An Aristotelian Ontology of the Text: 
In Response to Jorge J.E. Gracia

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ABSTRACT: In his recent work on the ontology of texts, Jorge J.E. Gracia (1996) attempts to apply various (and evidently Aristotelian) categories of being to that most unusual sort of entity called a “text”. Universal and individual, substance and feature, identity and individuation, etc.—we have some idea as to how these pairs of categories apply to tables, trees, and chairs. But to a text? In my critical review, I examine the author’s attempt to make sense of the “what” of a text in reference to these categories. While I am in overall agreement with his approach (and a very original approach it is), I disagree on a few details. I do have this one general and friendly complaint, which is that the author does not press his own, and promising, case far enough. I thus explore a few ways in which his ontology might be further developed.

RESUME: Dans son recent ouvrage sur l'ontologie du texte, Jorge J.E. Gracia (1996) tente d'appliquer diverses categories d'etre (manifestement aristoteliciennes) a ce type d'entite pour le moins insolite qu'est le “texte”. Universel et individuel, substance et accident, identite et individuation, etc.—nous avons tous une idee de la facoan dont ces doublets s'appliquent aux tables, arbres et chaises. Mais au texte? Dans cette etude critique, je considere la tentative de l'auteur de rendre compte de la quiddite du texte relativement a ces categories. Bien que, de facon generale, je sois en accord avec son approche, tres originale, je suis en desaccord avec quelques details. On peut lui reprocher de ne pas pousser assez loin dans sa propre perspective, qui s'avere par ailleurs prometteuse. J'explore donc quelques avenues qui permettraient de developper plus avant son ontologie.

I

Of course, if the term ‘ontology of texts’ is defined broadly enough, then everybody’s doing it. Suddenly, hermeneutics, semiotics, rhetoric, studies of literary style and form, are just so many attempts at doing an ‘ontology of texts’. I propose that we give this overworked word, ‘ontology’, a break. I propose that the term ‘ontology of texts’ be made meaningful, precisely by limiting its job description. I think it should mean something like this: An ontology of texts is a systematic attempt to hook up certain categories of being

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to those entities that are called ‘texts’. By extension, to do an Aristotelian ontology of texts — and this is the topic of the present essay — would be to ask how certain Aristotelian categories of being can be brought to bear on a text construed precisely as an entity. The question is: With these categories at our disposal, what should we — not literary critics, but ontologists — say about this different sort of entity called a ‘text’?²

Start with those kinds of entities that are not texts, those uncontroversial, or ordinary, or normal entities, entities like tables, trees, chairs, ships, and sealing wax. Traditionally, philosophers have been keen on studying the ontology of these normal entities. Take, for instance, a table: ‘That’s straightforward! This table is an instance of a kind of thing (category: first substance). The same table is blue (category: quality). It was assembled last year (time). It was put together by a carpenter (efficient cause). It’s in this room (location). I am sitting in front of this same table (relation), etc.’ All this is ‘easy enough’ for the philosopher, maybe. But what is a philosopher to say about a text? (Assuming it is an entity. And if it isn’t, what then?)

One of the few things about a text’s ontology that we can say for sure is this: As with nontextual entities, a text can be talked about in many different ways, maybe even in more ways than normal entities. ‘Bring that text over here’ (category: position). ‘The text goes back to antiquity’ (category: time). ‘This text, De amicitia, was written by Cicero’ (category: cause). ‘The text is philosophical’ (category: genre). ‘The text, left out in the rain, is now illegible’ (category: ideographic). ‘This text is ungrammatical’ (category: syntactic). ‘The text makes good sense’ (category: semantic). ‘The text is incoherent’ (category: logical). ‘This text is shorter than that one’ (category: length [?]). ‘Class, the text we’ll be discussing today —’ (category: universal). ‘Clair, where’s your text today?’ (category: individual).

But enough examples to convey the idea of what roughly makes for an ‘ontology of texts’. Going by our definition of it, it is fairly factual to say that, although there is some literature devoted to the subject, there is not very much of it. What is even harder to find is any literature devoted specifically to an Aristotelian approach to this problem. On either count, the search engines come up almost empty.

For sure, there is the ‘literary’ part of Aristotle, his treatises on tragedy and rhetoric, and the many commentaries that other people have written on these treatises. In addition, there do exist a few literary theories that have been appropriately described as ‘neo-Aristotelian’. A case in point is (or was) the New Criticism, which takes the idea of a work’s having a beginning, a middle, and an end — an idea figuring heavily in Aristotle’s Poetics — as the centrally defining feature of a literary work. (Not that ‘work’ means the same as ‘text’, or that Aristotle even entertained this modern distinction, or that he was even talking about what we would nowadays call a ‘text’.) Another case in point is the so-called Chicago School. This, too, is (or was) ‘neo-
Aristotelian', but for reasons having more to do with the *Rhetoric* than the *Poetics*. But that said, a 'critical theory', which is a theory more about 'literature' than texts, does not add up to an ontology of texts, let alone an Aristotelian ontology.

I would have thought that there had to have existed at least a few people who had tried to think about the 'being' of a text along Aristotelian lines. Yet as far as I am able to tell, the only person to have done work on it, and only recently at that, is Jorge J. E. Gracia. I am referring here to his 1996 book, which is titled *Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience*. (I refer to it in what follows simply as “Texts”.) It is mainly this book, and mainly the first two of the four chapters of the book, that I shall be commenting on. To go back a step: It has been in about the last five years that the author has written almost exclusively on the problem of texts. In that time, he has put out two books and a string of articles on the subject. Before turning to the second book — *Texts* — I should say something, only briefly, about the context in which this book was written. I shall limit myself to only a few remarks on the first of the two books, *A Theory of Textuality: The Logic and Epistemology*.

The aim of that book is twofold; appropriately enough, it falls into two parts. In the first, ‘The Logic of Texts’, Gracia sets out to define a text and to fill in that definition with the details. And in the second part, ‘The Epistemology of Texts’, he addresses certain hermeneutic problems directly related to the defining of a text, such as: What factors might establish the limits of a text's meaning? Is it the author, the audience, the context, the society, the function of that text? (Is the function of the text legal, literary, scientific, religious, historical, mnemonic?) And how does one know when one knows the meaning of a text? I shall comment, promptly, only on the first part — the defining of a text — which, more so than the second part, is a requisite background to the second book. What, then, is a text? Gracia has a long answer. This is my short version of it.

(a) A text can be of any length. Of course, *Don Quixote* is a text, but so is a paragraph, a sentence, an utterance, saying '2+2=4', or even a message as short as a one-word exclamation, 'Fire!' But whatever the length, a text is a group of entities, used as signs, that are selected and arranged by an author in a certain context to convey a certain meaning to a certain audience. (What the author calls the 'entities that constitute texts', or 'ECTs', I call simply the 'marks'.) (b) The marks of a text have no meaning when considered in themselves. They acquire it only when used (I read a text in English) or when taken as an ensemble of signs (I see this as a text, though written in a language I don't understand). (c) The primary function of a text is to convey a meaning. (Not as obvious as it sounds.) (d) A text always presupposes an intention. This is not to say (which would be silly) that the 'author' (writer or speaker) has to be fully aware of what is intended or fully aware of the
intending itself. (An interjection. Would somebody please name me just one philosopher, a philosopher who can be taken at least half seriously, who has ever really maintained this strawman view that the literary critics pride themselves on being able to beat up?)

To go on: (e) Context goes ‘with’ the text. It is, in a way, part of the text itself. It supplements the text, which is, in varying degrees, always ‘elliptical’. Moreover, one text may depend on its context more than another text on its context. So it is in varying degrees that a text has to be ‘filled in’ by the accompanying setting. (f) To mention only a few of the things with which a text has often come to be misidentified: A text is not one and the same thing as language. A text is not a work (which are the meanings of only certain texts). A text is not the same as an art object (though an art object might be a text). A text is not to be identified with the reading experience.

What Gracia has managed to put together in the first book is a complex taxonomy of distinctions. To what end? As with any taxonomy that has entries which are to the point, it brings clarity to the subject in question. One of Gracia’s grievances is that much of the current huffing and puffing about texts, about whether the author is dead, whether a text has an established meaning, etc. springs from being inadequately equipped with distinctions. A phenomenon with complex differences requires that we approach it with a complex set of distinctions. Without that, we end up working on pseudo-problems and spewing out pseudo-solutions. Gracia is surely right about this. ‘But,’ you might say, ‘everybody would agree with that!’ I doubt it. Gracia’s complaint is uncontroversial only in the sense that most people would not want to be caught disagreeing with it. There might be another part to his story, which he leaves out, and which is more mischievous: Taxonomies surely make paradigm busting a lot harder to do. Disciplined by a taxonomy, the buster is compelled to say, ‘qua this’, ‘qua that’, ‘with the proviso’, etc. After a few hundred of these, the theory no longer looks so novel. Hence, it might very well be that equivocation is sometimes a function of looking for a career. ‘A taxonomy such as Gracia’s? That’s so much silly “scholasticism!”’ In praise of scholasticism, I highly recommend this book. The reader can easily appreciate the distinctions the author comes up with without having to go to where Gracia eventually wants to take these distinctions. This is where his second book comes in.

It is the shorter book, the better book, and also the more flawed book. What about this second book, Texts? Besides what the subtitle tells us — Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience — what is the book about?

The blurb on the back cover of the second book is only more of the same of what is written on the back of the first: ‘The discussion is systematic, comprehensive, and detailed. Gracia raises all of the important issues related to texts within the areas he explores and [I don’t wholly agree with this part...]

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takes into account the pertinent literature. The style is argumentative and clear [very true], and the position Gracia defends is based on [warning, warning] common sense. He stays clear of the extreme views some contemporary authors have taken with respect to texts and textuality’. This has got to be the publishers’ fault, and my question goes straight to them: How bland and uninformative can a book blurb get? And how misleading as well. It is misleading in what it manages to leave out.

A quick survey of the work Gracia did before writing his two books on texts clearly tells us just what has been left out. Gracia is, really, neither ‘analytic’ nor ‘continental’. (Whatever ‘analytic’ and ‘continental’ are supposed to mean. And, even if the terms were tied up, it is not as if this were the only way to divide up the kingdom of philosophy.) J.E. Gracia is an ‘Aristotelian’, not doctrinally, but very much at heart. And his contribution to the study of texts has less to do with his ‘being clear’, ‘bridging the traditions’ (which is nice, but nothing to write home about), and a lot more to do with his being this Aristotelian. In fact, it is the book that might get the lower marks on the question of ‘being clear’ — the second book — that strikes me as philosophically the more significant. This, I recommend, is how we should read his two books on texts, and I mean especially the second: Keep the author’s own Aristotelian motivations in view. In this way we can better see what it is that Gracia has on offer. His contribution lies with his attempt to bring Aristotelian categories to bear on that very different sort of entity called a text.

I shall turn to the details of his ontology in a moment. Before getting to this, two more preliminary notes are in order. I should stress (i) that for Gracia a text is a complex of moments. There has to be an author, an intention to communicate, an audience, and a context, as well as the ‘outward signs’ and the ‘potential meaning’ conveyed by those signs. And (ii) that a text is also subject to the changes that go with history. A text’s meaning can change; hence, the text can change as well. In the following analyses, I shall single out only these two moments of a text, bracketing out all those other moments. (Gracia does the same thing in the first two chapters of Texts.) I am simplifying what is very obviously a very complex phenomenon.

A final preliminary note: I shall examine only a few of the key items in Gracia’s second book, ‘Texts’. I shall focus only on the first chapter (‘Ontological Status’) and the second chapter (‘Identity’). In the first, Gracia examines the suitability of applying four pairs of categories to texts: individual and universal, physical and nonphysical, substance and feature, and aggregate and nonaggregate. Why single out these categories, Gracia asks? Disappointingly, the only explanation he gives for what is basically his starting-point is contained in a single meagre line. The reason, he says, is that these categories are themselves ‘very often used in philosophy and because at least some of them have been applied to texts’ (Texts, 9). I shall be saying
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more about his shaky starting point in the third, or concluding, part of this paper. It will be in the last part that I also want to broach the bigger question: Why even bother doing an ontology of texts in the first place? I now turn to that part which comes after the Introduction and just before the Conclusion.

II. How Not to Aristotle a Text

What about the way Gracia tries to apply certain categories to the text? How does he apply them, and, more to the point, how does he misapply them? And what might be a better way to apply the categories in question? I have limited myself to examining only a few of the categories that Gracia attempts to apply. (Just as my reader would want me to. The point is not to say everything here, but give only a few samples of how Gracia’s ontology works and fails to work.) The pairs of categories that I have singled out for examination are these three, which I examine in this sequence: (1) universal and individual and (2) substance and feature; and (3) identity and individuation.

(1) Universal/Individual: Gracia’s definitions of ‘universal’ and ‘individual’ are these: What makes a universal a universal is its instantiability. And what makes something an individual is its noninstantiability. “Peter,” for example, is individual because he is an instance of human being but not itself instantiable. “Peter” is a noninstantiable instance. By contrast, “human being” is universal because it can be instantiated, indeed it is instantiated by Peter, Mary, and so on’ (Texts, 10). With the categories ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ defined, Gracia considers what to make of a text in these terms: Is a text an individual or a universal? On the one hand, it looks like an individual. A text is the result of the action of an author working in a set of circumstances at a certain time, at a certain place. And so a text, like any other entity brought about at a certain time and place, should count as being an individual. Yet, on the other hand, what we call a text is also capable of multiple instantiations. (Think of a best seller.) In that case, a text looks more like a universal than an individual. So which one is it?

There are three ways to answer this. (a) The one answer correlates the pair of categories, individual and universal, to a text in terms of the physical marks themselves. This is Gracia’s position. (b) The second answer correlates the pair to a text in terms of the meaning that the given text conveys. This is my position. (c) And the third answer, which is messy, tries to put together both answers (a) and (b). Gracia doesn’t go for position (c) and, for different reasons, I don’t either. Now to examine these three positions in turn.

(a) One may view a text solely in terms of the outward marks. For example: ‘2x2=4’ and ‘2x2=4’ are two individual texts. Each of them instantiates the same ideographic universal. Still another example: ‘zwei mal zwei gleich vier’ and ‘zwei mal zwei gleich vier’ are another two individual texts. These two individuals instantiate yet a different ideographic universal.
Similarly, ‘two times two is four’ and ‘two times two is four’ are also two individual texts. But again, each of these instantiates still yet another ideographic universal. Another example: These three copies of Don Quixote of a given translation are the individual texts (they are ‘copies’, after all). Each of these instantiates the same ideographic universal. And these three other copies of Don Quixote of yet a different translation are individuals correlated to yet a different ideographic universal.

This is the way Gracia construes the categories of ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ as they apply to the text. It all makes perfectly good sense. The only question is whether this way of construing them is relevant to an understanding of the ontology of a text. I doubt that it is. In fact, on his own grounds, going by his own working definition of a text (which I think is right), Gracia should be able to see that his way of talking about the individual and universal text is mostly irrelevant. The reason it is mostly irrelevant will come out in the course of my considering: the other two options (b) and (c); Gracia’s reason for rejecting both of them; my reason for rejecting the third (c); and my reason for favouring the second (b).

(b) Another way to bring ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ to bear on a text is to coordinate these categories, not with the marks, but with the meaning of the text. This is the second approach. Although Gracia does not say so, there is more than one way to go with it. Oddly, he does not so much as mention what is surely the more likely way to coordinate them (to be explained in a moment). What approach he does mention, and considers as the serious candidate (or a straw man?), is the much less obvious way! It is no wonder he ends up rejecting this second approach. Who wouldn’t? Here is how he construes the second approach:

... if one takes the text of Don Quixote to be the meaning [that the outward signs], when used as signs, are intended to convey, then the answer will depend on the individuality or universality of the meaning of the text. Because the text is about an individual fictional character, one might be tempted to conclude that the meaning of Don Quixote is individual. But the fact is that Don Quixote contains many sentences and even paragraphs that mean nothing individual. For example, Don Quixote’s musings about life. So it is an oversimplification to classify the meaning of Don Quixote as individual. [Texts, 16-17]

Observe how Gracia uses the operative terms: ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ do pertain to the sphere of meaning, but only in the sense that the logician would use the terms. (Could it be an Aristotelian logician, perhaps?) So when the logician speaks of the ‘universal proposition’, what he means is the
proposition taking the form, ‘All S are P’; of the ‘particular proposition’, the proposition taking the form, ‘Some S are P’; etc. Of course, there’s nothing objectionable about the logician’s decision to use these terms as to refer to ‘all, or some, or only one’. All power to the logician. What is objectionable is the idea of trying to apply these notions to the ontology of a text. The appropriate way to talk about ‘universal’ and ‘individual’ in terms of a text’s meaning, I suggest, is in the *semantic* rather than the logical sense.

Whether a proposition is *logically* a universal, or a particular, or an individual, whether it be ‘All S are P’, or ‘Some S are P’, or ‘This S is P’, has virtually nothing to do with the question of the ‘individuality’ and ‘universality’ of the text qua text. The universality of the text is semantic. It is *this* universality of a text that has directly to do with what is so central to the being of a text. Semantic universality has to do with what allows the given, individual text to be shared, and iterated, and gone back to, and remembered tomorrow, next year — whether the text that is iterated, shared, gone back to, etc. happens to be a *logical* universal ‘All S are p’, or a *logical* individual ‘This S is p’. It is by virtue of the semantic universal that one can mean the same utterance again, one can return to it, recall what one said, communicate it to somebody else. In fact, it is what allows the speaker to get to the end of an utterance and marginally understand that she’s still talking about the ‘same thing’.

My position is: A text, so long as it is ‘activated’ — I mean, read or listened to — has an individuality about it. It is individual in the sense that it is concrete and ‘in time’. And this is precisely in the way that the act of understanding it — ‘it’ meaning the universal text — is concrete and ‘in time’. The *individual* text is the individual reading. This does not mean to say that the text is nothing more than the reading experience, or one and the same as that individual reading. (We’re doing a *phenomenological* ontology here. This means that, historically and instinctively, and happily, we just have a deep aversion for anything that smacks of psychologism, including the latter-day psychologisms of Stanley Fish, *et al.* I stressed, the ‘individual text’ — as opposed to the universal text. This, although it transcends the reader, is immanent in the individual act.

It is crucial to point out, in a critique of somebody else’s Aristotelian ontology of texts, that the contrary position being taken here is itself Aristotelian. To which somebody might object, ‘No, it’s Husserlian’. And to which we would reply: ‘That’s correct, so long as we’re not talking about the “Platonic” Husserl, the Husserl of the *Ideas*. However, the theory of meaning of the early Husserl, the Husserl of the *Logical Investigations*, is decidedly Aristotelian, without fudging that term too far’. In any case, what we are proposing is that the better way to talk about the ‘individual’ and the ‘universal’ of a text would be somewhere in the context of an immanent realist theory of ‘meaning-universals’. Accordingly, the universal isn’t *out*
there’ all by its Platonic, lonely self. Rather, it ‘is’ constituted only in the
dividual — in this case, in the individual called an ‘intentional act’.\textsuperscript{10} To use
different terms, but to say almost the same thing: The type subsists only in the
token. Let me state for the record that nobody here is maintaining the view
that ‘universality’ in the \textit{semantic} sense is straightforward and unproblematic.
It has its problems, but it also has something else, which offsets those
problems by far: The idea has a way of being able to explain a lot of
‘meaning-phenomena’, for instance, understanding, interpretation, re-
enactment, iteration, communication, translation, \textit{and} textuality.

Seeing how Gracia construes the second option, it is no wonder that he
rejects it. For him, the universality and individuality of the meanings of \textit{Don
Quijote} are universal here and individual there. This sentence is universal,
and that one is individual. In other words, the sentence is universal, or
individual, according to the \textit{subject matter}, not its ‘meaning qua meaning’.
Once ‘universal meaning’ and ‘individual meaning’ are construed in this way,
the very question, ‘Is the text individual or universal?’ is misleading, at least
if the given text consists of more than a single line. This is because the answer
to the question would have to depend upon which sentence it is that is being
asked about. I would prefer to construe the idea of ‘universal’ and
‘individual’ meanings in quite a different way. The point is not that ‘It
depends upon which sentence of the text you’re talking about’. \textit{That}
consideration simply drops out as irrelevant. Meaning qua meaning is
‘universal’; and meaning qua \textit{understood} meaning, meaning ‘in’ the concrete
act, the only place where ‘universal meaning’ can \textit{be}, is ‘individual’.
Moreover, it is not just that this consideration — ‘It depends upon which line
is logically “universal”, logically “individual”’ — drops out. It is positively
expelled. A text is not an aggregate of lines. A text is a unity, whether it
consists of a single line or a million. This is a crucial point that Gracia’s
construal of ‘universal’ and ‘individual’ text either overlooks or simply
denies. And it is a crucial point that \textit{our} construal of these terms absolutely
accommodates and embraces.

(c) There is still a third option, which attempts to combine (a) and (b). (Or
rather, there are \textit{two} third options, given that there’s option (b) according to
Gracia and option (b) according to JB.) According to the option (c), the pair
of categories, universal and individual, should be correlated to the text in
terms of both its marks and its meaning. Of course, Gracia rejects the third
option, simply because he rejects (b) (as he construes [b]). I also reject it, but
for the reason that I reject option (a). I should now explain why I reject this
first of the three options.

Gracia construes a text as being a configuration of signs used to convey
a specific meaning. This view has two sides to it. The first is that even if the
ideographic configuration is the same, if the correlated meaning is different,
then the text will also have to be different. Thus, the text, ‘Fire!’ (read: there’s a fire in the house) is not the same as the text, ‘Fire!’ (read: launch the torpedo!). (Texts, 69) So far, so good, and it even fairly well conforms to the everyday meaning of the term ‘text’. It is the flip side of Gracia’s understanding of textuality — the side about the marks as opposed to the meaning — that is highly questionable. For him, the ideographic configuration of a text is *unsubstitutable*. ‘Unsubstitutability’ is my term, not Gracia’s, and by the term I mean this: Even if the meaning remains the same, if the marks change (from ‘Fire!’ to ‘Feuer!’), so does the text. So what’s the problem? The problem is that the view according to which a text is unsubstitutable scarcely conforms to what most of us mean by that admittedly fuzzy term ‘text’.

We can see what is wrong with Gracia’s own view by seeing where it takes him. Consistency pressures him to say what is surely counter-intuitive. He starts out by asserting that a text has to have an author, which is reasonable enough. But then he goes on to say, to this effect, ‘Different marks, a different text’. By itself, maybe this doesn’t sound all that contentious, until the question of *translating* comes up. Obviously, to translate is to alter the marks of a given work, while trying to preserve the meaning. Hence, consistency compels Gracia to say that the translator, since he has to alter the marks, is the ‘author’ of that translated text! (Texts, 108) But this is a mistake; and rather than read the unhappiness of this conclusion to be a *reductio ad absurdum* of his starting-point, he has simply embraced both the starting-point and the consequence of it. Appeal to the ordinary sense of the term ‘text’, and ‘author’, does not add up to an argument, I know. But appeal to it should count for something. There is more than enough of a difference between the everyday meanings of the terms ‘author’ and ‘translator’ as to strongly discourage anybody from saying that the translator is the author.

But if *this* is what is meant by an ‘individual’ and a ‘universal’ text, then what of it? How far does this almost physicalist talk about the ‘individual’ and ‘universal’ text go toward helping elucidate a text’s ontology? It may be that this sense of the ‘universality’ of a text is an eminently fitting way to look at texts if you happen to be working in a print shop or next to a photocopying machine. But otherwise, it is mostly *irrelevant* to an elucidation of its ontology. In applying these categories in *this* way, the author gives the impression that he is under an obligation to find these categories a job, any job at all. But the make-work jobs they end up having to do are more about looking busy than getting things philosophically done.

For Gracia, the text is a conjunction of the *signatum* and the *fixed signans*. Change the outward appearance of the sign — the *signans* — and it is a different text. If one wants to put strictures on the definition of a ‘text’ in this way, all very well and good. But if those are the strictures, then it is doubtful
that the question of the ontological status of a text — the ‘universal’ and the ‘individual’ text — can be all that pressing. The better question, the question that philosophers actually do seem to fight over, is this one: What is the suitability of these ontological categories so far as they apply to the meaning, or ‘message’, of the text? Accordingly, ‘Fire!’ (read: launch the torpedo!) and ‘Feur!’ (read: launch the torpedo!) are to be counted as individuals of the same ‘universal’. (Indeed, it is this sort of ‘universality’ that allows for the possibility of translation.) The signans, or outer perceptible part of a sign — the mark — such as ‘two’, or ‘2’, or ‘ii’, or ‘zwei’, or (although this doesn’t quite mean the same), ‘the square root of two’, or, in the language of Sir Quixote, ‘dos’, are each very different. Ideographically, each is an instance of a different universal. But surely it is the meaning of the sign — the signatum, not the signans — that is principally relevant when considering the suitability of talk about the ‘universal’ of a text.

We can take this last point one step further. As if having, in the sphere of meaning, both a semantic and a logical universal were not already enough, we should note that there is yet another sort of ‘universal’ at work. Call it the ‘objectual universal’, or ‘fourth thing’, even though it may be logically prior to the ‘third thing’. It works something like this. You and I understand each other, because we share in this ‘third thing’, which is the semantic universal. It is this universal that can be iterated and recalled and that is tacitly and ‘performatively’ appealed to in the very act of communicating, with others or with oneself. But on what basis is it even possible to share in this third thing? That is, on what basis do I know (believe, guess, hope, or whatever) that I understand what you mean? You say, ‘There flies a blackbird’; I understand the meaning of that ‘text’ to the extent that, obviously, you and I share in the semantic universal. But this third thing is shareable precisely thanks to the fact that I (and you) already have a rough idea as to what would fulfill what is already meaningful, what would make ‘true’ (or ‘false’) what is already understood. An understanding of the semantic universal, then, is correlated to its objectual universal, which in turn covers a range of possible objects. It is not unreasonable to describe this relation between the meaning (of the act) and the object meant or intended by that act as a relation between universal and individual. Now to move on to the next pair of categories:

(2) Substance/feature: Gracia proposes to understand substance ‘in the traditional Aristotelian sense’. ‘[S]omething is a substance provided it is neither predicable of nor present in something else’.

And he defines a ‘feature’ to be ‘anything that is either predicable of or present in something else’ (Texts, 29). Types of features include generic and specific characteristics (‘animal’ and ‘human’), specific differences (‘rational’, ‘risible’), accidents (‘white’, ‘tall’), quantities (‘three-feet long’), relations (‘fatherhood’), times (‘three o’clock’), actions (‘running’). Now, defining ‘substance’ (for example, Peter) and ‘feature’ (who is an animal, a human, rational, risible, tall, etc.) in
this Aristotelian way, Gracia proceeds to consider the question whether texts are substances, or features, or a combination of both. (Texts, 30)

It is one thing to ask, 'Is a dog, a tree, a table, or any other entity that is “normal”, a substance?' And the point of asking this question about normal entities is not hard to see. (I shall look at this point in a moment.) But what is not so obvious is the point of asking, 'Is a text a substance?' or 'How do the categories of substance and feature apply to a text?' The point of asking this question can be a bit perplexing. It is even more so if it is asked in the way that Gracia asks it. To give an idea of how he is asking this question, consider a few snippets from his discussion.

(i) If three billiard balls are similar in all discernible features, you could not possibly use them to compose a text, which reads, say, 'X is Y'. Given the complexity of this text, a complexity inherent in any text, you would need, say, three balls each of a different colour, or a different size, or some combination.....To comment: Gracia's point is well taken if his point is simply the semiological one that you could not have a text, let alone have a language, without differentiation in the outward aspects of the signs. (For example, /ei/ (as in /bed/) doesn’t sound like /a/ (as in /arm/) or like /i/ as in /sit/. Ideographically, /a/ is unlike /bl/, /ci/, /dl/, etc.) However, the point about semiological differentiation is not Gracia’s main point anyway. It is only meant to facilitate answering the bigger question, which is this: Is a text a substance, or an ensemble of features, or a combination of both?

(ii) To continue: 'If texts cannot be composed exclusively of substances considered apart from their features, however, we may ask: Can they be composed of features and nothing but features, that is, can texts be composed exclusively of signs that are predicatable of or present in other things?' (Texts, 31) Indeed, texts are usually of this variety. The black marks on the page may be construed as but features of the page itself, and those on the next page construed as features of yet another page. (iii) The conclusion Gracia reaches is that 'texts can be composed exclusively of features or can be composed of substances and their features but they cannot be composed exclusively of substances considered apart from their features' (Texts, 33).

His question about the ‘substantiality’ (or the ‘featurehood’) of a text does make good sense, only not in the way that he asks it. To see why, we need only stop to consider why a philosopher would ever want to talk about ‘substance’ in the first place. Start with nontextual entities, entities in reference to which it does make very good sense to ask, ‘Is this a substance or a feature?’ — entities such as this dog, this house, this colour, this tone, this alloy, this surface, this rocket engine. There is clearly a point to asking about such entities — nontextual entities — ‘Is this a substance, or just a feature of it?’ The point is to find out such things as: What is ontologically prior here? What depends on what? What is the whole, what is the part of that
whole? Is it a part qua ‘moment’ or a part qua ‘piece’? The question here is: Just what would be the point about asking the same questions about a text?

On my view (not Gracia’s), a text is not ‘just’ a different sort of entity, different because it happens to be, well, a textual entity. It is a very, very different sort of entity. And one reason for thinking it is so very, very different is that the categories suited to the requirements of the ontology of nontextual entities (just take the categories ‘substance’ and ‘features’, for instance) hardly work nearly so well when applied to texts. Or at least they don’t work nearly so well when they are applied in the same physicalistic way. And this, in the ‘physicalist way’, is just how Gracia mistakenly applies the category of substance to the text. This misapplication leads him to a counter-intuitive conclusion. Words to this effect, a given text might consist of a single substance. (In this case, the whole text is on, say, a single page; and it is on this single ‘substance-page’ that the ink-blot letters are attached as so many features.) Then again, a given text might consist of many substances, maybe as many as 300. (Part of the text is on, say, this page, another part on another page, and the last part on the 300th page.) What perplexes the reader can be expressed in these two words: So what?

Gracia’s mistake is not in having committed a ‘category mistake’, but in his misapplying a category to an entity of a very peculiar sort. His mistake is not without a motive. After all, a text is not just a ‘spiritual’ entity; it is not just the ‘potential’ meaning, which the interpreter has only to ‘actualize’. A text is also an ensemble of squiggles, curlicues, lines, and dots. Fair enough. Yet what makes this ensemble an ensemble, or this text this text, is not in the first place the physical marks themselves. Admittedly, a text can’t be a text without the physical ‘parts’. But, and this is only a claim, not an argument, what makes these parts parts is the ‘whole’. And it is this whole — the ‘substance’ — that is itself the spiritual side of the text. To illustrate the point:

What holds all the features of, say, this dog together is the substance ‘this dog’. But what holds all the ‘features’ of this text, what holds all these letters, and words, and sentences, together, is not the paper, not the ink, not the scratches, not the molecules, etc., but the ‘substance’ called the work, the message, the meaning. The substance is the sense. First comes the meaning, then come the marks. Again, I have no argument for this last point; that will have to wait for another time. But for now, I may as well stay with the main point, which is this. Roughly speaking, unless the category of substance can do for a text what it roughly does for nontextual entities, then we may as well let this talk about substance and feature drop out of an ontology of texts altogether. Now to the last pair of categories.

(3) Identity/Individuation: Gracia notes that ‘Because texts can be individual, the question comes up as to what causes their individuality. This is what is generally referred to as “the problem of the individuation” of texts. The solution to this problem is no different from the solution to the problem
of individuation of other entities. Nothing is so idiosyncratic about texts that it makes their principle of individuation different from that of other entities' (Texts, 17). I agree with Gracia's idea that the category of individuation pertains also to textual entities. (I stress, Gracia's idea. He says that the question is generally referred to as the "principle of individuation" of texts. Referred to by whom? He doesn't say, and I have no idea who that might be. I am assuming that applying this principle is, indeed, generally referred to as the 'principle of individuation'. But as near as I can make out, specifically to texts is Gracia's own idea.) In any case, what I disagree with is the optimistic premise that texts are not all that idiosyncratic after all. In fact, they are idiosyncratic, enough so that the principle of individuation, were it to operate in them, would have to operate in a different way.

(A parenthetical note: The topic of individuation has been central to much, or most, of Gracia's philosophical output. Yet when Gracia turns to consider the ontology of the text, discussion about the topic drops out mysteriously, conspicuously, almost completely. So rather than devoting the second chapter to textual individuation, and entitling the chapter 'Individuation', the author devotes the chapter to what is pretty well the correlative concept of individuation — 'identity' — and entitles it, appropriately enough, 'Identity'. I am unsure why the topic hardly comes up for air, but I am sure that an explanation is required. I can come up with only one explanation, which is not sophisticated. It is simply that Gracia deems the analysis, so far as it is connected to texts, just too straightforward as to merit more than a page of analysis. What makes it so straightforward is that — except for a little mutatis mutandis — the individuation of a text works in the same way as that of a nontextual entity. Just as the author himself says. The author has oversimplified the matter, for a reason that I shall only indicate in what follows.)

Gracia holds the view, sensibly, that individuation and identity are not one and the same thing. Although not many philosophers would deny this difference, it is still all too easily overlooked in practice. In any case, the author keeps these two questions separate, and so should we: the question, 'What makes this this?' and, though it almost sounds the same as the first, the question, 'What allows me to identify this, again and again, through time?' The first is a question of individuation, the second, a question of identity. I shall have to expand on this distinction. This is not exactly as Gracia would explain it, but it is close to it.

This is not quite right, but it does point in the right direction: One might want to say that 'individuation' has to do with the ontological side of an entity, and 'identity' with the epistemological side of the knower of that identity. For instance, I can identify, and then re-identify, this entity — this page — because I flag it, or note its page number, or dog-ear it. I close the book, open it, and, going by my system of reference, I say, 'This is the same
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page'. This is a problem closely connected to that of identity, but in any case not to be confounded with the problem of what makes this page this page, i.e., what individuates this page. What individuates it is not a given property, or a cluster of essential properties, or all of its properties taken together. (Hence the so-called 'bundle theory' of individuation.) Right down to the last detail, save its position, that page over there may be the same as this page over here. But, the 'principle of the identity of indiscernibles' notwithstanding, that page is still that page and not this page, and this page still this page and not that page.

To this, somebody might object: 'Would they not be one and the same if they did share every property? And what is this property that they can't share simultaneously but position itself?' To reply: First of all, position is hardly essential to the what of this page. Move the first page around the room, it is still the same page. Put the second page, exactly like the first page in every respect except position, in the position that the first page was a moment ago, it is still the second page, and not the first page. There are two lessons to draw from all this. The first is that we are to distinguish between essential identity and accidental identity (call them). There is the 'what' of this page — the 'pagehood' of the page — that persists 'in' the matter and that 'essentially' makes this page a page, gives this entity its identity of being a page. And then there are the accidents, which, though they may come and go, don't take away from, or add to, the pagehood of this page (accidents like a coffee stain, a dog-ear, ink marks, or indeed the position of this page right now).

The second lesson tells us that we had best alter the original formulation according to which 'individuation' and 'identity' are roughly correlated to 'ontology' and 'epistemology', respectively. After all, the dog-ear, the tear, the position, etc., may provide me with the 'epistemic' sign, may allow me to identify this page as being the same page I was looking at just last year. But what allows me to identify the page is not necessarily the same as what gives the page, ontologically, its identity. Its identity is not in the first place an epistemological affair. To speak of the identity of a thing in the sense of the what of that thing is to speak ontologically. Hence, the pair, 'individuation and identity', should be coordinated, not with 'ontology and epistemology', but with 'existence and ontology', respectively.

The first point, then: Referring to position, like a dog-ear, or a page number, is a way by which to identify the page. The second point: The 'pagehood' of a page is what gives this page its identity. And now the third point, which is to explain individuation. If a mystery can be explained: What makes this page this page (not 'a' page, which is an identity problem), or indeed this dog-ear this dog-ear, this typo this typo, etc....is existence. It is existence that is the principle of individuation. I read Gracia as roughly holding something like the position I have just described. On balance, I take his theory to be basically sound.
What, then, about the individuation of a text, and what about its identity? ‘That texts can be individual means that they can be noninstantiable instances. And to ask for the source or “principle” of the individuality of individual texts is to ask for the necessary and sufficient conditions of their individuality’ (Texts, 17). As already pointed out, for all that Gracia has written about the subject of individuation, he has remarkably little to say about the individuation of a text. And the tone of the discussion, not to say the length of it — merely a page! — almost suggests that the author deems the problem to be pretty well solved. Indeed, the problem is solved if Gracia is on the mark in maintaining that talk of the (individuated) ‘individual’ text and the (noninstantiated) ‘universal’ text essentially pertains only to the marks themselves. If the ‘universality’ and ‘individuality’ of a text are interpreted along physicalist lines, then how one identifies a copy of Don Quixote, as an instance of the ‘universal’ text, or identifies an individual copy as this copy, is to be distinguished from what it is that individuates the copy. And if all this is right, then the ideas of identity and individuation can still be kept fairly easily apart even so far as they apply to textual entities.

Such, I take it, is Gracia’s own view; and given how he defines the ‘universal text’ and ‘individual text’, he is right in saying what he does about the identity and individuation of a text. The question, however, is not about whether he is right about all this, but about whether he has hit the ontological mark. I think he has missed it. As Gracia himself acknowledges, a text has a foot in both worlds: that of the marks and that of the meaning. Alas, in his discussion of textual individuals and universals, it is precisely this ambivalence of the text that he refuses to take up. He does so in order to ‘avoid the complications’ (Texts, 17). Still, the unavoidable fact remains that a text is comprised of both the marks and the meaning. Along with this fact comes the possibility that a text is, indeed, so unlike any other entity, so idiosyncratic, that individuation works ‘in’ it in a very different way. And so I think it does work differently, and, I speculate, works something like this:

Individuation and identity are clearly separate constituents of ‘normal’ entities. Gracia is right about this much. But as constituents operative in a text, they are not nearly so clearly separable as he thinks. The act of understanding, or ‘identifying’, or ‘discerning’, the identity of a text — of identifying its meanings — is almost the same as individuating it. No, identifying and individuating are not one and the same thing, not even in the case of a text. (Saying otherwise would be tantamount to saying that understanding is the same as meaning, which it most certainly is not.) My claim is that in the act of identifying the meaning itself, a meaning which no doubt transcends that act, the meaning is somehow brought into being, somehow ‘individualized’ or ‘concretized’. When it comes to the nontextual entity, identifying this page (the one with the dog-ear) and this page’s being individuated as this page are ontologically distinct. But when it comes to the
text, 'identifying' the meaning, on the one hand, and this meaning's being individuated in the very act of this identifying, on the other, are not nearly so dissimilar. To sum up: In the realm of texts and meanings, identifying is still different from individuating. However, this realm is ontologically "idiosyncratic" in that to identify is to individuate. And — maybe also the reverse? — to individuate is to identify.

II. An ‘Ontology of Texts’? To What End?

Why does Gracia single out the categories that he does? To recall, his own answer to this was simply that 'they are very often used in philosophy and because at least some of them have been applied to texts' (Texts, 9). Fair enough as a starting point, maybe. But left at that, it is a problem — or maybe two or three problems. The first is that Gracia does not indicate just who else has actually applied these categories. He endnotes the line, but only to point out those very categories (action, event, process, possibility, assemblages) that he has chosen not to use!13 In addition, he fails to set aside a discussion, not in a skimpy endnote, but in the thick of the book itself, about why, or why not, one might not opt for these other categorial options instead? Why not see the text as an 'action', or an 'event', or an 'assemblage'? Or indeed, why not the inclusion of certain other Aristotelian categories, such as 'potential' and 'actual', 'matter' and 'form' — categories that, inexplicably, just don't find their way into his Aristotelian discussion? Why are these just left out? And why not any attempt to find out about the suitability of the subcategories of 'cause' — formal, material, final, and efficient causes — all of which surely matters by the time we get to the two last chapters on 'Author' and 'Audience'?

Then there is this problem: 'Note that by using these categories I do not mean to endorse them. There are strong disagreements among philosophers about the viability of these categories, and therefore, I cannot settle these matters in the course of an investigation devoted to something else' (Texts, 9). I have two objections to this: The first is that if the author doesn’t want to stand by these categories at the outset, put his ‘trust’ in them, and take them at least provisionally seriously, then why should the reader take the author seriously? Why should the reader read on? (To be fair, the author does, in fact, stand by them; his mistake is in stating his case in too lawyerly a way.) My second objection is that the ‘viability’ of these categories is to be determined not beforehand, in some aprioristic way, but in the course of the inquiry itself. The question of their viability turns not on what they are ‘by definition’, but on the suitability of their specific application — in this case, their application to the ontology of a text. And it is precisely the question of the viability in this sense that is to be worked out. Only then will one be in a
sure position to endorse, or reject, or modify these categories *so far as they apply to the text.*

A final point. Why does literary theory ask about such things as the genre and the style of a *literary* text? Or why is hermeneutics interested in things hermeneutical? Besides the fact that that's what literary theory and hermeneutics just happen to do, the reason for their doing what they do is not mysterious. You ask literary questions because you're interested in literature. You don't have to 'explain' why you're interested in it, because it is close to home. Or you ask questions about interpretation, because 'getting it right', or knowing whether you even can get it right, also happens to be a matter that is close to home. But why on earth an *ontology of texts?* It is one thing to talk about the categories that pertain only to texts (or perhaps better, 'works'), like genre, plot, style, etc., which is a concrete and self-justified way of talking. But it is quite another to bring highly general and 'ontological' categories to bear on a text — identity, substance, universal, potential, and the like — that presumably pertain to any and every entity. The reason for providing an ontology of texts is not nearly so obvious. As if it were already obvious, Gracia takes no time to explain the point of the whole exercise. I shall round out this paper with my own answer. My answer is only very brief, it has a few parts to it. I think some of it is true, and here it is:

The first part: The problems that texts *as texts* present are not unlike the problems that go with other entities. (Who knows, maybe having these problems may be the very reason why we see them *as entities* in the first place.) A tree has its identity problem: It grows, it blossoms, it gets old. Question: So is it still the same tree many years later? A ship has its problem: Its bolts, rudder, engine, and every other part have been replaced in the course of many years. Question: Is it still the same ship at the end of its career? And a text has its problem, too: The meanings of words change, the circumstances in which it was written disappear, and history has moved on. Question: Is it still the same text five centuries, or days, later? More questions: At what point is this text, which is changing, *no longer* this text? At what point does a change of the text constitute a replacement of one text with another text? Does a text have an established meaning *or* is its meaning only in flux? These are pressing questions, and they are *ontological* questions. They can't be answered 'within' hermeneutics, 'within' literary criticism. Answering these questions would be a matter of doing an ontology, of asking, 'What is a text *qua* entity?' For an illustration of what such an ontology might actually 'look like' in practice, consider the following:

A 'mereological essentialist' is somebody who would claim that (say) with the replacement of just one bolt of an engine of maybe a thousand parts, that engine would no longer be the same engine. A *new* engine would come into existence, *replacing* the old one that has gone out of existence. The same would happen to any other 'normal' entity. Such a claim is (I believe) wrong;
but it is also a claim that surely warrants a ‘mereological’ explanation of just
where it goes wrong. (The explanation would involve more than just pointing
out that the claim is obviously counter-intuitive to how we think about the
preservation of entities over time.) What has this to do with texts? As far as
I am aware, there is no systematic mereology of texts to be found in the
philosophical literature. Even so, one can see how developing an ontology of
parts to *texts* might radically alter the terms of the controversy over the
question, ‘*What is a text?*’

To illustrate the point, think about the not unfamiliar claim, which says to
this effect: ‘A different meaning, a different text’. Or, a variation of the same
thesis: ‘The meanings of just a few of these words have already changed. So,
in this text of two hundred thousand words, it must already be a different
text!’ All of which sounds very like what an essentialist would say, except in
this case what is being talked about is not an artefact but a text. Again, I
believe that this claim is mistaken; and again, it is a claim that warrants a
mereological explanation of where it goes wrong — not a ‘literary’
explanation, which will gotten us nowhere on this question, but an
explanation in terms of the parts and wholes of a text. Such an explanation,
which I imagine would have to be technically elegant, might begin in this very
simple way:

‘When it comes to the identity of entities, neither an upgrading of an
artifact nor the modification of a meaning of a text is in itself enough to
diminish that thing’s identity. The question has to be, *How much of a
modification?* This can be measured not quantitatively, but only
mereologically. The engine block, the fan, the pistons, the washers, the
carburetor — these are all indispensable parts, yet, arguably, it is the engine
block that is somehow more basic than these parts, the carburetor more basic
than those. By analogy, this text is an ensemble or ‘whole’ of meanings. Some
of those meanings are located closer to the core of that ensemble, some of
them closer to the periphery. Remove something from the periphery, the
modification is minor. Remove a part from the core, the modification may
have devastating consequences for the identity of *that* text. It is not just that
the text has changed; it may no longer be the same text at all.’

The second part: Set all these various entities down on the floor — a dog,
a shoe, a lamp, a bell, a rose — and then, after all this, set down yet another
entity — a text. Then, working out an ontology, we should be able to say:
‘This text is just like the rest of these things, though with these differences’. And *also* be able to say: ‘On the basis of those categories that apply to *normal*
entities, we have elucidated the *textual* entity in a controversial way. But
that’s not all. The inquiry proceeds in the other direction as well. It is no
longer just a question of how texts are entitative. It is now also a question of
how nontextual entities are “textual”. On the basis of what we have found out
about the ontology of a text, perhaps we shall have to rethink radically the
being of these nontextual entities: this dog, shoe, lamp, bell, and rose. God only knows where all this will eventually take us'.

A final note, in tribute to the author: In the last paragraph of *Texts*, Gracia writes that 'My hope is that those who have stayed with me have profited from their effort...I would rather have it produce active disagreement than contented acquiescence' (*Texts*, 172). I have profited from it; I have also tried to respect the author's closing wishes. Setting aside my own disagreements, I recommend his two books — for the conceptual clarity he brings to the problems (especially the first book), but also for the questions he asks (especially the second). Gracia's applications of ontological categories, like individuation, existence, feature, substance, and the like, to this entity called a 'text' are not 'category mistakes'. They are, to the extent that his analyses do go astray, more like misapplications of categories that do in fact have applicability to textual entities. Perhaps what the good author might consider is whether, instead of rounding out his investigation of texts with the second of what is intended to be only a two-volume set, he should go on to write also a third, a fourth, and maybe a fifth book on a subject that he has only breached. This discussion is far from finished.
Notes

1 I express my thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding my post-doctoral research. This paper was written during the tenure of my Fellowship. My gratitude also goes to Jeff Mitscherling for his 'Ingardian' input, as well as for proofreading the text.

2 By 'categories' I have in mind not just Aristotle's famous ten (not that he ever settled on the number): substance, and then the nine 'attributes' or 'features' that attach to it, which are position, time, quality, quantity, relation to itself (folding one's arms), relation to something else (standing next to something else), etc. I am using the term in such a way that it also covers certain other constituents of entities, not least: individuation and identity, universal and individual.

3 See note 13 below.

4 If there were such earlier attempts to do an Aristotelian ontology of the text, then Gracia, conversant in the Aristotelian literature, would surely have pointed them out in the bibliography, which he does not do. To be sure, one can readily find 'Aristotelians' who have thought about hermeneutic problems of (what else?) the text. Take, for example, Averroes's hermeneutics, a subject on which Gracia himself has written a few articles. (See Gracia, “The Philosopher and the Understanding of the Law”, in Averroes and the Enlightenment, ed., Mourad Wahba. Amherst: Prometheus, 1996; also Interpretation and the Law: Averroes's Contribution to the Hermeneutics of Sacred Texts”, Hist Phil Quart, vol. 14 (1), 1997: 139-53.) Yet it would be stretching it to claim to be able to find in the hermeneutics of Averroes actually delving into ontological questions about the text. I presume the same is true of any other Aristotelian of the Middle Ages: the question of a text's ontology simply did not come up, at least not thematically.

What about more recent thinking on 'texts'? Has there been no attempt at all to do an Aristotelian ontology of them? Two candidates come to mind: (1) In the New Criticism is to be found an emphasis on the concept of 'unity' or 'organicism' of the literary text — not unlike the idea of the 'whole plot' present in Aristotle's Poetics. A tragedy is required to be a 'whole', and this requires that it have a beginning, a middle, and an end. I am reluctant to think of this as an ontology in the useful sense of the word: The New Critic looks for what is distinctive in the text that is literary (the poem, say), as opposed to everyday prose, or scientific prose. And what he thinks this literary differentia is is 'unity'. This approach is not ontological, at least not in the broad sense of asking, 'What is a text qua text?' or 'How are we to range textual entities alongside nontextual entities? What categories do they share in common?' Its question is, 'What makes these texts, as opposed to those, literary?' I suppose that in
the narrow sense the question — or rather, the way by which the question gets answered — is ‘ontological’. After all, one is appealing to the category of ‘unity’ (or, which might be thought of as kinds of unity, ‘plot’ and ‘action’). However, there’s ontology and then there’s ontology. And second, there’s Aristotelianism and then there’s Aristotelianism. (Embracing the view that a poem, a tragedy, etc., has a unity does not automatically make one Aristotelian. Paul Ricoeur, following Aristotle, has much to say about ‘emplotment’ and ‘action’. Yet he comes off sounding more like a Kantian than an Aristotelian. [I refer to his “Text as Dynamic Unity”, Identity of the Literary Theory, ed. Mario J. Valdés and Owen Miller, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1985, 175-86].)

(2) The second candidate is the ‘Chicago School’. I quote Raman Seiden, from his The Theory of Criticism: ‘Though it has some things in common with the New Critics, Wayne Booth’s celebrated The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961) belongs to the neo-Aristotelian tradition of criticism which was also known as the Chicago School’. Note the sense in which this School, or Booth at any rate, is ‘Aristotelian’: ‘Like Aristotle, Booth is interested in rhetoric at the level of structures higher than the word. He believed that an adequate rhetoric of fiction would have to account for the different kinds of narrator and narration to be found in novels...’ (Raman Seiden, The Theory of Criticism: from Plato to the Present, ed. Raman Seiden, New York, Longman, 1988, 323). The School is ‘Aristotelian’ in the sense that Aristotle’s Rhetoric is Aristotelian; and it no more puts forward an ‘ontology’ than Aristotle’s Rhetoric does. Anyway, even if we were to call this Boothian approach an ontology, what would it be an ontology of? For the approach is taken up with asking, not ‘What is a text?’, but ‘What is a “literary” text?’ And maybe it is not even taken up with this narrower question. What it may be asking instead, without having to make reference to ‘texts’ at all (whether they be texts in general or texts specifically ‘literary’) is this: ‘What is distinctive about the way literature uses language?’ (ibid., 268).


Metaphysics, 47.4 (1994), 711-34.


8 Going by the “Index of Authors”, in either book, the reader may gather that Gracia is well aware of who’s who and who’s saying what on the subject of texts. What is disappointing is that the author hardly ever brings the positions of some of these people, big or small, somewhere into the centre of his discussion. Consider, for example, the third and fourth chapters of Texts: Ontological Status, Identity, Author, Audience, respectively titled ‘Author’ and ‘Audience’. The third chapter considers what role, if any, the author plays in the question of the identity of the text. (One part of a lengthy answer: “The creator of a text is someone who puts together an individual instance of a universal text that has not been instantiated before” [Texts, 139].) The fourth chapter, counterpart of the third, is devoted to answering the question: “Can a text exist without an audience?” The short answer is that, whether the text is real or imaginary, actual or potential, general or specific, the text does not, and cannot, exist without an intended audience. (“There are no texts if there are no actual or potential audiences for those texts....[M]y view is that there is always an audience for a text, even if in some cases that audience is restricted to the author of the text” [Texts, 168]. “The audience is the real or imaginary group of persons who are in fact acquainted, could be acquainted, or are meant to be acquainted with a given text” [ibid., 141]. See also “Can There Be Texts without Audiences? The Identity and Function of Audiences”, Review of Metaphysics, vol. 47 (1994), 723-34: “Finally, the narrow identification of an audience with the intended audience leaves out the audience that is absolutely indispensable to a text, namely, the author”, [734].)

Whether one agrees or disagrees with how Gracia answers these questions is a separate issue. My complaint here is with the manner of his presentation. I mean, it would have helped had he set aside a section or two devoted to explaining what other people have said about the subject, not a brief note here and there relegated to the endnotes, but a section located right in the body of the book. What, by contrast, does Roman Ingarden say about the author and the audience? Or what, by contrast, does H.-G. Gadamer, or Roland Barthes, or Umberto Eco, or Stanley Fish, or Wolfgang Iser, etc. say about how, or whether, and to what extent, the author and the reader figure in the ‘what’ of a text? Had Gracia spent a few pages on the business of contrasting, and comparing, the reader would be able to better understand the significance of the author’s own position. Notice, I am not saying that Gracia is hard to understand. On the contrary, his prose is free of jargon, or anything else that conspires against the laity. What I mean to say is that Gracia’s reader would be able to better
understand the **significance** of what he is already clearly saying. These days, when many people are saying many different things about what is a text, a map for the poor, bewildered laity (I may be one of them) would come in very, very handy. Were the names of such places as ‘Eco’ and ‘Barthes’ — prominent places on the map — more pronounced in both of Gracia’s books, it would be that much easier to pinpoint Gracia’s contribution, pinpoint what is new and better and worthwhile about his own position.


10 If worked out in detail, I imagine that our ‘Aristotelian’ theory of meaning would look not unlike that of Husserl’s *Logical Investigations*. I quote Barry Smith (this taken from his *Introduction to the Cambridge Companion to Husserl*, eds. Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995): “Real content [the understood meaning]...are entities existing in time. They are real parts of the conscious act. The ideal content, in contrast, is the *species* [universal] which this real content, with its real parts and moments, instantiates. Husserl’s treatment of these matters thus comes close to familiar Aristotelian, immanent realist, theories of universals” (17). For more on the Aristotelian theory of meaning in the early Husserl, see Barry Smith (1987) “Husserl, Language and the Ontology of the Act”, *Speculative Grammar, Universal Grammar, and Philosophical Analysis of Language*, eds. D. Buzzetti and M. Ferriani, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 205-27.

11 Which is more or less what Aristotle means by ‘substance’ in the *Categories*, 2a11.

12 Gracia, *An Essay on The Foundation of Metaphysics*, Albany, State University Press, 1988: “Among those few who have clearly distinguished individuality from identity in contemporary literature is G.E.M. Anscombe, in ‘The Principle of Individuation’ (1953)....” (249n35). “The view which makes identity...a necessary and sufficient condition of individuality is seldom explicitly defended, although it is occasionally attacked. What is commonly found are implicit confusions between identity and individuality” (39).

13 What Gracia has to say on the question of other philosophers who have tried to put basic categories to work on texts is very brief, and what he says about it is relegated to an endnote or two: “Among other categories used to describe the ontological status of texts are action, event, process, possibility, and assemblages...”. See also Ricoeur, “The Model of the
Aristotelian Ontology of the Text


14 An adequate mereology, or a theory of parts, ought to be able to account for entities of various kinds. The two kinds that particularly stand out are the ‘continuant’ and the ‘occurrent’. A continuant exists fully at any one point in the duration that it exists. (It is a thing, in the way a table, a tree, a dog, a car engine, are things.) An occurrent, by contrast, exists over a stretch of time. The growth of a flower, the playing of a tune would be examples of occurments. The parts of an occurrent exist as temporal phases.) What is missing in literature is a mereology that specializes in the text-entity. Here are some questions with which one might begin: is a text more like a thing (with its parts existing more or less contemporaneously) or more like an occurrent (with its parts existing only as successive phases)? Or could a text be a bit of both? Or maybe neither? And here is where one might want to go in answering these questions: sure, a text is a made thing, but its mode of existence is not quite like that of an artefact either. A text is a textual entity, and being textual is what makes it so different. An analysis of this made thing requires a mereology of a different sort, maybe along similar lines of that put forward in Husserl’s Third (on parts and wholes) and Fourth (on “categorial grammar” of the Logical Investigations. To get an idea of the level of sophistication such an analysis might reach, see (in addition to Husserl) Barry Smith, ed., Parts and Moments: Studies in Logic and Formal Ontology, München, Philosophia Verlag, 1982), which includes an extensive bibliography. Also Peter Simons, Parts: A Study in Ontology, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987.