

# REVIEW

## JOYCE SCHOLARS, EDITORS, AND IMAGINARY READERS

Robert Spoo

James Joyce. *Ulysses: A Reader's Edition*. Edited by Danis Rose. London: Picador, 1997. 741 pages. £20.00. Issued also in a limited hardback edition by The Lilliput Press of Dublin.

Christine Froula. *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996. 316 pages. \$42.50 and \$18.00.

**I**n his preface to *Ulysses: A Reader's Edition*, Danis Rose declares that “the overriding criterion applied in creating this edition has been to maximize the pleasure of the reader” (vi). He invokes the reader’s pleasure more than once in the front matter, pointing to its maximization through textual editing as a labor that he undertook on behalf of the “reader,” an entity that he is at pains to distinguish from the “scholar” (v). Scholars, Rose suggests, already have their *Ulysses*. Hans Walter Gabler’s critically edited text, which appeared in 1984, met with acclaim early on but soon came under attack for its unfamiliar theoretical rationale and its alleged errors of execution. The furore led to the reissue of the corrupt 1961 Random House text, which Gabler’s edition was expected to replace. In 1992, W. W. Norton announced the imminent release of a new *Ulysses* edited by John Kidd, Gabler’s chief assailant, but the volume, inexplicably, has not appeared. Rose’s edition seeks to bypass the squabbling “coterie of academics,” as he put it in a letter published in the London *Times Literary Supplement*, and to appeal to a “general public” not “frozen in academia” (11 July 1997: 17).

Rose is himself a noted Joycean and textual scholar, and his “Reader’s Edition,” despite its populist fanfare, is the product of years of toil on the genetic arcana of *Ulysses*, whose textual history he ably recounts in a lucid introduction. Rose, who

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provided editorial assistance to the Gabler edition and was not a little spattered by the bloodletting of that controversy, has followed Gabler in many decisions, most significantly in using pre-publication manuscript materials to establish the text afresh, free from the transmissional corruptions of its print incarnations. In preparing the “straight manuscript text,” or “isotext,” Rose worked to eliminate what he calls “errors”—mistakes “made as the text is transmitted from one copy to another by someone other than the author” (xxiii). Once the isotext was in place, he proceeded to convert it “into a text suitable for general reading” by ridding it of “textual faults,” a separate category of error that “can be suspected when one realizes that there is ‘something wrong’ with a particular sentence in the isotext, not simply where a word is misspelled but more subtly where the sentence is saying something that it should not, where the logic of the narrative is inexplicably broken” (xvii).

Nowhere in his own radically reconstituted edition of *Ulysses* did Gabler, as a matter of rationale, permit himself such a broad warrant for editorial search and seizure. Rose’s notion of textual faults licenses him to range far beyond the modest margin of aesthetic taste and critical intuition that inevitably subtends the act of editing. His avowed purpose is to improve the text, to emend it wherever he senses that it is “saying something that it should not.” Usually, he assures us, there is textual justification for such aggressive intervention—some document in the work’s evolution that attests to the chosen reading—but often enough “it is necessary to extrapolate the probable history of the textual fault from extradraft (notesheet) material and from the types of faults one finds in those cases where the protoversion does exist” (xvii). In other words, where a sentence seems to be saying something that it should not, and extant draft materials offer no explanation for the “fault,” the editor may rummage among Joyce’s pre-draft notes or seek counsel from analogous faults whose genetic history can be ascertained. It is hard to imagine an emendation that could not be justified on such a basis, and since Rose’s edition contains scant textual apparatus—it is not a critical edition—the wary reader may well wonder whether the pleasure of the text in a given instance is authorially or editorially generated.

While Rose’s objective is to give pleasure to the reader, it is equally clear that he hopes to provoke the scholar. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Molly Bloom’s famously unpunctuated soliloquy, to which Rose has added apostrophes and accent marks in an effort to restore the “undisturbed flow of the text” and to keep it from “irritating the reader” (xxv). His schoolmasterly assurance that “apostrophes are integral parts of their words” may fail to persuade even the gentlest reader of the value of such editorial paternalism, and the scholar will recall Joyce’s insistence that Molly’s “hairpins” (accent marks inserted by a printer) be removed from the French translation of her monologue. (Rose does include a version of “Penelope” without apostrophes as an “alternative format” in an appendix.) Only time will tell how far Rose has eroded Joyce’s contribution to modernism in seeking to make the rough places of his text plain and the crooked straight, to rectify those features that he deems “manifestly

wrong" (xviii). The common reader may well benefit in the sense that the marketing hype surrounding this edition is likely to increase short-term sales of *Ulysses* to the general public. I am doubtful that the "Reader's Edition" will be widely adopted in undergraduate courses. My greatest discomfort is with Rose's use of the abstract, elastic notion of the "reader" as a stalking-horse for the broad exercise of editorial power.

Christine Froula imagines a very different author of *Ulysses* in her book, *Modernism's Body: Sex, Culture, and Joyce*. Her Joyce is bent on frustrating readerly pleasure, ever ready to remind us that something is indeed wrong, with ourselves chiefly. Although she deploys a rich and eclectic array of feminist theory in her study of Joyce's major fictions, her primary concern is with masculinity and its discontents. She argues that as a critic of psychohistory and culture Joyce surpassed Freud and Lacan, who, for all their testing of the limits of repression, remained trapped within the master narratives of oedipal desire that they had pioneered. Joyce took his analysis of masculinity a crucial step further by producing what Froula describes as "a distinction between the oedipal Law of the Father, which subsumes identificatory desire within sexual desire, and what I am calling the law of gender: the social and cultural taboo against the son's *identificatory* desire for his mother, the maternal body, and those attributes his culture categorizes as 'feminine'" (12). The "law of gender" originates in the infant's early identification with its mother, a oneness with the biological source that the male child must later renounce as the price of admission to the adult carnival of gender distinctions and privileges. But the unconscious knows no negations, and the early mother-child union "makes the masculine unconscious a repository of all the desires it marks as feminine" (13)—a "repressed maternal substrate" that returns to haunt and to shape masculine experience of the world (12).

Froula's excavations of this repressed maternal substrate within the Joycean plot are extremely subtle and sensitive. She provides a vocabulary and syntax for what critics have long discerned but never fully articulated: the lament for a lost maternal principle that sounds plangently throughout Joyce's writing from *Dubliners* to *Finnegans Wake*. As might be expected, her theory works especially well with Stephen Dedalus, Joyce's fictive alter ego and the son of May Dedalus, the long-suffering wife and mother who dies of cancer and maltreatment between *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. In the latter work, Stephen is troubled by vivid dreams of his mother's revenant corpse, but, as Froula shows, his maternal loss began much earlier, in *A Portrait*, when at a tender age he was sent away to boarding school to learn the social scripts of sexual difference and gender that would require submersion of his rich maternal identification. Neither Stephen's schooling nor his mother's death makes him unusual in this regard; all boys and young men experience such ruptures. It is Stephen's growth as an artist that sets him off from the rest, for as an incipient writer he is in a unique position to draw on his maternal unconscious to fashion an art that has the power to expose the brutality of culture.

Froula's treatment of Joyce is refreshing in several respects. First, it restores Stephen Dedalus to the center-stage position from which a decade of criticism spotlighting Dublin's bourgeois culture—the world of Leopold Bloom—has pushed him. It is true that as Joyce's interest in Bloom grew, his patience for rendering the lineaments of the young artist wore thin, but Stephen is still a focal consciousness of two novels (and of a fragmentary third, *Stephen Hero*) and deserves the critical attention that Froula gives him. Second, she probes the rich psychic continuities between Stephen and his creator by positing "Stephen/Joyce," a construct that is neither fiction nor biographical fact but a self-conscious hybrid that allows the critic greater latitude in measuring the impact of Irish culture on the male psyche. The New Criticism's distrust of intentionalist readings and poststructuralism's erasure of the author have reduced discussions of autobiographical fiction to gingerly engagements with "textuality." Froula's bold though by no means naïve return to authorship is a welcome sign. Her thorough knowledge of Joyce's oeuvre and biography protects her from errors of emphasis and makes for sophisticated, detailed analyses. To my mind, she has produced one of the best books to date applying gender theory to the work of a major author.

Like any vital work of criticism, *Modernism's Body* tells a story about art and culture. In this case, it is the tragicomic tale of a boy's ritual death as his mother's son, through repression, and his rebirth as his father's son, through culture. The son's loss of his feminine self is enmeshed in the mechanics of repression and return: the fullness of being that he sacrifices early on is given back, dramatically transfigured, in the myriad forms of fetish, symbol, art, and culture. Joyce's craft of fiction, from first to last, was a steady unfolding of the perverse "symptom" that results from the male's burial of the feminine part of his psyche. Joyce, being a consummate artist and a fearless critic of culture, was able to take hold of his self-as-symptom and to anatomize it, to exhibit himself as a kind of visible man of masculine culture, subjecting modernity in the process to the scrutiny of his vivisectionist art. The episodes of *Ulysses* devoted to Gerty MacDowell and to Molly Bloom are supreme examples of this dissection of self and culture and could not have been written, Froula argues, had Joyce not gained aesthetic access to his repressed feminine identity. Ultimately, the heroes of this story are art and genius. Joyce made comedy out of tragedy by having the superior courage to face his psychic loss. In doing so, he created an art that is subversive of the culture that demands such sacrifices.

That Joyce's art is "subversive of" the law of gender, that it has a political role to play in culture, is a basic tenet of Froula's book, as of much current theorizing about modern literature. Froula shares with many Joyceans, and with the academy at large, the belief that a complex art harbors a revolutionary potential, the capacity to undermine rigid attitudes toward sex, gender, family, and social being. Yet, while she succeeds in showing how Joyce's gender-fluid parody and mimicry might persuade theory-savvy academicians of the repressive artificiality of the sex/gender

system, she does not address the problem of how such subversiveness can reach larger segments of literate culture.

Froula is not alone in begging this question. Her strangely intransitive use of the transitive idea of subversion, her rhetoric of change that never quite grounds itself in sociohistorical specificity, is a staple of the late-twentieth-century academy: "Joyce counterhails us into a mode of reading that unsettles repression, setting the stage for a potentially transformative confrontation with the hidden condition of those social fictions" (18). The faceless "us," the disembodied "unsettles repression," the hedged "potentially transformative confrontation" weave a language that hovers on the edge of assertion. Subversiveness is a critical piety that has remained largely notional—the unquestioned, unhistoricized phenomenon of an ideal reader responding ideally to the provocations of an ideal textuality. Critics have amply demonstrated how modern texts may be read as performing such a political function; they have yet to show how this function can really affect the life of the common reader, whom Virginia Woolf and Dr. Johnson regarded as a flesh-and-blood participant in the fate of high culture.

The problem Froula faces is one of audience. At times she suggests that mere exposure to Joyce's writings will work the miracle of consciousness-raising that her book celebrates. In this respect she seems to share Danis Rose's abstract notion of "readers" and his sanguine confidence in their ability to respond to and benefit from the minutiae of a complex text. At other times it is clear that Froula wrote her book in the belief that Joyce's subversiveness must be taught, yet it is hard to imagine any common reader deriving much from her heady instruction. Perhaps the conduit of a more general subversion will be the undergraduate classroom, but Froula does not indicate how her challenging discourse might be adapted to the needs of the typical student, nor how that discourse might be made to cross over to a public which, fed by the talk shows and the image-merchants, may actually be ready for subversive messages about gender. Indeed, it is not at all clear that the sort of subversiveness that *Modernism's Body* describes is separable from the lofty shoptalk that it sustains for nearly three hundred pages, or that anyone unacquainted with the assumptions and jargon of the academy can experience the particular subversion-effect that Joyce allegedly encourages. Without a theory of the relationship of Joyce and the academy to the larger culture, the most that can be hoped for is a rash of subversions within the Ivory Tower. The uncomfortable suspicion arises that Froula is preaching to the subverted.

*Modernism's Body* invites these troubling questions precisely because it makes such an impressive case for the political protest latent within Joyce's exuberant fictions. Froula's triumph is that she has argued more convincingly than most that Joyce can change our minds and hearts; her failure, which is really a failure of the current academy, is that she has not undertaken to show how this change may practically occur, whether such a change is really desirable, or how a book like *Mod-*

*ernism's Body* can help to speed the revolution. Danis Rose supposes that the people need a *Ulysses* purged of logical incoherency, and he arraigns the academy for its elitism in ignoring the plain wishes of the common reader. Christine Froula believes that the strategic incoherencies of Joyce's art are portals of discovery for a culture laboring under the myths of sex and gender, but she does not say how the common reader may be haled before those portals. Rose and Froula entertain equally abstract notions of readership, with the result that their claims, however arresting, fail to convince. Rose's pleased reader and Froula's candidate for subversion may in the final analysis be irreconcilable fictions, but it is high time that critics began to examine their relationship to the audiences they so blithely assume or invent. *Ulysses* will survive our disputations; it is the credibility of scholarship that is in question.