

In Memoriam: Edward M. Burns

ABSTRACT

One of the journal's longtime editors passed away last fall. *Textual Cultures* began as *TEXT* in 1984, edited by W. Speed Hill (1935–2007) and David Greetham (1941–2020). In 1997, with *TEXT* 10, Edward M. Burns replaced Greetham and, with Speed Hill, co-edited the journal through its run, until 2006, with volume 17. He then helped Wayne Storey with the transition from *TEXT* to *Textual Cultures* and stayed on as a co-editor until 2013. I asked Wayne to share some of his memories.

WHEN SPEED HILL STEPPED DOWN AS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF *TEXT* LATE IN 2004, the task of picking up the pieces to get the long-delayed *TEXT* 16 and 17 to press while fashioning a new journal was arduous and lonely. I turned to Ed Burns, who — after Greetham's departure as editor — had been helping Speed since the mid-1990s. While I don't believe Ed and I had ever exchanged much more than pleasant greetings in the years of executive committee meetings in CUNY's English department conference room in the Grace Building, in 2005 Ed very generously agreed to help me with *Textual Cultures* and we became good friends. Remarkably these were the years when Ed was hard at work editing the letters of Hugh Kenner, precisely when he had far less time to devote to the editorial tasks facing us as we closed down one journal and envisaged another. Yet he was always available to discuss editorial problems and strategies. There was not a more generous nor thorough reader than Ed Burns, who possessed an unassuming but rigorous critical eye. I could always count on him for readings, suggestions and assessments of essays or an entire issue. He was kind and forgiving and always happy to do what he could to improve an essay, a cluster of works or even a list of works cited. He was one of the few who mastered the intricate style sheet of *Textual Cultures*. And he understood its bibliographic and material missions. When we instituted the prize for the best essay in the journal, Ed would carefully reread the two years (four issues) of essays under consideration to give his best assessment for the award. In the early years when we encouraged young scholars from abroad to come to the conferences and present and publish in their native languages, usually French or Italian, Ed would delight in charming them with his impeccable French. Ed was all in for the work of the Society not for the glory. He was a quiet scholar, a scholar of integrity.

Over the years I got to know not just Ed's commitment to the journal and to the Society but his even more important work in the world of letters. I dare say that he will be remembered even longer as an editor's editor of the letters of twentieth-century literati and cultural figures of the caliber of Gertrude Stein, Thornton Wilder, Adaline Glasheen, and Alice B. Toklas. And unbeknownst to many in the Society, Ed was himself an important critic and supporter of artistic circles in New York and Paris, his two intellectual and social homes. But even when he was in France, he would always set aside his other work to tend to the Society's journal.

When I left the helm of *Textual Cultures* in 2013, Ed and I fell a little out of touch. He kindly came to my Society talk in New York in 2019, and we caught up. Ed was brimming with joy over a current project, which I learned later had been frustratingly stalled by Covid shutdowns. But I will always remember an animated lunch with Ed in Austin, Texas, in 2012, as one of the highlights of a memorable trip and conference. We had both spent a little time before the conference at the Harry Ransom Center and he had many tales to tell, often with the impish grin that let you know that he knew that you knew that he knew. Once Ed considered you his trusted friend, he would open up with legions of stories about writers, their papers and the libraries and private collectors who possessed them. I wish I had recorded that conversation. It was Ed at his finest.

I had always hoped that Ed would garner the recognition he deserved from the Society for his exemplary dedication to and work for *TEXT* and *Textual Cultures*. In many ways he was the unsung hero of the difficult transition from *TEXT* to *Textual Cultures*, providing an institutional memory — especially where the files had failed to record the reality of controversies and negotiations. Ed was so keenly adept at separating myth from truth. In those years he always embraced new and more precise ways of doing things and the standards that we set. He was a fine and generous scholar, a good friend, a consummate New Yorker, a dedicated textualist and long-term member of the STS, to whose journal he devoted decades of his life.

H. Wayne Storey
Former President of The Society for Textual Scholarship
Founding Editor of Textual Cultures

2 March 1944 — 3 November 2023

Edward Michael Burns was born and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating with a BA from Brooklyn College in 1965, he taught high school for more than twenty years, in Brooklyn and then in New York. In 1983 he received his PhD from The Graduate School, CUNY, and in 1989 joined the English department at William Paterson University, in Wayne, NJ, where he taught until 2015, retiring as Professor Emeritus. From 1964 to 2022, he lived in the East Village, on Lafayette Street and then E 10th Street. In his last year he lived in Mount Sinai, on Long Island. He was 79 years old when he died from a stroke.

In 1962, during his first year at Brooklyn College, Edward took a class taught by Ulla Dydo (1925–2017). From Switzerland, Dydo had moved to the US in her early 20s for graduate school, and meeting her led to his becoming interested in world of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas and in textual scholarship. Through Dydo, he then met Leon Katz (1919–2017), who had done extensive interviews with Toklas for his dissertation (Columbia University, 1963) on Stein's early notebooks and her novel *The Making of Americans*. Edward's first book, *Gertrude Stein on Picasso* (Liveright, 1970), included three Stein texts on Picasso, selections from her notebooks, and an essay that he co-wrote with Katz. In 1978, Edward guest edited a special issue on Stein for the journal *Twentieth Century Literature* and again he included a contribution from Katz.

Edward also followed Katz's lead in heading to France. He corresponded with Toklas but just missed meeting her; she died in March 1967 and he arrived that summer. Here I quote Isabelle Chapman, whose mother, Joan Chapman, became a close friend.

Edward came into our life in 1967. He was a young scholar then and it was summer, and he came to stay in our country house, in Montchoisi, near Bilignin, where Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas spent several years before and during WW2. My mother and my grand-parents [Elena and Paul Genin] had been good friends with Gertrude and Alice during the war. So they introduced Edward to all the people who had known them in the Bugey. Edward came back every summer to Montchoisi for several years.

He became fluent in French and for the rest of his life, he tried to go to France twice a year. When in Paris, staying at the Hôtel Louisiane, he would see friends and attend exhibitions. Another lifelong friendship, after

that with Joan Chapman, was with Michel and Louise Leiris. She was the daughter of Lucie Godon, wife of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler, who had sold paintings to Stein. Edward loved these connections to the past, to the people and the places. In a 2017 email to me from the city of pâtisseries, he wrote, “I am always reborn during my time in Paris.”

Edward’s second book, *Staying on Alone: Letters of Alice B. Toklas* (Liveright, 1973), was the first of the six books of correspondence that he would edit. In his bio for the 1978 Stein issue of *Twentieth Century Literature*, he noted that he had been “the adviser for a number of exhibitions and film projects dealing with Stein”. Dydo, meanwhile, was spending weekends and summers in New Haven studying the Stein manuscripts, and her scholarship on them first appeared in *TEXT* 1. Edward was working on his dissertation, which would become *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten* (2 vols., Columbia University Press, 1986). (He would eventually become the trustee for the estate of Van Vechten, succeeding Bruce Kellner, and for the estate of Toklas, succeeding Louise Taylor.) With Dydo, he then co-edited *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder* (Yale University Press, 1996) — and a year later, he became co-editor of *TEXT*. The Stein–Van Vechten and Stein–Wilder books are bounteously and meticulously annotated and together they cover much of Stein’s career; they became as or even more essential to Stein scholars than the biographies.

A pattern was being established: one of the correspondents in each new book had appeared in a previous one. Van Vechten and Stein led to Stein and Wilder — and then it was time for another Wilder correspondence: *A Tour of the Darkling Plain: The Finnegans Wake Letters of Thornton Wilder and Adaline Glasheen* (University College Dublin Press, 2001), with the assistance of Joshua A. Gaylord. Staying with Glasheen, Edward then turned to the letters of the Modernist critic Hugh Kenner (1923–2003), a contemporary of Katz and Dydo. He edited two correspondences. First was *A Passion for Joyce: The Letters of Hugh Kenner and Adaline Glasheen* (University College Dublin Press, 2008) and next was *Questioning Minds: The Letters of Guy Davenport and Hugh Kenner* (2 vols., Counterpoint Press, 2018). In a 2009 review of *A Passion for Joyce*, Marjorie Perloff noted that the “annotations alone [. . .] are worth the price of this volume” (837). *Questioning Minds* won the MLA’s Morton N. Cohen Award for a Distinguished Edition of Letters, a fitting acknowledgment of his brilliance. Edward was particularly fond of Michael Dirda’s review of *Questioning Minds*, which called it “the most intellectually exhilarating work published in 2018” and noted that Edward “identifies every name, reference and allusion, elevating his sometimes essaylike notes into an integral, invaluable part of the correspondence itself”.

Dirda also says that “As gossip alone, *Questioning Minds* is irresistible”. Dirda is referring primarily to the correspondents, Kenner and Davenport, but his comment is directed to the editor too. Edward was a detective and a magpie and these predilections were honed as an annotator of letters; they also served him as a conversationalist. In reminiscences posted online after Edward’s death, I found some about him having a spot in the Grassroots Tavern on St. Mark’s Place. The evgrieve.com site, on East Village happenings and history, remembered him as “affable and loquacious”. Edward Bowen, who teaches Italian cinema and culture, told me that in the early 2000s he could “find him at Grassroots in the early evening seated beside his close friend Joe Margolis, who was an assistant editor of *Cineaste* magazine. He had a breadth of knowledge that prepared him for almost any conversation and he was always full of encouragement. I consider him one of the most cultured and caring people I’ve ever met”.

Edward’s officemate at William Paterson University was Brad Gooch, the biographer of Frank O’Hara and Flannery O’Connor. Brad sent this to me: “I arrived at WPU in 1992. In that decade he was astonishingly adept at both university politics and scholarship, a rare combination. I relied on him to lead me through the intricacies of tenure, promotion, department politics, and he proved to be a generous and savvy ally, a mentor to me”. They also made the commute together:

We were steady members of the carpool from Manhattan to New Jersey, especially with Marie Friquegnon of the philosophy department. Ed did not drive; I did occasionally; Marie always. Alice Deakins was a member of the carpool as well. She used to say that you needed to read the NYT in the morning before getting in the car because of the level of conversation. Ed had much to do with that. He was a marvel of deep gossip, especially of Paris, Michel Leiris, Stein and Toklas, Francis Bacon, Sonia Orwell, as he was of NY and the Warhol scene and the gay scene that centered on The Bar on Second Avenue. I always prodded him to write his memoirs, which I titled for him *Confessions of an East Village Intellectual*. Sadly I don’t believe he did, unless he left it for us in a drawer.

As far as I know, Edward did not write a memoir. If he had and were it extant, we would likely know more about his personal life, which remains somewhat veiled. He was a gossip but he was private. His meeting Ulla Dydo and Leon Katz in the early 1960s was a formative moment, certainly, but so too was moving to the East Village, where he was connected to

not only the Warhol scene but also to what Judson Poet's Theater and The Living Theatre were doing. Who Edward was is in his books, in the annotations, and in his service to the profession generally and to textual scholarship in particular. It was in Paris and in his collecting practice and the support he gave exhibitions. He was also Jewish — his mother's family were Ashkenazi Jews from Lithuania — and he was a gay man who lost friends in the AIDS crisis, and these aspects are not ones that he openly shared. He lost Ondine (1937–1989). And he was very close with the artist Paul Thek (1933–1988). “Paul's death”, he told me once, “was another of those defining moments for me — the end of a part of my life that will never be fully resolved”.

An editor cannot annotate everything nor have complete assurance that every footnote is accurate. So too here, with his life. I close with something that Edward said to Edward Bowen in an email as he moved toward retirement: “I will leave teaching at just the right moment, still feeling positive about the possibility of the students”. He left us suddenly last fall. I don't think it was the right moment — I have questions for him! — but his positivity never left him and is something I will always remember.

Thank you to Wayne Storey, Isabelle Chapman, Edward Bowen, Brad Gooch, Rosalind Moad, Francesca Wade, Barbara Suess, Mark Klein, and Gail David for helping me compose this tribute.

Logan Esdale
California State University Long Beach

Works Cited

- DIRDA, Michael. 2018, Oct. 10. “The Most Intellectually Exhilarating Work of the Year”. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/entertainment/books/the-most-intellectually-exhilarating-work-of-the-year/2018/10/09/ba22ce40-cb27-11e8-a360-85875bac0b1f_story.html.
- PERLOFF, Marjorie. 2009, Nov. “Review of *A Passion for Joyce*”. *Modernism/modernity*, 16.4: 837–39.