a work of art as it is a work of history. He must be equally aware that literary works always disseminate historical information. Nonetheless, Parker, like Aristotle, would not want to collapse the distinction between these two kinds of work because they epitomize the difference between a form of writing that is committed to facticity and information, and a form that is, by contrast, devoted to creation.

History and literature differ, that is to say, along the line of their intentionalities. This being the case, we find in Parker's work a passionate engagement with the issue of literary intention. Parker's insistence that editors of literary works should return to authorial manuscripts wherever possible represents his desire to position the text in as close a relation to its authoritative source as possible. For literary work, in this view, is the creative expression of an individual's quest for meaning and order. The scholarly editor's task is to clarify as much as one can the artistic process of creative activity, for it is that process which is the literary work, whether we look at the work as a carrier of meaning (informational) or as a creative event (aesthetic).

Furthermore, if Parker, in contrast to Tanselle, maintains a clear distinction between historical and literary work, he reverses Tanselle's text-theoretical distinction between private papers and public (normally, for our period, printed) texts. Tanselle takes the distinction as a sign that some texts (typically, 'creative works') seek wide dissemination and a kind of iconic perfection, whereas others (typically, private documents) do not. But for Parker, the question of dissemination through printing is secondary, if not irrelevant, to the primary issue of artistic creativity.

For this reason Parker argues that Bowers and Tanselle are confused on the issue of intentionality. Their confusion is most apparent in the value they set upon so-called eclectic editing. To proceed with an editorial process along those lines is, for Parker, at best to court and at worst to ensure an unhappy result. The eclectic edition is by definition *not* a single authorial construct but a polyglot formation imagined by the editor. Furthermore, if the eclectic edition is based on a printed version of the work rather than an authorial manuscript version, the result will be to move even further from that moment 'when the artist was most in control' of his own work.²

I detail these matters here in order to position my argument with respect to this seminal debate. In what follows, therefore, I shall be trying to explain why I stand with Parker (and against Tanselle) in maintaining the distinction between historical and literary work, and why I support Tanselle (as against Parker) in Tanselle's view of the distinction between private and public documents. My own view of literary work, and hence of how to go about editing it, rests on this pair of distinctions. Furthermore, the distinctions highlight the centrality of literary texts for understanding the textual condition.

II

I have no disagreement with Parker, or Bowers, or Tanselle on a great many issues of editorial procedure. I take it we all agree that no scholarly editing can take place which does not enumerate all the relevant texts and establish their genetic or collateral relations. We also agree that all such information should be made available to readers who wish to judge both the nature and the executive adequacy of the edition. On other technical matters we differ. We do not agree, for instance, on the criteria for establishing copy-text; we also differ, in various ways, on

the appropriateness of copy-text editing (which is to say, 'eclectic' editing) for different kinds of text.

But these are not the subjects I mean to discuss here. Rather, I want to explore a pair of topics that expose the kind of approach I take toward editing literary works. The first deals with the question of multiple artistic intentionalities. The second concerns the aesthetic dimension of documentary materials.

Contemporary text theory, in the arena of literary scholarship, founded itself on the idea of authorial intentions. No one, of course, repudiates either the reality or the importance of authorial intentionality for the problem of text theory or editorial method. What is at issue is how absolutely the concept of authorial intention is to be understood *so far as the editing of literary works is concerned*. For Parker, the sole criterion on which a literary-editorial project ought to be based is the criterion of authorial intention. Furthermore, Parker postulates for every literary work an ideal process of creation. This process may become diverted or corrupted in many ways, by the author or by any number of other agents. The editor's task is to cut through those diversions and corruptions in order to reveal, as purely as possible, the original artist's creative intention.

Bowers and Tanselle also base their editorial theories on the concept of authorial intention. But because they discern in the production of literary works the presence of multiple authorial intentions, they seek to make compromises between the options offered by the diversity of textual witnesses. These compromises appear as the eclectic edition, which is an editorial construction built up from a copy-text. That copy-text becomes 'eclectic' when the editor, after examining the relevant documents, introduces readings from other textual witnesses which are judged to exhibit greater authority than the authority of the copy-text.

Parker criticizes the eclectic approach because it violates his notion of artistic integrity. The creative process for him is the artist's rage for order, which cannot be well approximated when an editor seeks for rationally derived compromises. It succeeds least of all if an editor grants equal authority to printed as to manuscript materials. In this situation, Parker devalues printed texts because they cannot embody the integrity of the artist's vision — too many other agents are involved in the production of such work. The job of the editor is to rescue the work from the chaos of conflicting and secondary authorities and agents — including the author's own secondary thoughts.

Eclectic editors, for their part, observe the scene somewhat differently. Where Parker sees randomness obscuring a hidden wholeness, the eclectic editor observes a kind of textual solar system, with the famous 'copy-text' standing as the center of gravity around which many textual planets move and have their being. 'Copy-text' is the still point in the turning world of a diversity of secondary or dependent texts.

But suppose the textual condition does not correspond to either of these imaginings. Suppose, for example, that the textual condition were to appear in the likeness of D. G. Rossetti's poetic sequence *The House of Life*. This work, as we have seen, was produced in multiple versions. Some of these versions stand in a genetic line of relation with each other, and hence could be taken for the dependencies of a primary authority. But one of the versions does not stand in such a relation, and the work breaks up into other kinds of independent units within each of the larger versions. Besides, the standard version of this work is a posthumous editorial construction made up from a decision about how to treat the heterodox amalgam of textual deposits.

Multiple versions of many Shakespeare works also come down to us — most notoriously, *King Lear* — and this situation is not merely common in the case of theatrical work, it is the rule. Today, the very concept of the famous 'bad quartos', once firmly established in editorial treatment of Shakespeare, has been undermined. Furthermore, it is equally typical that alterations in the

texts of plays are the consequence of the collective efforts of the theatrical company. Texts change under the pressure of immediate events.

Charles Lamb's highly artistic essay — they are really types of prose poem — appear as one thing when they are first published in *The London Magazine*, and as quite other things when he moves to have them produced in book form. The Cuala Press editions of Yeats's poems differ sharply from the texts brought out (almost at the same time) under the Macmillan imprint.

But there is no call to multiply examples. The problem is well known. Let me just conclude with the startling case of Ezra Pound's last published installment of his *Cantos* project, the section known as *Drafts and Fragments*. Here it is not merely that an extreme indeterminacy governs the state of the texts. More difficult is the fact, now well documented, that various agents besides Pound were involved in the production of this work.³ I should also make it clear that this case is just an extreme instance of something one discovers repeatedly in literary studies. Traditional ballads and songs typically descend to us through wildly heterodox lines of textual transmission. In such cases, trying to edit on the basis of any concept of 'authorial intention' or 'authorial control' is simply impossible.

Of course, each of these versions may be usefully studied as a singular example of a creative process, as may the two texts of *King Lear*, or the multiple versions of Stoppard's plays. Literary editing should encourage that kind of study. Nevertheless, literary work by its very nature sets in motion many kinds of creative intentionalities. These orbit in the universe of the creative work — but not around some imaginary and absolute center. Rather, they turn through many different kinds of motion, at many structural scales, and in various formal relationships. The universe of poesis no more has an absolute center than does the stellar universe we have revealed through our astronomy. What it has are many relative centers which are brought to our attention by our own acts of observation. The universe of literature is socially generated and does not exist in a steady state. Authors themselves do not have, *as authors*, singular identities; an author is a plural identity and more resembles what William James liked to call the human world at large, a multiverse.

Literary texts differ from informational texts by being polyvocal. Whereas 'noise' is always a form of corruption for a channel of information, it can be exploited in literary texts for positive results. The thicker the description, so far as an artist is concerned, the better. (Minimalist styles of art thicken their media by processes of subtraction and absence.) A thickened text is a scene where metaphor and metonymy thrive (Coleridge's 'opposite or discordant qualities', his 'sameness with difference'). For Parker, the thickness comes from the artists' imaginative resources, who can be counted on to put into their texts far more than even they are aware of. Parker's 'intention' includes, crucially, the vast resources of the unconscious and preconscious.

But thickness is also built through the textual presence and activities of many non-authorial agents. These agencies may be the artist's contemporaries — these are the examples most often adduced — or they may not; furthermore, the agencies may hardly be imagined as 'individuals' at all. The texts of Sappho, for example, gain much of their peculiar power from their fragmented condition, and the same is true for various ballads and songs, which exploit their textual fractures and absences for poetic results.

Most important of all, however, so far as the *aesthesis* of texts is concerned, are the scholars and institutions of transmission who hand our cultural deposits down to us. Texts emerge from these workshops in ever more rich and strange forms. Indeed, readers sometimes complain that cultural transmitters interfere with the original texts too much, that they make them appear too difficult, too alien — too thick and encumbered. And no doubt there are many helpless and hopeless interventions. But who is to say for certain which they are? Besides, 'literary' work, in its textual condition, is not meant for transparency, is not designed to carry messages. Messages may be taken

from such work, but always and only by acts of simplification and diminishment. So readers, in those ghostly shapes we call critics and scholars, hear many voices in the texts they study. Like Tennyson's sea, what is literary 'moans round' with many such voices. In doing and being so, texts put the features of textuality on fullest display.

III

To this point I have been taking the word 'text' to signify the linguistic text, the verbal outcome at every level (from the most elementary forms of single letters and punctuation marks up to the most complex rhetorical structures that comprise the particular linguistic event). And even if we agree, for practical purposes, to restrict the term 'text' to this linguistic signification, we cannot fail to see that literary works typically secure their effects by other than purely linguistic means. Every literary work that descends to us operates through the deployment of a double helix of perceptual codes: the linguistic codes, on one hand, and the bibliographical codes on the other.

We recognize the latter simply by *looking* at a medieval literary manuscript – or at any of William Blake's equivalent illuminated texts produced in (the teeth of) the age of mechanical reproduction. Or at Emily Dickinson's manuscript books of poetry, or her letters. In each of these cases the physique of the 'document' has been forced to play an aesthetic function, has been made part of the 'literary work'. That is to say, in these kinds of literary works the distinction between physical medium and conceptual message breaks down completely.

I could adduce scores of similar examples of works generated out of the production mechanisms developed by printing institutions. The most obvious are the ornamental texts produced, for example, by writers like William Morris, but the books published by Whitman, Yeats, W. C. Williams, and Pound – to name only the most obvious examples – make the same point. Less apparent, but no less significant, are the novels of Dickens and Thackeray, or the serial fictions produced throughout the nineteenth century – topics I shall elaborate upon in a moment. If Tanselle cannot easily draw a distinction between a historical and a literary work, it is just as difficult to distinguish, in all these cases, between that which is documentary and that which is literary. The physical presentation of these printed texts has been made to serve aesthetic ends.

Textual and editorial theory has heretofore concerned itself almost exclusively with the linguistic codes. The time has come, however, when we have to take greater theoretical account of the other coding network which operates at the documentary and bibliographical level of literary works.

Not that scholars have been unaware of the existence of these bibliographical codes. We have simply neglected to incorporate our knowledge into our theories of text. Surely no editor of Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' – if the editor chose to print the 1816 rather than the 1798 text – would consider placing the famous set of glosses anywhere except in the margin of the work. The glosses have to be *there*, and not set as either footnotes or endnotes, because their bibliographical position is in itself highly meaningful. Placed as they are, the glosses make an important historical allusion that affects the work in the most profound way. A similar kind of historical allusion operates in the ink, type-face, and paper used by William Morris in the first edition of his *The Story of the Glittering Plain* (1891). Both involve literary allusions: the one to medieval conventions of textual glossing, the other to fifteenth-century styles of typography and book production.

As Tanselle has argued, every documentary or bibliographical aspect of a literary work is meaningful, and potentially significant. But Tanselle's clear, practical sense of this matter has not led him to imagine how such materials are to be incorporated into a theory of texts and editing. On the contrary, in fact. He has neglected doing so, I believe, not because of his adherence to an

eclectic model of editing, but because of his unnecessarily restricted view of the processes of literary signification.

A few more examples will clarify what I have in mind. In the current controversy over the edition of *Ulysses*, attention has been focussed on a number of specialized, and largely executive, issues (for example, the *Ulysses*' editors failure to work directly from original documents rather than from photocopies).⁴ The overriding editorial question, however, has always been this: Should Gabler have chosen the 1922 *Ulysses* as copy-text instead of trying to construct as his copy-text (if that is the right term in this peculiar case) the theoretical entity he called in his edition 'the continuous manuscript text'? Without going into the technical issues involved, let me simply observe that John Kidd – Gabler's chief critic – originally took his own preference for the 1922 edition because he detected in that book an elaborate symbolism keyed to the sequence of page numbers. If Joyce's page numbering has been symbolically deployed, that fact has to be registered in the editorial reconstruction. Specifically, the 1922 pagination of *Ulysses* would have to be editorially preserved.

The example of *Ulysses* ought to remind us that many of the key works of the modernist movement in literature, especially the work produced before 1930, heavily exploit the signifying power of documentary and bibliographical materials. The first thirty of Pound's *Cantos*, published in three book installments between 1925 and 1930, are only the most outstanding examples of this fact about modernist texts. A great many similar examples could be cited from modernist writers working all across the Euro-American literary scene.

Nor does the situation change if we move back in time. The case of Thackeray is well known and typical, and the particular example of *Vanity Fair* eloquent. In the first 1848 edition Thackeray himself designed the sixty-six decorated initials and eighty-three vignettes – as well, of course, as the thirty-eight principal illustrations. His surviving manuscript of the novel with his markups shows where he wanted various cuts to appear. Yet most editions of *Vanity Fair* omit these materials altogether, even though they are clearly involved in the structure of the book's meaning. Gordon Ray has pointed out, for example, that while the verbal text 'leaves unanswered the question of whether or not Becky Sharp brought about the death of Jos Sedley[,], his etching of Becky's second appearance in the character of Clytemnestra more than hints that she did'.⁵ Thackeray's decorated cover for the nineteen separate parts of the serially published text (1847–48) is an equally unmistakable case of the book's graphic materials being coded for significance. Indeed, in chapter 8 of the novel the narrator refers to that symbolic design and explicates its meaning.⁶

From a scholarly point of view, it would be difficult to justify an edition of Thackeray that omits the illustrative matter handled at the documentary level of the work. For the novel is not merely 'one of the best illustrated books in the world', it is also an important 'experiment in composite form as much as Edward Lear's *Book of Nonsense*' (1846)⁷ – as much, indeed, as the more famous 'composite art' of William Blake. Indeed, Thackeray explicitly calls attention to his own composite art in the subtitle of his novel: 'Pen (i.e., linguistic) and Pencil (i.e., graphic) Sketches of English Society'.

Yet the same must be said in the case of Dickens, even though Dickens did not, like Blake, Thackeray, and Lear, design his own illustrations. For the texts of Dickens's novels were equally produced as works of composite art, though in this case Dickens supplied only the pen, while others worked with the pencil. The relevance of the illustrative material has been acknowledged throughout the editorial history of Dickens's works, both their scholarly and their commercial history.

Or what would one say of a critical edition of the Alice books that omitted the designs of Sir John Tenniel? So important was Tenniel's work for the first of the Alice books (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865) that his protest at the poor printing of the first edition caused the book to be cancelled altogether.

In fact, we have two distinct versions of this famous book: the version on which Carroll and Tenniel collaborated, published in 1865, and the fair manuscript copy with Carroll's own illustrations made as a Christmas gift for Anne Liddell, and eventually published in 1886. In both cases the verbal text and the documentary materials operate together to a single literary result.

Nor do I mean to isolate for importance, in the case of this work, only the marriage of illustration and text. As Tenniel's protest over the poor printing of the first edition indicates, the entire documentary level of the work must be understood as carrying significance. The fact that one version was conceived as a publishing event, and the other as a manuscript gift book, sets the bibliographical coding for each version on an entirely different footing.

The two versions of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* may well remind us of the variant versions of so many nineteenth-century books, especially the novels. Serial publication of one kind or another was the rule, as were the related publication mechanisms we associate with institutions like the circulating library. Writers worked within those particular sets of circulatory conventions (though they vary with place and time, such conventions always exist) and the literary results – the books issued – are coded for meaning accordingly.

Furthermore, different types of serialization were available. A novel written for weekly serial publication, like Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854),⁸ is not merely *written* differently from one that is written for monthly circulation (or for no serial publication at all); it is *produced* differently and comes into the reader's view via differently defined bibliographical structures of meaning. Or consider the exemplary case of *Oliver Twist*. First issued in serial parts in the monthly magazine *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837–39), it was printed again in three volumes (1838) even before the serial run had been concluded. Then in 1846 it was published again, this time in ten serial installments (the run in *Bentley's Miscellany* had been twenty-four installments). In each of these cases the text is organized very differently. The *Bentley's* and the three volume publications comprise fifty-one chapters, whereas the 1846 serial publication has fifty-three. *Bentley's* is divided into three 'Books', but these do not correspond exactly to the three 'volumes' of 1838. The *Bentley's* serial typically prints two, sometimes three chapters per unit, whereas the monthly numbered parts of 1846 typically contain six, some times five (and in one case, four) chapters.⁹

These kinds of production structures can be exploited for aesthetic effects in particular and always highly individuated ways. *Pickwick Papers* first appeared in serial parts (1836–37), as did *Little Dorrit* (1855–57), but in each case the bibliographical codes are manipulated to unique effect. The latter is one of the late novels, produced twenty years after the groundbreaking effort of *Pickwick Papers*. The early work is far more episodic than the later, so much so that many would be reluctant to call *Pickwick Papers* a novel at all. Whatever it is, the work emerged through the mutual efforts of Dickens, two illustrators (Robert Seymour and Hablot Knight Browne ['Phiz']), and the production mechanisms set in motion by the publishers Chapman and Hall, all working together in cooperative consultation'.¹⁰

Literary works are distinct from other linguistic forms in their pursuit of extreme concrete particularity. That special feature of 'literature' has two consequences we all recognize. First, literary works tend toward textual and bibliographical dispersion (signalled at the earliest phases of the work by authorial changes of direction and revision, which may continue for protracted periods). Second, they are committed to work via the dimension of *aesthesis* (i.e., via the materiality of experience that Blake called 'the doors of perception' and that Morris named 'resistance'). In each case, literary works tend to multiply themselves through their means and modes of production. These processes of generation are executed in the most concrete and particular ways. *Oliver Twist* is produced during Dickens's lifetime in several important creative forms. But then there are equally important versions of that work – equally significant from an aesthetic point of view – that are produced later. Kathleen Tillotson's is a splendid edition of a great literary work, but

perhaps we should want to argue that her edition is not the work of Charles Dickens. And perhaps we should be right in doing so.

Tillotson's edition stands in relation to Dickens's novel in the same kind of relation that (say) the Tate Gallery stands to the paintings of Turner. Both gallery and edition force us to engage with artistic work under a special kind of horizon. It is far from the horizon under which Dickens and Turner originally worked. It is nonetheless, still, an aesthetic and literary horizon, and that fact cannot be forgotten. Of course we cannot recover the earlier frame of reference; all we can do is make imaginative attempts at reconstituting or approximating it for later persons living under other skies. The vaunted immortality sought after by the poetic impulse will be achieved, if it is achieved at all, in the continuous socialization of the texts.

Notes

- 1 Tanselle here is quoting with approval the words of Nicolas Barker. See G. Thomas Tanselle 'The Editing of Historical Documents', reprinted from *Studies in Bibliography* (1978) in *Selected Studies in Bibliography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 454.
- 2 Hershel Parker, *Flawed Texts and Verbal Icons: Literary Authority in American Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1984), 49.
- 3 Peter Stoicheff detailed the complex history of the *Drafts and Fragments* text in a lecture at the Yale conference on editing Pound, sponsored by Yale and the Beinecke Library in October, 1989. The lecture forms part of a book which is now in press. [Peter Stoicheff, *The Hall of Mirrors: Drafts and Fragments and the End of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995).]
- 4 John Kidd's recently published 'An Inquiry into *Ulysses: The Corrected Text*' supplies, in great detail, the case against the edition in this respect. See *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 82 (December 1988): 412-584.
- 5 See Gordon N. Ray, *The Illustrator and the Book in England from 1790 to 1914* (New York and Oxford: The Pierpont Morgan Library and Oxford University Press, 1976), 75.
- 6 See *Vanity Fair* by William Makepeace Thackeray, edited with an introduction by Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1963); see pp. xxii and 80.
- 7 Gordon Ray, op. cit., xxxix.
- 8 *Hard Times* was first published in weekly parts in *Household Words* over five months, beginning 1 April 1854. It was then published separately.
- 9 See *Charles Dickens: Oliver Twist*, ed. Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), especially pp. 369-71.
- 10 For the story of these events see Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and His Publishers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), chapter 3, especially pp. 63-68.