

# Re-Assessing Michael Groden: The Genesis Of A Textual Scholar

[ALISON ARMSTRONG FOR JJ SOCIETY [NY] 30/04/2021; DOWNLOAD AT ACADEMIA.EDU 30/02/2021]

When Nick Fagnoli in one (virtual) breath announced that Michael Groden, who was scheduled to give our next talk, had died and then asked would I speak instead and sorry for the short notice, I instantly replied *Yes! I might, yes....* In any case this evening's tribute is just one of many more, doubtless to come that will honor his life's work, 40 years of which were devoted to the one book, *Ulysses*, in its various states. What Michael Groden did and how he did it has enhanced our understanding of the composition and "irreconcilabilities" of Joyce's penultimate work—to the advantage of scholars and just plain readers to come. Since we will not be able to 'repair' to the usual MacDougal Street restaurant, I hope to allow time for participants tonight to remember Michael from your own experiences, if that is agreeable to Nick and Jonathan.

Michael Groden's organizational skills always impressed me. Maybe it was due to his growing up in Buffalo's winters, or maybe from living in Canada, no doubt due to having pursued graduate work at Rutgers with Walt Litz, or that he taught *Ulysses* for years, and indubitably from his happy life with the poet Molly Peacock...but then he had accomplished much of his textual work before their marriage in 1992. Her work as a poet has not only coincided with his teaching and scholarly editing, she has celebrated their lives together in "Paradise, Piece by Piece." \*Note: September 1, 2020, they were on NPR-WNYC radio's StoryCorps Archive discussing their 60 year love story.

Writing a biographical tribute, even a short one such as this, entails compiling a virtual "copy text" of that person—from aspects of the person we think we know something of. I first became aware of him, perhaps, in 1977 at the Joyce Symposium in Dublin, and subsequently when he would come down from Canada to attend JJ Society meetings in the 1980s at Gotham Book Mart (with its Wise Men Fish Here sign hanging over the shop door on West 44th) when Frances Steloff was still living upstairs and Phil Lyman collected overdue dues and Sid Feshbach was president.

A few days ago, I discovered the *JJQ* series of brief diaries instigated by Sean Latham and was moved to watch and hear Michael recorded 13 months ago, speaking from his apartment in Toronto; he and Molly had then recently made their annual trip to New York where each taught 4 weekly classes every March at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y, but they'd had to leave after 12 days due to the pandemic shutdown; he mentioned what he was beginning to endure—the fight against procrastination, the lack of exercise, substituting the ability perhaps to organize one's files for getting on with new work at hand (editing Joyce's letters) despite deadlines (proofreading galleys for the impending paperback of his latest book, *A Necessary Fiction* out in hardback about which David Pierce's review states, "... it is a fascinating work of personal criticism or 'biblio-memoir' ..."). In the early days of lockdown in Toronto, Michael added, his continued monthly visits to the Princes Margaret Cancer Center for his usual immunotherapy treatments [for melanoma] offered a reassuring sense of normalcy. He had retired from

teaching 7 years prior but engaged in teaching adults whenever the opportunity arose. He mastered Zoom quickly in order to complete the remaining 3 weeks of classes for the 92<sup>nd</sup> St. Y remotely.

I am *not* going to discuss Groden's many accomplishments: We learn about his scholarly life from a digital publication: *Biography, Michael L. Groden (1947-...)*, a 736-word article from *Contemporary Authors Online*, available from Amazon. And from the observations of fellow scholars:

Fritz Senn, in *Inductive Scrutinies: Focus on Joyce* (Edited by Christine O'Neill, 1995) recalls: "In his study of the genesis of *Ulysses*, Groden distinguishes three stages: the third one a turning point for the whole book, was the ebullient 'Circe', whose continual excrescences affected the rest of the novel, [including the already written]. Revising 'Circe', Joyce .... changed gear, and decisively so..... Groden reports that [the messianic scene] results from Bloom's tendency to correct other people and to lecture to them'." (p. 47)

Much of Groden's published work has become collectible, out of reach financially, or nearly so.

For example, those of you who still have a complete run of *James Joyce Quarterly*, or at least have retained *JJQ* Vol. 28, No. 1 (Fall 1990) may be interested to learn that it is now as scarce as hens' teeth; Amazon lists two copies available, used, at \$549.99 each, OR two new, at \$768.57 apiece.

And then there is the hardback, (published by the James Joyce Archive, April 1, 1978) of *Ulysses: Eumaeus, Ithaca, Penelope: A facsimile of Page Proofs for Episodes 16-18* that is Out of Print.

Also, many of you may own *Ulysses in Progress* (Princeton Legacy Library) 676 pages (based on his Ph.D. dissertation), the paperback listed from \$35 to \$36.07, the hardback at \$109.09.

And more recently, *The Necessary Fiction: Life with James Joyce's "Ulysses"* (Nov. 30, 2019) used copies from \$68.88, in new hardback \$68.95. Go figure. Groden died before completely editing the galley proofs, so the paperback is now announced, *pas encore*, for August 2021.

He was co-editor of the *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, (2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2004) in hardback, new and used \$61.70 - \$85.00; used for \$57.70.

And there is *Contemporary and Cultural Theory: The Johns Hopkins Guide*, by Michael Groden. (...)

Nor am I going to mention Bernie Benstock's review of the 3-volume *Synoptic and Critical* edition in *Irish Literary Supplement* (Spring 1985), nor that Michael, along with Fritz Senn, were each awarded honorary D. Litt. Degrees from UCD in 2004.

Nor the acceptance speech Michael gave in 2011 when awarded the Helmut prize for Research from Western Ontario, nor the Guggenheim (1979-80)....

In addition to recognizing Michael Groden's accomplishments—the 63-volume *JJ Archive* (in photo-facsimile), the Hypermedia digital *Ulysses*, and his advising with a Yes the NLI to acquire 25 hitherto unknown items of MSS material for Eight (8) Million Euros--is to inevitably bring up the Kidd/Gabler "scandals" that began rumblings in the 1970s and erupted into the 1980s and 90s...with high points in 1980, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1990.

Michael's mentor was an academic whom we, of a certain generation, all knew. A. Walton Litz. During the 1979 Symposium in Zurich, I visited my friends who'd pinned up the poster listing the speakers. After a long perusal, I was asked, "Just what *is* a Walton Litz?" At Rutgers, a math student, Michael Groden, revealed to too

professor Litz an interest in *U* and was soon inducted into Joycean projects. In 1972 he had first looked seriously at *Ulysses*, according to Michael's own reminiscences in *Ulysses in Focus*.<sup>\*</sup> By 1977, Groden was presenting his work at the Dublin symposium, having initiated the Garland edition.

Groden's Princeton Ph.D. dissertation was exclusively on Joyce and became his first book, '*Ulysses*' in *Progress*. His editorship of the 63-volume *James Joyce Archive* followed ... and, as he has written, "its most direct and visible scholarly offspring was Gabler's 1984 "corrected" edition of *Ulysses*. In one sense, the *Archive* led directly to that edition, in that the existence of the photo-reproductions encouraged Gabler to think that the once seemingly impossible task of editing *Ulysses* was now feasible." (*U in Focus*, p. 90).

Later (by the 1990 Monaco event), of course, Gabler and his assumptions about the perfected "corrected" 1984 *U*, even more so than for the earlier 3-volume "definitive" *U*, would be criticized (politely, tentatively) on particular points by a number of his esteemed contemporaries, as well as by young John Kidd's shocking sweeping offensive composed of numerous details. Kidd attacked Gabler not only for his ineptness in Irish-English and for historical inaccuracies, but also for basing his research on the facsimiles, for not working from original materials [widely scattered, thus not a feasible undertaking, I should add].

The issue of what is a "critical edition" was unresolved. Kidd's definition, from his 1989 booklet *An Inquiry into Ulysses: The Corrected Text*, pp. 413ff, begins with detailed references to earlier textual work by Jack Dalton (1966-67), by Wm. York Tindall (1954), by Chester Anderson (1964), Robert Scholes' critical procedures in *Studies in Bibliography* vols. 15-17, and John MacNicholas' *Exiles: A Textual Companion* (Garland, 1979) whose scholarship, Kidd claims, is more complete and lucid than that of Gabler and particularly thoughtful in discussing WW Greg's rationale of copytext and the editorial principles advanced by Fredson Bowers. Kidd then continues by citing Bowers' range of valid meanings for 'critical edition' in *Essays* (1975). ... To get to a more precise definition, the idea of recovering *the author's intentions* 'more faithfully than any preserved transmitted document'—by emending one of those preserved forms—the resulting text is 'critical'...all the editors of Joyce set this as their goal. ... [Thomas] Tanselle [of the Society of textual Scholars] and Bowers have made clear that an exhaustive edition is only a subclass of 'critical edition'. IF for the sake of argument we suppose that a critical edition must include 'all necessary information about the text and the circumstances of its composition and transmission', *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition* is decidedly not a critical edition... no one is holding Gabler to the private definition by which he would judge Tindall, Scholes, McNicholas, Anderson, and Dalton. ...Tanselle and Bowers point out whether the judgement is good or bad, the apparatus as ample (or concise) as some might wish, a published work arrived at by textually informed judgement is a 'critical edition'. (*An Inquiry*, p. 415). He continues from p. 417 with sections on "The Rationale of Copytext," p. 419 "An Imaginary Continuous MS Text" ...and so on. This gives a taste of Kidd's detail-laden foundations for his diatribes, however informative.

Groden meantime is cited by Gillespie, in "Why Does One Re-Read *Ulysses*," (p. 53), a chapter of the 1985 collection of essays, *Assessing the 1984 U*.

“In general bibliographers use this term [critical edition] to identify a volume in which the editor has drawn upon his analytical skills to constitute a version of the text conforming as closely as possible to the final intentions of the author. [Leaving aside the pitfalls of the Intentional Fallacy!]. ...such decisions remain subjective...consequently such conclusions must stand...open to debate. Michael Groden, in an analysis of the structure of the Garland edition (in 3 volumes), presents a cogent and insightful overview of the text, but he makes statements regarding the nature of a critical edition that I believe place expectations upon the work that it was never intended to meet.

Groden describes the nature of the text...:

*Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition* is not a corrected edition, one whose editor looks for places where the printed text is inaccurate and corrects them...This new text corrects them only indirectly; by producing a 'critical edition' -- the new edition reveals that the first edition departs from Joyce's text about five thousand times, but not always in the same places." (p. 53) [Gillespie goes on here to query assumptions about an inferred 'eyeskip' to explain the lack of textual evidence for a loss of words between the Rosenbach Ms and a typescript...the (in)famous "love" as word known to all men. (p. 54)

Gillespie winds up his chapter stating that "The final test of any version of U, then, lies in its ability to offer a rendition of Joyce's compositional material in a manner which seems to follow the final form that he envisioned...while avoiding a prescriptive tone which leaves readers no room to exploit the ambiguities inherent in Joyce's work." (p. 55). [Thus antithetical to what Danis Rose would produce in his *A Reader's U*...scoured clean of any and all ambiguities. And, on another note, very different from an attempt to second-guess authorial intentions that seem inherent in the European approach that may change the evidence to fit the theory.]

### Lost In Translation?

Groden was briefly interviewed by Bruce Arnold in his film *The Scandal of "Ulysses"* in Monaco at that 1990 Joyce Symposium, a thrilling time (but not an event Kidd attended), as it was taken up mainly with the reverberations from the Gabler-Kidd debacle [in addition to the ever-indignant grandson Stephen James Joyce's verbal attack on the 1988 *Nora* biography by journalist Brenda Maddox.] Groden's mild response on the film was that it seemed that Gabler and Kidd were apparently working from different understandings of working methods. Groden subsequently claimed that he had always had faith in Gabler despite the theoretical differences between his and Gabler's approach (and between Gabler and Kidd's). The following gathering, at Miami, furnished an opportunity for Gabler and Kidd to verbally joust in person.

It was unclear to many just what that difference was between the European and the American. Even terms such as "Copy Text" had different applications; if we look at Gabler's earliest sources (e.g., typescripts made for Joyce by hired amanuenses typing from his own difficult to read handwriting) Gabler's "corrections" were compromised at times by the German scholar's misreading of Joyce's handwriting, by a lack of knowledge of Anglo-Irish terms (e.g., using "doner" instead of "goner"), and of Irish real life personalities such as the cyclist Harry Thrift presented as "Shrift," we can see that the thorough John Kidd had some legitimate issues, as he articulated while still in Boston to Bruce Arnold who sympathetically interviews in the film mentioned.

Michael's mild (at that time) comment in the 1990 Monaco film is supported in Donald Phillip Verene's brief chapter, "The 1922 and the 1984 Editions: Some Philosophical Considerations" at the end of the book of essays from the Monaco symposium, *Assessing the 1984 Ulysses*, edited by (the effervescent) C. George Sandulescu and (diplomatic member of the board of the Joyce Estate) Clive Hart (Published by Colin Smythe, 1986, as Princess Grace Irish Library: 1). "...this controversy is not (only) about what should or should not be corrected; it is a clash between two textual mentalities, perhaps even two senses of knowing." (p. 214). If Verene, the philosophy professor from Emerson, is thinking of Bergson's "two ways of coming to know," then we recall that one is the intuitive in his "Introduction to Metaphysics." Was Gabler practicing a type of imaginative presumption or intuiting of what JJ *may have* intended? Was he thus committing the logical fallacy, that of Begging the Question in its true sense of basing an argument and its conclusion on an unsupported major premise? [I see this committed too often, as in Lerme-Hayes, Schloss...]. Did he set out, not to perfect what Joyce intended but what Joyce should have intended? 1950s-brand American New Critics with their warnings about The Intentional Fallacy (Wimsatt, Beardsley, et al) would probably not have affected the German universities at Munich and elsewhere in Europe, even though imports into America such as French structuralism, varieties of reader response (or *Rezeptionstheorie*) à la Wolfgang Iser, *et alia*, and genetic theory were arriving and festering, or being fostered, here from the early 1970s.

Groden has written about the divergence in theoretical practices in various places, including *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-textes* (2004) co-edited with Jed Depman & Daniel Ferrer, and in his 2010 book, *Ulysses in Focus: Genetic, Textual, and Personal Views*, in which he observed:

"The Archive appeared just as European-based theory began to dominate North American English departments, and a *general shift away from precise text-based studies took hold. The series remained relatively unused and undiscussed until Gabler's edition of Ulysses appeared in 1984.*"

Indeed, what was it their textual scholarship "wanted"? And how did Groden, who had worked with Gabler, relate to the debacle between the German Professor Hans Walter Gabler and the young American scholar John Kidd? Each had raised funds for his projects; each in his own way was self promoting; one was mature (having already begun German university-funded projects with Wolfhard Steppe on *Dubliners* and *A Portrait* as was made evident at the Dublin Symposium in 1973) and by the 1990 filmed interview in Monaco seemed dense to obfuscating, while the other, an American adolescent, was rude, yet clear to the point of an over abundance of detail for argument's sake. And, on the strength of his 1988 "Scandal of Ulysses" splash on the front page of *NYRB*, Kidd was able to raise funds (\$300,000?) to set up his James Joyce Research Center which enabled Kidd produce his 174-page booklet, *An Inquiry into Ulysses: The Corrected Text* the following year, of which were printed 400 numbered copies including an errata list and given out to various scholars.

(Indeed, Groden observed that one could not have a life if all Kidd's issues were to be responded to.)

Certainly Gabler's accomplishment has been reviewed and critiqued more than Kidd's, in part due to Kidd's own off-putting behavior; yet when the scandalizing was beginning, before the 1988 NYRB article, a brief editorial by Robert G. Lowery appeared in *Irish Literary Supplement* (Fall 1985). Bob Lowery's "Piracy in the Joycean Ranks" succinctly...gave readers a sense of the appearance chronologically as well as the efforts and funds invested in what emerged –as the Garland "definite" edition (not Gabler's but Garland's term for the press). This while Kidd would be represented on 2 pages of *ILS* (Fall 1985) with "Gaelic in the New 'Ulysses'," (a suggested title at the bottom of Lowery's editorial page reads "Gabler Garbled Gaelic") and "The Genetic Joyce: A Retrospective Review" (*ILS* Fall 1987, p. 11), and before "Proof Fever: dissent against the 1984 *Ulysses*, Kidd's review of the Sandulescu & Hart edition, *Assessing the 1984 'Ulysses'* published in James Joyce Broadsheet (No. 25, Feb. 1988), right before the "Scandal of *Ulysses*" that Kidd would publish prominently in the June 1988 *NYRB* synchronously with the Symposium causing an upheaval among Joyceans world wide.

The kerfuffle is documented in Bruce Arnold's films, "Images of Joyce," and especially "The Scandal of *Ulysses*," (1990) in Monaco, in which he interviews a number of more opinionated scholars, many of whom were put off by Kidd's bad boy behavior yet not wholly convinced of the validity of the theoretical methods or certain results of the "corrected text" even though Gabler was a long time friend and colleague: they included Gus Martin, David Norris, Murray Beja, Hugh Kenner, Charles Rossman, Fritz Senn, Carol Schloss -- and Richard Ellmann who seemed to pull back from his earlier positive Preface to the Corrected Text). Later issues, including a truncated committee set up by Random House to be overseen by Tanselle, of the Society of Textual Scholars (after a New York City meeting and confrontation again between Kidd on the defensive Gabler), left some in utter confusion; the planned Norton edition of a Kidd counter-text never left the ground and on the head of that cost Michael Groden contracts for two books he had proposed...but finally, after the disappearance of Kidd, culminated in a happy reunion.

One of my last and certainly most memorable meetings with Michael Groden was in Dublin in the dining room of the Merrion Hotel, Merrion Square, during the Joyce Symposium of 2014. Jesse Myers was staying at the Hotel, and he invited me, Fritz Senn, and Michael and his wife Molly Peacock\* to a sumptuous meal and leisurely conversation about the prospects of future Joyce studies. At the end of the evening Jesse took us out through the lobby to see the Hotel's art collection that includes Rowan Gillespie's painting of Joyce's statue with the text of *Ulysses* embedded in the paving stones around it.

That Groden could have accomplished so much in his 40-year involvements with the novel, working alone although at times overseeing Gabler's collaborations with Danis Rose, Claus Melchior, and Wolfhard Steppe, is testimony to his prudent and pleasant personality combined with diligence and detailed work that he sustained while suffering treatments for a debilitating melanoma. No doubt his interrupted work on the unpublished letters of Joyce would yield valuable information about the intentionality of the author, for which we must now wait a little longer.

Tempestuous debates of the 1980s and 90s concerning the function and practice of textual scholarship are now abated, Kidd is no longer young, had a nervous breakdown, and has gone to south America. Most new purchasers of *Ulysses* now choose a Gabler text (either the “corrected” one or the later “Gabler text” with some post-Kidd changes silently made, including the Harry Thrift/Shrift/Thrift disappearance and reappearance). Still, *many prefer the older editions, each flawed in its own way*, the tattered and marked up '61 Radom House Modern Library one for example with the big dot for the Roc's Auk's Egg, or the clean reissued 1922 with some notes, or the Bodley Head, all thanks to the expiration of copy rights, once again available. Gone the days when Gabler's Random House big red/white/blue/yellow “Corrected Text” was the only new version available. We are free to indulge in our own comparative textual readings. As George Bornstein emphasizes in his book, *Material Modernism*, there is never a single definite final text – we recognize simultaneous multi-texts. Gabler himself implied something similar in his notion of ordering and constructing the continuous text out of discontinuities. Groden's work, to record what IS, not only section by section of *Ulysses* but also of *Finnegans Wake*, attests to the organic nature of a magical text written over many years by a man with astonishing visions of the capacities of language but with imperfect vision, human only, flawed in his own way. The genius who made no mistakes...makes a grand joke in the forms we are left with: a body of writings in a multitude of states composed during years in various places that will and must attract the scholars who would dare to set his work into a final form as well as those, like Mike Groden who archived all the evidence Joyce left and could not take with him.

--Alison Armstrong, New York City, April 2021

(I, lured by Ellmann from Joyce to Yeats, was out of the Joycean sphere, learning to practice textual scholarship with MSS of WB's late play “The Herne's Egg” in the NLI in the 1970s).

\*This sentence is strike-through in the download.