

## Genetic Inroads into the Art of James Joyce

HANS WALTER GABLER (*Author*)  
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In the realm of modernist literature, few figures loom as large as James Joyce. His works, characterised by innovative narrative techniques and intricate linguistic play, challenge readers and critics alike to delve deeper into the art of storytelling. Hans Walter Gabler's book *Genetic Inroads into the Art of James Joyce*, however, would tell you more than that. Here, Gabler embarks on a critical exploration of Joyce's creative process, shedding light on the genesis of his seminal texts. Through his scrutiny of manuscripts, drafts and revisions that make up Joyce's oeuvre, Gabler provides us with a glimpse into the intricate relationship between the author's ever-changing ideas and the plethora of literary forms he employs.

This book itself draws from the essence of the famous saying attributed to Ralph Waldo Emerson, "It is not the destination, it is the journey". Through detailed examination of Joyce's manuscripts, Gabler utilises "generic criticism" to uncover the layers of meaning embedded within them, giving readers the impression that the revisions made by Joyce are not mere corrections, but instead, essential components of art that make up his creative process. It is fair to admit that the extensive research done is not for the faint-hearted; there is a lot to digest. Yet, each reflection gives us a glimpse into Gabler's understanding of Joyce's thought process, creating the illumination of the writer's struggles and success.

For the most part of Gabler's professional career, the author has focused on the notion of "genetic criticism", scrutinising the developmental history of a literary work. This book serves to provide clear insights into this criticism, through Gabler's emphasis on the importance of the manuscript tradition in Joyce's work. The first few chapters of the book delve precisely into how Joyce's early drafts of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, *Dubliners* and *Ulysses* reiterate this ongoing quest to provide the perfect expression of his underlying themes. Gabler emphasises on Joyce's relentless pursuit of linguistic precision and narrative depth through the tracing of the genetic pathways of the works. This may beg the question, *why* is there a need to look into Joyce's work, in today's time and age?

The answer lies in the following chapters of the book, where Gabler further illuminates the cardinal concerns that preoccupied Joyce's work: identity, consciousness, and the complexities of modern life. The examination of Joyce's revisions leads Gabler to suggest that apart from stylistic choices, readers are able to ascertain Joyce's deeper philosophical engagements with the themes he chooses to write about. Gabler notes in the chapter, "James Joyce's Text in Progress" how, Joyce being an avid reader himself, was able to merge the knowledge he had acquired from "structural and semiotic analogies of language-encoded texts" along with the "experience-encoded reality" of his time (195). In "Joyce's Hamlet Chapter", Gabler even draws comparison between

the character of Stephen Dedalus and Joyce himself, as the character's challenges mirror Joyce's own struggle between artistic ambition and societal expectations. What Gabler reveals here is Joyce's ability to amalgamate writing techniques with existential thoughts surrounding the dilemmas of the past, which may still remain germane today.

Another important insight to note is how Gabler successfully presents the significance of textual variants, which provide not only changes in language but also in terms of a reader's interpretation. Gabler's deep analysis of Joyce's work invites the reader to reappraise their previously established interpretations of Joyce's work. ("We encounter Joyce as both the author and writer of the novel, and as his own first reader", 404). By highlighting Joyce's experimentation with both form and language, Gabler ultimately attempts to show us just truly how innovative Joyce's spirit is and how he continued to push the boundaries of literature.

While Gabler manages to eloquently depict this innovativeness Joyce possesses, most readers may find the language within this book to be too dense, the area of focus to be a little too niche, or some details pertaining to the analysis to be repetitive. Nevertheless, the profoundness with which Gabler approaches the subject may lead the average reader to most likely appreciate the depth and freshness of the perspectives offered. Gabler concludes his work with an open invitation "to whom it may concern" to ultimately, "rise above the shoulders of his team and *take over*", giving us the impression that while he and his team may have uncovered many discoveries from Joyce's manuscripts, there is still a lacuna to be filled. Whether this invitation is taken up remains to be seen.

As suggested in the blurb on the back cover of the book, Gabler's devotion towards Joyce's work is reflected through his seminal work "spanning fifty years from the analysis of composition he undertook towards a critical text of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, through the Critical and Synoptic Edition of *Ulysses*, to Gabler's latest essays on (appropriately enough) Joyce's sustained artistic innovation". Ultimately, this book serves not only as a "treasure trove" of a deeper understanding of the artistic labour behind the apparent brilliance of Joyce's work, but also a testament of Gabler's persistence and diligence in asking the right questions and seeking the possible answers. In doing so, this meticulous and well-curated collection of Gabler's accounts becomes an essential read for the modern reader seeking a broader understanding of the depths to which literary analysis of classic works and the process of writing them can go. More importantly, Gabler's homage to Joyce serves as a stark reminder that, while some works may be considered classics of the past, they remain highly relevant in the present day.