

CRITICAL EDITION OF MILL'S "AUTOBIOGRAPHY"

John Stuart Mill. *Autobiography and Literary Essays*. Edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981. (*The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. 1.) Pp. liv + 766. C\$60.00.

[I]f we want to know the real Mill or the real Hardy we can learn far more from the deletions and alterations of their autobiographies than from the published versions. (John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*)

About half the present volume is taken up by material directly connected with Mill's *Autobiography*. The main documents published are the two versions of the *Autobiography* that have textual authority—the "Early Draft"¹ and the Columbia manuscript²—together with the first draft of

¹ Previously edited by Jack Stillinger in *The Early Draft of John Stuart Mill's "Autobiography"* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).

² Also previously edited by Stillinger (Mill, *Autobiography* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1969]). The present Robson–Stillinger edition of the Columbia manuscript differs in only two substantives from the 1969 Stillinger edition.

material from Chapter VII dealing with the influence of Harriet Taylor on his writings (the "Yale Fragment") and an appendixful of rejected leaves from the "Early Draft" (Appendix G). Since the bulk of this material is already available in substantively accurate editions, one of the main advantages of the present edition is that the "Early Draft" and the Columbia manuscript are printed on facing pages. Since the sequence of the two documents is roughly the same (Mill's occasional major reorderings are taken up in Appendix G), it has been possible for the most part to keep corresponding passages in the two documents opposite each other by leaving space between paragraphs where old material has been deleted or new inserted. On the whole the system works admirably, and one appreciates the trouble the printers have taken in keeping parallel pages, often with a thick encrustation of footnotes, genuinely parallel. In fact, the footnotes present the one difficulty for this procedure. There are three levels of them: Mill's, textual footnotes, and annotations (mainly bibliographic identifications), and since some of those relating to the "Early Draft" are placed at the foot of the facing page (presumably in order to keep the two texts in parallel), the reader is occasionally left searching for notes among three types of footnote on two different pages. The textual footnotes are done in the manner which has become virtually a signature for the Mill edition: they are keyed to the text by superscript letters running continuously throughout a document in repeated *a-z* sequences. The advantages to the editors of such continuous referencing, rather than beginning each page afresh with "*a*", are so obvious that it seems churlish to complain that this reader, in over 500 pages of text, was never able to rid himself of the idea that textual note *a* would be printed before all other textual notes for that page.

A comparison of the two texts, now made so easy, does not, I think, entirely confirm John Fowles's judgment. The final version of the *Autobiography* was, for its time, a strikingly candid document, and the "Early Draft" provides few startling revelations. Nonetheless, there are some significant changes. Several harsh judgments passed upon friends and colleagues in the "Early Draft" were toned down in the Columbia manuscript. Most notably, Mill's hostile allusions to his mother in the "Early Draft" were replaced by a complete silence about her in the Columbia manuscript, and references to his father's severity were softened (see e.g. pp. 52, 53, also the cancelled passage printed on pp. 611-14). The "Early Draft" was hardly an immoderate document, but the overall effect of the changes made in the Columbia manuscript is one of further moderation. Mill's attack on Christianity, which was quite splendid in the "Early Draft", is weakened in the Columbia manuscript (compare pp. 42, 43; 46, 47; 72, 73). And there's a notable Victorianizing

of the account he gives of his father's attitude to sex (pp. 108, 109). Such changes are apparent, not just between the two major printed texts, but among the recorded authorial alterations, as well. The most remarkable of these is the extraordinary passage (printed on pp. 608-10) dealing with his inability in practical matters, wisely cancelled on Harriet Taylor's advice. The passage went beyond modesty or self-criticism, it was an embarrassing self-laceration. There was in Mill a certain want of autonomy, revealed in his relations with his father and his wife, and expressed most unnervingly in this passage. It appears, also, in many smaller authorial alterations (e.g. the tell-tale switch recorded in textual note *h*, p. 93). Finally, a number of personal details recorded in earlier versions are omitted from the Columbia manuscript presumably as irrelevant to the *Autobiography's* explicitly didactic purposes, making the final version, as the editors note, "less full, less varied in texture" and less warm (pp. xxv, xxvi) than the earlier ones. Although these changes sharpen our perception of Mill as a human being, they do not reveal, as Fowles suggests, new aspects of his character, except perhaps a vivid appreciation of natural beauty (see the cancelled passage on p. 150).

The second part of the volume prints some of Mill's periodical contributions, all of them concerning literature, written between 1824 and 1844. These are by no means his most important essays. Despite the length of some of them, they are slight and his critical judgment was often superficial. One is pleased to see that he recognized Tennyson's merits as early as 1835 (although he was scornful of Tennyson's charming poems to the owl—whimsy was certainly not his cup of tea). But his lengthy extracts from the poems of Richard Monckton Milnes, on which he wrote two reviews, amount, as his editors concede, "to a small anthology of the world's worst poetry" (p. xlii). His most substantial literary piece, "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" (1833), although the editors make as good a case as possible for its originality (pp. xliii-xliv), is primarily significant for the unabashed way in which it reveals the psychologistic aesthetics of traditional British empiricism. The critical essays written in the early 1830s, especially the two reviews of "Junius Redivivus", are interesting since they reveal the influence of Carlyle. They were, in part, literary experiments for Mill, and the style might best be described as dropsical. On the other hand, one of the unexpected delights of the volume is Mill's review of the *Edinburgh Review*, written in 1824 when he was eighteen. The criticism is narrow and sectarian, to be sure, and sometimes immature, but there is a freshness and a pungency about Mill's attack which is quite unexpected. There is, in this article, a sense of a mind that knew exactly what it was doing, a sense that is missing from many later, and better-known, works.

The literary essays are all, without question, the minor works of a major author. They have importance, however, not so much because of what they are but because of who wrote them. For this reason, they deserve their place in an edition of Mill's works.³ Whether they should have been included with the *Autobiography* or have been distributed among other volumes of essays is another question. The *Autobiography* could, and probably should, have stood pretty much on its own. The literary essays could not. Grouping materials into volumes on any principle except straight chronology is probably the most frustrating of editorial tasks: some of the problems are simply irresolvable and no one will even notice unless you make a mistake. The present combinations of materials is not, I think, a mistake, but it is a bit awkward and sometimes it seems as if a need was felt to bulk the volume out to the usual heroic proportions of a UTP Mill volume. For this, Mill's corpus is not helpful. Apart from the *Autobiography*, Mill left little by way of autobiographical material, unlike Russell who was tirelessly autobiographical. What little there is is printed here, mostly in appendices. There are two items on Mill's father (a letter to the *Edinburgh Review* [1844] and a contribution to Bulwer's *England the English* [1833]) as well as Helen Taylor's brief continuation of the *Autobiography*. In addition, Appendix A contains what little survives of Mill's juvenilia, his "History of Rome" and an "Ode to Diana", both written when he was six or seven. Mill's juvenile output was much greater than these scant remains indicate, and a complete list of his known early writings is provided in Appendix C. Not all the works listed there are lost, and some, including his "Traité de Logique" started when he was fourteen, are scheduled for publication in other volumes. There is a similar list of his early reading, assembled from a variety of sources but primarily from the *Autobiography*. These two lists will be of immense value to students of Mill's early development. The remaining appendices include Mill's minor editorial notes in the *London and Westminster Review* and a fragment on Browning's *Pauline* which he wrote on blank leaves at the end of his copy of the poem. (Mill in fact wrote a review of the poem which was refused publication in the *Examiner* and lost; it seems that Mill gave his copy of the poem to Browning, who revised it in the light of Mill's marginal comments.)

The editorial treatment of these materials is for the most part exemplary. The editors have wisely avoided recording Mill's purely stylistic manuscript amendments, thereby picking out those which change the sense of a passage. (Such changes used, in the Russell edition,

to be known as "substantial changes", a proper subset of substantive changes which include all changes in wording.) Formal or accidental variants between texts are mercifully not recorded, and copy-text accidentals have been generally preserved rather than embark on the endeavour of attempting uniformly to impose the author's supposed preferences on the copy-text.⁴ In these respects, however, the practices of the Mill edition seem to me quite defensible. Lacunae are few. I thought it a pity that the facsimile of the "Ode to Diana" manuscript should be allowed to intrude between p. 18 of the "Early Draft" and the corresponding page of the Columbia manuscript. More awkwardly, the reference letters "R" and "RII", referring to rejected leaves of the "Early Draft", were used on p. xxi, but not officially explained until p. 3 of the text.

Two points in the editing deserve more attention. The *Autobiography* was originally published (1873) from a transcript (the Rylands transcript) prepared by Helen Taylor from the Columbia manuscript. The Rylands transcript was quite correctly rejected as an authoritative text, since Mill had no hand in its composition and it contained over 2,650 variants, including over 450 substantives, from the Columbia manuscript. Many of these errors were corrected in the first published version, but over eighty substantive variants remained. Clearly, none of these have any textual authority and do not deserve inclusion in the record of variants at the foot of the page. Nonetheless, it seems to me unfortunate that in the present definitive and massive compilation the reader should be referred to Stillinger's article, "The Text of John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography*" (*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 43 [1960]) for a full record of these changes. The way in which Helen Taylor deliberately or inadvertently tampered with the text is of some interest, especially since the *Autobiography* made its first impact in the form which she authorized. Since space was found in the appendices for her continuation of Mill's *Autobiography*, space ought to have been found for her alterations to it as well.

Finally, Mill reprinted some of his literary essays in his collection of writings, *Dissertations and Discussions*, and in some other cases he reprinted only parts of the essays. Where, as in "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties", Mill reprinted the whole essay, the editors take as copy-text the second edition of *Dissertations and Discussions* (1867), the last

³ The same might, I think, be said of Mill's botanical writings which, so far as I know, are not scheduled for publication in the *Collected Works*, unfortunately.

⁴ Non-interventionist editorial policies, such as that of the Mill edition, have been usefully labelled "documentalist" by K. Blackwell, whose "'Perhaps You Will Think Me Fussy ...': Three Myths in Editing Russell's *Collected Papers*" (paper read at the Eighteenth Annual Conference on Editorial Problems, University of Toronto, Nov. 1982, and forthcoming in *Editing Polymaths*, ed. H. Jackson) gives an excellent rationale for the alternative policies adopted in the Russell edition.

edition whose publication was supervised by Mill. Thus they take as copy-text that version which embodies the author's final intentions (in so far as they can be determined). However, where only parts of an essay were reprinted (as in the review of *Thoughts in the Cloister and the Crowd*) the first printed (and only complete) version has been retained as copy-text but has not been amended by the incorporation of changes Mill himself made to those parts that were reprinted. This is hard-core documentalism. It is not, I think, a bad policy, but it is not the only good one, and it deserves discussion. It is in line with the Mill edition's refusal to emend copy-text accidentals, and derives its justification from the fact that the editors are reprinting historical documents and should reprint them as they stand, rather than engaging in "creative editing" by splicing together different versions. Clearly, if two complete texts are in competition the latest one should be chosen as copy-text, since it involves the author's final revisions. But where there is only one full text together with partial revised versions, it is probably best to print the full version in preference to creating a hybrid. (An exception, of course, would be where the revisions consisted in simple corrections of the original text. In such cases, the Mill editors have, of course, incorporated the corrections into their copy-text.) It is, I feel, less confusing for a reader to know that the text in front of him is that originally published (shorn of its errors) than to realize that it is a patchwork of early text and later revisions. The tables of variants provide him with all he would wish to know about the revisions.—Nicholas Griffin