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Fredson Bowers

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TEXTUAL AND LITERARY  
CRITICISM

THE SANDARS LECTURES IN  
BIBLIOGRAPHY  
1957-58

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# TEXTUAL & LITERARY CRITICISM

BY

FREDSON BOWERS

*Professor of English in the University of Virginia*



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## PREFACE

**T**HE first three of these lectures on 'Textual and Literary Criticism' were delivered on 20–2 January 1958 in my capacity as Sandars Reader in Bibliography for 1957–8 at Cambridge University. The fourth was given on 23 January 1958 in London before the Bibliographical Society. Since this latter was written very shortly after the completion of the initial series when my mind was much occupied with the general matter, its subject developed naturally from the Sandars lectures and is perhaps best considered in relation to them. I am indebted, therefore, to the Council of the Bibliographical Society for permission to print this fourth paper here rather than separately in the Society's Transactions.

A few excisions made in deference to the patience of my hearers have been restored for the more leisurely reader, and the opportunity has been taken to add some discursive notes to the basic text. Various informalities and acerbities more suitable for speech than for print have been altered; otherwise, the lectures are offered here as in their occasional oral form without other special preparation.

Although the specific subjects of the four discourses present something of a mixed bag, an underlying rationale is intended to be present. Literary criticism is viewed as directly dependent upon expert textual criticism, and some horrid examples are cited to illustrate what can happen when it chooses to operate independently. The expertise of the textual critic is taken as applying to four basic situations: (1) the analysis of the characteristics of an extant manuscript;

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(2) the recovery of the characteristics of the lost manuscript that served as copy for a printed text; (3) the study of the transmission of a printed text; and (4) the presentation of the established and edited text to the public.

The first lecture attempts to survey the initial three with illustrations drawn chiefly from post-Renaissance literary works to the present day, both English and American.

The second lecture concerns itself in detail with the first category, using as a case-history a recently investigated group of holograph manuscripts by the American poet Walt Whitman. The unusually full information of particular concern to a literary critic that 'bibliographical' analysis of these manuscripts has yielded, led me to venture a discourse that in its principles was pertinent to the series, though dealing with an author not native to my audience. However, the knowledge that early in his career Whitman was welcomed more boldly in England than in his homeland gave me some cause to hope that he would be an agreeable fellow-countryman to bring across the Atlantic with me.

In the third lecture, devoted exclusively to Shakespeare, some account is given of the most recent textual investigations bearing on the second and third categories, that is, the earnest attempt that is now being made on a new and more scientific basis to recover the essential facts about the copy behind all substantive Shakespeare printed texts, whether single (and thus concerning the identification of manuscript characteristics in the print) or multiple (and thus concerning a scrupulous examination of the circumstances of transmission). Since nothing dates faster these days than Shakespearean textual criticism, the illustrations I have chosen may become obsolete in some respects before this

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book is published; but I hope that the principles enunciated may stand longer than the examples.

The results of textual criticism reach their fruition in an established edited text; and therefore my fourth lecture completes the series by an analysis of the rationale of the modern critical old-spelling edition intended to recover an author's words in their contemporary forms more fully and accurately than can be found in modernised or in facsimile texts, or in any of the original documents.

As they progress, the lectures grow increasingly technical, and emphasis on the factual bases of textual criticism replaces the attention given at the beginning to the factual or rather textual bases of literary criticism. This is a fault for which it is proper to apologise, pleading only the learned auspices of these lectures, the pull of my own special interests, and the particular demands of the subject.

F. B.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA  
20 February 1958