Genetic Criticism and Philology

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Il faut reconnaître qu’on se débarrasse aisément du public, et même du monde auquel font référence les signes, lorsqu’on désire constituer un écrit en objet d’analyse, mais on a plus de mal à écarter le spectre de l’Auteur, à cause du sceptre, sans doute, qu’il a longtemps porté au Royaume des Lettres.

Jean Bellemín-Noël, Le texte et l’avant-texte

FROM ITS BEGINNING IN THE LATE SIXTIES, French genetic criticism has been intimately linked with German literary and critical traditions. Everything started when, in the fateful year 1968, the CNRS, the French National Science Council, created an équipe de recherche to study the Heinrich Heine manuscripts that had been acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale. This little group of researchers, led by Louis Hay (who had convinced the National Library to buy the Heine papers), became the core of a research project that in its first phases grew exponentially, with new researchers and new groups joining, resulting finally in 1982 in

1 “We must realize that, when we want to turn a piece of writing into an object of analysis, it is all too easy to disregard the addressee of a sign, and even the world to which the sign refers, but it is much more difficult to disregard the specter of the Author, doubtless because of the scepter that he has wielded for so long in the Kingdom of Letters.”
the establishment of a separate institute, the *Institut de textes et manuscrits modernes* (ITEM), which at present has more than a hundred researchers.

Since many of the early researchers were *germanistes*, there has always been some form of cooperation with German editors, resulting in three Franco–German conferences; German editors have been present at French genetic conferences and French genetic critics at German conferences. The sometimes close cooperation of French and German scholars and the interest on both sides in developments in the other camp should not blind us to the fact that scholars—especially the French—keep repeating that there are important differences between the theory and practice of German editing on the one hand and French genetic criticism on the other. In this essay I would like to address these differences from the perspective of ITEM's self-understanding: after all, Louis Hay himself has admitted that the genetic critics themselves waited too long to study their own history. It was only in the late eighties that genetic criticism began to be interested in the history of its own practice: "Ce décalage significatif a sans doute retardé l'information des généticiens et ne les a pas aidés à situer d'emblée leur démarche par rapport à une tradition."³ We will see that there are two different ways in which genetic critics understand their relationship with historical precedents and thus, with German philological traditions too.

Despite the fact that in France philology has been considered from its introduction in the nineteenth century as a German science and, thus, especially after the war of 1870, as alien and hostile to the true French spirit, and despite the even more obvious fact that philology was invented in Germany, it should be pointed out, as Michel Espagne does, that of course philology is no more intrinsically German than rhetoric is French: "En tant que technique interprétative ou éditoriale, elle est nationalement neutre, mais joue le rôle de l'intrusion étrangère dans la constellation intellectuelle nationale."³

Most scholars who have written about the history of genetic criticism take the establishment of the Heine research group as

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³ "As an editorial or interpretative technique, it has no nationality, but it does play the role of a foreign intrusion in the national intellectual constellation," Michel Espagne, "Quelques tendances de la philologie allemande," *Genes 3* (1993), 34.
their starting point. Only fairly recently and rather reluctantly have French genetic critics begun to acknowledge French precursors. This does not mean that they see themselves as a completely new development: the self-understanding of most French genetic critics is based on a view of their history as being to a large extent determined by more recent developments in literary criticism, most centrally those of structuralism and post-structuralism. Outside the paradigm, critics of genetic criticism have used the reference to philology as a strategy to dismiss genetic criticism as a critical novelty or at least to cast doubt on its credentials.

In the seventies and eighties most genetic critics tended to describe their approach as the direct and logical heir of structuralist and post-structuralist literary criticism, and this still seems to be part of the self-understanding of the majority of genetic critics. As late as five years ago, Jacques Neefs could write that French genetic criticism has little to do with historical research and that it is a development of structural researches:

... comme une sorte d’ouverture vers un amont du travail de l’écriture, s’arrachant à des recherches d’ordre générique, linguistique, narratologique, sociocritique, psychanalytique ou stylistique, c’est-à-dire comme mise à l’épreuve, sur ces objets textuels mobiles que sont les dossiers de la création, de recherches développées autour des notions mêmes de texte et d’écriture.4

Before we can begin a closer examination of this view of the history of French criticism, shared by most genetic critics and by the majority of foreign (non-French) observers, it must be pointed out that it is more than a little Darwinian, as if all academics before 1968 were completely devoted to the teachings of Gustave Lanson, and after that date they were suddenly and miraculously replaced by the followers of Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida, only to be followed ten years later by the genetic critics. In reality of course, departments of French literature, much like literature departments elsewhere in the world, were and are divided among

4 “... as a sort of opening toward a going upstream of the act of writing, breaking away from generic, linguistic, narratological, socio-critical, psychoanalytical or stylistic approaches, i.e. as a form of testing, on the mobile textual objects that are the creative dossiers, of research on the notions of text and writing themselves.” Jacques Neefs, "La critique génétique, entre histoire et esthétique," *Romantic Review* 86.3 (1995), 420. In a movement that we will later recognise as characteristic, Neefs admits in the paragraph following this quotation that the effect of these studies is that they “progressively trace the history and geography” of these materials.
hermeneutic critics, adherents of the "l'homme et oeuvre" school of criticism, post-structuralists and post-colonial theorists, etc., etc. Although there is a chasm between the reality of critical adherence in concrete departments and the generalizing rhetoric about such adherence, it is still quite interesting to observe how critics and theorists understand their own practice. It is this self-understanding of genetic criticism that should concern us here. Critics of genetic criticism not only do not agree with this view of the history of the discipline, they often make this disputed genealogy the center of their critique. This can be observed both in the work of scholars who feel that genetic criticism is too radical and of those who accuse it of being too conservative; we will discuss them in turn.

The enormous success of genetic criticism should not blind us to the fact that it is not the only surviving approach to literature in France. It may be precisely because of its success that in recent years it has been under almost constant attack. In December 1996 the literary pages of Le Monde, one of the most visible and thus most important publications in France, carried an article in which Laurent Jenny criticized the craze for manuscript study. Jenny opens his argument by underlining the obvious success of genetic criticism in acquiring funds from national scientific organizations that are generally not eager to support research in the humanities. By its very nature, Jenny writes, genetic criticism has all the required scientific credentials: a clear object of study, a need for teams of researchers to work together, and the use of sophisticated technological equipment. From an institutional perspective, genetic scholars are no match for the solitary, unverifiable gentleman–critic. But Jenny asks how scientific genetic study really is: "L'appareillage institutionel et technique de la génétique textuelle ne saurait faire oublier que l'objet qu'elle se donne échappe presque par définition à la 'science.' Ce que scrute la génétique textuelle, c'est en effet un inobservable, un inobjectivale: l'origine même de l'oeuvre littéraire." Immediately after this remark, he adds that in reading genetic critics, one wonders whether we have here the science of the twenty-first century (leading to a radical redefinition of the notions of text and creation) or just a throwback to the positivism of the nineteenth. Against this positivism, Jenny (who describes

5 "The institutional and technical machinery of textual genetics should not blind us to the fact that the object that it purports to study will almost by definition escape 'science.' What textual genetics studies is in effect something that cannot be observed, that cannot become an object: the origin itself of the literary work," Laurent Jenny, "Divagations généticiennes," Le Monde des livres (20 December 1996), v.
himself elsewhere as “a hermeneuticist or even a phenomenologist
of literature”⁶ argues for a decision to read and interpret, which is
based on “le geste arbitraire et souverain qui institue l’oeuvre en
totalité momentanée de signification.”⁷

The article in Le Monde was based on a longer, more explicit
one, in which Jenny traces the “genealogy” of genetic criticism and,
more specifically, its relation with post-structuralism. In one of the
early essays by Raymonde Debray-Genette, described by Jenny as
“a foundational moment,” Roland Barthes’s notion of writing is
adopted, on the one hand, for the new science of literature by
applying it exclusively to the handwritten form of text and, on
the other hand, the openness of the text advocated by Umberto
Eco is translated into “the expansion of the text to include its pre-
textual documents.”⁸ Jenny distinguishes between two kinds of
geneticists. “In the first case, genetic criticism is not interested
in the text but in ‘writing,’ which can be considered on its own,
without any teleological relation to the final text.” In the second
case, “genetic criticism confronts a process and a product, and
sets its sight on an interpretation”; Jenny sees Debray-Genette as
a representative of the second group (14). The problem for both
groups is situated in the open nature of the pre-text: by definition
no representation of the pre-text is possible, and if possible, it
would always be incomplete.

Jenny then goes on to argue that the “essentially indefinite char-
acter of the pre-text hardly predisposes it to serving as the founda-
tion of an interpretation of the text.” In effect, while it cannot
help with the interpretation of texts, “it certainly has the power to
suspend interpretation or render it indeterminate for reasons of a
quasi-technical nature” (15). After a look at two “genetic” authors,
Victor Hugo and Gustave Flaubert, and in particular the latter’s
poetics, in which Jenny observes a “specular relationship” with
genetic criticism, he concludes that the aim of genetic criticism
is not to interpret finished texts: “It seeks, rather, to undo these
same texts and to suspend their interpretations” (19). And this it
does in pursuit of the “real” of creation: the new form of reading
advocated by genetic criticism “incites us less to construct meaning
[...] than to envision the real of a creation starting with the written

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⁷ “... the arbitrary and sovereign gesture which creates the work in its immediate and
complete meaning,” “Divagations généticiennes,” ibid.
traces” (22). In what Jenny describes as a final irony, genetic critics then endeavor to transform the reality of the genetic materials by a movement of “computerised dematerialisation” into a “hyperreal simulacrum, endowed with ubiquity and infinite reproducibility” (23). Interestingly, Jenny concludes that at least in practice genetic criticism does not contradict interpretation. “Nonetheless, in theory and in the logic of its emergence, genetic criticism renders the critical relationship null and void” (25). Jenny’s essay is a good example of an attitude toward genetic criticism (and textual criticism in general) that is common enough but very seldom expressed. For him, the essential tasks of criticism are to “question the configurations of problematic meanings and to elucidate how one experiences literary forms, to illuminate our own times through our queries” (24). This is an attitude shared by many literary critics.

In Le Monde des livres, Pierre-Marc de Biasi answered Jenny’s criticism. First he accused his opponent of wanting to deny the existence of manuscripts (which only manage to complicate things needlessly), an approach based on the idea of the “closure” of the text, which according to de Biasi has served for the last thirty years “à débarrasser l’analyse littéraire du biographisme.” In itself this is a serious error because genetic criticism is not interested in the author, but in something entirely different: a “process of writing.” According to de Biasi, genetic criticism simultaneously offers “une formidable mine de découvertes” and a formal denial of the very possibility of closure in the meaning of texts. It is this “renouvellement interprétatif” that upsets hermeneutic critics so much. The implicit model of hermeneutics has always been the Sacred Book: “Pour l’hermeneutique, le Texte est le seul Dieu et le critique est son prophète.” A genetic critic, on the other hand, is always an anti-fundamentalist: “Les manuscrits lui ont enseigné que le texte est l’effet d’un travail, qu’il ne vit que par la mémoire vive de sa propre écriture, que le sens est instable et la vérité problématique.” Genetic criticism attempts to establish a historical and materialist epistemology of literary writing which is fundamentally opposed to the notion of the autonomous nature of the literary work.

9 “... to free literary analysis from biography,” “Les désarrois de l’hermeneute,” Le Monde des livres (14 February 1997), xii.

10 “For hermeneutics, the Text is the only God and the critic is his prophet.”

11 “The manuscripts have taught him that the text is the effect of a form of work, that it only lives in virtue of the living memory of its own writing, that meaning is not stable and truth is problematic.”
First—and apart from the rather unfair rhetoric of both parties that seems to be an integral part of all polemic—the hermeneut accuses the geneticist of constituting a return to nineteenth-century positivism. This is the worst insult in French intellectual circles. Michael Werner writes that you can only call yourself a positivist in France when you possess „ein übermenschliches Mass von masochistischer Selbstverleugnung.” More interesting is that—at least in his theoretical position—de Biasi does not resort to the traditional editor’s strategy in arguments with non-editors (one could almost call it the editor’s gambit): that some of the latter’s favorite interpretations may well be based on faulty texts. On the contrary, de Biasi’s four anti-fundamentalist lessons of manuscript study are remarkably liberal: the last two (and presumably the most basic and most important) are that meaning is unstable and truth problematic. Traditionally these are claims that belong in the camp of the opponents of textual studies, precisely because they challenge its scientific and positivist pretensions. De Biasi is thus able to turn the tables, but he has already harmed his rhetorical victory by asking in an earlier aside what to do with interpretations which are “flagrantly contradicted” by what their early drafts teach us? This may be a fine version of the editor’s gambit but it seems to be in stark contradiction with unstable meanings and problematic truths, and thus with what manuscript study is supposed to teach us.

Another important critic of genetic studies is Pierre Bourdieu. It is tempting to apply the theories of France’s most influential sociologist of culture to his own intervention in the literary domain, his monumental study of Gustave Flaubert, Les règles de l’art: Genèse et structure du champ littéraire. On the one hand, after Sartre’s L’Idiot de la famille, every leading French intellectual in search of dominance in the literary field must have his own big book on Flaubert, and, on the other, there may be some personal rivalry too: Bourdieu was a contemporary of Louis Hay at the École normale supérieure. Another temptation one has to fight is the application of genetic principles to this attack on genetic criticism. The two pages in his book that address genetic criticism are clearly a late addition to the manuscript: they are set in a smaller font and they interrupt the argument which simply resumes afterwards.

Bourdieu’s contribution to the debate about genetic criticism is interesting because it does not come from the hermeneutic or

pheno...logical right of the literary field, but from the socio-
logical left. But he too begins by accusing genetic criticism of a
"positivisme de l'historiographie littéraire la plus traditionnelle." For Bourdieu genetic criticism is a last-ditch attempt by "la critique
créatrice" to escape its crisis of formalism. A genuinely genetic
criticism, "une science rigoureuse de la littérature," which some
geneticists at least unwittingly practice, must attempt to recon-
struct "la logique du travail d'écriture entendu comme recherche
accomplie sous la contrainte structurale du champ et de l'espace
des possibles qu'il propose" (277).

As he makes quite clear in his introduction, Bourdieu aims to
formulate an answer to all the "philosophers, critics and writers"
who believe in the irreducibility of the work of art, and thus in
its fundamental transcendence (11). However, Bourdieu's radically
historical and sociological view of literature is not an act of reduc-
tion or destruction: "C'est tout simplement regarder les choses en
face et les voir comme elles sont" (15). This critique of genetic
criticism is doubly interesting because it involves a third force in
French intellectual and academic life. Within genetic criticism, as
we have seen in Jenny's critique, literature and science stand in an
uneasy relation to each other.

The third major force (or "field" if we want to use Bourdieu's
term) in French academic research and in intellectual life in general
is sociology. In fact, Michael Werner has formulated the hypothesis
that in the nineteenth century the social sciences in France played a
role similar to that of philology in Germany, both of them as sci-
entific opponents of the culture of "belles-lettres." Although Werner
then adds that there are intrinsic differences between an essentially
normative sociology and philology's relativising of norms, when we
take Bourdieu's own sociology of culture seriously, we can describe
his Les règles de l'art as an echo of the nineteenth-century oppo-
sition to philology in France. But that would be unfair: the polemical
overkill both on Bourdieu's part and on that of his critics has
obliterated the fact that there is not that much difference between

14 "... the logic of the work of writing as an analysis structurally constrained by the
field and the space of the possible outcomes that it proposes."
15 "It is simply looking straight at things and seeing them as they are."
16 "A propos de l'évolution historique des philologies modernes: l'exemple de la
Bourdieu’s non-normative and historical sociological study of literature on the one hand, and an interpretation of genetic criticism of at least one part of the genetic movement on the other. In the same way there is more continuity between Bourdieu’s project of a study of intellectual culture and the genealogy of literary studies in France by Michel Espagne and Michael Werner than both parties would probably care to admit.

Genetic criticism also has critics on its own left. Louis Hay mentions a group around Jean Levaillant who have their own journal and who claim that traditional genetic critics have capitulated before the tyranny of the text. Already in 1982, in the introduction to a collection of studies about Valéry’s Narcisse, Levaillant had been much more radical than his colleagues at ITEM, opting for the avant-texte against the final text. In his view, the draft is no longer a preparation for the text, it becomes “l’autre du texte” (“the other of the text”), and he simply turns the table: “le texte n’est peut-être que l’une des manières d’interpréter le brouillon” [his italics].

Most of the internal criticism comes from genetic scholars or editors who feel that ITEM exaggerates the novelty of its approach by exaggerating its post-structuralist legacy and simultaneously forgetting or obscuring the continuity with previous textual and editorial studies. Thus, as Louis Hay points out, they accuse genetic critics of the exact opposite of what Levaillant claimed. The two most important critics of genetic criticism are Antoine Compagnon and Jean-Yves Tadié, significantly, both of them editors of the Pléiade edition of Proust’s A la recherche du temps perdu. In his survey of twentieth-century literary criticism, Tadié does not follow the Darwinian model of history, and he certainly does not subscribe to the idea that genetic criticism developed out of structuralism or post-structuralism. Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Umberto Eco and the Tel Quel group appear in a chapter on semiotics with Propp, Greimas and Lotman, but the whole final chapter is devoted to genetic criticism—or rather to precisely those French precursors orthodox genetic critics do not want to be associated with. In his introduction to the chapter Tadié points out that the current fashion of genetic criticism has made us forget its roots: in writers like E. A. Poe who have described their practice themselves, the large

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18 “... the text may be only one way of interpreting the draft.” Jean Levaillant, “Ecriture et génétique textuelle,” Écriture et génétique textuelle: Valéry à l’œuvre, ed. Jean Levaillant (Lille, 1982), 15.
scientific editions and the works of pioneers like Gustave Lanson, Daniel Mornet, Gustave Rudler "ont défini ou redéfini les principes sur lesquels s'appuie, de nos jours encore, consciemment ou non, quiconque veut éditer ou commenter les textes littéraires et leur préparation." Because contemporary genetic critics tend not to cite them, Tadié provocatively gives the first of three sections on these precursors the title "Retour à Lanson." In his discussion of Bellemin-Noël's early essays, Tadié stresses the fact that the very definition of the term "avant-texte" includes the critic but excludes the author (285). Somewhat impatiently he later notes that next to the "travail patient, ingrat, infini des éditeurs" (289), almost any critical methodology can apply itself to manuscripts and drafts, even psychoanalytical approaches. In conclusion, he deplores the fact that literary criticism, after having been historical for a long time, has now become excessively anti-historical: "Tout se passe comme si se constituaient un prolétariat voué à l'érudition et une aristocratie de l'interprétation" (292). In reality the two cannot exist without each other.

As Tadié's co-editor of the Pléiade's *A la recherche*, Antoine Compagnon published an essay in 1992 in which he addressed the problem of refutation in literary criticism. Although Karl Popper's theory of the necessary falsifiability of scientific theories is not often applied to literary criticism, Compagnon believes that the new edition of the *Recherche* should make it possible to show that some interpretations are wrong and that the question, "Tout est-il aujourd'hui permis en critique littéraire?" should be answered in the negative. Compagnon refutes one psychoanalytical reading, but he adds that of course Popper believed that psychoanalysis could not be refuted (and was thus not a scientific theory). More successful is the refutation of a number of historical and biographical conjectures. In his conclusion Compagnon writes that no serious literary critic can henceforth afford to ignore the genetic

19 "... have defined or redefined the principles used, to this day, consciously or not, by those who want to edit or comment on literary texts and their writing," *La critique littéraire au XXe siècle* (Paris, 1987), 275.

20 "All this creates the impression that we have a proletariat doomed to erudition and an aristocracy devoted to interpretation."

21 For an eloquent defense against this charge from an 'orthodox' genetic critic, see Jean-Louis Lebrave, "La critique génétique: une discipline nouveau ou un avatar moderne de la philologie?", *Genesis* 1 (1992), 33–72.

22 "Is everything allowed in literary criticism today?" "Ce qu'on ne peut plus dire de Proust," *Littérature* 88 (1992), 54.
findings of the new Proust edition (with the possible exception of deconstruction, the American variant of post-structuralism, for the same reason that it is, like psychoanalysis, a world-view and not a scientific theory) (61).

In 1994 Compagnon and Almuth Grésillon organised a French–American conference on genetic criticism in New York, the proceedings of which were published in *Romanic Review*. The first sentence in Compagnon’s introduction is: “Developed during the 1970s, and yet indebted to the philological tradition, genetic criticism has become a major field of literary studies in France” (*Romanic Review* 86.3 [1995], 394). Of course the clause between commas is a deliberate challenge to the orthodox ITEM scholars, and Compagnon’s discussion of genetic criticism (for the benefit of American textual critics) is quite critical. In a series of questions the old objections against genetic criticism recur: is genetic criticism really new? is it really criticism? is it a return of the old philology?, etc. The questions then culminate in what Compagnon calls three “perplexities”:

1. “Is genetic criticism a theory of criticism or just helpful advice, something like: keep in mind that manuscripts can also contribute to the understanding of literature?” (395).

2. “Does genetic criticism really represent a rupture or breakthrough in literary studies as claimed by its practitioners? ... Is the avant-texte, the text at work, becoming text, *in statu nascendi*, different from the old manuscript?” (296).

3. “What are the relationships between genetic criticism and critical editing?” (297).

Compagnon’s comments on the second and third questions make clear that he does not belong to what he himself calls the “hardliners” of genetic criticism. The major disjunction in textual studies in France is that between editors, such as those of the Pléiade edition of *A la recherche*, and these hardliners, who claim critical editions can never render the third dimension of the text (time), “in particular the non-linear aspect of the manuscript” (397).

Ten years after Tadié’s survey of twentieth-century literary criticism, Compagnon published *Le Démon de la littérature: Littérature et sens commun*. As its title and subtitle show, the author is rather critical of the theory of literature. The book consists of the analysis (we can assume that the author himself would object to
the use of the term “deconstruction”) of seven concepts central to literary theory: literature, the author, the world, the reader, style, history, and value. In the section on the author, Compagnon addresses the problem of the intentional fallacy or, as it came to be called in Roland Barthes’s famous title, “the death of the author.” There is no space here to do justice to Compagnon’s complex defense of authorial intentions. In his erudite commentary, ranging from Plato to the original disagreement about Racine between Barthes and Raymond Picard (which lies at the origin of French structuralism and post-structuralism), Compagnon makes it clear that rumors of the author’s demise may well be premature. He shows how most reading strategies (and most theories of literature) logically presuppose some concept of authorial intention, and he comes to the conclusion that we should not be forced to choose between the two alternatives represented by Picard and Barthes, the “intention clair et lucide” of the former, and the latter’s total refusal of intention. Basing himself partly on E. D. Hirsch, Compagnon distinguishes between two ways of reading a text, either in reference to its original context, or to that of the reader. He concludes:

Toute interprétation est une assertion sur une intention, et si l’intention d’auteur est niée, une autre intention prend sa place, comme dans le Don Quichotte de Pierre Ménard. Extraire une œuvre de son contexte littéraire et historique, c’est lui donner une autre intention (un autre auteur: le lecteur), c’est en faire une autre œuvre, et ce n’est donc plus la même œuvre que nous interprétions.23

Compagnon is well aware that his defense of the notion of intention against its rejection by literary theory will convince neither the literary theoreticians nor the hardliners of genetic criticism, although his reappraisal of the role of intention has been confirmed by at least some of the participants at a recent series of seminars by literary theoreticians.24

23 “Every interpretation is an assertion about an intention, and if the intention of the author is denied, it is replaced by another intention, as in Don Quichotte by Pierre Ménard. If we abstract a work from the literary and historical context, we give it another intention (another author, the reader), we turn it into another work, and it is therefore not the same work that we are interpreting,” Le Démon de la littérature: Littérature et sens commun (Paris, 1998), 98.

It is time for a first summary of our findings: genetic criticism is one of the most successful methodologies in the last two decades in France, but as a result of its accomplishments it has been under attack: hermeneutic and other more traditional critics attack its scientific status, claiming that genetics has destroyed the literary text; sociological–historical critics accuse genetic scholars of disregarding a work’s historical context. At the same time, there has also been an internal opposition, on the one hand from an avant-garde of hardliners who claim that official genetic critics still privilege the final text and on the other from those editors and critics who accuse it of the opposite sin. What is interesting is the central role of philology in all these arguments. All of the participants in this debate refer to genetic criticism’s problematic affinity with philology (and thus with positivism), but they do so either to bury or to praise it.

The central position of philology in these debates is due to the polemical power that the term continues to have, and that has everything to do with the history of literary studies in the second half of the twentieth century. In the late sixties literary theory in France emancipated itself from the historical approaches prevalent at French universities to that date. In comparison with other critical traditions like those of German, British and American academic studies, formalist structuralism and post-structuralism were belated manifestations of developments that had manifested themselves elsewhere in the early forties and late fifties. The initial attacks came from the margins of the quite centralised French university system, from the École pratique des hautes études, the École normale supérieure, and even from creative writers without much institutional backing, such as the groups around the journals Tel Quel and Change. In the seventies post-structuralism radicalised not just the academic study of literature but also psychoanalysis and philosophy, resulting in a view of the literary text (and language as such) that became increasingly subjective and even mystical.25

The tabula rasa attitude of post-structuralism towards history in general, the taboo about the period preceding Barthes’s foundational “victory” over Picard, and an overall feeling that one must

be “new,” still make it difficult if not impossible for French scholars to acknowledge a continuity with literary criticism as it was practised before 1968. Although this finding explains the considerable polemical power of the philological insult, it does not bring us closer to an understanding of the role of the key notion that divides genetic criticism: the troublesome concept of authorial intention.

In order to understand its role in these debates we will now focus more closely on one genetic dossier that has been studied extensively at the ITEM, that of James Joyce. In many ways Joyce’s work, especially *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, has been central both to post-structuralist and to genetic debates. Hans Walter Gabler’s edition of *Ulysses* has been an interesting test case for genetic editions.26 And in *The French Joyce* I have described how in the eighties the post-structuralist readings of Joyce (an important point of reference for both Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida) were slowly replaced by genetic studies of his work. Whereas the pioneers of the modern academic Joyce study in France, Claude Jacquet and Jacques Aubert, both made important early contributions to the study of the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks, the younger generation of Joyce critics was trained first in literary theory, most of them as students of one of the most radical of post-structuralist critics, Hélène Cixous. When they turned to a study of the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks, this represented neither a break with post-structuralism nor a return to philology. On the contrary, Daniel Ferrer, Jean-Michel Rabaté, and Laurent Milési stress the continuity of their theoretical work with that of Derrida and Lacan.

Before we can look more closely at their theories, we must briefly discuss two related phenomena that go beyond the boundaries of our discussion up to this point. First, much more than their colleagues at ITEM who work on German authors, the genetic critics who study Joyce also take part in the British and American context: either by publishing with British or American publishers, or by teaching at universities in Great Britain or the United States. A second point is that post-structuralism has been quite successful, especially in the States but also in the United Kingdom and more

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specifically among specialists on Joyce’s work. But it should be added that American post-structuralism, and especially its variant deconstruction, do not always closely resemble their French originals.

Both theses comments are relevant when we begin our reading of the theoretical writings of Daniel Ferrer, at present the most important genetic French Joyce scholar, with a look at his contribution to the Franco-American conference on genetic criticism and textual edition for which Antoine Compagnon wrote the introduction. The title of his essay, which he wrote with Michael Groden, is programmatic: “Post-Genetic Joyce” combines “post-structuralist” with “genetic” because genetic criticism stands in relation to traditional genetic studies as post-structuralism does to structuralism: “It does not reject them but subsumes them, and reinterprets them from a different point of view (which is precisely based on a post-structuralist conception of the text)” (Romantic Review 86.3 [1995], 500). Ferrer then points out that genetic Joyce studies are not new: critics such as A. Walton Litz, Robert Scholes, David Hayman, and Michael Groden himself have been studying manuscripts and notebooks since the fifties. Even Stuart Gilbert’s James Joyce’s Ulysses, the first book-length study of Joyce’s most famous novel, makes use of genetic documents and is thus at least “partly genetic.”

First Michael Groden re-reads his 1977 study Ulysses in Progress in the light of later developments. Groden’s major retroactive insight is that post-structuralist notions of the text as a “methodological field” or “network” (Barthes) have taught him that the unity of the literary work he was looking for in 1977 may not exist:

if the network includes the text’s own past, then the sense of a teleological movement from early stages to finished product can be replaced at least provisionally by one of a textual field that extends backwards and forwards between avant-texte and text. (503)

Ferrer then looks at an extra set of corrections for part of the “Circe” chapter which Joyce sent to the printer after the “bon à tirer” had been given. When the printer would or could not make the corrections, Joyce then transformed the material and used it in those sections of the chapter he was working on at the time. Ferrer notes the importance of the “bon à tirer” in genetic criticism since “it marks historically the simultaneous birth of the modern text and its counterpart, the pre-text, the authorial working manuscript.” In this way Joyce’s attempt to circumvent this divide “can be taken as
a symbol of Joyce’s attempts to subvert this limit, as well as all the other limits that constitute textuality”; it even “destroys the quasi-legal fiction of a unified authorial intention” (509). Earlier Ferrer had suggested that the reason for a Joycean geneticism “avant-la-lettre” lies in the nature of Joyce’s texts: “the power of the Joycean text and avant-texte had already induced a practice of reading that largely anticipated theorisation.” In both these cases I believe that Ferrer overstates his case. First, I doubt very much that Joyce would be the only writer to try to make changes in his text at the last possible moment, and beyond. And second, I think that the interest in Joyce’s manuscripts has more to do with the straightforward fact that they became available to scholars fairly early than with an exceptional status that would make Joyce’s texts escape the conditions of other literary works in the first half of this century.

In a more recent article in *Genesis*, Ferrer explicitly grounds a general discussion of the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks in the post-structuralist tradition which I analysed in *The French Joyce*. In this book I attempt to show how the philosophical variant of post-structuralism that Ferrer refers to was not so much a reaction to structuralism but rather the result of a particular interpretation of Heidegger’s linguistic philosophy. Later these ideas were applied in psychoanalysis (Lacan), metaphysics (Derrida), historiography (Foucault) and still later in other fields including theology. The result was not so much a theory of writing (*écriture*) as its deification. In addition I try to show how in most post-structuralist approaches Joyce’s work always manages to escape the dominant culture (metaphysics, the patriarchal order, post-colonialism) and to function as a precursor of alternative or progressive practices, so it is not surprising to find that Joyce has also anticipated genetic theory.

In his essay “Les carnets de Joyce: avant-textes limites d’une oeuvre limite” (the sub-title illustrates the phenomenon described in the last paragraph), Ferrer describes the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks in terms of the philosophical status of *écriture*. Ferrer opens the article with a discussion of the case of the French prime minister whose diary happened to be displayed on his desk when it was photographed. In the diary the words “Affaire fiscale Médecin” could be made out. For the press, this suggested that the prime minister wanted to intervene in the fiscal affairs of the already well-compromised politician Médecin. The prime minister denied this: he had simply planned to talk to the minister of Economic and Fiscal Affairs about the fiscal problems of the medical profession.
Ferrer believes that it is impossible to decide who was right since the case "concerned a piece of private writing, which implies no communication to somebody else and therefore no obligation to conform to a public code" (*Genes* 3 [1993], 45). The same is true, or so Ferrer believes, for a writer's notebooks: they have no addressee, they do not want to communicate and therefore they have no proper logic. Ferrer quotes Michel Foucault's description in *Histoire de la folie* of a post-Mallarméan literature that "suspends the reign of language in a gesture of writing." The book that most closely resembles this definition is *Finnegans Wake*, which makes Joyce's last book very similar to a private notebook or a "private joke" (46).

The avant-texte or genetic record of *Finnegans Wake* consists not only of drafts, typescripts and proofs, but also of a series of more than sixty notebooks, ranging from large volumes to tiny copy-books. These notebooks (which were included in the complete facsimile edition of all of Joyce's manuscripts) contain notes, mostly consisting of an isolated word, sometimes clusters or even sentences. Among specialists there is no unanimity of what went into the notebooks: some critics claim that these are for the most part the result of notes taken from sources, other critics see them as "epiphanoids" or semi-autobiographical insights related to the "epiphanies" Joyce collected as a young writer. But everybody agrees on what came out of the notebooks: in working on drafts, typescripts and proofs of *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce would return to the notebooks, copy one of the words or phrases onto his manuscript and then strike out the unit in coloured crayons. In order to find materials more easily he devised a system of drawings or "sigla" to represent characters or themes in his book.

When the notebooks were first catalogued by Peter Spielberg of the University of Buffalo, four groups were identified: a large notebook with headings taken from the titles of Joyce's works (VI.A, also known as "Scribbledehobble"), the regular B-series of notebooks in Joyce's handwriting, and the C-series, in the clear hand of an amanuensis, who in the early thirties was asked to copy out all the unused items when Joyce's eyesight was failing. The final D-series is a group of virtual notebooks: because in the C-series we

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27 The notebooks were edited by David Hayman and published in facsimile by Garland in 1977. A new edition by Vincent Deane, Daniel Ferrer, and Geert Lernout will for the first time fully transcribe and annotate all of the surviving notebooks. The first three notebooks, scheduled for publication in 2001 in book form, will be followed by an electronic edition after five years.
find entries that cannot be traced to any of the surviving B-series notebooks, we assume that there must have been a number that have disappeared in the meantime.28

A discussion of the structure of one of the notebooks leads to Ferrer’s conclusion that Scribbledebobble is not simply a channel between two texts: “the notebook’s function transcends the simple logic, the neutral and complete transferral of elements that are conceived or appropriated outside of it” (51). Since at the time of writing Ferrer still considered VI.A as the chronologically first notebook (which we now know is not the case), he can claim that this form of organisation “soon disappears” and is replaced by an “equally structured, intrinsic system.” The overt chaos hides “an extremely strong power of integration” which works in two ways: on the one hand the sigla and on the other the translation in a totally individual language. Ferrer believes that the C-series of notebooks shows that Joyce was fascinated by the mistakes and errors introduced by his amanuensis Mme Raphaël because they also form the implicit and explicit theme of Finnegans Wake. The D-series reminds us, Ferrer writes, that the virtual status of any textual element in the Wake resembles that of the lost and therefore virtual D-series notebooks, because “the ‘definitive’ text of the Wake […] although it exists in its printed form, has been designed to remain for ever in a state of perpetual signifying and discursive suspension” (56–57). Ferrer’s conclusion is that Joyce’s Finnegans Wake notebooks at the same time do and do not comply with the philosophical definitions (by Derrida in “Signature, événement, contexte”) of the major predicates of writing:

The work of writing that is evident in the notebooks is paradoxically founded on taking seriously those essential properties of writing that their status as notebooks seems to challenge. They are witnesses of that other essential predicate that Joyce will exploit ad nauseam: the “possibility of disengagement and citational graft which belongs to the structure of every mark, spoken or written, and which constitutes every mark in writing before and outside of every horizon of semio-linguistic communication; in writing, which is to say in the possibility of its functioning being cut off, at a certain point, from its ‘original’ desire-to-say-what-one-means [vouloir-dire] and from its participation in a saturable and constraining context.”

28 A more extended discussion of the so-called Buffalo notebooks and the different ways in which they have been read can be found in Geert Lernout, “The Finnegans Wake notebooks and Radical Philology,” European Joyce Studies 4, ed. David Hayman and Sam Slote (1995), 19–48. Some of my discussions here are based on my comments in that article.
There is a double movement at work here that we have previously observed. On the one hand Ferrer places Joyce’s notebooks and *Finnegans Wake* in a very specific literary tradition (Mallarmé, Valéry, Blanchot) and on the other he places the study of the notebooks itself in an equally specific critical tradition that is marked by the names of Foucault and Derrida.

The trouble is that the post-structuralist notion of “écriture” and “text,” intertextually rich while lacking a contextual or intentional anchoring, is one that is only seemingly implied in the case of *Finnegans Wake*. Ferrer refers to the Lacanian–Derridian problematisation of writing effected in Joyce’s notebooks, but at the same time he makes claims about the notebooks that are difficult to reconcile with post-structuralist notions. In his essay in *Romantic Review* he had concluded: “The genetic documents do not authorise or forbid interpretations, but they open dizzying new ranges of potentialities” (511). We have already seen in the case of de Biasi that such liberal views are hard to maintain when you are confronted by manuscript evidence. In an article published in the *James Joyce Quarterly* on a series of notes in VI.B.19 which Joyce copied from the third volume of Freud’s *Collected Papers*, Daniel Ferrer writes that “One of Joyce’s holograph notebooks gives us at last some *irrefutable evidence* of a direct (and close) contact with Freud’s text in the English translation. We can now be *absolutely certain* that Joyce read attentively ‘Little Hans’ and ‘The Wolf Man.’”

The reason for this seeming incompatibility of post-structuralist notions of the text and of any serious work on manuscripts is relatively simple: a close study of an avant-texte automatically involves consideration of the status of drafts and proofs in the chronology of the text’s development. If, for example, we see the *Finnegans Wake* notebooks as preliminary stages for the work on the *Wake*, we effectively contextualise them by imposing a temporal order on them. If we look for the sources of the textual units, we do not open up the notebook text to the larger intertextual network: on the contrary, we ground the text by limiting the infinity of its possible meanings, we find “irrefutable evidence” and end up being “absolutely certain.”

It is also possible to differ with Ferrer’s overall description of the material found in the notebooks and most centrally with the status

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29 “The Freudful Couchmare of *F* Joyce’s Notes on Freud and the Composition of Chapter XVI of *Finnegans Wake*,” *James Joyce Quarterly* 22.4 (1985), 367. The italics are mine.
of all the pre-texts, drafts and notebooks. I do not believe that Joyce’s notebooks are private documents in more than the most pedestrian of meanings. The *Finnegans Wake* notebooks are not diaries or journals, although occasionally they do contain personal material such as a dream or part of a conversation, addresses, and telephone numbers. The notebooks also differ from a writer’s journal: they do not record the history of the writing of *Finnegans Wake*, although it is obvious that such a history would be impossible to write if one did not have access to the notebooks. On a more theoretical level, the possibility of a private form of writing that is implied in Ferrer’s reference to Derrida is highly questionable. There is no reason to assume the possibility of a private language in this fundamental sense, and if it did exist, we would not be able to say anything about it. The French minister should not be let off the hook that easily: we must read “Affaire fiscale Médecin” in the context of other statements and texts, and although there is no evidence that he was not using some kind of private code, there is even less reason to assume that he was. Shouldn’t we consider a prime-minister’s diary as a more or less public document? Why are the words “affaire” and “médecin” in the singular? Is the French prime minister as bad with the spelling of plurals and singulars as at least one former vice-president of the US? Why does the last word have a capital letter? From the evidence provided by Ferrer it seems that the prime minister has quite some explaining to do.

In contrast to this, what happens “before and outside of every semio-linguistic communication” belongs to what Kant called the intellectual intuition, that whereof we cannot speak. A really radical philology limits the inquiry to the original desire-to-say of any form of writing and to its participation in a saturable and constraining context. If it did not, it would forfeit all relevance. Take away a text’s intentions and context, and the only thing left to say about it is that it can mean anything at all.

We have seen that there is a great continuity between the theoretical statements of the major orthodox genetic critics: the claim that genetic criticism is an heir to post-structuralism and that it has little to do with earlier historical or philological approaches. Genetic criticism opens possibilities for the interpretation of texts, and it does not limit interpretations. Yet the emphasis on time, on the “third dimension” of literary texts, strangely excludes both the beginning and the end of the process. On the one hand, genetic critics reject the notion of literary intentions which precede or otherwise transcend the written traces in the manuscript record.
On the other hand they also refuse to grant any special privilege to the final text which they see as just one of many equally valid variants. The rejection of intention and of teleology explains their aversion to editions and to any other strategy that claims to freeze an (avant-)text that is in theory and in practice open, fragmented and fluid.

But this is not the whole story: both internal and external critics have accused genetic criticism of having an old-fashioned philological agenda that contradicts the orthodox theoretical agenda outlined above. Some genetic critics, especially those with an interest in the social and ideological history of their own discipline, see more continuities with older historical approaches than with post-structuralism. On the other hand, when they are discussing specific texts, even orthodox genetic critics cannot avoid coming to definite historical findings which, whether they like it or not, contradict some interpretations.

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It would be possible to conclude from the evidence presented here that the relationship of genetic criticism to its past is less a matter of history than of polemical rhetoric. This explains, for example, why it is easier for Daniel Ferrer to consider Joycean textual studies as precursors of genetic criticism, whereas his colleagues in German or French literature cannot: Anglo-American New Bibliography has played almost no part in the politics of French literary study. Genetic criticism follows post-structuralism as the paradigm of literary studies, and it must thus constitute a step forward and subsume its precursor, rather than associating itself with a philological tradition that was finally and totally defeated in the late sixties.

The references to post-structuralism and the rejection of intention and teleology are not crucial to the essentially historical and philological turn effected by genetic criticism. In his article in the special issue of *Romantic Review*,30 Louis Hay answers the critics of genetic criticism. Most surprising is the sheer number of anti-genetic statements, but ironically the controversy (Hay speaks of "la nouvelle querelle de la génétique") only manages to prove that genetic criticism has acquired the status of a powerful "paradigm." Hay also stresses that some of these critiques are mutually exclusive: for some critics genetic criticism is too modern, for others

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30 "Critiques de la critique génétique"; see n. 2, above.
it is not modern enough. Genetic criticism's genealogy is central to most of these critiques, and like Jean-Louis Lebrave before him, Hay attempts to show the fundamental differences between genetic criticism and its supposed positivist ancestors.

More interesting for our present purposes, however, is Louis Hay's defence against the charge that the emphasis of genetic criticism on the pre-text has destroyed the text itself. The "objective core" of this question is formed by the recent editions of central modernist texts (Ulysses, A la recherche) which have re-opened the question of which elements belong to a text and which do not. Genetic criticism is not responsible for this development, it has only attempted to elaborate methods to describe the relationship of writing with texts and in some recent editions these methods have then been applied. Next came an essentially "aesthetic opposition" which celebrates open, fragmentary, changing and modern texts against "traditional" and closed texts. These aesthetic considerations were followed by the philosophical movement of deconstruction (with its own emphasis on fragments and openness). Hay is not sure that the study of manuscripts will ever allow us to decide between contrasting aesthetic or philosophical considerations, which have less to do with methodology than with taste and freedom of choice.

These comments of Louis Hay are the basis of a theoretical diagnosis. At the objective core of genetic criticism are the editions of modern texts. Not just the representation of genetic evidence but also the establishment of a genetic dossier necessitate a careful study of the complete manuscript record, and that task cannot be effected without establishing the documents' chronology, which in its turn is impossible without recourse to a writer's diaries, letters, and to testimonies from his or her relatives and friends. These findings and the resulting dossier of text and "avant-texte" (which does not even need to be published) form an objective core which genetic criticism has in common with philology, with German traditions of historical-critical editions and even with Anglo-American editorial theory. It is as impossible to establish such a dossier without recourse to authorial intentions as it is to exclude from it the published or final versions of the text. The resistance of genetic criticism to philology or to editions (even when they are genetic) is logically secondary and, as we have seen, mostly polemical. And that is why it would be much more useful if French editors, genetic critics, sociologists and historians of literature, German and American editors, instead of concentrating on their
differences and identifying exactly what separates one's own group from the others, would attempt to define a common ground which, I believe, will bear a close resemblance to Louis Hay's "objective core."