

## EDITING PEAKE

As mentioned in *MPR* 12 (p.39), I have made corrections to the Titus books for the new King Penguins. These corrections have also gone to Methuen and to the Overlook Press for the new edition they plan to publish next year. This, I hope, will bring the texts of the paperback and hardback editions closer together. They should of course have been rigorously identical, as the paperbacks were offset from the hardbacks. But right from the start there were differences and they multiplied as the publishers made corrections to each new impression.

How important were these differences? Often they pass unnoticed; whether you read "the Poet was taking his work to heart" or "the poet was taking his work to heart" (*G* p.505) is not going to affect your understanding of the book, particularly at this juncture. (All current editions now have "Poet", not "poet", by the way.) On the other hand, the first line of this same page reads "Why was he walking every day to the monotony of..." in the Penguin Modern Classic and "Why was he waking every day" etc. in recent impressions of the hardback. Here the difference *is* important — and it should be "waking", of course. Another example: David Lister, reviewing the Swedish translation of the Titus books in *MPR* 12 (p.33) mentioned that the translator had corrected some of Peake's mistakes, such as "six heads" for "four heads" in *Gormenghast* page 328 (line 24). Well, it all depends on which impression you read! The hardbacks and early paperbacks have "six heads"; in the mid-seventies, Penguin corrected this to "four heads". And "four heads" it should be, by all normal logic, although Peake failed to correct his mistake in the first edition.

When editing the texts, my first concern was to reinstate what Mervyn Peake actually wrote, spelling excepted. This meant correcting printer's errors ("waking" for "walking") and those mistakes which the printer ought to have corrected automatically ("poissonnier" for "poissonier"). In second place, I had to consider Peake's own mistakes, like six heads instead of four at the birthday masque. This extremely delicate category runs from purely verbal quibbles to aspects of the plot itself. For instance, when Peake made Steerpikie escape from the Octagonal Room, he forgot that seventy-five pages earlier, after Flay and Steerpikie had peeped through the spyhole, he had had Flay propell Steerpikie out of the room, take him down the corridor and lock him in *another* room. Clearly, mistakes as substantial as this could not possibly be altered. On the purely verbal level, however, something could sometimes be done, often with the

help of the manuscript. In *Titus Groan*, for instance, there was a sentence in the middle of page 308 that ran:

Behind the dark lenses of her glasses her eyes were hidden from view, but . . . it might be safely assumed that they were making contact with and of covering the inner side of the lenses of her spectacles with the moisture with which the smoke had filmed them.

From the MS I discovered that Peake had originally written,

. . . it might be safely assumed that in the event of their acting in emotional agreement with the two more southerly features of her head, her eyes would be not only bulging outwards, but doing so to the extent of making contact with, and of covering the inner side of, the dark lenses of her spectacles with the moisture with which the smoke had filmed them. (l:v)

Clearly enough, he had deleted "to the extent of" (among other things) and failed to remove the second "of" that depended on it. So I amended the relevant passage to read:

. . . it might be safely assumed that they were making contact with, and covering the inner side of, the lenses of her spectacles. . .

More important were some of Peake's errors in naming the characters. In *Titus Groan*, Irma Prunesquallor calls her brother both Alfred and Bernard. Should this be made consistent? Maeve Gilmore, to whom I submitted all my amendments, thought not. Mervyn was aware of the mistake, she said, and was not bothered by it. In *Gormenghast* on the other hand, Sourdust's name crops up instead of Barquentine; she agreed that this was an oversight on Peake's part and should be corrected.

Of the forty-two corrections made to *Titus Groan*, these are the most important:

page 29	line 36	For "gare-de-manger" read "garde-manger"
30	38	For "poissonier" read "poissonnier"
49	35	For "whinney" read "whinny"
77	32	For "oceans" read "ocean's"
94	3	For "And as Nannie" read "And Nannie"
	4	For "basket had" read "basket, had"
116	8	For "abjure" read "adjure"
123	8, 9, & 11	idem
130	21	For "hundreds" read "hundred"
	36	For "Of what" read "What"
162	6	For "jug of water" read "jug the water"
167	20	For "exeunt" read "exit"
178	1	For "known." read "known?"
182	34	For "triffe" read "trifle"
367	10	For "repeated" read "repeats"
	12	For "said" read "says"
386	23	For "exeunt" read "exit"
425	24	For "when" read "where"

440	6	For "hundred-feet" read "hundred-foot"
455	15 & 25	For "hangar" read "hanger" (also on pp.456 & 488)
462	9	For "daub" read "dab"

There were thirty-eight corrections to *Gormenghast*, including

page 24	line 5	For "stories" read "storeys"
25	27	For "waist. Steerpike" read "waist, Steerpike"
72	12	For "Sudden the" read "Sudden in the"
103	3	For "his" read "its"
109	38	For "Sourdust" read "Barquentine"
110	25	For "could they want" read "they could want"
225	19	For "marmorial" read "marmoreal"
263	24	For "mass from another" read "mass to another"
298	20	For "uncharged" read "uncharted"
320	2	For "a few of the garments" read "a few garments"
	5	For "others" read "other"
388	30	For "cachement" read "catchment"
	37	For "to set" read "to be set"
405	33	For "alone." read "along."
496	28	For "primordian" read "primordial"
505	1	For "walking" read "waking"

*Titus Alone* differed from the other two books in that it had already been substantially edited by Langdon Jones. Yet there were ten corrections to be made:

page 33	line 13	For "can't" read "can"
35	1	The complete line should read "uncontrolled (for at the back of it all he was scared and little"
66	32	For "forego" read "forgo"
70	20	For "tissue" read "fissure"
111	35	For "nature now" read "nature: now"
112	1	For "river a voice" read "river: a voice"
145	9	For "learned it, it seems" read "learned, it seems"
157	1	For "air, recalled" read "air recalled"
178	17	For "couched" read "crouched"
202	9	For "exhibition" read "expedition"

While I was preparing these amendments, I pointed out to Penguin's that *Peake's Progress* needed some correcting too, there being a complete stanza missing from "The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb", for example. Thus I found myself landed with the enormous task of going through *Peake's Progress* in less than six weeks, so that the corrections could be incorporated in the paperback edition which was coming out in September. In the end, I made more than 200

amendments, which I won't list here. Instead, I should like to discuss the status of some of the texts in the book. Not having seen the manuscripts of the previously unpublished pieces, I shall deal only with those that had already been published elsewhere.

First of all the poetry. *Peake's Progress* reprints most of the shorter poems quite accurately; they needed only minor correcting, many errors being the mere omission or confusion of words. In one instance, however, I was able to improve on the original printing, as Maeve Gilmore kindly loaned me the original typescripts of a few poems, including "Thunder the Christ of it" (p.574). There I found "Gallop your traitors in" (line 4) instead of "Gallop you traitors in", an important difference! Owners of *A Reverie of Bone* (where it is entitled simply "Poem") may like to correct their copies.

On the other hand, the longer poems in *Peake's Progress*, like "Tintinnabulum" and "The Rhyme of the Flying Bomb" (but not the "Reverie of Bone"), had received a fair amount of extra punctuation. I question this practice; poetry is so sensitive to punctuation that it should be left, whenever possible, as the author wrote it, sparing though he may have been, as Mervyn Peake was, with his points and commas. Let me take just one example from the end of "Tintinnabulum", a poem which had been given a couple of dozen extra commas and stops. In the penultimate stanza (p.507), a full stop had been added at the end of the first line, to read:

His eyes were on me all the while.  
I flung the symbol through  
The downpour with the kind of smile  
That needs attending to.

so that "all the while" could only refer back to the actions of the previous stanza. Without the full stop, as printed in *A Book of Nonsense* (p.58), it refers forward to his flinging the symbol through the downpour. What is more, it means that the smile probably belongs to the other man rather than to the persona of the poem.

To conclude this discussion of the punctuation, let me add that the editors had judiciously distinguished between the vocative "O" and the interjection "Oh," whereas Peake habitually wrote plain "O" for both. So it may be that the poetry is marginally easier to read in *Peake's Progress* than in previous collections of his verse, but it nevertheless remains that, for purists who want their Peake as close as possible to the way he wrote it and approved it in print, the collections published during his lifetime remain the editions for reference.

What little time I had to make these corrections was made even shorter by correspondence with Maeve Gilmore taking unusually long to be delivered; so I was not able to correct everything to my satisfaction, and I made two mistakes. Like "Thunder the Christ of it", a number of poems had originally been printed under different

titles and sometimes I had difficulty finding them quickly enough. On pages 514–15, none of the poems was titled, not even with the first line above them in caps, but time ran out before I could settle the choice of title with Maeve Gilmore. So the page remains unnaturally blank. "An old and crumbling parapet", which was untitled in *A Book of Nonsense*, was called "Pictures and Paints" by the editor of *Omniumgathum*. "She stared at him" is not previously unpublished (*mea culpa*) but appeared in *A Book of Nonsense* under the title "Crocodiles". (In the penultimate line, by the way, read "de trop" for "de trop".) I was wrong too in thinking that "The Bull-frog and the Flies" was previously unpublished; erroneously attributed to *Omniumgathum* by the hardback of *Peake's Progress*, it was in fact printed in *Writings and Drawings*, page 96. There are other minor anomalies at the end of the book, not affecting the text, and the printers made a few mistakes ("*Nonsense*" on page 489) but all these should be tidied up when the book is reprinted.

Similar comments apply to the prose in *Peake's Progress*. There were more typographical errors to correct than in the poetry, but these are now dealt with. The short stories are verbally correct (with one exception: Maeve Gilmore did not agree to my reinstating "(as one usually does, God help us)" in the middle of line 11 of the first page of "The Connoisseurs"), but again the punctuation is not always the same. Following Peake's manuscripts, they were lightly punctuated in the original publications and received additional punctuation when they were reprinted in anthologies. *Peake's Progress* contains third versions that follow neither the original printing nor the anthology texts, with a weight of punctuation lying somewhere between the two.

Of all the prose in *Peake's Progress*, "Boy in Darkness" deserves particular attention. We must go back to 1955 when Mervyn Peake wrote his novella longhand and took it to the Hampstead Secretarial Bureau in NW3 to have it typed. They provided a top copy and at least one carbon copy, for there is a carbon copy deposited in the Bodleian Library which I have been able to examine, with the kind permission of Maeve Gilmore. Now Mervyn Peake's handwriting is not always easy to read — to say the least of it — and sometimes the secretary misread him and typed the wrong word. Sometimes she just left a blank where the word was illegible and went on.

When Peake received the typescript, he went over it with care, filling in the blanks, altering a word here and there and correcting the typist's misreadings as he went along. But he did not always remember to make the same amendments to the carbon copy. Now the book will have been set from the corrected top copy and Peake probably made further corrections on the proof — again without bringing his carbon copy up to date with his latest thoughts. So the typescript in the Bodleian Library constitutes the earliest extant draft of "Boy of Darkness", with all the typist's errors and a few of Peake's

corrections, but without the revisions that go to make the final text published in *Sometime, Never* in 1956.

Now it was this inaccurate and incomplete typescript (or its double) that was used for the Allison & Busby edition of "Boy of Darkness" (in *The Inner Landscape*, 1969), for subsequent paperback editions and for Wheaton's separate edition of the story. This accounts for the numerous discrepancies which (as Academicus) I denounced in *MPR* 3 (pp.29–31). *Peake's Progress*, thank heavens, eschews this corrupt text and reverts to the first printing of 1956 (to within a comma or two). At long last, you can read "Boy in Darkness" in the text Peake prepared and approved.

To conclude, the new *Peake's Progress* that came out this autumn is very close to the previously published texts, reliable (with the exceptions already mentioned) and therefore a must for every admirer of Peake.

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I should like to thank Maeve Gilmore for her patience and Robin Robertson, of Penguin Books, for giving me the opportunity to make these corrections.

## THE THINGS THEY SAY!

The bones of the novel are traditional but the flesh is quite out of the ordinary. Deeply imagined, splendidly written, the text is full of images of death — graves, dungeons, lightless libraries, stagnant pools — which counterpoint the main theme, the search for the sun. For this is the first volume of a four-part work, *The Book of the New Sun*, which promises to be the most stimulating fantasy of its sort since Mervyn Peake's Titus trilogy.

David Pringle reviewing Gene Wolfe's *Shadow of the Torturer* (Sidgwick & Jackson) in *The Guardian* of 4 June 1981.