

Foucault

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 17 Dec 1999

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/2038>

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Jonathan Laidlow — 17 Dec 1999, 12:09

Jeremy also wrote:

"So what F. challenges is not the author as individual who writes, but author as unified idea. We should be looking at the system of dispersion of discourse, its discontinuities, how it ebbs and flows together. You already provided a good summary of the author-function (must cut and paste into my own notes!)."

Precisely - the author, as well as being a physical being who writes, is also a constructed feature of discourse, which works on some levels to control the reception of that discourse - hence my suggestion of the very different ways we might read Kilgore Trout's 'BotNS'. Your quote from Foucault looked excellent - I've been searching for more discussion of the Author Function, is it readily available in a collection? I'd be grateful if you'd send me more details privately (vacation email to: ultan01 at yahoo.co.uk) On Materiality of the book Jeremy said: "Well the only thing I can think of is how certain texts might be seen to be valorised by receiving expensive bindings and illustration plates." It's a bit more than that in my own research - stems from the belief that rather than read works as the genius outpourings of a solitary figure we should recognise the influence and importance of editors, publishers, artists, type-setters and so forth in the process of production. Sterne is an interesting figure because, like Blake but on a commercial level, he chose to keep tight control over the appearance of his books - choosing the format (octavo), layout, and special features (wobbly lines, black pages, use of footnotes merging with the main text). One SF example might be Alfred Bester's 'Stars my Destination' (or is it the Demolished Man) which plays with concrete poetry later on, and was butchered by editors at one point. Now happily restored. The point is that meaning does not just come from one source - whether that be the author's stated purpose, or the linguistic units on the page. The argument continues in the debate in the 80s over the 'correct' edition of Joyce's Ulysses, which started from the principle that Joyce's aims had been misrepresented in the original published edition because of editorial interference. A 'corrected' text duly appeared. This was then lambasted by a scholar who argued that Joyce had been working with the publishers to insert jokes and other references in the published edition. I forget the exact details, but one of them was the appearance of a number in the text that corresponded to the page that it appeared on.

"On the other hand, there is a more underground literature (not, after F., the Victorian again!) which might "mask" its interior (anyone read the Sixteen Pleasures?). This was Clute's idea in that Salon piece I guess. You have to know the "code" to access the material, and there is a certain jargon, look, illustration type, etc that signals to the cognoscenti. So there is a "discourse" to the appearance of the book which can exclude or filter access. Well, maybe not! You'll have to tell us more about your work..."

I seem to remember an argument that Oscar Wilde's plays, while performed in the mainstream London theatres, also contained lots of jokes which would make sense to the turn of the century London gay culture. As these were deliberately designed not to be understood by the 'ordinary' audience, there was some debate about whether these sections should be spelt out in modern editions of the plays, or left for the reader to take or leave.

Right, I'm finishing work now until the new year. I should have sporadic access to my Uni account via the web and will keep checking the Urth and Whorl lists. Should any of you like to contact me, it would be best to use my yahoo email account, ultan01 at yahoo.co.uk

Merry Christmas/Happy Holidays and have a fantastic New Year if I don't get back to the list.

Jonathan

Visit Ultan's Library - A Gene Wolfe web resource

<http://members.tripod.co.uk/laidlow/index.htm>

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