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**BEYOND COMPLETION: TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF UNFINISHABLE
NOVELS**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

LITERATURE

by

James Ramsey Wallen

March 2014

The Dissertation of James Ramsey
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Beyond Completion: Towards a Genealogy of Unfinishable Novels

By James Ramsey Wallen

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ABSTRACT

James Ramsey Wallen

“Beyond Completion: Towards a Genealogy of Unfinishable Novels”

This dissertation examines strange literary phenomena I call “unfinishable novels,” or novels whose very structure and/or worldview would seem to prohibit the possibility of their own “successful” conclusion. Famous examples include Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, Franz Kafka’s *The Trial*, and Robert Musil’s *The Man Without Qualities*. Focusing on a canonical and historically diverse selection of Euro-American texts and authors ranging from François Rabelais to Thomas Pynchon, my project not only contributes to the critical literature on my primary texts by examining and contextualizing their “unfinishability” but also suggests a new historiography of the novel by focusing less on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—the zenith of the novel’s cultural and political importance, but also a period dominated by linear plotlines—and more on periods (early modern and twentieth century) in which the status of endings was far more uncertain, thus tracing something like a “backstage history” of the genre.

To develop a theoretical-historical framework in which to read these texts—both on their own terms and in the context of the history of the novel—my dissertation puts into practice a “prosaics of unfinishability,” a critical methodology that privileges prose and the novel and attempts to be less weighed down by what I call “the poetic prejudice,” i.e. the assumption that all literary texts worthy of the name should form organically unified totalities. This prejudice has historically dominated the discourse

surrounding unfinished works, which, when they are acknowledged at all, are traditionally described in terms of an author's "failure" to achieve perfection.

The dissertation is divided into three sections, preceded by an Introduction ("On Unfinished Works and Unfinishable Novels") that uses Fernando Pessoa's unfinishable *Book of Disquiet* to articulate a theory of unfinishable novels, which I define as "novels that can only be finished *as* unfinished works." The introduction clarifies the distinction between unfinished works and unfinishable novels, offering a critique of the traditional poetics of the unfinished work and its corollary rhetoric of failure before describing my own "prosaic" methodology and outlining my project.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my Mother, in whose lap I learned to love to read, and to my Father, in whose passenger seat I learned to love to argue.

Ineptitude consists in wanting to conclude. We tell each other: but our base is not fixed; which of the two will be right? I see a past in ruins and a future in embryo; the one is too old, the other too young. Everything is in a state of confusion. But this means wanting only noon or midnight; it means not understanding twilight...

Yes, stupidity consists in wanting to conclude. We are a thread and we want to know the pattern. That goes back to those eternal discussions about the decadence of art. Now one spends one's time telling oneself: we are completely finished, we are at the very end, etc., etc. What mind of any strength—beginning with Homer—has ever come to a conclusion?

L'ineptie consiste à vouloir conclure. Nous nous disons: mais notre base n'est pas fixe; qui aura raison de deux? Je vois un passé en ruines et un avenir en germe, l'un trop vieux, l'autre trop jeune, tout est brouillé. Mais c'est ne pas comprendre le crépuscule, c'est ne vouloir que midi ou minuit...

Oui, la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure. Nous sommes un fil et nous voulons savoir la trame. Cela revient à ces éternelles discussions sur la décadence de l'art. Maintenant on passe son temps à se dire: nous sommes complètement finis, nous voilà arrivés au dernier terme, etc., etc. Quel est l'esprit un peu fort qui ait conclu, à commencer par Homère?

—Gustave Flaubert, Letter to Louis Bouilhet (September 4, 1850)

I leave Sisyphus at the base of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches us the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Je laisse Sisyphe au bas de, la montagne! On retrouve toujours son fardeau. Mais Sisyphe enseigne la fidélité supérieure qui nie les dieux et soulève les rochers. Lui aussi juge que tout est bien. Cet univers désormais sans maître ne lui paraît ni stérile ni futile. Chacun des grains de cette pierre, chaque éclat minéral de cette montagne pleine de nuit, à lui seul, forme un monde. La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un coeur d'homme. Il faut imaginer Sisyphe heureux.

—Albert Camus, "Le Mythe de Sisyphe"

INTRODUCTION: ON UNFINISHED WORKS AND UNFINISHABLE NOVELS

This living hand, now warm and capable
Of earnest grasping, would, if it were cold
And in the icy silence of the tomb,
So haunt thy days and chill thy dreaming nights
That thou would[st] wish thine own heart dry of blood
So in my veins red life might stream again,
And thou be conscience-calm'd—see here it is—
I hold it towards you.

—John Keats

I. From a Poetics of the Unfinished Work...

When we speak of an unfinished work, what are we speaking of? Rarely if ever do we speak of “finished works,” and with good reason—finishedness is something we expect from works of art, it is the norm. Historically, the phrase “unfinished work” has functioned primarily as a warning label, a disclaimer avowing that the organic unity of the work in question has been compromised due to certain historico-biographical circumstances that have conspired to keep it unfinished, incomplete, imperfect. Beyond this, the unfinished label actually tells us very little about the work to which it is applied. It specifies neither how the work came to be unfinished nor just “how” unfinished it is. By itself, the phrase makes no distinction between the first stanza of an aborted epic and a magnum opus that fell a mere six or seven *mots justes* short of perfection. In short, the unfinished work is not only a

warning label but a logical monstrosity: it is an oxymoron that can only be defined by a tautology.¹

At the same time—and this is often the case with warning labels—the knowledge that a work is unfinished can also function as something of an advertisement. Given the vast amounts of scholastic labor that their publications inevitably entail, the mere existence of an unfinished work is usually enough to mark it as a work of genius—or, at the very least, as the work of a genius. For whatever else one says about unfinished works, it must be admitted that not just anyone is capable of producing one. To justify their perverse and paradoxical existence, unfinished works are presented as the finishing piece(s) of a canonical author's complete work or *oeuvre*, a masterpiece of many parts whose closure the unfinished work both enables and threatens to undermine. Considered in this light, the publication of an author's unfinished works can be seen to mark the posthumous delimitation of what Michel Foucault famously defined as an “author-function,” that “principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning” by means of “which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses; in short, by which one impedes the free

¹ The feeble theoretical utility of the unfinished work becomes even more striking when one compares it to the fragment, which can boast of a long and illustrious career as both a critico-philosophical concept and a genre unto itself. Although I will occasionally be talking about fragments and fragmentariness in the pages to come, the topic of the fragment in general is far too overdetermined for me to engage it directly. A great deal of great work already exists on the subject, fortunately, and the interested reader might start with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Literary Absolute* (for the concept of the fragment in modern literature) or (for classical literature) with Page DuBois' *Sappho Is Burning* and Ann Carson's *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*.

circulation, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction” (“What Is an Author?” 221). For better or worse, an unfinished work inevitably places a great deal of power in the hands of the editors, scholars, and other literary executors who assume the responsibility of organizing, explicating, and publishing it—a power that shapes our inheritance of both the unfinished work itself and the oeuvre it completes, and that helps to determine in advance the interpretive practices we bring to bear on each.

On a more visceral level, an unfinished work can also arouse our interest through the unique biographical significance it promises, through its seductive suggestion that the literal death of its author might be made physically manifest in its pages. There is a certain morbid aesthetic thrill to be had, for instance, when one reaches the end of *The Massacre of Paris* and is forced to reflect that the play’s final form was determined not only by Christopher Marlowe but by his murderers as well, who thus in a perverse sense become the play’s co-authors and grab a place for themselves in the backstage history of English literature. In such cases it is the very ambiguity of the unfinished label that demands our attention, reminding us that unfinished works (much like unhappy families in Tolstoy) are each unfinished in their own way. Such a reminder cannot help but draw us to the stories behind these works’ composition and publication, particularly when these stories concern authors of personal and/or professional importance to us.

Consider the case of Fernando Pessoa, today widely regarded as **the** pre-eminent name in Portuguese literature. Although he was well known and highly

respected amongst the Lisbon literary circles of his day, Pessoa received almost no public recognition during his lifetime and was able to publish only a small fraction of his work before dying of cirrhosis at the age of 47. Upon his death, the bulk of Pessoa's literary estate—over 25,000 pages of “poetry, prose, plays, philosophy, criticism, translations, linguistic theory, political writings, horoscopes and assorted other texts, variously typed, handwritten or illegibly scrawled in Portuguese, English, and French” (Zenith viii)²—was discovered inside a large trunk amidst the small set of modest rooms in which Pessoa lived out his final months. Since that time, the organization and redaction of Pessoa's oeuvre—inscribed “in notebooks, on loose sheets, on the backs of letters, advertisements and handbills, on stationary from the firms he worked for and from the cafés he frequented, on envelopes, on paper scraps, and in the margins of his own earlier texts” (ibid.)—has proven to be one of the most Herculean scholastic labors ever undertaken. The extraordinary difficulties involved in untangling Pessoa's posthumous legacy stem not only from its fragmentariness (in both the literary and literal senses of the word), but also from the fact that Pessoa “wrote under dozens of names, a practice—or compulsion—that began in his

² Throughout this section, I will be quoting at length from Richard Zenith's masterful introduction to his translation of his own Portuguese edition of the *Livro do Desassossego* (*The Book of Disquiet*). I feel this will be helpful not only as a means of situating the unique status of this particular text but also as a means of pointing to the unique status which introductions in general (together with prefaces, footnotes, etc.) enjoy in unfinished works. Since the unfinished label inevitably implies at least some degree of co-authorship, the line between the artistic “work-in-itself” and the scholarly apparatuses that have been attached to it often becomes impossible to draw. This is particularly true in the case of Zenith's *Book*, but by no means unique to it. The question of the huge roles played by editors and scholars as co-authors of unfinished works will be addressed at greater length in subsequent chapters, where I shall delve more deeply into specific textual histories.

childhood. He called his most important personas ‘heteronyms’, endowing them with their own biographies, physiques, personalities, political views, religious attitudes and literary pursuits” (ibid.). At times, it seems that even Pessoa himself was unsure about which of his assumed personas should assume responsibility for a given work, and in fact “the very first item among the more than 25,000 pieces that make up his archives in the National Library of Lisbon bears the heading *A. de C. (?) or B. of D. (or something else?)*” (Zenith xi). In this case, “*A. de C.*” refers to Álvaro de Campos, Pessoa’s most prolific and longest-lived heteronym (who wrote both poetry and prose), while “*B. of D.*” refers to *The Book of Disquiet*, Pessoa’s major prose work.

The Book of Disquiet is of particular interest to us here, because it represents one of those rare examples of a literary work generally acknowledged to be not merely historically unfinished but structurally and thematically unfinishable. Indeed, Pessoa’s singular *Livro* is not so much a book as the “subversion and negation” of a book, “the ingredients of a book whose recipe is to keep sifting, the mutant germ of a book and its weirdly lush ramifications, the rooms and windows to build a book but no floor plan and no floor, a compendium of many potential books and many others already in ruins” (Zenith ix). Bernardo Soares, the reclusive assistant book-keeper who serves as *The Book*’s purported “author,” never actually does anything: he fills his ledgers during business hours and his notebooks during the hours that remain. In-between, he eats and drinks at the exact same restaurant every day. He does all this without ever leaving the cramped and only partially allegorical confines of Lisbon’s

Rua dos Douradoures. A few sample passages, chosen not entirely at random, should suffice here to illustrate *The Book*'s arbitrary and unfinishable character:

I envy—but I'm not sure that I envy—those for whom a biography could be written, or who could write their own. In these random impressions, and with no desire to be other than random, I indifferently narrate my factless autobiography, my lifeless history. These are my confessions, and if in them I say nothing, it is because I have nothing to say. (20)

To know oneself is to err, and the oracle that said 'Know thyself' proposed a task more difficult than the labors of Hercules and a riddle murkier than the Sphinx's. To consciously not know ourselves—that's the way! And to consciously not know ourselves is the active task of irony. I know nothing greater, nor more worthy of the truly great man, than the patient and expressive analysis of the ways in which we don't know ourselves, the conscious recording of the unconsciousness of our conscious states, the metaphysics of autonomous shadows, the poetry of the twilight of disillusion. (133)

I'm astounded whenever I finish something. Astounded and distressed. My perfectionist instinct should inhibit me from finishing; it should inhibit me from even beginning. But I get distracted and start doing something. What I achieve is not the product of an act of my will but of my will's surrender. I begin because I don't have the strength to think; I finish because I don't have the courage to quit. This book is my cowardice. (136)

Aesthetics of Discouragement—Since we can't extract beauty from life, let's at least try to extract beauty from not being able to extract beauty from life. Let's make our failure into a victory, into something positive and lofty, endowed with columns, majesty and our mind's consent. (261)

And I who am saying all this—why am I writing this book? Because I realize it's imperfect. Dreamed, it would be perfection; written, it becomes imperfect; that's why I'm writing it. And above all else, because I advocate uselessness, absurdity, {?}—I write this book to lie to myself, to be unfaithful to my own theory. (278)

In these passages, and in many others like them, we can clearly glimpse the structural and thematic modes of incompleteness that characterize Soares/Pessoa's strange and extraordinary novel. Structurally, it is a compilation of fragments whose order can

never be definitively determined and whose boundaries can never be definitively drawn. Thematically, it exemplifies better than any text I know the ethos of aesthetic decadence that was so famously prevalent in *fin-de-siècle* Europe, an ethos that might be defined in terms of a desire to take aesthetic responsibility for one's inaction. *The Book of Disquiet* is an unfinished work, to be sure... but it is also an unfinishable novel.

At first glance, the idea of an “unfinishable novel” might appear even more absurd and paradoxical than the idea of an “unfinished work.” Is not the novel, that quintessentially modern genre, uniquely characterized by its inexorable movement from an intriguing beginning to a revelatory conclusion? This certainly seems to have been the opinion of Walter Benjamin, who in “The Storyteller” places the need for an ending at the heart of his famous distinction between a story—which is always capable of being continued—and a novel, which “cannot hope to take the smallest step beyond that limit at which [it] invites the reader to a divinatory realization of the meaning of life by writing ‘Finis’” (100). If this is true, then it would seem that any novel worthy of the name must be finishable, at least insofar as it attempts to satisfy the metaphysical needs of its readers.³ For Benjamin, however, what the reader of the novel actually “grasps” is not so much the meaning of life as the ungraspability of

³ Frank Kermode, in *The Sense of an Ending*, goes so far as to claim that all novels “have a fixation on the eidetic imagery of beginning, middle, and end,” and that this is true even when such a fixation necessarily “implies a philosophy disclaimed by their authors” (Kermode 138). Here Kermode is referring not only to the desire for narrative unity that we as readers bring to novels, but also to how attempts by novelists like Sartre and Robbe-Grillet to demolish this “eidetic imagery” were themselves symptomatic of their “fixation” on it.

such a meaning, and in fact the “divinatory realization” Benjamin describes is more like a consolation prize than a genuine revelation, a makeshift religious experience for readers born into a world whose “Lebenssinn” is no longer immanent or even directly expressible. Thus, if “‘the meaning of life’ is really the center about which the novel moves” (Benjamin 99), it nonetheless remains an invisible center whose conspicuous absence is continuously felt, a center whose existence is finally demonstrated only by the closing-off of the circle inscribed around it: the ‘Finis’ of novel.

György Lukács, whose *Theory of the Novel* laid the groundwork for Benjamin’s own reflections on the genre, makes this point even more clearly. In contrast to the Homeric epic, which Lukács claims portrayed a world that was already complete in itself, the modern novel is charged with the task of compensating for the lost totality of that ancient *Weltgeist*: “Art, the visionary reality of the world made to our measure, has thus become independent: it is no longer a copy, for all the models have gone; it is a created totality, for the natural unity of the metaphysical spheres has been destroyed forever” (Lukács 37). Because of its very independence, however, the novel’s “lack of limits... has a ‘bad’ infinity about it: therefore it needs certain imposed limits in order to become form” (81). Here Lukács is referring to Hegel’s distinction in *Wissenschaft der Logik* between “bad infinity” (*schlechten Unendlichkeit*)—conceived of as an endless repetition/recycling of finitude and described in terms of a line that stretches endlessly in both directions—and “true infinity” (*wahrhaft Unendliche*), which for Hegel is exemplified in the endless self-

identity of a circle (*Enzyklopädie* 140-157). In the context of my own project, “bad infinity” also refers to the specifically structural unfinishability inherent to the novel as a genre without borders, i.e. a genre that has no clearly defined boundaries of its own and yet continually transgresses the boundaries of other genres, often incorporating them into itself either directly or through parodic restyling. According to Lukács, the “novel overcomes its ‘bad’ infinity by recourse to the biographical form” (Lukács 81)—i.e., it constructs its totality within a movement from beginning to end that resembles (at least to some degree) the individual’s journey from birth to death, which now constitutes the sole remaining metaphysical gold-standard “in a world abandoned by God” (88).

Whether or not one credits the Hegelian metanarrative in which it is couched, Lukács’ discussion of “‘bad’ infinity” and the need to overcome it points to an essential paradox at the heart of the novel genre: on the one hand, novels must be completed—they need to have “beginnings, ends, and potentiality, even if [or precisely because-J.W.] the world has not” (Kermode 138). On the other hand, the very urgency of this need points to certain unfinishable tendencies deeply embedded in the novel genre, a tendency towards unfinishability that the novel as genre can never entirely uproot. Indeed, the novel genre depends on its unfinishable tendencies, since it is only by continually overcoming them that it is able to generate and regenerate the forms that “will suffice” (in Wallace Steven’s phrase) to communicate the ascendant truths of its culture. One might even go so far as to locate the “finishability” of a novel precisely in this: in its ability to overcome the bad infinity

inherent to it as a genre without borders, to circumscribe an imaginary center in such a way as to summon that center into existence.⁴

Pursuing this line of thought, it is tempting to ask what kinds of structural deformities one might observe in a novel that failed to overcome its bad infinity? Pursuing this line of thought still further, one wonders what orbital eccentricities and perversions of plenitude might arise in a novel that unabashedly embraced its own unfinishability, that consciously utilized its bad infinity as a means of representing life in all its random, contingent, and arbitrary glory? Might such a novel not justly be called unfinishable? In the context of my present inquiry, the rhetorical nature of this question seems so clumsily apparent that I hesitate to answer it. In the interests of clarity, however, I would here like to venture a vaguely Lukácsian distinction between finishable and unfinishable novels in these terms: whereas the former might properly be defined as forms of “transcendental homelessness” (Lukács 41), the latter might better be understood as forms of “transcendental hoboism.” Eschewing the imposition of any clear and meaningful itinerary, they carry their bindles with pride.

To illustrate this distinction, we need only return to Pessoa’s *Book of Disquiet*. Admittedly, neither the structural nor the thematic modes of incompleteness I have ascribed to Pessoa’s *Book* (i.e. the fragmentary and the decadent modes) are unique to it, and in fact both modes can be readily observed in a number of novels that are

⁴ It should perhaps be pointed out that the novel’s bad infinity can be overcome just as well by ‘boiler plate’ novels as by ‘serious literature’—and often far more easily, since in these cases ‘overcoming’ would simply mean plugging new “information” into a pre-existing formula: changing the butler from murderer to murderee, for example. Certainly, Danielle Steele has overcome the bad infinity of the novel genre many, many, many times.

neither unfinished nor unfinishable. Indeed, one could quite reasonably locate *The Book of Disquiet* within the novelistic sub-genre of the intentional diary-fragment, the most famous example of which is probably Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1864). Like Bernardo Soares, Dostoevsky's Underground Man stubbornly persists in his literary project without the slightest hope of recognition, remuneration, or fame. His seemingly endless and unedited torrent of prose is bounded by borders that he has no role or stake in determining. These borders are fixed by unknown and unnamed editors,⁵ who inscribe this seemingly arbitrary "ending" beneath a particularly significant ellipsis:

But enough; I don't want to write any more "from Underground"...

However, the "notes" of this paradoxalist do not end here. He could not help himself and went on. But it also seems to us that this may be a good place to stop. (Dostoevsky 130)

Whatever similarities exist between Pessoa's *Book* and Dostoevsky's *Notes* are rendered almost banal by this conclusion, which brilliantly illuminates the far more interesting and theoretically fertile chasm that divides them. In the passage above, we can see how Dostoevsky utilizes the fragmentariness of his work as a means of imposing form—in this case, the carefully constructed arbitrariness of the novel's

⁵ Actually, Dostoevsky attaches his own name to the footnote attached to the novel's first book (*Underground**): "*Both the author of the notes and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictional... In this fragment, entitled "Underground," this person introduces himself, his outlook, and seeks, as it were, to elucidate the reasons why he appeared and had to appear among us. In the subsequent fragment will come this person's actual "notes" about certain events in his life.—Fyodor Dostoevsky" (Dostoevsky 3). In the final footnote, however, there is no signature and the editor(s?) speak(s) in the first person plural.

conclusion actually enables a far more grandiose representation of arbitrariness and unfinishability in general. The Underground Man, that avatar of *ressentiment*, must continue in his scribblings—what else could he do?—and the only way to represent this state of affairs is through a meticulously crafted portrait of unfinishability, a seemingly random excerpt from a genuinely unfinishable (albeit imaginary) work. For Dostoevsky, fragmentariness serves here as a means of overcoming the bad infinity that threatens his work.

In contrast, the fragmentariness that characterizes *The Book of Disquiet* not only fails to overcome the novel's bad infinity but actively serves to exacerbate it. *The Book* is not only an intentional fragment... it is intentionally fragmentary. Moreover, its refusal/inability to exploit its fragmentariness as an organizing principle endows *The Book* with a recursive authenticity that cannot be equaled by the “artificially” fragmentary *Notes*. As Zenith affirms, it is precisely this “consummate disorder [that] gives *The Book* its peculiar greatness. It is like a treasure chest of both polished and uncut gems, which can be arranged and rearranged in infinite combinations, thanks precisely to the lack of a pre-established order” (Zenith xvi). Whereas *Notes from Underground* utilizes the fragment as a means of containing and thereby overcoming unfinishability, *The Book of Disquiet's* structural unfinishability is in fact founded upon its uncompromised and uncompromising fragmentariness. If *Notes from Underground* offers us a painstakingly crafted portrait of arbitrariness, the intentionally fragmentary *Livro* exemplifies arbitrariness itself and forces us to

confront it all the more directly by teasing and frustrating the form-giving impulse we bring to bear on it.

The question now arises: if novels must be completed—as I have already claimed—then how is it possible to label a work as unfinished and unfinishable as *The Book of Disquiet* a “novel”? The answer lies in the following paradoxical definition: an unfinishable novel is a novel that can only be completed as an unfinished work. For a novel to exist, it must exist physically as a book. Moreover, it must exist as a printed, bound and reproducible book that partakes of both the completed action of its publication and the (quasi-)organic unity imposed upon it by its front and back covers.⁶ In this sense I am in total agreement with Kermode’s assertion that “No novel can avoid being in some sense what Aristotle calls ‘a completed action’” (Kermode 138). In the case of Pessoa’s *Livro do Desassossego*, each act of publication (there have been four Portuguese editions thus far) inevitably imposes some final form on it and thereby “finishes” it. Thus Zenith, after suggesting that the most appropriate way to organize *The Book* would be as “an edition of loose pieces, orderable according to each reader’s fancy, or according to how they happen

⁶ Although recent technological changes have to some extent pulled the rug from under this argument, it is worth noting that even “e-Books” rely upon (indeed, create) a sort of Platonic Ideal of the Book that they reproduce, and this Ideal Book can be said to exist even when there is no actual printing. In the context of this dissertation, however, novels come into existence as novels only when they are published. Thus, prior to its initial publication in 1982 the *Livro do Desassossego* was not a “genuine” novel but only an unpublished, unfinished work. Upon its publication **as** an unfinished work, however, it became a novel—a physical book. Moreover, it was also at that point that the *Livro* was “completed” as an unfinishable novel.

to fall,” is forced to acknowledge the impracticality of such a project and to concede, at least as far as *The Book* is concerned, that

the mere circumstance of publication entails a kind of original sin. Every editor of this *Book*, automatically guilty, should (and I hereby do) (1) apologize for tampering with the original non-order, (2) emphasize that the order presented can claim no special validity, and (3) recommend that readers invent their own order or, better yet, read the work’s many parts in absolutely random order. (Zenith xxix)

The damage has been done. Once an unfinishable novel is published as an unfinished work its bad infinity is overcome by default and it becomes in some sense finished—or at least “complete”—though of course it remains possible for it to be completed again in a different way at a later date. We thus should probably make a distinction between a “complete novel,” whose boundaries have been formally set by its creation as a physical book, and a “finished novel” that achieves some “sense of an ending” via the closure of its narrative process, a termination that (in most cases) is performed and authorized via an authorial *Finis* that delimits the novel’s fictional world. Remigius Bunia makes a similar distinction between “completion” and “completeness” in “Framing the End,” with the former referring to the formal limits imposed by a given artistic medium, and the latter (at least in the context of the novel genre) denoting an aesthetic quality linked to narrative closure: “Closure requires completeness, yet closure refers not to technical completion but to aesthetic comprehensiveness” (366). My use of “finished” should be seen as echoing Bunia’s use of “completeness,” but with the added connotation of “finishing” as the point when the unity of the work is established through the severing of author and author-

function, or, in a more romantic formulation, the Pygmalion moment when the artist sends the work out into the world and it takes on a life of its own.

II. Towards a Prosaics of Unfinishability...

Despite the fact that unfinishable novels depend upon the category of the unfinished work for their very existence, they cannot help but problematize this category. Indeed, in examining the relationship between these two terms and their constituent parts (unfinished/unfinishable, work/novel), we can glean many of the problems that have historically plagued literary scholarship's attempts to account for the novel in general, to say nothing of unfinishable novels in particular. Since Aristotle first parthenogenerated the discipline of literary criticism, the vast majority of all literary analyses have been conducted under the aegis of a poetics, an interpretive practice that teaches us "to perceive texts as totalities,... to apprehend their structure and, in the description of that structure, to assert our mastery over the text" (Godzich & Kittay 48). This is the aegis under which the unfinished work was born, and thus it is small wonder that unfinished works, when they are acknowledged at all, are traditionally described in terms of an author's "failure" to achieve a perfect organic unity.⁷ This rhetoric of failure is most often romanticized through the

⁷ Although the motivations and particulars necessarily vary from case to case, it is possible to sketch here the four most popular strategies (none of which are mutually exclusive) for enlisting unfinishedness into the service of a larger rhetoric of failure, alternately worshipful and disparaging, that is used to validate an aesthetic paradigm based on wholeness and unity through the diminishment of texts seen as incomplete and/or fragmentary, and (sometimes) to make hegemonic claims for a particular interpretation of an unfinished works and the oeuvre it completes:

aggrandizement of a particular poetic project and the impossible ideal of perfection that its author was unable to achieve, as in Petrarch's letter "To Publius Vergilius Maro" where he bemoans how "death, envious of thy great and noble beginnings, overtook thee as thou wert so earnestly endeavoring to raise him [i.e., Aeneas] to the sky" (Petrarch 139). Such an approach is not inappropriate when dealing with a work like the *Aeneid*, governed as it is by the laws of dactylic hexameter and bounded within a symmetrical twelve-book structure. Any unfinishability the *Aeneid* could lay claim to would be founded solely on the impossible standards of artistic perfection that Virgil had set himself.⁸ Here and elsewhere, the implicit assumption is that the ideal form of the work existed in the poet's mind, but that the daily grind of existence

1) The commentator redeems the work's unfinishedness either by claiming that it heightens our appreciation of what was/is finished, or by playing up the divinely inhuman ambition of the attempted work as a way of lending the author's "failure" tragic status.

2) The commentator dismisses potentially problematic passages as mistakes that would later have been corrected, thereby pre-empting and redirecting any non-biographical interpretations that might be given to them.

3) The commentator downplays the unfinished status of a canonically tenured work by playing up the more blatant unfinishedness of another, more expendable work.

4) The commentator co-opts the authority of an author by letting the reader know what the author "would have said" and/or by placing the story of the author's failure within a larger narrative that furthers the commentator's own rhetorico-ideological goals.

⁸ Although most of the *Aeneid* seems finished—indeed, I translated much of it in High School but didn't discover it was unfinished until I went to college—Virgil was never satisfied with it and begged Augustus to burn it after his death. For a more modern example of this classical Virgilian paradigm of unfinishability one might point to Wordsworth's *The Prelude*, the properly epic unfinishability of which could be contrasted to the more novelistic unfinishability observable in Byron's *Don Juan*, often characterized as "a novel in verse."

conspired with the frailty of his all-too-human body to prevent him from putting that ideal form onto paper.

The traditional discourses of unfinishedness remain relatively unproblematic so long as one is dealing in genres with clearly defined boundaries: a five-act drama, for instance, or a sonnet. Indeed, the rhetoric of failure can also be judiciously applied to certain novels, such as Dickens' *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. Here, it is true: Dickens failed to finish the book and all lovers of Dickens would do well to bemoan the fact.⁹ For those in search of a good read, *Edwin Drood's* lack of an ending does indeed stand as a major defect, and one might well hesitate to recommend the book to a friend who was not a literary scholar or devoted Dickensian. In this case, the fact that we know where the book would have gone had Dickens lived to finish it makes its de-facto post-mortem unity appear all the more meager and insufficient. Unfinishedness, insofar as it is interesting at all, is here interesting only from a biographical perspective: the unfinished label steers us away from the uncertainties of the compromised and imperfect text towards the more familiar and reassuring shores of authorial biography.¹⁰

Unfinishability, by contrast, is a productive concept, one more inclined to lead us to the actual text of the novel in question. It is a term designed more to generate

⁹ Dickens completed only six of his planned twelve installments to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, the third of which was published just prior to his death on June 8, 1870. Although multiple continuations of the novel have been written, the plot of the unfinished chapters was apparently outlined by Dickens in a letter to his friend (and subsequent biographer) John Forster.

¹⁰ At the same time, admittedly, the rhetorical power of the unfinished label does mean that it can offer a useful meta-critical tool for thinking the history of literary criticism and the ethics of canonization.

discourse than to regulate it. This being the case, it should come as no surprise that the shortcomings of the unfinished label (and its corollary rhetoric of failure) become particularly apparent when it is applied to unfinishable novels. In order to say that Soares/Pessoa “failed” to perfect *The Book of Disquiet*, for instance, one would have to utterly disregard one of *The Book’s* most insistent themes: namely, the impossibility of achieving perfection in any artistic medium longer than a short poem (and perhaps not even there):

If I had written *King Lear*, I would be plagued by remorse for the rest of my life. For the sheer greatness of this work greatly magnifies its defects, its monstrous defects, the tiniest things that stand between certain scenes and their possible perfection. It’s not the sun marred by spots; it’s a broken Greek statue. All that has ever been done is ridden with errors, faulty perspectives, ignorance, signs of bad taste, shortcomings and oversights. To write a masterpiece large enough to be great and perfect enough to be sublime is a task no one has had the fortune or divine capacity to accomplish. Whatever can’t be done in a single burst suffers from the unevenness of our spirit. (Pessoa 247)

In this passage, unfinishedness and imperfection—here tied together by the “broken Greek statue” metaphor—are presented not as special cases but as the norm. Soares-Pessoa’s refusal to finish his book, to endow it with an authorized final form, enables him to pursue perfection in fragmentary passages that are, presumably, short enough to be sublime, and thereby to lay the foundation for a posthumous text composed primarily of “single bursts,” unconnected fragments whose very unconnectedness guard against contamination by the “unevenness” of the author’s spirit. Simultaneously, the unevenness of the *Book* itself reinforces its author’s suggestion that greatness and sublimity are essentially incompatible... that imperfection, and the

contamination of organic unity, are not exceptions to the rule but the rule itself. Passages like this one help to reveal not only the intellectual poverty of the unfinished label (at least as an analytical tool), but also the more far-reaching and fundamental inadequacy of attempts to account for unfinishable novels by means of a traditional poetics of failure.

We have seen how unfinishable novels acquire a de-facto unity as unfinished works through the organizing principles of death and publication. Moreover, we have just seen how the artlessly contingent unity thrust upon *Edwin Drood* pales in comparison to the complex and painstakingly accidental unity achieved by Pessoa and Zenith in *The Book of Disquiet*. But what kind of unity is this? How can we talk about it? In these questions, we can already see the poetic prejudice begin to rear its beautiful and well-coiffed head, the poetic prejudice that whispers to us that however strange and perverse the unity we are dealing with may be, the simple fact that it **is** a unity marks it *a priori* as the highest and noblest aspect of the *Kunstwerk qua Kunstwerk*, the aspect most deserving of inquiry and description. Yet what is most interesting about unfinishable novels is precisely the ways in which they resist totalization, the ways in which they become unified in-spite-of-themselves. If anything, it is the **un**organic character of these unities that makes them worthy of study, and yet it is precisely this unorganic character that poetics cannot competently account for. “Unorganic unity,” in this case, refers to the way a *Book* like Pessoa’s, unwilling or unable to achieve the organic unity expected from literary works, nonetheless comes to partake of the physical unity conferred upon all books produced

“in the age of mechanical reproduction”—even those produced over their authors’ dead bodies. Not so much “inorganic” (artificial or mechanical) as zombie-like, undead, embodied and animated, a Frankenstein’s monster brought posthumously to life.

The question remains: what might it mean to speak of an unfinishable novel on its own terms? Is such a thing possible? What kinds of language, what critical stratagems might enable us to properly account for a novel like *The Book of Disquiet*, to confront it not as a literary “work” but as a literary process, a shifting multiplicity rather than a static totality? How best to tease out the modes of incompleteness that determine it, to portray it in all its unfinishable and imperfect glory? Poetics cannot avail us in such a task: we need a prosaics.

In its most general sense, “prosaics designates a theory of literature that privileges prose in general and the novel in particular over the poetic genres” (Morson & Emerson 15). If left to its own devices such a definition would probably induce more migraines than insights, however, since “prose in general” is one of the few concepts that raises more problems for literary studies than “the novel in particular.” In spite and/or because of its ubiquity, prose stands out today as one of the least examined and most rigorously overlooked concepts in the history of human discourse. We all know what prose **is**, of course, but as soon as we attempt to have a meaningful discussion about it, to define it or prescribe rules to it, things, well, they fall apart... One might even posit a certain unfinishability inherent to the writing of prose in general: to the breaking away from the safe and steady footsteps of dactyls

and iambs, meters of various but reassuringly fixed shapes and sizes, into the uncharted territory of the sentence, a voyage of uncertain length whose safe completion is only made certain with the final coming into view of the period. Yet although much of my first chapter will be devoted to addressing the unique problems posed by the medium of prose, I can also state at this point that the aegis of prosaics under which I have placed my critical enterprise does not require that one know precisely what prose is—indeed, such a presumption would probably be counter-productive—but only a willingness to examine what prose does.

If poetics could be described as a kind of literary geometry, then prosaics should be thought of as a kind of literary calculus, an attempt to describe the various logics and rates of change that determine the movement and organization of a literary text across a variety of scales. Indeed, like calculus, prosaics seems to have been invented twice: so far as I can tell, the term first appeared in 1987 when it was independently coined by Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay in *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics* and Gary Saul Morson in *Hidden In Plain View*. Morson and Caryl Emerson would later incorporate the term into the title of their book *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (1990), where they specifically differentiate their own use of the term as designating both a “theory of literature that privileges prose” and “a far broader... form of thinking that presumes the importance of the everyday, the ordinary, the ‘prosaic’” (Morson and Emerson 15). While both texts explicitly describe prosaics as an alternative to poetics, the specific meaning of prosaics is tailored in each case to meet the particular needs of its authors’ critical

enterprise. For Godzich and Kittay—whose book “takes as its point of departure the emergence of prose in France in the Middle Ages” (Godzich & Kittay xii) and proceeds through subtle readings and rigorous historicizations to offer a far-reaching account of the theoretical implications and methodological dilemmas posed by the emergence of prose in general—prosaics refers primarily to a methodology of close-reading designed “to espouse the movement of the text as it manages the economy of its discourses, to establish where thresholds of decision arise, what the decisions are, and what their motivations and determinations as well as their consequences have been. In other words, we must learn to follow the progressive threading of the text” (Godzich & Kittay 48).¹¹ In Morson and Emerson, prosaics serves both as a means of situating Bakhtin within the specific context of Soviet criticism (for his part) and Slavic studies (for theirs), and as a “global concept” that can be seen to permeate Bakhtin’s infamously heterogenic critico-philosophical career as a whole.

Indeed, it is no coincidence that Mikhail Bakhtin, who took both the theorization and the historicization of the novel further than anyone before or since, was able to do so only by means of an infamously idiosyncratic lexicon of coinages and revaluations: “dialogism,” “heteroglossia,” “polyphony,” “unfinalizability,” “chronotope”—these terms and others like them represent a sustained attempt to break free of the poetic prejudice and confront the novel on its own terms.¹² Unlike

¹¹ As should be evident from my calculus metaphor, this conception of prosaics has had a major influence on the formation of my own approach.

¹² Any historian of the novel indebted to Bakhtin encounters a strange dilemma *vis-à-vis* his critical vocabulary. On the one hand, the terms are there and we should use them. On the other hand, a wide-eyed adoption of the Bakhtinian lexicon in all its

Lukács—who was unable to think the novel’s bad infinity and transcendental homelessness as anything other than symptoms of modernity’s spiritual bankruptcy—Bakhtin valorized the novel over all other genres precisely because of the unique and unprecedented artistic possibilities afforded by its essential unfinishability, the unfinishability inherent to the novel’s “spirit of process and inconclusiveness” (“Epic and Novel” 7). Although Bakhtin did recognize the need for such overcomings, observing that the novel’s “lack of internal conclusiveness and exhaustiveness creates a sharp increase in demands for an *external* and *formal* completedness and exhaustiveness, especially in regard to plot-line” (31), Bakhtin located the novel’s greatest potential not in its ability to overcome the particular modes of unfinishability inherent to it, but rather in its ability to internalize them, to transmute them via a cheerful dialogic alchemy into a bounded but endlessly productive unfinalizability that would “not just exploit (and risk exhausting) potential, but [would] produce still greater potential” by means of a heteroglossia “rich enough [to] be in principle endless, ‘unfinalizable,’ and ‘interminable’” (Morson & Emerson 310). Bakhtin believed that the particular unity of a given novel is far less interesting than the process by which it has been achieved—the various overcomings and/or

specificity would not only alienate non-Bakhtinian scholars but would probably offend Bakhtin specialists as well, since nothing could be more contrary to the dialogic spirit than such a wholesale appropriation of Bakhtin’s hard-won terminological idiosyncrasy. At the risk of bourgeoisness, then, I will be attempting to strike a middle path in the pages to come: adopting certain words in their explicit Bakhtinian sense (heteroglossia, dialogism), tailoring some to meet my own needs (unfinalizability, chronotope), and explicitly ignoring others (carnival). Such an approach, I hope, will be both useful to my own enterprise and in keeping with the dialogic spirit.

internalizations that made this achievement possible. For instance, whereas a novel that merely overcomes its unfinishability via the imposition of a pre-existing generic formula “serves to further the centralizing tendencies of a new literary language in the process of taking shape (with its grammatical, stylistic, and ideological norms)” (“Discourse in the Novel” 67), a novel that not only overcomes but internalizes its unfinishability becomes simultaneously finished and unfinalizable, irreducible to any single dominant authorial language or ideology and impervious to any totalizing interpretation.

For an example of an overcoming that is also an internalization, we might return briefly to Dostoevsky’s *Notes from Underground*. Even as Dostoevsky’s novel overcomes the “fragmentary mode of incompleteness” inherent to it via the formal trope of the intentional diary fragment, it also internalizes that mode by using its artificially bounded fragmentariness as a means of representing a potentially unfinishable work. Moreover, although Dostoevsky similarly overcomes (via the interpolation of “outside” editors) the more thematic “decadent mode” of incompleteness that endlessly spurs his hero’s underground ramblings, he likewise internalizes that mode by refusing to allow the underground man to “finalize” himself by determining the proper cutting-off place for his own *Notes* —a move that would inevitably have undermined Dostoevsky’s portrayal of a decadent hero whose “consciousness of self lives by its unfinishability, by its unclosedness and its indeterminacy” (*Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* 53). In *The Book of Disquiet*, as we have seen, Pessoa takes the internalization of these modes still further through his inability to overcome them,

through his unwillingness to betray his alter-ego's belief that "the truly noble destiny belongs to the writer who doesn't publish. Not who doesn't write, for then he wouldn't be a writer. I mean the writer in whose nature it is to write, but whose spiritual temperament prevents him from showing what he writes" (Pessoa 185). Here, internalization is in part a refusal to overcome, making Soares/Pessoa's *Book* not only radically unfinalizable in the Bakhtinian sense but literally unfinishable as well. Indeed, in a case like this one—in which a novel's unfinalizability is to some extent inseparable from its unfinishability—it might be better to describe *The Book* as incorporating its bad infinity—in the sense of "giving body" to it—rather than internalizing it.

There are, of course, several routes by which unfinishable and/or unfinalizable novels can be created, and it is specifically to the uncovering and exploration of such routes that my own prosaics is dedicated. Like those of my predecessors, my prosaics is tailored to meet the needs of my own project: namely, an exploration of the major roles that modes of incompleteness have played in the historical development of the novel genre.¹³ Considered as a methodology, my prosaics will approach the central texts of my dissertation in three ways:

- 1) By historicizing these novels and the modes of incompleteness operative in them within the larger context of (Western) European

¹³ While the potential advantages of my prosaics extend beyond the study of unfinishable novels, the brunt of my analysis will remain focused on unfinishable novels since a) they are by their very nature particularly amenable to an examination of modes of incompleteness and b) their canonical status as "works of [a] genius" assumes and assures their privileged place in the novel's history.

modernity in general, and, more specifically, within the context of a certain historiography of the novel (deeply indebted to Bakhtin) that attempts to tell the history of the novel as a history of its incompleteness, of the particular modes of incompleteness that have arisen in particular eras and the particular strategies that have been adopted to overcome them.

- 2) Through an examination of the specifically textual histories of these novels—their histories **as** texts—that focuses on the scars, amputations and prostheses that the co-authorship of editors, critics and ideologues have imposed on them (for better or worse). Paying particular attention to the various attempts to cover up and/or expurgate some of the unorganic aspects of these unities, I will reflect on some of the ideological investments that have been made in the canonization of these works, and ask what has been lost and gained through such investments.
- 3) Through close readings which focus less on the organic wholes of these novels and more on the processes by which they are constructed. Conceding the point that some sort of unity inevitably exists in these texts, my prosaics will seek to tease out and illuminate some of the modes of incompleteness whose overcoming and/or internalization shapes and/or undermines their “successful

completion,” and that now stand in the way of totalizing interpretations of them.

This, then, is the story I am telling: the modern novel arose in a world already shaped by the emergence and growing ascendancy of prose, prose literacy, and the printed word. The first genuine novel—*Don Quixote*—was created through an overcoming and internalization of the chivalric and picaresque modes of incompleteness, and since that time many different modes of incompleteness have contributed to the unfinished procession of the novel genre. These modes of incompleteness are both structural, reflecting the general status of the novel as a genre without borders, and thematic, reflecting the distinctive expressions of metaphysical angst that have characterized the different eras of modernity.¹⁴ The development of particularly effective methods for overcoming unfinishability has led to the establishment of particular novel genres—the mystery and the romance novel, for example—but the development of the novel can be understood just as well in terms of the subversion of these generic templates as in terms of their establishment. As novelists of succeeding generations attempt to undermine and/or rejuvenate the traditional strategies of closure that they have inherited, new modes of incompleteness arise and old modes, slightly modified, reassert themselves. This leads to the development of new strategies for overcoming and/or internalizing these modes,

¹⁴ Although it is certainly possible to characterize some modes as “more structural” or “more thematic,” it is important to remember that the structural/thematic distinction is never absolute, and that all the modes I am describing partake of both kinds of unfinishability to some extent.

although quite often the “newness” of these strategies rests largely on their reinterpretation and re-appropriation of previous strategies. Thus, the history of the novel cannot be understood simply as a progression from some original beginning to some destined end by way of our present middle, but must be conceived of as a process(ion) in which every step both adds to and irrevocably transforms that which has come before it. Like *The Book of Disquiet*, the history of the novel is both unfinishable and unfinalizable—it has no *telos* towards which to progress, and each stage of its development changes our understanding of its development as a whole.

III. The Plan of The Book

The dissertation is divided into three parts, each preceded by its own brief introduction. The first section (The Modern Novel) tells the story of the novel’s emergence, and examines modes of incompleteness characteristic of early modern prose narrative while raising questions about the nature of prose itself. **Chapter One (“Pantagruelism and the Perils of Prose”)** examines Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* and Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* in terms of Pantagruelism, a key Rabelaisian term that encompasses both the early modern obsession with excess and the Scheherazadian notion of writing and incompleteness as vital forces (writing/storytelling as a perpetual postponement of death). The chapter also attempts to better understand prose itself (and, more specifically, novelistic prose) by examining the trope of digression, the figure of Hermes Trismegistus—here read as an emblem for prose’s dual talent for encyclopedic syncretism and alchemical amorphousness—and the more

specifically Rabelaisian figures of the Diogenic Barrel and the Quest for the Holy Bottle. **Chapter Two ("The Birth of the Novel from the Death of Don Quixote")** complicates the common identification of *Don Quixote* as the first "true" novel by describing this origin in terms of the factors that prompted Cervantes to kill off his protagonist (above all, Avellaneda's "false" sequel of 1614) and thereby to transform a potentially endless series of picaresque adventures into an organically unified biographic text with a clear beginning, middle, and end. This chapter ties the birth of the novel to the birth of the novelist as professional writer, and reads the death of Don Quixote as an assertion of literary property by Cervantes, an early symptom of a more widespread European shift from courtly and folkloric models of literary production to a more nationalized and nationalizing model based on the figure of the author, and bolstered by an emerging bourgeois aesthetic of proprietary originality.

The second section (The Modernist Novel) skips over "the rise of the novel" to the end of the nineteenth century, and examines what I call "The Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels" (circa 1880-1942) and the unprecedented glut of unfinishable novels produced in Europe during this period. **Chapter Three ("Everything in Its Right Place")** reads Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as dramatizing a self-de(con)struction of the Encyclopedic ethos of the Enlightenment, and speculates on the possible unfinishability of the novel's unrealized second volume. **Chapter Four ("The Immoralist's Dilemma")** looks at Kafka's *The Trial* and *The Castle* in terms of what I call the immoralist mode of incompleteness, in which a writer's attempts to achieve an aesthetic totality are continually undermined by his or her own moral-aesthetic

standards. The title of the chapter also refers to Max Brod's famous decision to ignore Kafka's request that all his unpublished works be burned upon his death, a decision that has obviously had profound consequences for the history of literature. The chapter thus uses Kafka's notoriously fragmentary oeuvre as a case study for investigating the function of the "unfinished" label in general. **Chapter Five ("Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften in The Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels")** offers a survey of unfinishable novels from *Bouvard and Pécuchet* (1880) to Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities* (1942), before reading the latter text in terms of what Russell Berman calls "the crisis of realism": a breakdown of faith in narrative truth and the ideology of progress.

The third section (The Postmodern Novel) considers the postmodern turn towards "openness" and "unfinalizability" as a period in which endless interpretation is valorized over endless composition. **Chapter Six ("Unworking Totality")** again reads *The Man Without Qualities*, this time as a battleground between a modernist drive towards totalization and a postmodern espousal of open-endedness. Whereas Chapter Five looked at Musil's work in the context of realism and literary modernism, this chapter examines the novel's role as a vehicle for (and/or alternative to) philosophical discourse in the Western tradition, and considers Musil's literary philosophy of "Essayismus" as a means of practicing what Derrida calls "philosophy in/of the margins." **Chapter Seven ("Beyond Completion")** looks at the postwar rise in circular and "open-ended" novels (e.g. *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, *Catch-22*, *The Song of Solomon*) as a response to the crisis of narrative described in previous chapters,

and ends with a comparative reading of Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and Umberto Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum* that contrasts both their central chronotopes (Parabola vs. Pendulum) and their different approaches to utilizing the boundless sea of data that has become the hallmark of "The Information Age." The chapter and the dissertation end with some closing reflections on the meanings of their shared title.

PART I. THE MODERN NOVEL

The modern novel assumes a desire for narrative closure. Even when such closure is explicitly denied the reader—as for instance in *Tristram Shandy*, where this denial is self-consciously employed for comic and philosophical effect—the reader’s desire for closure remains something that must be thematized and accounted for (hence the comedy, hence the reflection it provokes).

Yet this desire is historical: it has a history and a pre-history. In my second chapter, focusing on *Don Quixote*, I will examine the emergence of this desire for closure and argue for its centrality to the birth of the modern novel as such. My first chapter, by contrast, will attempt to explore the modern novel’s pre-history by focusing on the books of Rabelais, texts in which this desire for closure is not yet so pronounced. Since the size of these two chapters has made it impractical to offer a sustained comparative reading of these authors in either of them, it seems advisable to begin by briefly outlining the crux of the contrast around which this first section revolves.

In comparing these two works, the first modern novel and the quintessential Pantagruelist text, we might first note the strikingly different ways in which modes of incompleteness are imported and manipulated by their authors. Although Cervantes, in forming the narrative template for his novel, imports modes of incompleteness that had traditionally produced unfinishable texts (i.e. the chivalric and the picaresque modes), he nonetheless manages to alter and overcome these modes en route to imposing an organic, biographic teleology on his novel. In Rabelais, by contrast, not only are

traditionally unfinishable modes of incompleteness (e.g. the romance, the chronicle) allowed to remain in their “natural,” open-ended state, but traditionally “finishable” modes of incompleteness (e.g. the philosophical dialogue, the national epic) are also imported and rendered unfinishable by the grotesque narrative logic of the Pantagruelist text.

In each case, moreover, this process can be said to reflect the aesthetic and/or ideological goals of the author. For Cervantes, one of his essential aesthetic objections to the *libros de caballerias* that drive his protagonist insane is their “endless” (*inacabable*) nature, and indeed much of his satiric assault on the genre is directed at the fact that knights like Amadis of Gaul or Belianis of Greece had been resurrected again and again by continuators and forced to undergo “inacabables aventuras” that were not only tedious to read, but that served to diminish the value of the original texts (e.g. the first four books of *Amadis*) by endlessly regurgitating them until what had once been striking had come to reek of cliché. For Rabelais, the open-endedness of his books seems simultaneously negative and positive, since by portraying the perils and vicissitudes of a world devoid of finality and absolute truth they simultaneously reinforce the value and importance of both Rabelais’s philosophy of Pantagruelism (as a general outlook on life) and of Pantagruelist books, whose meager but harmless medicine can help to soothe the thirst (*altère*) inspired by the wasteland of modern life. Like a television commercial that arouses an anxiety in us before informing us of how we can relieve this anxiety by purchasing a particular product, the inability of Rabelais’s books to arrive at a revelatory conclusion can also

be said to advertise their value, since they offer advice on how to live in a world that does not yield revelatory conclusions.

These differences are reflected in these authors' almost diametrically opposed relationships with their respective continuators. Given that continuation was still a well-respected literary activity at this time, it is not surprising that these enormously popular texts produced continuations; what **is** surprising, indeed, is that they produced so few. Yet whereas Cervantes in his *Segunda Parte* assumes a blatantly antagonistic relationship to his continuator Avellaneda—whose attempt to turn *Don Quixote* into an endlessly continuable text in the vein of *Amadis* is thwarted by the repentance and death of Don Quixote at the end of Cervantes' novel—in Rabelais's case it actually seems to have been his continuator who sought to provide some sort of conclusion to the work (albeit in an open-ended, ironic, "Rabelaisian" fashion) in the posthumous *Cinquième Livre*. For Rabelais, whose third and fourth books were published under the personal authorization of the King of France, the authorial anxiety expressed in his later books is not directed at the aesthetic and/or financial threats posed by rival continuators but rather at the distortions performed by careless printers who threatened to open his books to new charges of heresy. For Cervantes, by contrast, "finishing" his text eventually seems to have become a prerequisite for "owning" it, for claiming Don Quixote and Sancho Panza as "his" characters. This difference, I believe, can be seen as symptomatic not only of the particular literary proclivities of François Rabelais and Miguel de Cervantes, but also of a more widespread shift in early modern Europe from courtly and folkloric models of literary production to a

more nationalized and nationalizing model, based on the figure of the author, and bolstered by an emerging bourgeois aesthetic of proprietary originality.

CHAPTER ONE: PANTAGRUELISM AND THE PERILS OF PROSE

“If ‘tis wrote against any thing,—‘tis wrote, an’ please your worships, against the spleen; in order, by a more frequent and a more convulsive elevation and depression of the diaphragm, and the succussions of the intercostal and abdominal muscles in laughter, to drive the *gall* and other *bitter juices* from the gall bladder, liver and sweet-bread of her majesty’s subjects, with all the inimicious passions which belong to them, down into their duodenum.”

—Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (270-271)

“[Prose] presents itself as prior to verse or any specific discourse. It thus can claim a foundational role and functions as the ground of reference, a sort of degree-zero of language for all further formal elaboration. We stated at the beginning that verse is seen as developmentally second. But we know it to be developmentally first. Well then, if verse is first *and* verse is second, where is prose? That there has been virtually no answer to this question, that is, that prose is considered omnipresent, is an indication of the success of prose. Prose is meant to have no place; prose does not happen. Prose is what assigns place.

In relation to verse or indeed any other form, prose assumes the position of matter. Let us recognize what is significant about such a move. Matter is the unavoidable, the indestructible, *l’incontournable*, “that around which you cannot get.” It is there from the beginning, as the *hyle* of the world, and it is what will remain after the destruction of whatever forms may have been imposed upon it. Unlike ancient *hyle*, however, prose is not inert: it does not wait for the inspirational breath to set it in motion, it animates and motivates, disposes, arranges, assembles, and orders by itself. This is a position that prose has staked out for itself, or, if you will, that culture has demanded. It is a position of considerable power, for in a world of change, a world that acknowledges and demands change, prose, unsubstantial though it may be, *holds*.”

—Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose* (197)

It must be stated at the outset that this chapter will represent something of an anomaly vis-à-vis the rest of my dissertation. Whereas future chapters will outline the textual histories of a number of unfinishable novels and offer meta-narrative analyses of their modes of incompleteness in the context of the history of the novel as a whole, in this chapter my subject is not yet the modern novel, but novelistic prose, which will

make the novel possible much as large bodies of water make ships possible. There is a cornucopian boundlessness to prose observable in a number of early modern texts—think Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621-51)—but nowhere more relentlessly exploited and explored than in the writings of François Rabelais. Although Rabelais cannot be said to offer a coherent “theory” of prose, he does demonstrate an uncanny awareness of its possibilities and can certainly be said to theorize on prose during his meta-literary speculations on his own enterprise. This chapter, of course, cannot possibly hope to give a comprehensive account of Rabelais, let alone prose, let alone both, but it will treat a number of figurations essential to both, figurations that seem tied to an unfinishability inherent to novelistic prose in general, a radical digressivity that is thematized and valorized in Rabelais’s work partially by means of what I call the Pantagruelist mode of incompleteness.

The chapter is the longest in the dissertation, and is divided into eight sections that build upon one another in a somewhat digressive and circuitous manner. The first section attempts to offer a theory of prose while pointing to the peculiar difficulties posed by prose as an object of theo-historical inquiry. The second section examines the theme of excess and its links to prose in early modernity. The third section offers an account of the Pantagruelist mode of incompleteness, in which the perpetual growth of a text is linked to an endorsement of its medicinal value. Section four tackles the trope of digression via a brief digression on Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*.¹ Section five

¹ Although/because it is not actually “early modern,” *Tristram Shandy* provides a contrast to the books of Rabelais as an example of a Pantagruelist text that postdates the emergence of the modern novel.

turns to the figure of Hermes Trismegistus as a way of exploring prose's dual talent for encyclopedic syncretism and alchemical amorphousness. Sections six and seven examine two peculiarly Rabelaisian figurations of the reading/writing process: the Diogenic Barrel and the quest for the Holy Bottle. Section eight, finally, will step back and offer a more holistic and historicized account of the narrative structure of the Rabelaisian novel, looking at Rabelais's relation to his continuator and the radical unfinishedness imposed on his text by its two distinct endings. I now close with this *apologia*: if my argumentation in the pages to come at times seems somewhat amorphous itself, my benevolent reader will bear in mind the unique perils posed by my present object of inquiry.

1.1 The Perils of Prose

“Prose:—Plus facile à faire que la vers.”—Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*

We live in a prosaic world. Prose comprises such an integral part of modern life that there would seem to be no objective, “outside” perspective from which we could understand it: such a thing would be like salt attempting to objectively understand the ocean. Prose creates and shapes us from childhood and yet, despite its ubiquity and all-pervasive influence, remains devilishly hard to define. Wikipedia, for instance, attempting to understand prose in opposition to verse, defines it as “a form of language which applies ordinary grammatical structure and natural flow of speech rather than rhythmic structure (as in traditional poetry).” Both these statements seem patently false: prose does not need to be grammatically correct—a sentence fragment

is still prose—and moreover prose is just as capable of calling attention to itself as writing as it is of imitating the “natural flow of speech” (whatever that might be).² Prose makes use of rules, but is not bound by them: it is a self-generating principle of textual organization that changes and redefines itself as it moves along.

Northrop Frye makes a telling disclaimer about the poetry/prose distinction at the beginning of his *Anatomy of Criticism*, acknowledging that if he were to write a textbook on literature the first two pages would have to remain unwritten. Whereas the first of these unwriteable pages would have answered the question “What is literature?”, the second would have “explain[ed] what seems to be the most far-reaching of literary facts, the distinction in rhythm between prose and verse. But it appears that a distinction which anyone can make in practice cannot be made as yet by any critic in theory” (Frye 13). Frye seems aware that prose cannot be satisfactorily accounted for under a poetic lens, a lens that almost mandates that “any attempt to give literary dignity to prose is likely to give it some of the characteristics of verse” (263). This assertion is reinforced by Frye’s own attempts to understand the poetry/prose distinction in terms of “recurrent rhythm” vs. “semantic rhythm,” rhythm being itself a poetic category.³ Frye sees the critical establishment’s

² The OED definition of prose, as one would expect, comes much nearer the mark: “Language in the form in which it is typically written (or spoken), usually characterized as having no deliberate metrical structure (in contrast with *verse* or *poetry*).”

³ Rhythm, of course, is also an oratorical category, which points to another dilemma inherent in the literary study of prose: the fact that classical understandings of the “literariness” of prose are rooted in the sound of the spoken word (we still use adjectives like “sonorous” or “stentorian”) rather than in the possibilities of the printed page. Both Isocrates and Cicero, for instance, privilege “prose” over verse as

continuing inability to offer a coherent theory of the poetry/prose distinction as a notable failure of the critical enterprise, a failure that may or may not be correctable in the future. As if throwing up his hands, Frye at one point appeals to the simple, utilitarian wisdom inherent in Jeremy Bentham's distinction of "prose from verse by the fact that in prose all the lines run to the end of the page" (263).

Bentham's understanding of the prose/poetry distinction is in a sense quite sound, and in many ways unsurpassed. At the same time, of course, it is woefully inadequate. A more fruitful point of departure might be found in the fact that whereas poetry cannot contain prose and remain "pure," prose (arguably never pure to begin with) can contain poetry without ceasing to be prose. Poetry, as its etymology suggests, is constructed, while prose refers not merely to lines that run to the end of the page but also to an arrangement and organization of discourses, the process Mikhail Bakhtin describes as "exploiting the resources of heteroglossia." Prose is not (or not only) a territorial dominion within writing—"All that is not prose is verse, and all that is not verse is prose," as per the Master of Philosophy in Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*—it is (also) the organization and manipulation of a variety of textual elements. Prose is the printed page, it is what there is, and "pure prose" (if not a contradiction in terms) can best be recognized through its resistance to recognition, its

offering greater freedom to the orator, hence Cicero's term for it: "It has been suggested that the first stable term for prose is not *prosa* or its related terms but Cicero's *oratio soluta*, unfettered, free speech, which we see now as discourse in solution, suspended speech" (*Emergence* 193). Interestingly, "oraison solue" is also used as a term for prose in the prologue to the *Cinquième Livre* (789).

refusal to call attention to itself. Pure prose would be the blank page, or a stand-alone conjunction. Or.

Theories of prose are difficult to come by, as are sustained scholastic inquiries into its history. One reason the history of prose so effectively resists exposition is the immense difference that exists between “ancient” and “modern” understandings of prose: whereas in the ancient world both verse and prose could be understood to exist within the larger category of rhetoric, modern understandings of verse are entirely conditioned by the ubiquity of prose. The Russian Formalist theory of poetry, for instance, sees poetry as “prose that has been worked on” (prose with surplus value, one might say), and thus depends on a peculiarly modern understanding of prose: an acceptance of written words as something assumed, as “natural.” If *poieisis* is craftsmanship, “making,” then prose becomes the craftsman’s raw material, the substance from which poetry is made.

For a culture fully immersed in prosaic literacy, such an understanding of prose can function as a relatively unproblematic basis for stylistic and taxonomic analysis (as in Frye). The downside, however, is that in accepting such a conceptual framework one is forced to forego almost *a priori* any rigorous inquiry into what makes prose prose: how it functions, the needs it serves, the novelties it enables. What is more, the idea of prose as raw material, as matter in need of form, flies in the face of historical evidence:

The view of prose as natural, which has commanded assent, is at odds with a set of facts that are indisputable. Literary scholarship is well aware that prose is not omnipresent. It has not always been present in all cultures, even in all literate ones. Historical evidence shows us that it is verse that precedes prose.

In the linguistic traditions of Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Arabic, Old Icelandic, English, Spanish, German, Wolof, and Pulaar, and on and on and on, prose comes after verse. There is an epoch in each of these traditions in which there is no prose, and apparently never had been. There is then, subsequently, a time in which prose appears. And the appearance of prose does not at all coincide with the appearance of writing. [...] To the extent that a general description can be said to exist concerning these matters, it runs as follows: first there is oral verse, and then there is the writing down of oral verse (and other oral discourses). And then, somehow, there are works written in prose, which tend to proliferate until they seem to become the dominant mode of written communication. (*Emergence* xi-xii)

Godzich and Kittay's remarkable book remains more or less unique in its attempt to raise and address the question: how **did** prose come to be seen as matter, as given, as "the natural output of our language activity"? Focusing its inquiry on the historical emergence of French prose in the late middle ages, the book contextualizes the emergence of prose in relation to some more and less well-known historical processes (above all, the emergence of the modern state). Given the major influence it has had on my own project, as well as the apparent monopoly it still seems to hold over its subject-matter, it seems worthwhile here to offer a brief summary of Godzich and Kittay's *The Emergence of Prose: an essay in prosaics*.⁴

⁴ Besides *The Emergence of Prose*, the two theoretical works that most inform my own thinking on prose are Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (particularly "Discourse in the Novel" and "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse") and Victor Schklovsky's *Theory of Prose*. Though these books tend to focus more on the novel (or "novelistic prose") than on prose as such, this strategy does enable insights insofar as they attempt to understand prose as the medium of the novel rather than the "Other" of verse. Indeed, one of Bakhtin's most sustained close readings of "novelistic discourse" ("Prehistory" 43-51) actually uses lines from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, a self-titled "Novel in verse." Since post-prose verse is always already conditioned by prose, attempts to understand prose literacy or novelistic prose in terms of territorial dominions allotted by the poetry-prose distinction are inevitably doomed to failure. It should thus be understood that, as novelistic prose develops, verse will be able to share in its achievements. Indeed, Byron's *Don Juan* could be

The authors' choice of the French middle ages as their privileged locus of inquiry is motivated both by the "exceptionally large number of manuscripts" that the French tradition has left us, and by the "fact that such limited scholarship as exists on the subject agrees in seeing the modern emergence of prose in the West as occurring in the linguistic tradition of French" (xii). They begin with the case of Nicolas de Senlis, a minor court writer who in 1202 was asked to translate a Latin text known as the *Chronicles of Turpin* into French prose or, more specifically, into "romans sans rime" (unrhymed vernacular). Pointing to this request as "the oldest instance that we have in the French language of a stated preference, a motivated choice, of nonverse over verse" (xv), the authors delve into the possible culturo-historical factors that could have motivated such a choice. They find the request to be linked to an ongoing attack on the authority of the *jongleur*, the traveling performer who served as mnemonic repository and deictic anchor for culturally important texts. Yet these attacks also raised new problems that helped catalyze a more far-reaching epistemological shift, since "when jongleurs are seen as newly unreliable, they alone cannot guarantee the veracity of their message. Here, the variability of their performances becomes particularly disturbing. To be authoritative, a text must be verifiable, exclusive of its jongleur. The issue becomes verifiability, which is connected in a new modern sense to stability. Truth [...] resides no longer in a moveable tradition but [...] in a self-sameness, an unalterability, a document" (xviii).

described as both an unfinishable novel and a nineteenth-century Pantagruelist text, though of course here we would be speaking of "novelistic discourse" rather than "novelistic prose."

The authors describe this as a change in “signifying practice.” Since signifying practices (e.g. verse and prose) escape the broadest category of poetics (i.e., genre), the authors claim it should come as no surprise that poetic approaches to prose have historically produced negligible results. To understand a signifying practice, they claim, we must not only examine the textual artifacts that have made use of it but also the literacies that enable and underlie it, the particular competencies it demands. Unfortunately, the signifying practices to which we are most accustomed tend to be the most difficult to analyze:

Messages are often taken to be at one with the medium in which they are delivered (“I know so because I read it in the paper”), therefore, the truth, the very meaning and importance, of a message tends to be associated with, and even dependent on, the signifying practice used to convey it. This puts a very large investment in the present configuration of signifying practices, makes that configuration appear natural and unquestionable, and renders problematic the effort to penetrate the way in which dominating contemporary signifying practices work. (5)

Looking at eras in which changes in signifying practices were occurring can thus help us to defamiliarize aspects of prose that seem natural to us, but would probably have seemed anything but to those attendant on its emergence. What problems does prose solve? What problems does it create? Interestingly, the same technology of writing that would eventually replace the *jongleur* initially seems to have empowered him. Entrusted with texts that only he was competent to read/perform, the *jongleur* represents an intermediate (aural) stage between oral and written culture, as the deictic dilemmas opened up by the decision to write down these “chansons de geste”

were initially resolved by this performing subject, whose body could anchor the *deixis* of the text.⁵

For a culture that has fully embraced the dual technology of reading/writing and developed “prose literacy,” however, such a deictic anchor becomes unnecessary:

Writing is a kind of communication in absence (in the absence of the addressor, in which we are given only traces of actions), and it is that quality of writing that prose exploits in particular. The necessity of establishing a stable position is of less importance for prose than the *process*, the know-how, which the absence of an identifiable subject forces on the reader. The strategy is not to establish a neutral *position* as if internally but to use the reading *process* by which such positions are defined (the literacy we have just briefly developed) to other ends. In emerging prose, when faced with reading a text of heterogeneous discourses, one can assign a position without that position being single, neutral, or absolute. The reader must come to terms with *positionality*, that is, the assignment of different, multiple, and short-term positions. Instead of overcoming the loss of a [performing] subject by the establishment of such a single, neutral, and absolute position, readers of prose move from discourse to discourse to gradually establish a sense of relative position. This is prose literacy. (112)

To illustrate this shift and track some of the stages by which French prose emerged, Godzich and Kittay examine a series of texts central to this process: “derhymed” texts that allow for comparisons between rhymed and unrhymed versions; “Versiprosa” texts that alternate verse and prose, thus allowing for a better understanding of the

⁵ Godzich and Kittay point to *deixis* as perhaps the most fundamental problem that prose literacy attempts to solve. To take the paradigmatic example, the statement “I am here now” when spoken aloud is not only unproblematic but even axiomatically true, insofar as “I” is the person speaking, “here” is the place s/he is speaking, and “now” is the time s/he is speaking. Once the statement is written down, however, a host of new problems arise: who is “I”? Where is “here”? When is “now”? This is a pivotal dilemma that must be addressed by a culture transitioning from the oral to the written, and the *jongleur* provides one (ultimately temporary) solution by anchoring the I, here, and now of the text in his own performance. In modernity, the relationship between *jongleur* (*acteur*) and audience is to some extent replaced by that between author (*auteur*) and silent reader, who has acquired the ability to construct the *deixis* of the text within his or her own imagination.

types of truth each was thought best equipped to express; and finally earlier “Chantefable” texts, written partly in prose but meant for performance, which point to the place where prose inevitably makes its first appearance (the margins).

The final section of the book suggests some ways in which the signifying practice of prose might be thought. There is prose literacy, which involves a raising-up of the deictic anchor (the performer) and an unmooring of the reading process. There is prose history, which points to both an increasing awareness of the “form” vs. “content” distinction and also to an extended capacity to “process” change, to perceive oneself as standing in the midst of an uncertain historical process that is always in flux and never fully comprehensible, except (perhaps) from a God’s-eye-view. And there is prose fiction, the emergence of which Godzich and Kittay link to the emergence of the modern state and its concomitant syncretism of a variety of local myths into a single national culture, a process that seems to have demanded a newly modern division of “fact” and “fiction.”⁶

⁶ “A new national identity had to be forged out of particularities [...]. The forging of a national identity required the meshing of the various groups that had considered themselves culturally autonomous before then, and it forced at least a partial renunciation of their foundational myths and tales. [...] All these traditions could not be simultaneously true, and yet a forced distancing must not be total. A mechanism had to be found to prevent one’s beliefs in the truthfulness of one’s own set of myths from leading to absolute social intransigence in the face of similar claims from others. The only avenue open was to void the claim to truthfulness, while preserving and indeed showing solicitude towards the texts that were previously the objects of such claims. The texts become fictional. And the preexisting opposition between what is *our* territory (the inside, the true) and what is not (the foreign, the untrue) is remapped to allow what is ours to be either historical or fictional. Truth and lack of truth become, respectively, the historical and the fictional, both ours and both precious. These differing myths can be ours, can coexist on the inside without being mutually exclusive of each other, as long as the ground for which they compete has changed.

As the first book to raise and seriously reflect upon these questions, it is not surprising that other important questions go unasked, the most significant being the role played by the printing press in the development and exploitation of prose literacy, prose history, and prose fiction. Elizabeth Eisenstein, in her seminal work *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, explores some of these roles. Although she is less concerned with “signifying practices” as such than with the crucial role played by the press in larger cultural processes—the rise of science, the Reformation, and the Renaissance (which, thanks to the press, became the “beginning” of our modernity rather than simply one more classical revival)—connections between the press and “prose literacy” can nonetheless be inferred from Eisenstein’s argument that the Renaissance itself resulted far less from the spontaneous generation of “new” ideas than from the fact that books and ideas could now be compared and contrasted on a previously unthinkable scale. For Eisenstein, the difference between “old” and “new” ideas is far less important when thinking the Renaissance than is the radical shift in textual consumption enabled by the press, and the newly modern sense of intertextuality it inspired. Similarly, the material conditions necessary for the large-scale development of “prose literacy” require that readers possess sufficient numbers

(We can understand why in these transitional cyclical texts, outright fantasy must be purged: one must make way for a new fiction.) Fictional texts are valued as remnants of tradition, indeed, constitute tradition in itself ([...]), but they do not have the injunctive power of explanatory myths endowed with truthfulness.” (183)

of heterogeneous texts to be able to establish a sense of “positionality” amongst them.⁷

In this sense, this first section of my dissertation can hopefully be thought of as continuing Godzich and Kittay’s work, insofar as my focus is not the emergence of prose literacy but the development of novelistic prose, which places us in a period between the emergence of prose and the emergence of the modern novel. Prose literacy—without which the books of Rabelais could not have been written or read—can be assumed, but not yet the sorts of generic literacy that will accompany the rise of the novel: Ian Watt’s “circumstantial realism,” Kermode’s “eidetic imagery of beginning, middle and end.”

Novelistic prose, as I use the term, refers to 1) the dialogic arrangement of genres and discourses described by Bakhtin in “Discourse in the Novel,” and 2) any prose narrative that creates its own fictional world within the confines of a book. Novelistic prose thus requires both prose literacy and some understanding of

⁷ Cf., for example, pg. 169: “As previous discussion of dissemination may suggest, printers initially contributed to ‘the advancement of disciplines’ less by marketing so-called ‘new’ works than by providing individual readers with access to *more* works. The sheer increase in the quantity of copies in circulation was actually of immense significance. Augmented book production altered patters of consumption; increased output changed the nature of individual intake. The literary diet of a given sixteenth-century reader was qualitatively different from that of his fourteenth-century counterpart. His staple diet had been enriched, and intellectual ferment had been encouraged, whether he consulted living authors or dead ones, ‘new’ books or ‘old’ ones.” Also relevant here is Eisenstein’s comparison of the “remarkably variegated texture” of Judeo-Christian biblical texts with “the more homogenous Koran” (334-335), which points to the necessity of something like prose literacy for a culture whose most sacred text is multi-authored, and links this to the more general Protestant/Islamic contrast on the importance of reading versus reciting.

“fiction.”⁸ Since novelistic prose predates the press, it is certainly possible to think of them as independent to some extent (as Bakhtin does): Herodotus, Plato, Heliodorus, Plutarch and Lucian all develop and utilize aspects of novelistic prose. Yet the advent of the printing press and mass literacy, together with the emergence of the category of “fiction,” enabled an epochal expansion in the possibilities of novelistic prose. The rise of the press, for instance, is deeply implicated in the rise of silent reading, as the individual-yet-infinitely-replaceable reader of novels becomes possible only in a world of mechanically reproducible texts.⁹ This exchangeability of lectorial experience will be central to the novel’s rise as cultural capital, and to the valorization of fictional worlds as such: anyone can build a Utopia, but it needs a readership to exist as a cultural phenomenon. Thus, although prose literacy and the press arise independently, neither can realize its potential without the other.

Between the emergence of prose and the birth of the modern novel, problems arise and opportunities are exploited for/by novelistic prose, nowhere more flamboyantly than in the books of François Rabelais, whose literary debut (the 1532 *Pantagruel*) is described by Barry Lydgate as “the first significant work of imaginative prose narrative in French written specifically to be disseminated via the

⁸ “Some understanding” should perhaps be underlined here, since many ancient genres that predate the emergence of “fiction” proper (particularly romance and Menippean satire) would nonetheless fall into this category. Also included under this heading would be books written under “semi-fictional” pseudonyms, like “Democritus Junior” in Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Whether or not one considers a given text written in novelistic prose/novelistic discourse to be “a novel,” strictly speaking, would of course depend on the particular theoretical-historical framework in which one is placing the novel genre (see Chapter 2.1).

⁹ Cf. Eisenstein on Europe’s transition “From a hearing public to a reading public,” pp. 129-136.

printed page” (12).¹⁰ Particularly important to my investigation, however, are problems that do not appear to arise for Rabelais (or, presumably, for his readers)—above all problems of closure. The open-endedness of the *Cinquième Livre*, and the willingness of the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres* to break off their narratives *in medias res*, point to a strange comfort vis-à-vis the problems of closure that prose historically poses.¹¹ In Rabelais, the challenges to closure that prose threatens—though not without their own anxieties—at times seem positively liberating, and in the end the problem of closure is radically, emphatically, not solved.

This comfort in the face of process and inconclusiveness is apparent in *Gargantua*'s fifty-eighth and final chapter, which first employs then discards two standard formulae of closure. The chapter (“Prophetic Riddle Found on the Foundations of the Abbey of Thélème”) begins with the titular “*Énigme en prophétie*”—a 108-line poem, mostly written by Rabelais's friend Mellin de Saint-Gelais—itself a potential closural device insofar as framing prose texts within opening and closing verses was then standard practice. Instead of closing the text,

¹⁰ This conference paper, “Going Public: Rabelais, Montaigne and the Printed Word” (quoted by Freccero), goes on to point out that the book “is tensely poised between the new and old modes of production and consumption.” For Rabelais's importance in the history of printing, see Lydgate's “Printing, Narrative, and the Genesis of the Rabelaisian Novel” and Michael Kline's *Rabelais and the Age of Printing*.

¹¹ “Because prose appears to leave situations undominated, unfinalized, and unknown, it immediately has a problem with closure. Having no form as such, prose can only approach closure but cannot, as prose, put it forward. It might be said that prose does not close but must delegate the task, by investing in one discourse at its end, and it is that discourse which closes, which marks the margin [...]. As we have seen, verse is the rich-est resource to which prose turns, when faced with the need to close” (*Emergence* 171).

however, the poem is then interpreted (by Gargantua) as describing “Le discours et maintien de vérité divine” (206), a safely theo-monological interpretation that would seem to offer another safe means of achieving closure. Yet the book’s final words are in fact given to the irreverent Frere Jean, who reads the poem as “a description of a game of tennis, written in obscure language” (“une description du jeu de paulme soubz obscures parolles”) (*G* 128; 206-207). Ending the book with Frere Jean’s reading not only unfinalizes the text by providing two readings of its closing poem that the author refuses to choose between, it also hints at deeper uncertainties inherent in the reading process itself, the clash of interpretations that can at times seem quite like a “jeu de paulme” (as so often in the *Tiers Livre*). Frere Jean’s closing words (*Et grand chère!*) can thus be read as a fellow player’s “good luck!” to the reader, who has finished reading the text and can now begin the game of interpreting it.

Both before and after the press, the physical boundaries imposed by the techno-logy of the book inevitably serve to provide some sort of “closure.” Yet the nature of this de facto closure changes when books begin to be mass-produced and sold on the market-place: rather than quantity of content being determined by the physical boundaries of a given book (how much writing can it hold?), the contents of a particular text were now used to delimit fungible, marketable volumes (how much writing should it hold?). This, in turn, seems to have increased demand for “organic,” internal unities that would organize the contents of these mechanically reproducible

volumes.¹² In this sense, the resistance to closure that prose offers is today observable in the need for narrative closure that has become characteristic of the modern novel. Yet even before the novel, the problems prose poses to closure are apparent in the popular practice of framing (“book-ending”) prose texts with verse, as well as in the disproportionate attention paid to matters of closure in ancient and medieval discourses on letter-writing (*ars dictaminis*).¹³

Godzich and Kittay find the problems and opportunities offered by this essential unfinishability of prose to be particularly dramatized in historical writings, and especially in the *Mémoires* of Phillippe de Commynes, a fifteenth-century diplomat and historian who sought “not to construct cognitive situations, wherein the flux is arrested so an object can be constituted by a knowing subject [...], but to efface the subject, so that the flux underlying the objects can come to the fore, thereby allowing access to the objects” (168). This re-conception of history provokes a striking change in the function of the *Mémoires*’s closing invocation: whereas medieval history had seen itself as explaining history as the successful realization of

¹² Eisenstein discusses this in terms of a general shift in the aesthetics of literary creation, arguing that “opportunities for spontaneous improvisation were curtailed once authors began to compose with the new presses in mind. [...] As creative activities in general and literary compositions in particular became less impulsive and more responsive to the demands of the new medium, standards of excellence shifted accordingly. Among editors, translators and critics, true eloquence became less and less associated with ‘inspired’ improvisation, more and more with obedience to the rules of rhetoric reflected in carefully polished, flawless prose” (322). With the rise of the modern novel, this emphasis on “obedience to the rules of rhetoric” is joined by an expectation of obedience to a teleological, neo-classical paradigm of plot—a clear movement from beginning to middle to end.

¹³ For the importance of letter writing as precursor to prose, see *Emergence* (147-150).

God's will, Commynes invokes God "to hold out to us the promise of a fulfilled cognition, but that is the same moment when our success of fulfillment is revealed to be but partial. His invocation functions as a limit to the kind of understanding we can hope to achieve: He is here a closural device; a closural device of the kind prose needs, paradigmatic of what prose must do to close" (171). There may be a God's-eye-view of history, but it is not a perspective Commynes believes we will ever be able to share on earth. Thus we must write history in prose, and appeal to God as the imagined perspective from which the flux would make sense. For Godzich & Kittay, this "resort to such indirect devices" of closure is not only the hallmark of "a signifying practice that leaves situations unfinalized"—it also points to a deeper connection between prose literacy and historical consciousness: "history is now also unfinalized, never closed to a backward glance. Once history has come to include us, once we have entered into it, we cannot mark its ending. To do so is to remove ourselves from within it. And we have seen that prose allows no such final outside position" (172). This unfinalizing of history coincides with an unfinalizing of the written word: the further God and the miraculous recede from view, the more omnipresent prose seems to become.¹⁴ Yet the more omnipresent prose becomes, the more it too recedes from view, eventually achieving its fully modern state of quasi-invisibility. Such a process, as one might imagine, summons up both new possibilities

¹⁴ In this sense, it is no coincidence that *Le Queste del Saint-Graal*—the most influential prose continuation of Chretien's *Conte du Graal*, and one of the first great European prose cycles—takes as its theme "la fin des enchantements de Bretagne."

and deep-seated anxieties, “a sense of loss *and* a sense of excess” (16; my italics) that at times (as so often in Rabelais) appear to become inseparable.

1.2 “Out of all compass”

Maria: Ay, but you must confine yourself within the modest limits of order.

Toby: Confine? I’ll confine myself no finer than I am. These clothes are good enough to drink in, and so be these boots to.

—William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night* (I.3.7-12)

Early modern understandings of the poetry/prose distinction are often dramatized in Shakespeare, nearly all of whose plays mix poetry and prose. This mixture inclines to a variety of purposes, and while there is no single way of understanding this division that would hold up to a sustained reading of all Shakespeare’s plays, there are certain character types who seem particularly linked to prose as a signifying practice hospitable to excess, modernity, and wit. The most notable of these is the fat, debauched knight, whose fall from high society is thematized by his use of prose instead of verse, even as his “diminishment” is paradoxically cast in terms of comic overconsumption and physical growth.

All this is played upon during the first entry of Sir Toby Belch, quoted above: Sir Toby’s refusal to “confine” his drinking hours “within the modest limits of order” is implicitly tied to his refusal to “confine” his speech within the limits of iambic pentameter. Although any gentleman might occasionally be expected to lapse into comic prose whilst drunk, Toby’s constant carousing has turned the exception (prose)

into the rule.¹⁵ Toby's response plays on this, even as he interprets (or pretends to interpret) Maria's comment as being directed towards his apparel rather than his comportment. Prose is "good enough to drink in," better suited for the knight's comic purposes, as are the extra "boots" that prose makes available to the metric line. These boots not only allow sentences to run-on beyond the boundaries of decorum, but also allow for sophistic manipulations of what has previously been said: as Feste puts it, "A sentence is but a chevril glove to a good wit. How quickly the wrong side may be turned outward!" (III.1.11-13). The parasitic, debauched knight, whose lack of money and excess of consumption have rendered him unfit for the medieval world of courtly love and warrior poetry, finds himself more at home in the fallen world of prose, which not only provides better support for the boundlessness of his grotesque body but also better suits the sorts of sophistic, alchemical wordplay that have become his stock-in-trade.

In *I Henry IV*, the play's deployment of poetry and prose seems particularly tied to its opposition between the violent, impractically courageous worldview of Hotspur, and the wittily cowardly worldview of Falstaff. The education Prince Hal undergoes—first in the tavern and then on the battlefield—demonstrates his ability to operate effectively in each of these worlds and move fluidly from one to the other, as the modern Prince must do. Falstaff, explaining how "villainous company hath been the spoil" of him, exploits the possibilities of prosaic excess in this famous exchange:

¹⁵ For the most part, nobles tend to speak in verse unless they are 1) drunk; 2) mad (or feigning madness); 3) overly pedantic; or 4) engaged in witty banter and/or consorting with "villainous company".

Falstaff: I was as virtuously given as a gentleman need to be, virtuous enough: swore little, dined not above seven times a week, went to a bawdy house not above once in a quarter of an hour, paid money that I borrowed three or four times, lived well, and in good compass.

Bardolph: Why, you are so fat, Sir John, that you must needs be out of all compass – out of all reasonable compass, Sir John. (*1 Henry IV* III.3.14-23)

In Sir John's speech, we can witness a link between the comedy of excessive consumption and the comedy of sophisticated equivocation: if prose is the appropriate medium for describing the wasteful excess of Sir John's dissolute life, it is also the appropriate medium for Sir John's alchemical wit, as virtue is transmuted to vice through the addition of a few extra words: "above seven times a week"; "of an hour"; "three or four times"; these are the dubious prosaic "boots" that comically unwork the proverbial wisdom toyed with by Falstaff in his anti-sermon.

In the play on "compass" that governs this exchange, we may perhaps glimpse some further insights into prose. In Sir John's claim to have "lived well, and in good compass," the moral sentiment of the phrase is ruthlessly, comically subordinated to its gustatory connotations. Although Sir John was unable to live within the "good compass" of self-moderation, this lack of moderation has allowed him to construct himself in good compass by rounding out the circumference of his belly. And yet, as Bardolph points out, this form of "living well" smacks of the cure become poison: not content to proceed from an unhealthy thinness to a comfortable geometric rotundity, Falstaff must rush onwards towards an immeasurable over spilling of all boundaries, "Out of all compass," not only unrestrained by limits or order but exceeding all units of measure, all "reasonable" units of measure. To measure or "confine" Sir John, it

would appear, an “unreasonable” compass would be needed... and it is perhaps not too unreasonable to suggest that prose fills this role. Out of all compass itself, prose can encompass all.

The idea of an “unreasonable compass” links Falstaff to prose in three ways. First, there is the power of sophistic-alchemical wit evident in Sir John’s own play on “good compass,” the fact that prose can be made as straightforward or obscure as the occasion demands in order that the true motives of Sir John (“gentleman of the road”) might not be “compassed” by his victims. Second, there is the sense of moral relativity in Bardolph’s “out of all compass”: both prose and Falstaff lack a single, privileged, sacred discourse to fix their “moral compass,” and thus both incline towards potentially sacrilegious mixtures of the sacred and the profane. And third, there is sheer physical **EXCESS**, the transgression of the reasonable limits ordained by meter and self-moderation.

This over spilling of boundaries, both physical and ideological, connects prose to what Bakhtin calls “the grotesque body,” itself linked to a “grotesque style” whose “fundamental attributes” include “[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness” (RW 303). Bakhtin devotes a great deal of space to discussing the positive nature of the grotesque body in *Rabelais and His World*, claiming that in Rabelais this trope points to a larger, “indestructible” communal body in which birth and death are always intertwined:

The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. Moreover, the body swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world [...]. This is why the essential

role belongs to those parts of the grotesque body in which it outgrows its own self, transgressing its own body, in which it conceives a new, second body: the bowels and the phallus. These two areas play the leading role in the grotesque image, and it is precisely for this reason that they are predominantly subject to positive exaggeration, to hyperbolization [...]. Next to the bowels and the genital organs is the mouth, through which enters the world to be swallowed up. And next is the anus. All these convexities and orifices have a common characteristic; it is within them that the confines between bodies and between the body and the world are overcome: there is an interchange and an interorientation. This is why the main events in the life of the grotesque body, the acts of bodily drama, take place in this sphere. Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and the end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (*RW* 317)

Many of the grotesque characteristics of the body celebrated in the passage above are characteristic of prose as well. Prose's tendency to interweave beginning and end, for instance, can be seen as cause and symptom of its difficulties with closure (beginning and end can be interwoven because prose has difficulty demarcating either). And whereas lines of poetry must have good reason to transgress their borders, the transgression of borders is in some sense prose's *raison d'être*... to the extent that textual borders have become irredeemably transgressed, to the extent that there is no longer a clear hierarchy of privileged perspectives and/or discourses, prose becomes indispensable as an agent of "interchange and interorientation." And when prose becomes indispensable in this way, the books of Rabelais become possible.

Yet perhaps equally instructive is a way in which *Rabelais and His World* leads its readers astray (at least from a historicist perspective), namely its linkage of Rabelais' positive portrayal of giants to an older folk culture that predates the emergence of French prose. For Bakhtin, Rabelais' wise, heroic giants do not tie him

to a sense of abundance constitutive of emergent capitalism so much as to a nostalgia for the utopic carnival culture Bakhtin associates with the middle ages.¹⁶ In her reading of Rabelais and Bakhtin in *On Longing*, Susan Stewart attempts to explain the particularly modern aspect of this valorization of giants, arguing that whereas “preindustrial culture locates the gigantic within the surrounding natural landscape,” amidst “the rise of industrial capitalism the gigantic becomes located within the abstraction of an exchange economy. The gigantic is moved from a pre-social world of the natural to a social world of material production” (Stewart 79, 80). The privileged locus of European culture’s newfound identification with the gigantic, Stewart suggests, was the marketplace of the late middle ages: “Under an agrarian economy, the giant became associated with the market and the fair and their attendant feasts. In both statuary and living form, the giant appeared as a symbol of surplus and licentiousness, of overabundance and unlimited consumption. Hence the giant’s consuming image is placed at the center of local civic identity: the hub of the marketplace and its articulation of commodity relations” (83).¹⁷ In this context, it hardly seems a coincidence that *Pantagruel* was first sold at the annual fair in Lyon, one of the primary commercial hubs in Europe at that time.

Rabelais’s positive portrayal of giants thus ties him to nothing so securely as his own present day, as Walter Stephens argues at length in *Giants in Those Days*:

¹⁶ Given the book’s already dangerously anti-Stalinist tone, it is unlikely Bakhtin would have connected the grotesque body to emergent capitalism even if he had believed them to be linked.

¹⁷ This sense of abundance will later become increasingly tied to imperialist-colonialist anxieties. For a reading of *Gargantua*’s “Abbey of Theleme” episode along these lines, see Freccero’s *Father Figures*, particularly pages 122-124.

Folklore, Ancient History and Nationalism (1989). Taking issue with the folkloric foundations of Bakhtin's argument, Stephens demonstrates that until the sixteenth century giants were almost invariably represented as evil, or at least as forces of unrestrained nature—like Euripides' Cyclops, quoted by Pantagruel as saying: "I sacrifice only to myself [...], and to this my belly, which is the greatest of all the gods" (*QL* 501)¹⁸—that must be conquered en route to the *polis* or (occasionally) tamed and put to use by the forces of a culture in the making (Stephens 31-32). Though Stephens understands the modern valorization of giants in multiple ways, in Rabelais' case he believes it is particularly linked to a then-in-vogue genre of nationalist historiography. Stephens describes the most important book in this tradition, Jean Lemaire de Belges' three-volume *Illustrations de Gaule et singularitez de Troye* (1511-1513), as "a mixture of romance and history written in French for a non-specialist" that quoted "extensively" from Annius of Viterbo's pseudo-historical, pro-Tuscan *Antiquities* (1498) "in order to prove the cultural superiority of the 'Gallic and Frankish peoples,' especially the French" (Stephens 142). Stephens shows that these "histories," together with the work of nineteenth-century scholar Abel Lefranc, ultimately constitute the main evidence for Bakhtin's "folkloric" reading of Rabelais' heroic giants. The good giants of French folklore, according to Stephens, thus came into being more as simulacrum than as remnant of some earlier, popular reality, as French citizens desirous to show their patriotism proved happy to acknowledge their King's descent from Noah (the greatest of all good giants, according to both Annius

¹⁸ "Je ne sacrifie que à moy [...] et à cestuy mon ventre, le plus grand de tous les Dieux" (*QL* 739).

and Lemaire), and to associate particular “good giants” with their native towns and villages.

Rabelais’s own deployment of the good giant, Stephens claims, should not be seen as endorsing these texts but rather as satirizing their easy movement between factual history and fantastic invention. The fact that Rabelais satirizes the tendency of nationalist historiography to romantically invent itself as factual history suggests that Rabelais and his readers already possessed a relatively modern sense of facticity vis-à-vis historical matters.¹⁹ Indeed, without this, much of the books’ comedy would not work:

And for his daily nourishment they allocated seventeen thousand nine hundred and thirteen of the best cows from Pontille and Bréhémont, near Chinon—because it would have been impossible to find him an adequate wet nurse, even if they’d scoured the entire country: he needed such a tremendous quantity of milk. Still, certain disciples of Duns Scotus have insisted that his mother fed him herself, and that she could pump out of her breasts fourteen hundred and two casks, plus nine small pots, of milk at a time. *This is simply unrealistic*—a scholastic proposition solemnly declared (by other scholastics) to be mammarily scandalous, offensive to pious ears, and even smelling a bit of heresy. (G 22-23; my italics)²⁰

¹⁹ This fits well with Eisenstein’s chronology of historical consciousness, in which “‘a totally rationalized view’ of antiquity began to appear only in the first century of printing [...T]he preservative powers of print were a prerequisite for this new view. It is not ‘since the Renaissance’ but since the advent of printing and engraving, that ‘the antique has been continually with us’” (200).

²⁰ “Et luy feurent ordonnées dix et sept mille neuf cens treze vaches de Pautille et de Brehemond pour l’alaicter ordinairement. Car de trouver nourrice suffisante n’estoit possible en tout le pays, considéré la grande quantité de laict requis pour icelluy alimenter, combien qu’aulcuns docteurs scotistes ayent affermé que sa mère l’alaicta et qu’elle pouvoit traire de ses mammelles quatorze cens deux pipes neuf potées de laict pour chascune foys, *ce que n’est vraysemblable*, et a esté la proposition déclairée mammallement scandaleuse, des pitoyables aureilles offensive, et sentent de loing hérésie.” (58). The translator’s use of “scholastic” attempts to convey Rabelais’ use of “des pitoyables aureilles offensive,” a standard formula used

Here Rabelais satirically calls attention to a rhetorical strategy dear to nationalist historiography (and, later, to science fiction): the attempt to divert suspicion from the improbability of one statement (the amount of milk consumed by baby Gargantua) by “exposing” the improbability of another, similarly dubious proposition (the mammary output of Gargantua’s mother is declared not to be “vraysemblable”).

Historiographers often achieve a similar effect through excess of detail. Thus, after Herodotus (whom Oscar Wilde lauds as “the Father of Lies”) provides detailed figures for the contributions made by each province, tribe and client kingdom to the Persian army, it seems slightly less unbelievable when he states that “Xerxes, son of Darius, led five millions two hundred and eighty-three thousand two hundred and twenty men to Sepias and Thermopylae” (475). Rabelais’ use of numbers, by contrast, trains his readers to be suspicious of such excessive detail. Along with randomly large numbers like those cited above, Rabelais also inserts numerical jokes that prompt the reader to reflect on the artificiality of their own construction:

As he set about governing Dipsodia, Pantagruel gave Panurge the lordship of Salmagundi, worth 6789106789 gold pieces, not counting fluctuating revenue from the sales of may-bugs and snails, and adding up, year after year, to a grand total of anywhere from 2435768 to 2435769 gold pieces. In a good year for snails, with may-bugs in demand, revenues could reach as high as 1234554321 gold pieces. But, of course, this did not happen each and every year. (*TL* 250)²¹

by Sorbonne Theologians to condemn scholastic propositions they found “scandaleuse.”

²¹ “Donnant Pantagruel ordre au gouvernement de toute Dipsodie, assigna la chastellenie de Salmiguondin à Panurge, valent par chascun an 6789106789 royaulx en deniers certains, non compris l’incerain revenu des hanetons et cacquerolles, montant bon an mal an de 2435768 à 2435769 moutons à la grande laine. Quelques

The numbers in this paragraph serve the opposite function of the “mille tre” names on Don Giovanni’s list, of which the aesthete in Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* makes so much. Rather than lending a sense of facticity to the document, these numbers point to their own constructedness and, by extension, to the dubious facticity of overly detailed “historical” documents like those of Annius and Lemaire. This very play with fact and fiction indicates Rabelais’ privileged place in the development of novelistic prose, a literary resource still then in the process of defining itself in relation to “history” proper.²²

The emergence of fiction is also tied to the rise of vernacular and printed literature in general: an over spilling of texts, both old and new, but also an attempt to construct modern literature as its own source of authority and veracity, no longer bound to imitate the models of the past but free to drift and wander on the sea of prose, the voyage of writing. In Rabelais, the exuberant excess of his prose is tied to a sense of anxious exhilaration over the unprecedented abundance of texts to be found less than a hundred years after books and pamphlets had first become mechanically reproducible objects. In Pantagruel’s visit to the library of Saint Victor, ambivalence towards textual proliferation can immediately be felt in the comic contrast between

foys revenoit à 1234554321 seraphz, quand estoit bonne année de cacquerolles, et hanetons de requeste. Mais ce n’estoit tous les ans” (377).

²² This critique of traditional historiography resurfaces in the “Island of Hearsay” episode in the *Cinquième Livre*, where the narrator describes a number of ancient “and I don’t know how many other modern historians, hidden behind a piece of tapestry and sneakily scribbling down some great stuff, and all from *Hearsay*” (“et ne scay combien d’autres modernes historiens cachez derriere une piece de tapisserie, en tapinois esrivans de belles besongnes, et tout par Ouy-dire”) (CL 595; 876).

Pantagruel’s stated admiration for the library—“[Pantagruel] thought the library at Saint Victor’s abbey was magnificent, especially for certain books he found there” (150-51)—and the ludicrous list of titles that follow, titles that run the gamut from mildly punny to patently absurd.²³ Yet the list’s uneasy slide between the sacred and the profane, the twisting of generic scholastic titles into more trivial secular inquiries (*l’Aiguillon de l’amour divin* becomes *L’Aiguillon de vin*; *l’Éperon de discipline* becomes *L’Esperon de fromaige*), also makes it unclear whether its satire is directed more at the press-enabled proliferation of trivial books or the inane formalism that guided scholastic theological writings. In the St. Victor library the line between these two satiric targets is often quite blurry, as in

M. n. Rostocostojambedanesse, *De moustarda post prandium servienda lib. quatuordecim, apostilati per M. Vaurillonis*[, The Serving of Mustard after a Meal in Fourteen Volumes, marginal notes by Maître Varillon] (P 241)

On the one hand, the fact that fourteen volumes can be written on the post-prandial use of mustard clearly places us in an era in which the book as sacred object has been devalued, in which the labor required to produce a book no longer demands that only “important” subjects be committed to writing. On the other hand, the fact that this text has been commented upon by M. Varillon (a famous *fifteenth* century theologian) suggests the inanity of these books might be of less recent vintage. The question is

²³ “[Pantagruel] trouva la librairie de saint Victor fort magnifique, mesmement d’aulcuns livres qu’il y trouva” (239). An ambivalent fear of secular literature supplanting the sacred can already be felt in *Pantagruel’s* Prologue, where Nasier informs us that “the booksellers sold more copies of this book [the *Chronicques Gargantuine*] in two months than the Bibles they sold in nine years” (“*a esté plus vendu par les imprimeurs en deux moys qu’il ne sera acheté de Bibles en neuf ans*”) (P 134; 215-216).

implicitly raised: is devoting hundreds of pages to answering “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin?” really less absurd than writing “Des Pois au lart, *cum commentario*” (240)?

The closing lines of this chapter—“Some of these volumes have already been printed. The rest are currently being printed in the noble city of Tübingen” (*P* 155)—again point to the modern nature of this comic anxiety: books, once scarce and precious objects chained to lecterns, are suddenly in abundance, fungible items sold at city fairs alongside cheeses and textiles, wines and sausages.²⁴ This new availability of books for purchase posed a direct challenge to practices of censorship built into medieval libraries, which by controlling access to books could keep a careful record of who was reading what. Newly abundant “Livres Pantagruelicques,” devoted to entertainment and suddenly available to a newly emergent, commercial reading public, could in this sense be said to clear the ground of strict theo-monologic readings, paving the way for an expansion of the dialogic imagination and a revolution in novelistic prose. Whereas the Church had long been invested in reading all stories as variations on (or allegories of) a single narrative—the redemption of mankind—frivolous books like *Pantagruel* posed a double threat to such a paradigm: on the one hand, they clearly suggested that different narratives were possible; on the other hand, to actually perform Christian allegorical readings of these texts might threaten to mock the practice of allegorical reading itself. Henceforth, attempts to subordinate all reading and writing to single-minded visions of literacy will find

²⁴ “Desquelz aulcuns sont jà imprimés et les aultres l’on imprime maintenant en ceste noble ville de Tubinge” (244).

themselves increasingly disoriented amidst (if not buried beneath) the bewildering varieties of textual proliferation, the excess of modern prose.

This exuberant abundance of early modern prose is attended by new anxieties. As many scholars have pointed out, early modern authorship was less influenced by any “anxiety of influence” than by an “anxiety of originality,” as attempts to construct modern vernacular texts as their own sources of authority were accompanied by fears about departing from ancient models.²⁵ Particularly attuned to these anxieties is Terence Cave’s *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, which tracks the overall ambivalence of the “cornucopia” figure common to this period and frequently invoked by Erasmus as well as Rabelais:

[Rabelais’s] comic redeployment of traditional fictions hangs in the balance between the supposed plenitude of such paradigms and the emptiness of simple entertainment. At the same time, the proximity of the Bible, now becoming available as a vernacular text, creates its own turbulence within the fictional medium. When the narrator of the Prologue to *Pantagruel* claims that more copies of the *Chronique Gargantuine* were sold in two months than of the Bible in nine years, his irony turns back on its own text, on its productive but also perilous chances of dissemination. Throughout Rabelais’s work, indeed, the rewriting of classical and biblical *topoi* creates tensions that cannot be resolved. [...] It is as if, having recognized its commitment to a post-lapsarian world in which people prefer romances and giant-stories to the Bible, Rabelais’s text aimed at a maximal confrontation between paradigmatic fragments and a willfully deviant discourse. The acceptance of such a fallen

²⁵ The distinctive Renaissance sense of *imitatio* can be seen as a transitional phase between modern and “pre-modern” conceptions of originality: “[The] old meaning [of original] was ‘closest to divine inspiration; closest to the fount, to the well-spring, to the original, to the source.’ This inspired the slogan ‘To the sources,’ *Ad Fontes!* The modern meaning is quite different. As every art critic knows, to be original is to break with precedent, to depart from tradition” (Eisenstein 192). For Rabelais’s own conception of originality, see David Quint’s *Origin and Originality in Renaissance Literature*, which reads Rabelais as deftly straddling the line between modern and Renaissance notions of authorship. The changing concept of originality and its importance to the novel genre will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 2.

plurality, transposing and betraying the harmonious plurality of ideal models, is the only strategy open to a writer conscious he is undertaking an impossible project.

The redeployment or re-grounding of *topoi* is, of course, a major preoccupation of French Renaissance writing in general. Rabelais, Ronsard, and Montaigne are all caught, in their different ways, in the same problem: the resistance of alien fragments within a new formal context tends to disrupt the movement of the text towards a stable meaning, and thus draws attention to the mode of operation rather than to the product of the writing system. As a corollary, this same phenomenon blocks the possibility of full thematic closure. The major French Renaissance texts are characteristically reflexive, dialogic, and open-ended. Written in the shadow of an impossible ideal, they proliferate in order to question themselves and to lay bare their own mechanisms. They thus invariably represent *copia*, or the cornucopia, as a centrifugal movement, a constantly renewed erasure of their own origins. (Cave 181-182)

Cave's book offers the fullest account of how the re-grounding/erasure of traditional sources in these texts engenders an unsettling proliferation of meanings that is directly linked to the image of the cornucopia, whose "dynamic productivity will sooner or later begin to appear, in a post-lapsarian world, as an emptying out, or as mere flux or repetition" (183). Nonetheless, as my next section will argue at greater length, I feel that Cave's reading of Rabelais is overly pessimistic insofar as he seems to attribute to Rabelais an aversion to "the emptiness of simple entertainment," an aversion belied by Rabelais's own continual affirmation of the importance of "refreshment" to human life.²⁶ Cave also declines to theorize whether and to what extent the material abundance enjoyed in France at this time may have contributed to

²⁶ Indeed, if there is one unequivocal message to be drawn from Rabelais, it is that we should work hard by day and spend the evening relaxing and drinking with friends.

the more positive connotations of *copia*.²⁷ Tying Cave's reading to the rise of the press, one might say that the unprecedented abundance of texts in early modernity helped catalyze an unprecedented excess of meaning.

Summing up, we can point to at least three ways of thinking prosaic excess in Rabelais: there is the satirization of excessive detail in historical literature. There is the anxious celebration of an emergent culture of literacy, in which a dedicated humanist might fashion himself into "*un abysme de science*" (*P* 248) through the consumption of newly abundant books. And there is the grotesque body, which dominates the first two volumes but which cannot always be said to unreservedly "valorize" excess, as the "two hundred sixty thousand, four hundred and eighteen people" said to have drowned in Gargantua's river of urine ("not counting women and small children") might attest (*G* 42). Given the greater-or-lesser ambivalence of all these themes, one might say that it is not so much excess Rabelais celebrates as the enjoyment of abundance, enjoyment itself being thematically linked to health in the text. Indeed, the books' philosophy of "Pantagruelism" seems to exist precisely at the conjunction of enjoyment, laughter, abundance, and health, four constitutive elements of what I am calling the Pantagruelist mode of incompleteness. The positivity of Rabelaisian excess, I believe, becomes most apparent (and least ambivalent) when thought in terms of his continual endorsement of the medicinal value of his books.

²⁷ Nestled between the plagues of the fourteenth century and the incipient "little Ice Age," fifteenth century France had witnessed far-reaching improvements in roads and agriculture, which in turn fueled the newly abundant offerings at sixteenth century city fairs and markets.

This figuration, I believe, is **the** most important element to understanding Rabelais's celebration of his own texts' lack of closure.

1.3 The Pantagruelist Text

"I don't want to achieve immortality through my work... I want to achieve it through not dying."—Woody Allen

A central but rarely commented upon feature of the Rabelaisian corpus is its emphasis on health, the connections it draws between its own textual proliferation and the physical health that this proliferation is meant to confer upon its readers. This connection between health, laughter, and the double activity of reading and writing is immediately drawn in the opening poem to *Gargantua*, where the author defends his book as containing no "infection" while conceding that its only "perfection" lies "en cas de rire." The Prologue to *Gargantua* stretches this conceit further, as the author compares his book to a "Silenus Box" (*boîtes dites Silenus*) whose outside is covered with fantastic images but whose inside is filled with "les fines drogues" ("rare medicines") (*G* 38; 7). The end of the Prologue makes the book's medicinal purposes still more explicit: "Now have fun, my lovely friends, and read all the rest of this gaily, *because it's good for your body (and not bad for your kidneys, either)!*" (9; my italics).²⁸ Note that it is not merely reading, but "reading gaily" (*guayement lisez*) that is figured as healthy in this authorial injunction. This emphasis on health, though less pronounced and more ambivalent in *Pantagruel* due to its satirization of the alleged

²⁸ "Or esbaudissez-vous, mes amours, et guayement lisez le reste, *tout à l'aise du corps et au profit des reins!*" (41).

“magical properties” (*propriétés occultes*) of the *Chroniques Gargantuine*—said to be able to cure toothache (213)—is a running theme through-out Rabelais’ work, most clearly articulated in the dedication of the *Quart Livre*:

You are certainly aware, O most noble Prince, just how many high and eminent personages have directed, requested, even begged—not only in the past, but daily—that I continue these Pantagruelian narratives, pointing out that many languishing, ill, or otherwise indisposed and afflicted people have, by reading these volumes, triumphed over their worries, experienced moments of happiness, and been granted a new cheerfulness and comfort. And I have been in the habit of answering that, writing these books as a frolic and sport, I have been totally unconcerned with either glory or praise but thinking only of how these pages might give some small relief to the sick and the afflicted, just as I do when I am able to be with them, gladly and cheerfully, when my knowledge and my services as a doctor are called on. (QL 379)²⁹

In the *Tiers*, *Quart*, and *Cinquième Livres*, the purported health value of these books gain newfound authority through the reattribution of their authorship from the dubious alchemist Alcofribas Nasier to the certified *Doctor* François Rabelais, referred to by the King himself (in the “PRIVILÈGE DU ROY” of the definitive 1552 edition) as “nostre cher et bien aymé, M. François Rabelais, *docteur en médecine*” (358; my italics).

The purported medicinal value of the books is linked not only to laughter—whose astonishing curative powers have been recognized by physicians from ancient

²⁹ “Vous estes deument adverty, Prince très illustre, de quants grands personaiges j’ay esté et suis jour-nellement stipulé, requis et importuné pour la continuation des mythologies Pantagruelicques, alléguans que plusieurs gens languoureux, malades ou autrement faschez et désolé avoient, à la lecture d’icelles, trompé leurs ennuictz, temps joyeusement passé et repceu alaigresse et consolation nouvelle. Èsquelz je suis coustumier de respondre que, icelles par esbat composant, ne prétendois gloire ne louange aucune, seule-ment avois esguard et intention par escript donner ce peu de soulagement que povois ès affligez et malades absens, lequel volontiers, quand besoing est, je fais ès présens qui soy aident de mon art et service” (562).

times to the present—but also to the books’ philosophy of “Pantagruelism.” Indeed, *Gargantua*’s subtitle—“livre plein de pantagruelisme”—clearly hints that Pantagruelism is precisely the “precious medicine” to be found within the book’s grotesque outer shell. Pantagruel’s own name is (bilingually) etymologized as “all-thirstiness”: “*Panta* in Greek means ‘all,’ and *Gruel* in Arabic means ‘thirsty,’ thus indicating that at the hour of his birth the whole world would be thirsty—and [Gargantua] saw, prophetically, that someday his son would be lord of the thirsty” (*P* 141).³⁰ Interestingly, Rabelais’ word for thirsty (*altéré*) connotes not only ill-health but also the dangers of textual proliferation, coming from *altération*, which does mean “great thirst” but whose primary and secondary definitions are “change (for the worse); impairing (of health, etc.); deterioration” and “debasing, debasement (of coinage); adulteration (of food); falsification (of document); garbling (of text); misrepresentation (of facts).”³¹ These several connotations of thirst all reinforce the

³⁰ “*panta* en grec vault autant à dire comme *tout* et *gruel* en langue Hagarène vault autant comme *altéré*, veulent inférer que à l’heure de sa nativité le monde estoit tout altéré, et voyant en esprit de prophétie qu’il seroit quelque jour dominateur des altérez” (224).

³¹ For the thirst motif in Rabelais, see Thomas Greene’s “The Hair of the Dog that Bit You: Rabelais’ Thirst,” which offers this historical contextualization: “The word *alteré*, [...] Rabelais’ most common word for ‘thirsty,’ tended to have negative implications during the sixteenth century. Although Rabelais uses the verb *alterer* routinely in the sense ‘to excite thirst,’ this would not appear to have been one of its readiest meanings during his own era. Huguet omits it altogether from his entry devoted to the verb and suggests a related meaning only cautiously and tentatively in his long entry devoted to the noun *altere*, despite the abundant evidence in the Rabelaisian text. *Alterer* in the sixteenth century meant primarily to change something but also to trouble somebody, to upset and to anger. The cognate noun *altere* meant ‘malheur,’ ‘état penible.’ The participle *alteré* could mean ‘avid,’ even ‘greedy,’ as a tiger is avid for blood. The reflexive verb *s’alterer* meant ‘to be disturbed’ and is so used by Rabelais (‘sans plus vous fascher ne alterer,’ 2:18). But it

reading of Pantagruel as a figure of redemption, a comic Christ for the fallen modern prosaic age.³² As “Lord of the Thirsty” (*dominateur des altérez*), Pantagruel, redeemer and *dominateur*, conquers garbling and brings health to the sick, water to the thirsty, wine to the sober.

In addition to Pantagruel himself, other *Panta-* words forming key links in the books’ semiotic chain include *bons Pantagruelistes*, *livres Pantagruelicques*, *l’herbe Pantagruélion*, and of course *Pantagruelisme*. The final sentence of *Pantagruel* offers a fairly clear definition of “bons Pantagruelistes”: “if you want to be good Pantagruelists (which means to live peacefully, happily, healthily, always having a good time), never trust anyone who looks at you under a cowl [*par un pertuys*]” (235).³³ Interestingly, the definition of what it means to **be** a Pantagruelist is here

also had the meaning ‘to change’ intransitively, with a negative nuance; medieval writers had already used it with an implication of deterioration, an implication which remains in Amyot and Montaigne. When the narrator of the *Quart Livre* prologue archly compliments the reader—“Vous avez remede trouvé infinable contre toutes alterations.” (2:11)—this last word refers to an unhealthy deterioration of the balance of humors” (80).

³² For a sustained reading of Pantagruel as a Christ-figure, see Edwin Duval’s “Pantagruel’s Genealogy and the Redemptive Design of Rabelais’s *Pantagruel*.”

³³ “si désirez estre bons Pantagruelistes (c’est à dire vivre en paix, joie, santé, faisant tousjours grande chère), ne vous fiez jamais en gens qui regardent par un pertuys” (353).

Literally, “par un pertuys” translates as “through a hole.” Thus, although “under a cowl” captures the primary sense of the phrase, the French could also be said to connote a second injunction not to trust one-sided historiographers or narrators who cloak their tales in shrouds of alleged objectivity. In this reading, the “pertuys” would be the hole through which writers observe their fictional worlds, and/or the hole through which historians observe and record their “facts,” perhaps anticipating the tapestry through which historians will record the words of “Hearsay” (*Ouy-Dire*) in the *Cinquième Livre*.

confined to parentheses and subordinated to the dominant injunction never to trust monks... most of whom, we have just been informed, are terrible readers:

And as for their studying, they spend all their time reading pantagrueistic books—but not for pleasure. No, they read in order to injure others, wickedly—by articulating, monarticulating, lyingly articulating, sitting on, shitting on, and diabolically spitting on—which means viciously [*callumniant*]. They're just like those country clods who poke around in little children's shit, during cherry season, so they can dig out the pits and sell them to druggists, who use them for oil and perfumes. (235)³⁴

Note the link drawn here between reading “wickedly” (*meschamment*) and the latest quackery of Parisian “drogoureux.” This suggests again that the health value of *livres Pantagrueiques* depends largely on the spirit in which they are read. If monks, scowling from behind their “pertuys,” are here cast as the others of “bons Pantagrueists,” it is less because of their behavior (they apparently read the same books) than because of their surly and “callumniant” disposition. Pantagruel, good Christ-like humanist that he is, seems inclined to love sinners and tolerate human frailty so long as it is accompanied by a more general sense of Pantagrueism: hospitality, healthy joviality and *bon esprit*.³⁵ This, for instance, seems to be part of what separates the fun-loving but morally dubious Panurge from other characters

³⁴ “Quant est de leur estude, elle est toute consummée à la lecture de livres Pantagrue-icques, non tant pour passer temps joyusement que pour nuyre à quelc'un, meschamment, sçavoir est articulant, monort-iculant, torticulant, culletant, couilletant et diabliculant, c'est à dire callumniant. Ce que faisans, semblent ès coquins de village qui fougent et echarbottent la merde des petitz enfans, en la saison des cerises et guignes, pour trouver les noyaulx et iceulx vendre ès drogoureux qui font l'huile de Maguelet.” (352)

³⁵ Bakhtin defines Pantagrueism as “the ability to be cheerful, wise, and kind” (“Forms of the Time and of the Chronotope” 186), and although he leaves out “healthy” one could say that someone who is cheerful, wise and kind will generally be more likely to enjoy good health than someone who is surly, foolish and mean-spirited.

(like the pretentious “*Limosin*”) who incur Pantagruel’s wrath. To be a Pantagruelist thus seems to denote one as a follower of Pantagruel, rather than one who is explicitly like Pantagruel in appearance or behavior. And if all the followers of Pantagruel cannot live up to the highest calling of Pantagruelism, the Christian humanist example set by good King Pantagruel himself, they can at least aspire to the more modest share of Pantagruelism allotted to all fun-loving *bons Pantagruelistes*. King Pantagruel, unlike King Henry, clearly does not “banish plump Jack.”

It is another small step to what I am calling “the Pantagruelist text,” or a text that follows a Pantagruelist mode of incompleteness. Within the history of the novel, it must be stated that the Pantagruelist mode of incompleteness is something of an aberration, a monstrous birth that will occasionally continue to erupt even amidst the more straightforward eidetic imagery of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Once the modern novel has come into its own, as it were, modes of incompleteness will serve primarily as signposts pointing the way to narrative closure, and will constitute the process by which the beginning and middle of a novel are redeemed via the reader’s experience of some sense of an ending. In a Pantagruelist text, however, the situation is radically different: unlike most modes of incompleteness, the Pantagruelist mode does not move towards closure but instead strives for perpetual growth (much like Bakhtin’s grotesque body). Closure has little positive value here, since it stands opposed to growth and to the healthy jollity that is no less than a moral imperative for all *bons Pantagruelistes*. The Pantagruelist text offers itself as medicinal (it soothes *les altérés*), and—like Vitamin C—the more there is of it, the better. Closure must be

delayed and thwarted by the Pantagruelist text because it signifies death: the presumable death of the writer who is no longer able to generate more volumes, and the slow, thirsty, mirthless death of the reader deprived of medicine. The implicit contract made between author and reader is: “I will continue to write, and the text will continue to grow, until I die.”³⁶ Figured thusly as death, as the absence of all health, closure here lacks the positive character it will acquire during the rise of the novel, when the link between death and closure will become more firmly tied to the fungibility of the text and, with it, the commercial interests of the modern novelist, who “owns” his or her characters and sells their adventures in book form.

Literary connections between narrative and the prolongation of life are of course older than Rabelais. One thinks of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, in which the rationale underlying the exchange of stories is a plague the storytellers are fleeing. On a practical, medicinal level, the *Decameron* presents storytelling in the country as a healthy alternative to life in the disease-ridden city: time spent exchanging stories is time not spent contracting and suffering from plague. The unfinished French *Decameron* (or *Heptameron*) of Marguerite de Navarre (patron of Rabelais) makes use of this motif as well, as the text’s prologue begins with a trip to “the spa town of Caunterest,” said to possess “remarkable cures, so remarkable that patients long given up by their physicians go home completely restored to health” (60). On their way home from this spa, an intense deluge forces the main characters to take refuge in a

³⁶ Sterne actually makes this contract explicit, as Tristram promises to keep his narrative “a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits” (64).

remote Abbey, where they declare “Unless we have some amusing and virtuous way of occupying ourselves, we run the risk of [falling] sick,” or even of becoming “miserable and disagreeable – and that’s an incurable disease” (66). They thus decide to pass the time as healthily a possible by creating a (never completed) French *Decameron*.

Yet perhaps the most important figure in this context is Scheherazade, heroine of *The Book of The 1001 Nights*. For Scheherazade, it is not enough simply to tell a story so entertaining that her listener cannot help but be enthralled. Rather, to preserve and prolong her life in the face of her husband’s homicidal intentions, Scheherazade must interweave the beginnings and endings of a variety of tales in such a way as to keep open the process of storytelling. Scheherazade’s dual role as heroine-narrator marks her as a key figure in the development of novelistic prose: on the one hand, she is the heroine of the frame narrative by means of which a number of disparate stories are connected. On the other hand, she is the storytelling agent who arranges and manipulates the borders of tales that were once heterogeneous. As heroine of the frame narrative, she provides a means for uniting a disparate series of tales into a single text, henceforth susceptible to literary analysis in its entirety. As weaver of the text’s narratives, she manages the margins by which the narrative process is kept open (some nights end in the middle of a story still being unfolded; other nights end with the promise of a better story the next night; still others end shortly after a new story has begun, as the reader remains caught up in the transition

from ending to beginning). Narrating for her life, Scheherazade must use every means at her disposal to continue her tale and control the attention of her listener.

The example of *The Book of the 1001 Nights* has an added significance to my project, since the Syraic text on which the European *Arabian Nights* was based—and from which the frame-narrative of Scheherazade was taken—ends less than three hundred nights into the promised thousand, and thus constitutes something of an unfinishable, Pantagruelist text itself. Rather like the “Seventy-Eighth Book” that Rabelais promises on the title page of the *Tiers Livre*, the “1001” Nights in the title seems originally to have functioned less as an explicit organizing principle and more as an impossibly large number that reflected the positive unfinishability and asymptotic growth of the text. Over the course of the eighteenth century, however—i.e., amidst the rise of the novel—European editors and “translators” (most notably Antoine Galland) found it desirable to fill out each and every one of the “1001” nights promised by the ninth century text, as a desire for formal completion apparently came to trump the sense of frantic open-endedness and digressive vitality that might otherwise seem more appropriate to Scheherazade’s situation.³⁷

Where does François Rabelais fit into this picture? A major innovation Rabelais will make in this line is that with him this vitality of storytelling becomes firmly linked to his texts’ self-consciousness of themselves as texts, as fungible

³⁷ For the “authorship” of *The Arabian Nights*, see Ibrahim Muhawi’s “The ‘Arabian Nights’ and the Question of Authorship” (2005). In this context, it also seems germane to note that some of the great unfinished eighteenth century novels—Potocki’s *Fragment of a Manuscript found at Saragossa*, Sade’s *120 Days of Sodom*—are not so much structurally or thematically “unfinishable” (at least in theory) as they are overly ambitious in the numerology of their frame narratives.

objects meant to be consumed by reading subjects. In Rabelais, endless reading and interpretation become part and parcel of the narrative process, and the individuating interpretations of different readers in some sense replaces the variations that inevitably attend the passing of stories “from mouth to mouth.” If the “cask” (*tonneau*) that is his book is “inexhaustible” (*inexpuisable*) and has a “living source” (*source vive*), as Rabelais claims in the prologue to the *Tiers Livre*, writing in his own name for the first time, it is not because he thinks he will live to write infinite books but because the books he does write will be capable of being re-read *ad infinitum* by living readers. Indeed, this seems to be precisely the superiority of his books to those he claims “will disappear” and never be heard from again (*CL* 526; 788). In this sense, the entire history of Rabelaisian criticism, in which centuries of scholarship have failed to resolve some of the most basic interpretive dilemmas posed by his books, should stand as testament to the truth of his promise.

We readers of Rabelais are asked to withhold our laughter until the seventy-eighth book.³⁸ Anyone able to comply with such a request is obviously not a good Pantagruelist. Yet this deferral of judgment to the seventy-eighth book points to another central Pantagruelist trope: digression. In a Pantagruelist text, digression takes on an immensely positive character by leading the reader away from closure

³⁸ On the title page to the *Tiers Livre*: “L’Auteur susdit supplie les Lecteurs bénévoles, / soy réserver à rire au soixante / et dixhuytiesme Livre” (355). The second line break here reinforces the sense of deferral, as the “sixty” that ends line two becomes “seventy-eight” in line three. Thus, the more one reads, the further one gets from the end... but it is all in good fun.

and death. At the end of *Pantagruel*, Nasier offers a list of what readers can expect in forthcoming volumes:

The rest of this history will be ready for sale at the next Frankfurt Fair, and you will see how Panurge got married, and was cuckolded from the very beginning; and how [Pantagruel] found the philosopher's stone, and just how he located and used it; and how he climbed the Caspian Mountains; how he sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, and routed the cannibals, and conquered the Antilles Islands; how he married the King of India's daughter (Prester John was that King's name); how he fought the devils and burned up five rooms in hell, and utterly destroyed the great black room, and threw Proserpina into the flames, and broke four of Lucifer's teeth, not to mention one of the horns on his ass; and how he traveled to the moon in order to find out if, in fact, the moon was not all there (since women have at least three-quarters of it in their heads); And a thousand other gay little tales, each and all of them absolutely true. (235)³⁹

Ending one's work with a description and promise of future volumes (whether or not one intended to write them) is a classic closural device dating back to antiquity, when to "publish" a book meant to give a public reading of it. Thus, although few of the adventures described in this paragraph ever actually occur in the text, this in fact is the most traditional of any of Rabelais's endings. Yet rather than repudiating the "truth" of any of these promised adventures in future volumes—as Cervantes will do with Don Quixote's promised trip to Saragossa—Rabelais's final four books

³⁹ "Vous aurez le reste de l'histoire à ces foires de Francfort prochainement venantes, et là vous verrez: comment Panurge fut marié, et cocqu dès le premier moys de ses nopces; et comment Pantagruel trouva la pierre philosophale, et la manière de la trouver et d'en user; et comment il passa les Mons Caspies; comment il naviga par la Mer Athlantique, et deffit les caniballes, et conquesta les isles de Perlas; comment il espousa la fille du roy de Inde nommé Presthan; comment il combatit contre les diables et fist brusler cinq chambres d'enfer, et mist à sac la grande chambre noire, et getta Proserpine au feu, et rompit quatre dentz à Lucifer et une corne au cul; et comment il visita les régions de la lune pour sçavoir si, à la verité, la lune n'estoit entière, mais que les femmes en avoient troys quartiers en la teste; et mille aultres petites joyeusetes toutes véritables" (350).

endlessly defer the fulfillment of even the first of these “petites joyeusetez,” initially by following the story of the son (Pantagruel) with the story of the father (Gargantua), but subsequently by means of a Quest to determine whether Panurge should marry. Interestingly, the very question that drives the action of the *Tiers*, *Quart* and *Cinquième Livres*—will Panurge’s wife cuckold him?—has already been clearly decided here at the end of the first (written) volume. The truth is already there for the reader to see, and the only question is whether Panurge will be able to accept it or not.⁴⁰

Of course, the Quest-occasioned delay in Panurge’s marriage also delays the other promised adventures, including Pantagruel’s own marriage (which Gargantua is said to be arranging while Pantagruel is questing). Panurge’s eternal indecision thus becomes a kind of eternal youth for Pantagruel, as the author is free to digress for seventy-eight books before arriving at a place where the reader might finally be justified in asking whether the end were in sight. In this sense, one might say that from the *Tiers Livre* onward digression becomes **the** structuring principle of the work as a whole (advertised to include at least seventy-eight books). Such a reading not only connects the *Tiers Livre* more strongly to the *Quart* and *Cinquième Livres* (since all three can be seen to form a single digression as well as a single Quest), it also provides a more positive, Pantagruelist alternative to the “repetition” of “mere

⁴⁰ This points to the strange paradox inherent in the idea of being “destined” to be a cuckold, since a man’s status as cuckold depends not only on the behavior of his wife but also on his own ignorance of this behavior. By continually refusing to accept the wisdom he receives in the *Tiers Livre*, by using sophistry to wriggle his way out of accepting the truths that are given to him, Panurge could be said to be demonstrating his “worthiness” to be such a cuckold.

formulae” that Cave identifies as the *Tiers Livre*’s structuring principle (Cave 193). While the plot of the *Tiers Livre* is undeniably repetitive and certainly does repeat a formula—signs of greater or lesser ambiguity are interpreted as saying that Panurge both will and will not be cuckolded, with Panurge inevitably arguing the latter—its continual, iterative digression in search of new contexts to play out this formula is precisely what enables its satiric-encyclopedic mapping of ancient, traditional and contemporary sources of wisdom. Panurge’s sophistic wit, which again and again allows him to digress from the truth in the direction that best suits him, is thus what prevents the text from becoming sterilely repetitive by ensuring an abundant succession of excessively fertile signs. As positive reevaluation of Cave’s “empty flux and repetition,” endless Pantagruelist digression is more in line with Derrida’s affirmation of “the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play” (*Grammatology* 50), an affirmation that would itself seem to require a strong dose of “Pantagruelist *courage*.”⁴¹

Carla Freccero offers a similar reading of Panurge’s function in the quest narrative, pointing to how Rabelais co-opts the endless deferral characteristic of the

⁴¹ For this term, see Thomas Greene’s “The Unity of the *Tiers Livre*”: “Pantagruel is able to dominate that condition of imperfect communication which is a human constant. But we as readers do not receive messages as easily as Pantagruel, since we need his explications. We like Panurge are condemned to receive messages accompanied by noise, and of that noise are conflicts made. Thus aural vulnerability in Rabelais doubles genital vulnerability, and both threaten Pauline harmony. Between them, we wonder how a serene human life is possible. The volume demonstrates how precious is that *bon espoir* promised by the Prologue. The volume demonstrates the value and rarity of that *courage* which distinguishes the Pantagruelist. It shows how he can properly be represented as a metaphorical soldier. His hope and his joy are the only solace of our innate vulnerabilities” (Greene, “Unity” 298).

romance genre as a structuring principle for the semiotic quest of his final three books: “As the principle of digression and generator of the quest, Panurge becomes the locus for Rabelais’s parodic exploration of romance as the genre that puts into question its own process of narration” (171).⁴² Freccero builds on Patricia Parker’s *Inescapable Romance: Studies in the Poetics of a Mode*, which claims “Romance” to be “characterized primarily as a form which simultaneously quests for and postpones a particular end, objective, or object. [...] When the ‘end’ is defined typologically, as a Promised Land or Apocalypse, ‘romance’ is that mode or tendency which remains on the threshold before the promised end, still in the wilderness of wandering, ‘error,’ or ‘trial’” (4). Digression, of course, lies at the heart of the romance genre’s signature narrative device—the separated lovers—and most romance narratives indeed take place in a time of digression, a time between mystery and revelation, arousal and consummation, engagement and marriage. Romance marks an interruption of the natural teleology of these connected events, but at the same time it constructs a narrative whose own teleology is oriented towards a re-tying of the causal chain it itself has severed: the separated lovers are reunited, and this process of separation and reunification constitutes the narrative itself. This is the time of the quest, or what Bakhtin (speaking of the chronotope of ancient romance) calls “adventure-time.” According to Bakhtin, one defining characteristic of “adventure-time” is that it “leaves no trace” (“Chronotope” 90): i.e., just as the lovers in these texts neither age

⁴² Like Cave, Freccero focuses on the semiotic anxieties that pervade the Rabelaisian text and not on the more positive, medicinal qualities that are tied to its perpetual growth.

nor change during their lengthy and agonizing separations, so their self-contained adventures do not effect the outside world. On a tropological level, one might perhaps stretch this idea further and claim that digression is the “adventure-time” of narrative itself, as language, leaving no trace on the primary plot.

Interestingly, however, much of the comedy of *Tristram Shandy* is actually founded on the shattering of this illusion—as in the quote below—as the aging and the writing of the narrator are linked together under the aegis of that quintessential eighteenth century chronotopic image: the man at his desk.⁴³ Yet at the same time, *Tristram Shandy* also illustrates how Pantagruelist digression, far from being strictly formulaic, exists primarily in a continual turning away from formulae, or (perhaps better) in a continual oscillation between them.

1.4 A Brief Digression on *Tristram Shandy*

“I am this month one whole year older than I was this time twelve-month; and having got, as you perceive, almost into the middle of my fourth volume—and no further than to my first day’s life—‘tis demonstrative that I have three hundred and sixty-four days more life to write just now, than when I first set out; so that instead of advancing, as a common writer, in my work with what I have been doing at it—on the contrary, I am just thrown so many volumes back—was every day of my life to be as busy a day as this—

⁴³ This, incidentally, is how Bakhtin distinguishes between “Pantagruelism” and “Shandyism”: whereas in Rabelais the hero’s body remains inseparable from the communal body, in Sterne we are clearly in a world of private individuals: “It is characteristic that *internal man*—pure ‘natural’ subjectivity—could be laid bare only with the help of the clown and the fool, since an adequate, direct (that is, from the point of view of practical life, not allegorical) means for expressing his life was not available. [...] A personalized eccentricity, ‘Shandyism’ (Sterne’s own term), becomes an important means for exposing the ‘internal man’ and his ‘free and self-sufficient subjectivity’—means that are analogous to the ‘Pantagruelism’ that had served in the Renaissance to reveal a coherent external man” (“Chronotope” 164).

And why not?—and the transactions and opinions of it to take up as much description—And for what reason should they be cut short? as at this rate I shall live 364 times faster than I should write—It must follow, an' please your worships, that the more I write, the more I shall have to write—and consequently, the more your worships read, the more your worships will have to read.

Will this be good for your worships eyes?"

—Laurence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (256-257)

To tackle the topic of digression without reference to *Tristram Shandy*, arguably the most sustained and sophisticated engagement with this trope in all of western literature, would be criminal; hence this digression on *Tristram Shandy*, the most famous unfinishable novel of both the English language and the eighteenth century. Concerns for its readerships' eyes aside, *Tristram's* status as a Pantagruelist text is openly proclaimed from its opening dedication, where Sterne describes his writing project as part of "a constant endeavor to fence against the infirmities of ill health, and other evils of life, by mirth; being firmly persuaded that every time a man smiles,—but much more so, when he laughs, that it adds something to this Fragment of Life" (3). There are likewise numerous direct and indirect references to Rabelais, as well as the occasional outright theft.

Digression serves as both structuring principle and primary trope for the novel. As its title—*The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*—suggests, Tristram's life-narrative is constantly interrupted by opinionated digressions (and vice versa), as diegesis and exegesis digress from one another again and again in a continual, joyous cycle. All this is described and played out in the novel's first volume during

Tristram's "chapter on digressions," which (fittingly) follows a previous digression from a story about his Uncle Toby:

CHAP. XXII.

The learned Bishop *Hall*, I mean the famous Dr. *Joseph Hall*, who was Bishop of *Exeter* in King *James* the first's reign, tells us in one of his *Decads*, at the end of his divine art of meditation, imprinted at *London*, in the year 1610, by *John Beal*, dwelling in *Aldersgate-street*, "That it is an abominable thing for a man to commend himself;"---and I really think it is so.

And yet, on the other hand, when a thing is executed in a masterly kind of a fashion, which thing is not likely to be found out;---I think it is full as abominable, that a man should lose the honour of it, and go out of the world with the conceit of it rotting in his head.

This is precisely my situation.

For in this long digression which I was accidentally led into, as in all my digressions (one only excepted) there is a masterstroke of digressive skill, the merit of which has all along, I fear, been overlooked by my reader,--not for want of penetration in him,---but because 'tis an excellence seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression;---and it is this: That tho' my digressions are all fair, as you observe,---and that I fly off from what I am about, as far and as often too as any writer in *Great-Britain*; yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence.

I was just going, for example, to have given you the great out-lines of my uncle *Toby*'s most whimsical character;---when my aunt *Dinah* and the coachman came a-cross us, and led us a vagary some millions of miles into the very heart of the planetary system: Notwithstanding all this, you perceive that the drawing of my uncle *Toby*'s character went on gently all the time;---not the great contours of it,---that was impossible,---but some familiar strokes and faint designations of it, were here and there touch'd in, as we went along, so that you are much better acquainted with my uncle *Toby* now than you was before.

By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,---and at the same time.

This, Sir, is a very different story from that of the earth's moving around her axis, in her diurnal rotation, with her progress in her elliptick orbit which brings about the year, and constitutes that variety and vicissitude of seasons we enjoy;---though I own it suggested the thought,---as I believe the

greatest of our boasted improvements and discoveries have come from such trifling hints.

Digressions, incontestably, are the sun-shine;—they are the life, the soul of reading;---take them out of this book for instance,--you might as well take the book along with them;—one cold eternal winter would reign in every page of it; restore them to the writer;-----he steps forth like a bridegroom,—bids All hail; brings in variety, and forbids the appetite to fail. [my italics—J.W.]

All the dexterity is in the good cookery and management of them, so as to be not only for the advantage of the reader, but also of the author, whose distress, in this matter, is truly pitiable: For, if he begins a digression,---from that moment, I observe, his whole work stands stock-still;—and if he goes on with his main work,---then there is an end of his digression.

—This is vile work.—For which reason, from the beginning of this you see, I have constructed the main work and the adventitious parts of it with such intersections, and have so complicated and involved the digressive and progressive movements, one wheel within another, that the whole machine, in general, has been kept a-going;---and, what’s more, it shall be kept a-going these forty years, if it pleases the fountain of health to bless me so long with life and good spirits. (63-64)⁴⁴

Tristram’s reflections on his own astonishing powers of digression point to one of prose’s most interesting features: its double nature as simultaneously “digressive” and “progressive.” On the one hand, prose is digressive, long-winded, euphemistic, and round-about. On the other hand, prose gets straight to the point. Moreover, as Tristram’s chapter on digression shows, in digressing from a point one may ultimately end up arriving at it, just as in going straight to one point one may well be digressing from another. Yet (somehow) through this process it is possible to gain

⁴⁴ Lengthy as it, this quotation points to the difficulties involved in quoting prose, for it is still only a single chapter, and the organizing force of prose not only binds sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into chapters, but chapters into books as well, and (sometimes) books into novels. Yet this binding power, dimly perceivable in a series of speeches by different characters, slightly more clear in the movement from one chapter to another, is almost impossible to capture via quotation, which seeks to fragment and highlight certain privileged segments of prose rather than highlighting the function of prose as organizing principle. Prose is not (only) the writing inside the quotation marks, it is the process of quotation itself.

knowledge, knowledge of disjunction as well as knowledge of the subject that is being digressed from/to (in Tristram's case, the character of his Uncle Toby, in my case, the character of the Pantagruelist text).

Tristram describes digressions as "the sun-shine," without which "one cold eternal winter would reign" in his book. In the preceding paragraph, Tristram begins by saying that the double nature of his work (digressive-progressive) is not like the double motion of the earth (diurnal-elliptical), but this mini-digression is brought to a close with the admission that they are at least enough alike to have suggested the thought. Narrative without digression, Tristram suggests, would be like the earth continuing in her orbit without turning on her axis: the change in seasons might continue, but the process would scarcely be observable to that half of the planet condemned to eternal darkness. Digressions are that with which the author "brings in variety and forbids the appetite to fail"; as "the sun-shine," they enable the very play of light and darkness by which contrast and disjunction become recognizable and susceptible to cognition, and are the means of introducing growth, difference, and process into the static, monologic text. The process of digression, which controls the reader's attention by allowing it to wander, sheds light on itself as well as on other textual processes, exposing particular narrative logics as lacking the inevitability they proclaim.

At the same time, Tristram's very desire to defend his own "digressive skill" suggests that digressions "executed in a masterly kind of a fashion" are far less common than their unwieldy and mismanaged counterparts. Indeed, Tristram's

admission that his own particular “excellence” is “seldom looked for, or expected indeed, in a digression,” offers a clear reminder that “digression” rarely carries positive connotations. To be successful, a digression must be capable of both manipulating and holding the attention of the reader, this being much of the “dexterity” required for “the good cookery and management of them.” Born from the nexus of difference and deferral, digression is in a sense pure *différance*; it should thus hardly be surprising that such a surfeit of *différance* as *Tristram Shandy* offers might at times become a bit disorienting even for its narrator:

I told him, Sir—for in good truth, when a man is telling a story in the strange way I do mine, he is obliged continually to be going backwards and forwards to keep all tight together in the reader’s fancy—which, for my own part, if I did not take more heed to do more than at first, there is so much unfixed and equivocal matter starting up, with so many breaks and gaps in it,—and so little service do the stars afford, which, nevertheless, I hang up in some of the darkest passages, knowing that the world is apt to lose its way, with all the lights the sun itself at noonday can give it—and now, you see, I am lost myself!—— (416)

Trying to describe the confusion attendant upon his own writing process, Tristram fails to hold his own attention and gets “lost.” Yet without ever arriving at its point, this passage captures the process of losing one’s way, and thus by the time Tristram admits to having forgotten his point it has already been thoroughly made. Although digression is not successfully described in this paragraph, such a description might in any case threaten to turn digression into an object, a thing, rather than the wandering process that is embodied in Tristram’s failed attempt at a description. Tristram’s lack of skillful “cookery and management” in this paragraph can be said to reveal Sterne’s

own abundance of it, as Tristram, failing in his attempt to describe the thing, succeeds in the thing itself.

It is worth noting that at least two plot elements in the novel link Tristram Shandy to prose as well. The first is the long discussion of Tristram's birth, and of whether it is better to be born headfirst or not. Mythologically speaking, this is about as direct a reference to prose as one can make, since Prorusus, the Roman deity for whom *prosa* was named, was the god who presided over headfirst births.⁴⁵ And Tristram is born headfirst, though not without controversy or misfortune as his nose is crushed by the physician's forceps. The "ease" or "straightforwardness" of the headfirst birth is therefore belied by Tristram's own experience, or at least muddled up by the interventions of modern science. As a figure for prose, Tristram is a markedly imperfect and distorted figure, *sans* purity or majesty, nose or foreskin.

This anxious allegorical identification with modern prose is further reinforced by the story of Tristram's name, which is degraded (by word of mouth) from his father's intended "Trismegistus" to the unfortunate "Tristram." One might read this as pointing to the degeneration of "the Word" in modernity: the noble name Trismegistus, lovingly selected by the Father, is distorted by Berta the messenger and Tristram the baptizer as the Father's word fails spectacularly to be made flesh.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ For a full etymology of *prosa*, see *The Emergence of Prose*, p. 193.

⁴⁶ This failure is made all the more significant in the novel by the fact that Walter Shandy (Tristram's father) is possessed of a peculiar belief in the importance of first names for determining a man's character, as well as by his more specific theory that, just as no name could possibly do better service to a man than "Trismegistus," so no name could be more trivial or depraved than "Tristram," a name of which he is said to

Interestingly, “Trismegistus” (“Thrice-Great”) is itself the result of a similar distortion, a Greek mistranslation of the Egyptian “Twice-Great,” one of the epithets given to Thoth. One cannot help but note the contrast between this upwardly-mobile textual distortion of antiquity (**twice**-great becomes **thrice**-great) and the downwardly-mobile baptism enacted in Shandy Hall, where “greatness” is expurgated from the name altogether (Tristram is closer to “sad soul” than “thrice-great”). As modern Europe was defined by the “degeneration” of Latin into vernacular romance languages, so modern authorship is founded on a degeneration of textual authority—when “Tristram Shandy” can become an author, what becomes of *auctoritas*? Nonetheless, Tristram’s original, undelivered name connects him (if only by way of contrast) to a far more ancient figure of *auctoritas*: Hermes Trismegistus.

1.5 Hermes Trismegistus, God of Prose

“At first glance the contours of Hermes Trismegistus seem sharp, but on closer inspection they dissolve. Was he a god, like Hermes and Thoth? Many viewed him as such, but for others he was a prophet. It seems to have been in the nature, in the very essence of this fictive figure to be shimmering, iridescent, without form, for many ancient writers were unclear regarding his identity. Was there only a single Hermes Trismegistus? A text attributed to Manetho, an Egyptian priest of the third century B.C.E, tells of two figures who bore the name Hermes. The Egyptian Thoth was the first Hermes; prior to the flood he recorded his knowledge in hieroglyphs. After the flood the knowledge was translated from the “sacred language” into Greek and placed in the temples by the second Hermes, the son of “Agathodaimon” and father of Tat. Cicero took multiplicity to the limit, reporting in his *On the Nature of the Gods* that there were five gods called Hermes, the last of whom was Hermes Trismegistus.

have “the lowest and most contemptible opinion of [...] any thing in the world” (46-51).

God, prophet, or sage? In any event, writings bearing the name of Hermes Trismegistus were handed down, and these established the Hermetic tradition.”

—Florian Ebeling, *The Secret History of Hermes Trismegistus* (6-7)

Hermes Trismegistus began as a Greek name for Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom, writing, administration, and the library. In the fifth century, Herodotus straightforwardly identifies Thoth with Hermes, but succeeding generations apparently found it desirable to make more subtle distinctions until, in Cicero’s time, it became possible to speak of “five gods called Hermes, the last of whom was Hermes Trismegistus.” Following Alexander’s conquest of Egypt, a distinction seems to have been made between two figures, a first who invented hieroglyphics and used them to write down antediluvian knowledge, and a second who translated this knowledge into Greek after the flood. Finally, in late antiquity (200-300 A.D.), Hermes Trismegistus emerged as the hero of a genre of philosophical dialogues in which the seeker after knowledge takes him as teacher and model. For some, Hermes Trismegistus was a god; for others a King; for the Hermetic philosophers, he was a mortal man who had attained divinity through wisdom and secret knowledge.

As god of the library and preserver/translator of antediluvian knowledge, Hermes Trismegistus almost could not help but function as a figure for the degeneration of the Book as mystic object in modernity; he thus became a rallying point for a sort of elitist nostalgia, a yearning for an imaginary time when knowledge

was communicated directly (“without noise”) amongst a closed circle of initiates.⁴⁷ During the Enlightenment, seekers after powerful occult knowledge (ranging from Rosicrucians to Isaac Newton to Victor Frankenstein) would return to Hermes Trismegistus in search of ancient secrets, as he became a symbol not only for “Hermetic arts” like alchemy—Paracelsus was called “our German Hermes, the noble, most beloved monarch and thrice-great philosopher” (qtd. in Ebeling, 75)—but also for mystic, lost or undecoded ancient knowledge in general, from the still unreadable hieroglyphs in the Book of the Dead to the lost library of Alexandria. Like prose, the library functions as an organizing principle for written knowledge. Before the press, the library was a symbol for a textual economy ruled by scarcity: these libraries were miniature fortresses, closed to the public and dedicated to the preservation and control of rare and mysterious objects (books). After the press, as one can see in Rabelais’ treatment of the Library of St. Victor, the library emerges as locus and organizing principle for an endlessly expanding series of volumes, an unfinishable deluge of prose that the library must constantly collect, sift, and organize in its attempt to “keep-up” with the progress of human knowledge:

A rapidly expanding bookish universe was being charted and catalogued by scholars all over the world [...]. The seemingly endless expansion of the library without walls helps to account for the sense of limitless vistas forever unfolding which characterized arts and letters in the age of the Baroque. The difference between the circumscribed contents of the walled libraries of antiquity and the open-ended data banks which were developed after printing ought to be considered in conjunction with developments such as the ‘denial

⁴⁷ This nostalgia is observable in Nasiers’ discussion of hieroglyphics in the “blue and white” chapters of *Gargantua* (G 27; 67). See Freccero’s reading of this episode (68-84) in terms of contemporary Renaissance theories of reference.

of limit,' the 'breaking of the circle,' and other similar conceptual shifts[.] (Eisenstein 219)

Even as this “library without walls” (an Erasmian phrase) was taking hold in the imagination of the Republic of Letters, actual libraries (once attached to castles and monasteries) were also becoming privatized, standard rooms in which any bored gentleman or bourgeois (from Alonso Quijote to Emma Bovary) might pass the time. It is in the library of Shandy Hall that Tristram’s father exercises his oratorical skills, the same library in which Tristram writes his Pantagruelist text.

The Renaissance witnessed a “return” of Hermes Trismegistus as the acknowledged author of both the dialogues in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (newly translated by Martin Ficino in 1464), and of several alchemical texts, particularly the Arabic *Tabula Smagdarina* (on which Isaac Newton would later write a commentary).⁴⁸ One could thus say that the Renaissance produced two traditions of Hermes Trismegistus: one centered in Italy and devoted to theo-philosophical syncretism, and another centered in German lands and devoted to the Hermetic art of alchemy. Moreover, as Ebeling argues in *The Secret Life of Hermes Trismegistus*, these two Renaissance hermetic traditions generally had little or no knowledge of each other. The one exception to this, however, seems to have been the field of medicine, and indeed Rabelais (who had read both Ficino and Paracelsus) demonstrates his awareness of both traditions relatively early into Panurge’s quest for

⁴⁸ As Ebeling points out (37-58), Hermes Trismegistus did not actually disappear in the Middle Ages but was little known due both to the unavailability of most of “his” texts in Latin translation, and to the disparaging interpretations given to those that were available (primarily *Asclepius*) by St. Augustine.

knowledge in the *Tiers Livre*.⁴⁹ The comic juxtaposition of these two traditions of Hermeticism might even provide an underlying logic (or illogic) for the structure of the *Tiers Livre*, whose disconnected narrative has long baffled literary scholars.⁵⁰ The move from Panurge's search for wisdom—generically, most of these chapters are closer to philosophic dialogues than to anything else—to the author's closing five-chapter digression on the properties of *l'herbe Pantagruélion*—chapters that might seem more at home in an alchemical textbook—creates a comic disjunction that points to the disparity between these two traditions of Hermeticism. Thus, although Greene persuasively argues that the unifying principle for the *Tiers Livre* is the “Pantagruelist *courage*” that is necessary if we are to emerge strong and healthy from the flames and vicissitudes of modern life, the unity Greene posits would be impossible without the transformation of Pantagruelism from one substance to

⁴⁹ The first is in Pantagruel's neo-platonic discourse on dreams, where Hermes Trismegistus is explicitly mentioned—“And [in dreams] [the soul] is reminded of its divine origins, and—while contemplating this infinite intellectual sphere, the center of which lies everywhere in the universe, with a circumference that is nowhere to be found (which, according to Hermes Trismegistus, is God), where nothing happens, there is no time, nothing fades away, all time is continuously present—our soul observes not only the lesser movement of all things past and done with, but also the future” (*TL* 270). The second is Panurge's visit to “Herr Trippa,” a Paracelsian figure whose name suggests Cornelius Agrippa and the German hermetic tradition, and who tells Panurge without any ambiguity that he will be a cuckold. Panurge rejects this on the grounds that Trippa is himself a noted cuckold, perhaps a nod to the dubious attributions of authorship associated with these traditions.

⁵⁰ See Floyd Gray's “Structure and Meaning in the *Tiers Livre* Prologue”: “The fictional structure of the *Tiers Livre* [...] was quite unlike anything the world had ever seen. It is not constructed around the life of a hero, does not include a progressive revelation of character, follows neither an ascending nor a descending line of development, conforms, in short, to no known fictional pattern” (61). Although I do not necessarily agree with Gray's assessment, it represents a fairly typical attitude toward the book.

another via the Hermetic art of writing. It is novelistic prose that simultaneously compiles and transforms these disjointed discourses into a single, precious, encyclopedic substance: the Pantagruelist text.

The two Renaissance traditions of Hermes Trismegistus (theo-philosophical syncretism and alchemy) can thus be said to align with two of the great talents of prose. Syncretism represents perhaps the greatest talent of prose, its ability to manage and organize a variety of heterogeneous discourses, to deploy “the resources of heteroglossia” in such a way as to smooth over or highlight (as the situation demands) whatever essential incompatibilities might arise amongst them. Prose has this ability: to take different styles of expression, different points of view, different areas of knowledge, and different ways of knowing, and arrange and array them side-by-side. Prose takes what it needs, discards what it finds superfluous, and arranges what is left. The best figure for this prosaic syncretism is the encyclopedia, whether in its modern form or in older incarnations like Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologies* or Pliny’s *Natural Philosophy*. Although these texts defy modern notions of proprietary authorship (i.e. it is not always clear when quotation is occurring), they are even more noteworthy for their refusal to differentiate “factual” and “fictional” knowledge, and indeed Umberto Eco has suggested that the modern encyclopedia is distinguished from its predecessors precisely by its recognition of the category of “fiction.”⁵¹ If this is true, then the *Tiers Livre* might be seen as a pivotal document in this process, since it actually reproduces much of the content of the ancient encyclopedia (via its ironic

⁵¹ Cf. Eco’s *Dall’Albergo al labirinto*, pg. 55. This book offers an excellent account of the conceptual history of the Western encyclopedia (see Chapter 3.1).

survey of wisdom literatures) even as it satirizes the tenuous line between fact and fiction in ancient sources like Pliny.⁵²

As Bakhtin notes, Rabelais's books can themselves be seen as something like an encyclopedia of genres, borrowing from epic, romance, chronicle, scripture, dialogue, and (above all) Menippean satire, a genre which could itself already have been described in these terms, as its etymology suggests.⁵³ In the *Tiers Livre*, moreover, Rabelais's inclusion of the encyclopedia itself in his satiric compendium of genres could be said to point to the more general "saturation" of the semiotic field in this period. The *Tiers Livre* can even be said to dramatize one of Eco's theories about the transformation of the encyclopedia: whereas the Enlightenment encyclopedia (according to Eco) is organized like a map, in which various domains of knowledge are progressively "filled in," the ancient encyclopedia was instead based on the model of the Porphyric tree, which classified things by subjecting them to a series of distinctions (living or dead, plant or animal, etc.). The failure of the questers to unequivocally classify any given sign in the *Tiers Livre* thus suggests a more general

⁵² "But you'd be even more flabbergasted and struck dumb if I took the trouble to lay out for you the whole chapter in Pliny, in which he speaks of strange, unnatural births. Anyway, I'm hardly the kind of established liar that he was. Read the seventh book of his *Natural History*, chapter three, and stop bothering me about this whole business" ("Mais vous seriez bein dadvantaige esbahys et estonnés si je vous expousoys présentement tout le chapite de Pline auquel parle des enfantements estranges et contre nature, et toutefois je ne suis point menteur tant assuré comme il a esté. Lisez le septiesme de sa *Naturelle Histoire, capi. iij*, et ne m'en tabustez plus l'entendement") (*G* 22; 58). Eisenstein notes the resurgence of Pliny in this period: "Forty-six editions of the elder Pliny's vast encyclopedia were turned out before 1550. They were valued for content, not style" (194).

⁵³ *Satura* was a sausage in which an unknown number of different meats were mixed.

failure of this Porphyric tree, while at the same time Panurge's failure to move beyond the first step of this classification process (does the sign mean yes or no?) actually necessitates his consultation with a series of different sources, a process that eventually leads to the creation of a genuinely encyclopedic (albeit satiric) map of wisdom literatures in the book.

Links between alchemy and (good Pantagruelist) prose include the already-discussed health value of the text, the extra years of youth and vitality it can afford to those who consume it in the right spirit, and also the transmutation of baser books (like the *Chronicques Gargantaine*) into literary gold, the gluttonous expansion of the treasure-trove of the French language. Traditionally, the powers of the alchemist had two main goals: the transmutation of "base" elements into "precious" ones (most famously lead to gold), and the creation of a youth-preserving elixir that would hold the key to eternal life. Both these powers were linked to the philosopher's stone, also called the "Quint Essence." We may recall that the discovery and mastery of the philosopher's stone is one of the heroic feats Pantagruel is promised to perform at the end of Book II. We may also recall the full title of M. Alcofribas Nasier (*ABSTRACTEUR DE QUINTE ESSENCE*). Initially, as Stephens points out, the threat of alchemy as a figure for the instability of form and content, genre and message, is satirized by Rabelais, who points to how dangerously close romantic historiographers like Lemaire can come to parodying scripture. As his literary project advances, however, Rabelais seems to assert himself more and more as participant in an on-going renovation of French letters, a transmutation of the base, fallen

vernacular into a treasure of its own, a precious substance that (like gold) can be easily shaped into a variety of forms.

This sort of alchemy (in which form and style are used to ennoble or satirize content) is common to literature in general and should not be considered a “property” of prose. One might even suggest something alchemical about the more general power of fictional narrative to convert words into characters, objects, and actions—the author-god says “Stately plump Buck Mulligan” and there he is, or informs us Gregor Samsa awoke one morning as a vermin, and so he does. Yet whereas the alchemical powers of verse (pre-prose verse in particular) tend to be commemorative, like sculpture—“So long as ears can hear and eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee”—prosaic alchemy is more like the strange mixture to be found in Gargantua’s ring—the only concrete example of Nasier’s alchemical powers we are given in the text—which is considered remarkable and precious precisely because its four metals are simultaneously distinct and inseparable: “a ring fashioned of the alchemical four metals, worked as if into just one metal [*faict des quatre métaulx ensemble*], in the most marvelous fashion ever seen, the steel never splitting away from the gold, the silver never twisting against the copper—the whole thing managed by my good friend Captain Chappius and by Alcofribas, his good assistant” (*G* 26).⁵⁴ Alcofribas’s ability to work with all four alchemical metals as a single “ensemble” reflects prose’s peculiar power to weave heteroglossia into a single, precious

⁵⁴ “un aneau faict des quatre métaulx ensemble en la plus merveilleuse façon que jamais feust veue, sans que l’assier froisseast l’or, sans que l’argent foullast le cuyvre; le tout fut faict par le capitaine Chappuys et Alcofribas, son bon facteur” (63).

substance, without depriving it of its essential variety. For novelistic prose, which creates “new” substances through mixture rather than through totalizing transformation, it would seem that alchemy and syncretism often amount to the same thing.

Like Panurge and Alcofribas, the Renaissance alchemist was an erudite swindler: generally speaking, it was not so much that the alchemist claimed to possess knowledge he did not have, but that alchemical knowledge was itself ultimately impotent in the field of *praxis*. In this sense, what actually separates the professional alchemist (like the title character in Ben Jonson’s play) from his amateur counterparts (like Sir Isaac Newton) is precisely the knowledge that he is a charlatan. Similarly, one could say that what separates Rabelais—and, soon, Cervantes—from traditional historians (from Herodotus to Holinshed) is his Lucianic self-consciousness of the artificiality of his narrative. In this sense, one might contrast the constant alchemical mutations of Rabelaisian prose with the continuous metamorphoses of Ovidian verse: whereas in Ovid the sense of unending change conveyed by his (post-prose) verse is founded upon an apparently sincere cosmological vision of world history, reputed to be locked within an endless cycle of ages (from gold to iron and back again), in Rabelais the alchemical metaphor that underlies his versatile prose is itself acknowledged to be fraudulent and artificial. For Rabelais, as for Jonson, words (i.e., “hot air”) are the be-all and end-all of the alchemist’s art.

And yet words, whatever their shortcomings, are never scarce, as Pantagruel himself reminds us in the “parolles gelées” episode, “saying that it was folly to save

something we never ran out of and always had ready at hand—like the bright red words always exchanged between good, happy Pantagruelists” (*QL* 497).⁵⁵ The fact that words will never be scarce, even in times of famine or plague, offers another Pantagruelist counterbalance to anxieties over the press-enabled proliferation of meaning and knowledge. Much like affirming the new abundance of books, however, affirming this eternal abundance of words requires that one *accept* excess of meaning, and thus ineradicable uncertainty, as a constitutive element of the human condition... a fact that all courageous Pantagruelists must face.⁵⁶ In Rabelais’s text, the ambivalent nature of this acceptance is illustrated by Gargantua’s comments (after his “resurrection” in the *Tiers Livre*) on Panurge’s consultation with the skeptic philosopher Trouillogan:

“It seems to me the world’s gotten itself thoroughly tangled up [*beaux filz*], since I first became aware of it. Has it come to this? Have our most learned scholars and our wisest philosophers all become Pyrrhonians, professors of uncertainty, skeptics and ephetics? God be praised! Truly, from now on we’ll be able to catch lions and horses by their manes [...]—but not philosophers like this by their words. Good night, my friends.”

And so saying, he left them. Pantagruel and the others wished to follow after him, but he would not permit it. (*TL* 337)⁵⁷

⁵⁵ “disant estre follie faire réserve de ce dont jamais l’on n’a faulte et que tousjours on a en main, comme sont motz de gueule entre tous bons et joyeux Pantagruelists” (732).

⁵⁶ Cf. Freccero’s pithy reading of Pantagruel’s claim that words “ne signifient naturellement, mais à plaisir” (*TL* 438): “Words love each other and multiply. This proliferation is both joyous and menacing, threatening meaninglessness and hiding the agency of ‘quelque beau diable’” (Freccero 146).

⁵⁷ “«A ce que je voys, le monde est devenu beau filz, depuis ma cognoissance première. En sommes-nous là? Doncques sont huy les plus doctes et prudens philosophes entrez on phrontistère et escholle des pyrrhoniens, apporhéticques, scepticques et épheticques? Loué soit le bon Dieu! Vrayement on pourra dorénavant prendre lions par les jubes, les chevaulx par les crains [...]; mais jà ne seront telz philosophes par leurs parolles pris. Adieu, mes bons amys.»

If philosophers like Trouillogan will never again be “caught” by their words, it is partly because there will always be more words to be spoken, just as now (after the press) there will always be more authorities to cite. The ambivalence of Gargantua’s pronouncement is embodied in the phrase “beaux filz” (glossed as designating “un homme habile”) which in this context seems to mean something like “too clever for its own good.” Yet the epilogue to Gargantua’s speech also makes it abundantly clear that, whatever our feelings, there is no turning back: although we may perhaps share the King’s nostalgia for a more stable worldview, a Great Chain of Being in which we all know our place, as good Pantagruelist readers we are not permitted to follow Gargantua into resigned retirement but are instead encouraged to accompany Pantagruel’s fellowship as they proceed to their next uncertain source of wisdom, and (eventually) to join them on their quest for the word of the Holy Bottle.

This ambivalent valorization of textual uncertainty can be extended to the figure of *Pantagruélion* as well:

It must be admitted that the Pantagruelion *is* a conundrum. It represents its author’s imagination at its most perverse, and it requires the reader to pass through large tracts of conspicuous irrelevance before reaching what is essential. It assuredly has nothing to do with the progress of the arts and sciences, and it has little to do finally with the hemp plant. The secret of its interpretation lies in its name, as the text affirms: «Aultrement est dicte Pantagruelion par similitude.» It symbolizes Pantagruelism as incarnated by its hero. (Greene, “Unity” 298)

While I agree with Greene that the only sustainable reading of Pantagruelion is as a figure for Pantagruelism, I think it is equally significant that a sentence-by-sentence

Ces mots prononcez, se retira de la compaignie. Pantagruel et les aultres le vouloient suyvre, mais il ne le voulut permettre” (503).

reading of the *Pantagruélion* chapters could easily find support for both interpretations Greene dismisses (and many more as well). From moment to moment, amidst the flux of the reading process, Pantagruelion clearly does lend itself to a number of ultimately unsustainable allegorical readings, and one might argue that the significance and value of Pantagruelion has as much to do with its resistance to ultimate meanings as it does with its “similitude” to Pantagruelism. In this sense, the “large tracts of conspicuous irrelevance” to which Greene alludes are no less important than the “secret to its interpretation,” a secret that is ultimately far less complex than the literary mechanisms used to obscure it. Ironically, in going straight to “what is essential” about Pantagruelion, Greene risks compromising the herb’s essential unfinalizability and even threatens to impose the sort of clear allegorical reading that Pantagruelion seems designed to resist. Yet in the end, provided all passages are given their due weight, Pantagruelion seems to be just as impervious to allegorical readings as it is to fire... and perhaps this is one reason the gods find it so threatening.

Cave and Greene both see the *Tiers Livre* as the most pessimistic of Rabelais’s books, the most conscious of its own groundlessness. Greene even claims that Panurge, in the *Tiers Livre*, is no longer a Pantagruelist: having lost his outsider status, Panurge is no longer able to cheerfully weather the same sorts of interpretive uncertainties he so excels at exploiting in *Pantagruel*. Yet while this is certainly true on a psychological level, in another sense Panurge’s increasing lack of Pantagruelist courage is actually what forces him to continually push his sophistic-alchemical

powers to new heights. Indeed, it is precisely Panurge’s fear-inspired sophistry that enables the *Tiers Livre*’s encyclopedic mapping of wisdom literature, and that subsequently necessitates the Quest for the Holy Bottle. Panurge’s constant, mercurial oscillation between terrifying uncertainty and sophistic over certainty is exemplified in the closing paragraph of the *Quart Livre*, where he emerges from below-deck having “Thoroughly Beshat Himself” with fear (*par male paour se conchia*) after confusing a cat for a devil. Commanded by Pantagruel to “get a hot bath, clean yourself, get a grip on yourself, find a clean shirt and make yourself presentable!”, Panurge instead attempts to transmute the evidence of his cowardice via a purely verbal formula: “What devil is this, anyway? Do you call this stuff right here diarrhea, crap, dung, shit, turds, bowel leavings, fecal matter, excrement, ordure, droppings, bird lime, slop, offal, dried-up diarrhea, or goat shit? [I know, it’s Spanish saffron!] Ho, ho, hey! It’s Spanish saffron, by God! Damned right! So let’s drink!” (*QL* 522).⁵⁸ Transmuting shit into saffron, one might think, is at least as impressive as transmuting lead into gold, and in any case it provides an alchemical tinge to this closing hymn to the grotesque body, forever “in the act of becoming.” Here and elsewhere, Panurge’s ability to digress from the truth, to transmute every word of wisdom he receives into folly, serves to actively unwork the mode of incompleteness common to most philosophical dialogues, in which the wise man leads his

⁵⁸ “vous estuver, vous nettoyer, vous asceurer, prendre chemise blanche et vous revestir!” (765); “Que Diable est ceci? Appelez-vous ceci foire, caca, crottes, merde, fiente, déjection, matière fécale, excrément, repaire, laisse, chiure, fumée, étron, merdaille sèche ou crottes de bique? C’est, je crois, du safran d’Espagne. Ho, ho, hie! C’est du safran d’Espagne! C’est cela! Buvons!” (766).

interlocutor to knowledge via a process of reasoning. Impervious to Socratic reason, but fluent in sophistic hermeneutics, Panurge takes on all comers and is thereby able to keep Rabelais's own "Diogenic Barrel" a-rolling.

1.6 The *Tonneau Diogénic*

"Every honest drinker, every gouty guzzler, every truly thirsty man who approaches this barrel of mine and doesn't feel like drinking, needn't drink. But if they feel like it, and their Lordly Lordships like the wine, let them drink as much as they like, swill it right down: it won't cost them a cent, and they don't have to hold back. That's an order. And there's no need to worry about the wine running out, the way it did at the wedding feast at Cana, in Galilee. Whatever you pull out through the spigot, I'll put right back in through the bung hole. And the barrel will be forever inexhaustible. It has a living source; it will flow eternally" (*TL* 246)⁵⁹

One of Rabelais's most sustained figurations of his own writing takes place in the Prologue to the *Tiers Livre*, where he famously develops the conceit of the "tonneau Diogénic" (Diogenic barrel) by comparing his literary endeavors to Diogenes' activities whilst watching the Corinthians prepare to defend their city against Macedon. The process by which the cynic philosopher simultaneously mocked and supported the efforts of the Corinthians (and also got himself some healthy exercise, no doubt) is likened to Rabelais's own writing project and his ironic eagerness to contribute "ce rien, mon tout" to the French war effort. Writing is here

⁵⁹ "Tout Beuveur de bien, tout Goutteux de bien, altérez, venens à ce mien tonneau, s'ilz ne veulent, ne beuvent; s'ilz veulent et le vin plaist au guoust de la seigneurie de leurs seigneuries, beuvent franchement, librement, hardiment, sans rien payer, et ne l'espargnent. Tel est mon décret. Et paour ne ayez que le vin faille, comme feist ès nopces de Cana en Galilée. Autant que vous en tireray par la dille, autant en entonneray par le bondon. Ainsi demeurera le tonneau inexpuisable. Il a source vive et veine perpetual" (370-71).

portrayed as an endless, Sisyphean activity, an object that sometimes requires great effort and exertion to move forward but that can also tumble downhill at speeds beyond its owner's control. The writer's will alternately determines and is determined by this process, with upward struggle and downhill tumble following one another in endlessly unpredictable succession. The list of Diogenes' activities reflects this unpredictable logic of composition, as the eruption of free-flowing word play interrupts Aesopian diegesis. I will include the French in the main body in order to give a sense of how the rolling of the barrel is echoed in the procession of the list:

Diogenes, seeing the whole city in such a whirl of activity, and himself not having been assigned to any task at all, for a few days simply watched and said nothing. Then, as if impelled by the warlike spirit, he pulled back his cloak and, belting it tight, rolled his sleeves up to the elbows, tucked up his clothes like an apple picker, handed his beggar's sack, his books, and his writing tablets to an old friend, then went outside the City toward the Cranium (a ridge of high land, with a hill, near Corinth), which was a fine parade ground. And he rolled out there the clay barrel in which he lived—his only shelter against the elements—and with singularly violent motions began to turn it this way and that, moving it wildly every which way, without apparent rhyme or reason—twisting, turning, spinning, beating on it, turning it over, turning it back again, caressing it, whipping it around, flogging it, bashing it, bumping it, shaking it, tumbling it, trampling it, banging it, sticking in the plug, pulling it out again, speeding it up, prancing it, dancing it, thumping it, dumping it, rolling it, tolling it, rocking it, socking it, lifting it, sifting it, veering it, steering it, whirling it, hurling it, clamping it, damping it, setting it, getting it, tying it, trying it, sticking it, pricking it, spreading it, heading it, squeezing it, wheezing it, clapping it, tapping it, cranking it, yanking it, whacking it, cracking it, clacking it, hacking it, tacking it, backing it, sacking it, racking it, packing it, crashing it, bashing it, rapping it, zapping it, running it down from the hill to the valley, then tossing it off the Cranium, then lugging it back up the hilltop once more, *like Sisyphus with his endlessly rolling stone*, and all with such passion and violence that he very nearly smashed it to pieces. (TL 243; my italics)

Diogènes, les voyant en telle ferveur mesnaige remuer et n'estant par les maginstratz employé à chose aulcune faire, contempla par quelques jours leur contenance sans mot dire. Puy comme excité d'esprit Martial, ceignit son

palle en escharpe, recoursa ses manches jusques ès coubtes, se troussa en cueilleur de pommes, bailla à un sien compaignon vieulx sa bezasse, ses livres et opistographes, fait hors la ville tirant vers le Cranie (qui est une colline et promontoire lèz Corinthe) une belle esplanade, y roulla le tonneau fictil qui pour maison luy estoit contre les injures du ciel, et, en grande véhémence d'esprit desployant ses braz, le tournoit,

Viroit, brouillot, barbouilloit,
hersoit, versoit, renversoit,
nattoit, grattoit, flattoit,
barattoit, bastoit, boutoit, butoit, tabustoit, cullebutoit,
trepoit, trempoit, tapoit, timpoit,
estouppoit, destouppoit, détracquoit,
triquotoit, tripotoit, chapotoit,
croulloit, élançoit, chamailloit,
bransloit, esbranloit, levoit, lavoit, clavoit, entravoit,
bracquoit, bricquoit, blocquoit,
tracassoit, ramassoit, clabossoit, terrassoit,
bistorioit, vreloppoit, chaluppoit,
charmoit, armoit, gizarmoit,
enharnachoit, empennachoit, caparassonnoit,

le dévalloit de mont à val, et praecipitoit par le Cranie, puys de val en mont le rapportoit, *comme Sisyphus faict sa pierre*: tant que peu s'en faillit, qu'il ne le défoncast. (364-5; my italics)

In addition to Rabelais's "Sisyphean" figuration of writing itself, one might also note the contrast between Diogenes' physical presence in the public square and Rabelais's ability to perform a Diogenic function via the mediations of the press and prose literacy. The idea that a writer can fill this Diogenic role of public cynic, at least within the republic of letters, is itself notable in terms of the evolution of the modern author-function. Rabelais himself emphasizes this peculiarity, insofar as Diogenes—who gives away his "livres et opistographes" before proceeding to the Cranium—seems to consider writing and barrel-rolling to be mutually exclusive activities.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ One should guard against making too much of this, however, since Rabelais actually takes the story of Diogenes' tub-rolling from Lucian's treatise *How Write History*, and since there is a long-standing connection between cynic philosophy and

Rabelais also acknowledges the more cosmopolitan consequences of this shift, freely admitting that once his book is published both sides (the French and their enemies) will be able to benefit from its “refraischissant” powers: “And so, since this is my lot, my fate (because we can’t all be so lucky as to live in Corinth), I have decided to serve both sides of this conflict” (244-45).⁶¹

Exploiting the alchemical possibilities of the French tongue, Rabelais soon transforms the “tonneau fictil” (clay barrel) in which Diogenes famously lived into a “tonneau Diogenic” (Diogenic Cask), from which Rabelais draws draughts of “sentences Pantagrueliques” for his readers (“you have my permission to call them worthy of Diogenes”) (245). Once again, Rabelais’s book is figured as healthy (*refraischissant*) only for those who consume it in the right spirit: “For in each and all of these warriors for whom I write, I see a [...] unique character trait which our ancestors called Pantagruel-ism, proving that they will never take offense at things which, as they know perfectly well, spring from a good, loyal open heart” (240).⁶² For

Menippean satire (both Menippus and Lucian were considered cynics). Nonetheless, Diogenes (like Socrates in the Platonic dialogues) is figured as the original hero of cynic philosophy largely because his “philosophizing” (living in a barrel, wandering with a lantern in search of an honest man) was inseparable from his physical presence in the public square. For Diogenes, Menippus, and Lucian, moreover, this public square was still also where “publication” occurred, and in this sense Rabelais’s press-enabled role as cosmopolitan public cynic does seem exceptional.

⁶¹ “Pays doncques que telle est ou ma sort ou ma destinée (car à chascun n’est outroyé entrer et habiter Corinthe), ma délibération est servir et ès uns et ès autres” (367).

⁶² “Je reconnois en eulx tous une [...] propriété individuelle, laquelle nos majeurs nommoient Pantagruelisme, moienant laquelle jamais en mauvaie partie ne prendront choses quelconques ilz cognoistront sourdre de bon, franc et loyal couraige” (370).

readers such as these, the *tonneau Diogénic* will be a renewable source of joyous, healthy refreshment, a “vray Cornucopie de joyeuseté et raillerie” (371).

For those who fail to read the book in the right spirit, however, the cynic bares his fangs: “Get back, you mutts! Out of the way—stop blocking my sunshine, you hooded devils! Did you come here, wagging your tails behind you, to sniff around my wine and piss all over my barrel? See this stick? Diogenes put it in his will that this was to be laid next to his body, after he was dead, so he could whip off and drive away these graveyard ghouls and hounds of hell” (247).⁶³ Here the *tonneau Diogénic* is transmuted again, this time into a “baston” with which to beat inhospitable readers. By transforming his happy cask into a didactic stick, that most indispensable tool of Renaissance pedagogy, Rabelais finds a useful purpose for his book, placing himself squarely in a literary-philosophical tradition as Menippean satirist and public cynic. In Rabelais, however, this *baston* is ironically turned against those who would demand such blunt utility from healthy, harmless fiction. For those unwilling to join in the party but determined to spoil the fun, Rabelais’ *tonneau Diogénic* is not a “Cornucopie de joyeuseté et raillerie” but a satiric weapon with which to attack stuffy and “callumniant” readers through wit, scorn, and scatology.

⁶³ “Arrière, mastins! Hors de la quarrière, hors de mon soleil, cahuaille au Diable! Venez-vous icy culletans articuler mon vin et compisser mon tonneau? Voyez-cy le baston que Diogènes par testament ordonna estre près luy posé après sa mort pour chasser et esrener ces larves bustuaires et mastins cerbéricques” (371). Interestingly, dogs are here portrayed as the enemies of the cynic.

Alice Fiola Berry has noted the similarity between Rabelais's description of writing in his prologues and the opposition of Apollonian and Dionysian forces that Nietzsche posits as the root of artistic creativity in *The Birth of Tragedy*. For Berry,

Rabelais consistently and emphatically associates literary creation with the great god of wine who seizes him in joyful rapture and causes words to pour forth without conscious meditation or art. But, as Alcofribas puts it in the prologue to *Gargantua*, this wine is mixed with oil, and Bacchus is always opposed by another voice which praises seriousness over joy, silence over words, and which urges us to ignore Bacchic appearances in favor of high and serious truths lurking beneath the grotesque surface. [...] It is Apollo, the god of silence and contemplation, who dilutes wine with his sacramental oil, the god of form and order who disdains and restrains the anarchic Bacchic flood. [...] The Apollonian injunction implies gravity of inspiration and intent on the part of the writer and urges a symmetrical responsibility on the reader—contemplation, meditation, and seriousness of interpretation. (88-89)

As Berry points out, however, the distinction between these two voices seems far more blurry in the *Tiers Livre* than in *Gargantua*, and indeed Berry actually singles out the barrel-rolling passage for its mingling of the silent, scornful figure of Diogenes with the free-flowing Bacchic wordplay that generates his list of activities.

While I certainly agree that Rabelais thematizes this mythological duality of the creative process, I think it should be pointed out that a third deity is present in Rabelais as well: Hermes. Whereas Greek Tragedy (according to Nietzsche) makes possible a merger of the Apollonian and Dionysian through the intervention of the chorus and the singularity of a live performance, in Rabelais's novelistic prose these forces are not merged. Rather, they dialogically coexist, sometimes metamorphosing smoothly into one another and other times reveling in their own comic disjunction. The necessity of Hermetic mediation for this process can be seen in the first

paragraph of the Prologue, in one of Rabelais' most famously untranslatable sentences:

C'est belle chose veoir la clairté du (vin et escuz) Soleil. (362)

In this sentence, the binary opposition of the Dionysian and the Apollonian is both joined and represented by the powers of the Hermetic: not only does money follow wine in the ignoble process of free association contained in the parentheses (escuz-de-soleil being a name for doubloons), the parentheses themselves represent the Hermetic power of prose by simultaneously closing off and conjoining, allowing the various permutations of this pun to become visible to the eye of the reader. The parentheses around "(vin et escuz)" serve not only to mark the boundary between sacred proverb and profane wordplay in this sentence, they also function as the principle of exchange between them, allowing them to dialogically inflect/comment upon one another while continuing to coexist in a sort of suspended solution, a solution that dissolves once the sentence is read aloud.⁶⁴ If Apollo and Bacchus provide the forms and words with which to imagine and populate fictional worlds, then Mercury, patron of Panurge & god of writing, commerce, and thievery, provides the *techne* of novelistic prose as the medium through which the imaginative forces of dreams and intoxication might be realized as prose fiction.

⁶⁴ There are few writers in any language who offer a wider mix of aural and typographic wordplay than Rabelais, whose texts are equally designed to be read silently and to be read aloud around a table, and whose virtuosity in both these realms once again testifies to his privileged position in France's transition from an aural to a written culture.

Rabelais's *tonneau Diogénic* is thus not a duality but a trinity. Its constant transformation (from cynic barrel to Pantagruelist cask to satiric club) reflects the alchemical powers of novelistic prose, just as its continuous-simultaneous process of “emptying out” and “filling-up” (*Autant que vous en tireray par la dille, autant en entonneray par le bondon*) marks it as a fully functional (if somewhat low-brow) cornucopia. One might even consider this ever-ambivalent cornucopia as a more modest version of the “Quint Essence” promised by Nasier: whereas the sophist narrator attempts to swindle his readers with tales of the philosopher’s stone, Dr. Rabelais is content to preach the virtues of laughter and cynic wisdom. For Rabelais—professional doctor, Pantagruelist philosopher, and Menippean satirist—this *tonneau Diogénic* is probably the closest thing to a philosopher’s stone we are likely to find.

1.7 The Ship and The Bottle

“The officers, interpreters, pilots, assistant pilots, captains, apprentices, chief rowers and sailors were all summoned to the *Thalamège* (or, in Greek, “Sleeping Ship”), which was Pantagruel’s great flagship. On its stern, instead of a flag with Pantagruel’s colors, it carried a huge bottle, half of the smoothest, most shining silver, half of gold enameled in rose—which made it easy to understand that white and red were the colors of these noble travelers, and that they were seeking wise words from the Holy Bottle.” (*QL* 393)⁶⁵

⁶⁵ “L’assemblée de tous officiers, truchemens, pilotz, capitaines, nauchiers, fadrins, hespailliers et matelotz feut en la *Thalamège*. Ainsi estoit nommée la grande et maistresse nauf de Pantagruel, ayant en poupe pour enseigne une grande et ample bouteille, à moytié estoit d’or esmaillé de couleur incarnat. En quoy facile estoit juger que blanc et claret estoient les couleurs des nobles voyageurs et qu’ilz alloient pour avoir le mot de la Bouteille” (583).

The duality of dreams and intoxication is again apparent in the description of Pantagruel’s flagship, which clearly thematizes some sort of mixture of Apollonian and Dionysian forces. Yet the presence of Hermes can again be felt here as well, not only in the bottle’s dialogic combination of gold and silver (reminiscent of Gargantua’s ring, as is the sixth ship in Pantagruel’s fleet whose insignia is also made “des quatre metaulx ensemble”), and in the Mercurial figure of Panurge (the primary Quester), but also in Panurge’s mercantile friend Xenomanes, “that great traveler down dangerous roads” (*QL* 393).⁶⁶ It is Xenomanes—whose name connotes not merely wanderlust but importation, a desire for exotic goods—who charts the course of the journey, and who provides Gargantua with “a carefully drawn sea map of the route they would be taking, on their journey to the oracle of the Holy Bottle” (393).⁶⁷ Whereas dreaming, imagination and narrative all seem to be linked to the figure of the ship (whose name attests to its Apollonian sympathies), the mapping of the voyage—indeed, of the ocean itself [*Hydrographie*]—the organization of the *topoi* to be traversed, is associated with the powers of commerce, the prosaic process by means of which the various islands visited in the book’s fragmentary chapters become steps in a single itinerary. One should also keep in mind that “inspiration” and “importation” are not always clearly distinguishable in Rabelais, much of whose writing consists of reworking other material. As (yet another) metaphor for reading,

⁶⁶ “le grand voyageur et ransverser des voyes périlleuses” (583). Demerson glosses “Xenomanes” as “le contraire de *xénophobe*: il s’agit de quelqu’un qui a la passion de choses de l’étranger” (536).

⁶⁷ “signé, en sa grande et universelle Hydrographie, la route qu’ilz tiendroient visitans l’oracle de la dive Bouteille” (582).

importation provides Rabelais with new source material to stylize, new fonts of wisdom to satirize, new islands to visit.⁶⁸

Although the flagship *Thalamège* is not introduced until the *Quart Livre*, the wind that fills the writer's sails (like the "hot air" spouted by the narrator) is a persistent theme throughout the Rabelaisian corpus, in which "sails" (*les voiles*) are frequently used by both Nasier and Rabelais to figure the ebb and flow of the writer's narrative powers. Indeed, in the *Tiers Livre* Prologue publication is actually figured as shipwreck (*nauffrage*): "Having chosen this path, I thought it would not be entirely useless or tiresome to roll my own barrel of Diogenes—indeed, *all I have left since I went aground, trying to sail past the lighthouse of bad luck*" (244).⁶⁹ Once his ship/narrative has run aground, all that is left for the author is to roll out his newly filled barrel for his readers. In the *Quart* and *Cinquième Livres*, moreover, we as reader/dreamers become passengers on the ship to some extent as well, which (as emblem for the book) contains its characters and traces a plotline over the endless intertextual ocean of prose. With the wind at its back, the ship sails smoothly on its

⁶⁸ As Kline notes, the "terms plagiarism and copyright did not exist for the minstrel. It was only after printing that they began to hold significance for the author" (54). It was also during this time that the sense of a writer's "style" became divorced from its original context (handwriting), and began to take on its modern meaning (authorial idiosyncrasy). Moreover, as Glauser argues in *Le Faux Rabelais*, the best evidence for the "inauthenticity" of the *Cinquième Livre* is the fact that several passages and episodes are taken from their source texts with little or no alternation, in contrast to the previous four books in which every borrowing is accompanied by a major stylistic overhaul. (This fact is not necessarily as significant as Glauser claims, however, as it remains unclear whether any or all of these passages were selected by Rabelais for re-working prior to his death).

⁶⁹ "Prins ce choys et éléction, ay pensé ne faire exercice inutile et importun, si je remuois mon tonneau Diogenic qui *seul m'est resté du naufrage faict par le passé on far de Mal'encontre*" (367; my italics).

course, connecting the dots of the fragmented, island-hopping narrative that occupies books four and five.

It is when the wind dies, and additional inspiration is needed, that the characters turn to feasting and free-flowing Bacchic inspiration. The power of the Dionysian is apparent not only in the intoxicated rush of lists and word-play poured forth by the narrator, but also in the around-the-table banter the ships' Pantagruelists engage in when the winds fail. Just as sailing the ship (prior to its *nauffrage*) has filled the Cask for Rabelais's readers, so drinking and feasting can be used to summon up a wind in times of calm. This oscillation between sources of inspiration is dramatized in chapters 63-65:

The next day, as we sailed along, indulging ourselves in small talk, we arrived near the island of the Hypocrites, where the wind failed us and the sea went completely calm, preventing Pantagruel's ship from making land. We made headway only by tacking this way and that, swinging from starboard to port and then from port to starboard; even rigging up the wind-catching bonnet sails didn't pull us along. So we lay around and thought, and chased empty ideas, stupefied and irritated, no one saying a word to anyone else. (512)⁷⁰

It is not difficult to read this paragraph as depicting something akin to writer's block. The failure of the wind leads Frere Jean to ask Pantagruel: "How do you amuse yourself, and blow up good weather [*haulser le temps*], when the wind's gone

⁷⁰ "Au jour subséquent, en menuz devis suyvens nostre route, arrivasmes près l'isle de Chaneph, en laquelle abourder ne peut la nauf de Pantagruel, parce que le vent nous faillit et feut calme en mer. Nous ne voguions que par les valentiennes, changeans de tribord en bâbord et de bâbord en tribort, quoyqu'on eust ès voiles adjoinct les bonnettes trainneresses. Et restions tous pensifz, matagrabilisez, sesolfiez et faschez, sans mot dire les uns aux aultres" (751-2).

down?” (512).⁷¹ Pantagruel, who has fallen asleep to a copy of Heliodorus—again reinforcing a link between dreaming and romance narrative—begins to spout learned anecdotes until his own erudite digression is interrupted by an impromptu feast: “But at these words, the guardians of men’s gullets set up tables and sideboards[...]. My God, how we drank, how we ate, and what a splendid time we had! Nor had we reached dessert when, suddenly, the northwest wind began to fill our sails—jibs and moorish lateens and square foresails and all” (515).⁷² Just as the wind provides fodder for conversation by driving them from island to island, so feasting, drinking, and Pantagruelist banter supplement the plot when other action is lacking, eventually raising a wind of its own. Indeed, this is precisely what Pantagruel tells Panurge is the best means of blowing up good weather:

But haven’t we done exactly that? Just look at the pennant up on the mast. Look at those whistling sails. Look at the taught stays, and ropes, and sails themselves. We blew up good weather by raising our cups: the weather and our drinking were linked by some hidden natural sympathy. (517)⁷³

⁷¹ “Manière de haulser le temps en calme?” (752). “Haulser” means to raise, and “temps” means both “time” and “weather,” so the phrase gives a double entendre of “raising weather” and “killing time,” as well as its maritime connotations of sail-raising (generally) and heavy drinking (specifically). Demerson glosses the phrase thusly: “En langage de marin: boire sec, mettre le temps au beau quand il n’y a pas de vent” (753).

⁷² “Ce mot n’estoit achevé, quand les officiers de gueule dressèrent les tables et buffetz[...]. Vray Dieu, comment il y feut beu et guallé! Ilz n’avoient encores encores le dessert, quand le vent Oest-Norouest commença enfler les voiles, papefilz, morisques et trinquetz” (756).

⁷³ “Ne l’avons-nous à soubhayt haulsé? Voyez le guabet de la hune. Voyez les siflements des voiles. Voyez la roiddeur des estailz, des utacques et des scoutes. Nous haulsans et voidans les tasses, s’est pareillement le temps haulsé par occulte sympathie de nature” (758-59).

The phrase around which this episode revolves (*haulser le temps*) is not a Rabelaisian invention but was then a common maritime term for drinking heavily in times of calm. Yet by “importing” this specialized jargon into his own thematic exploration of literary creation, Rabelais is able to dramatize how his Apollonian and Dionysian sources of inspiration become interdependent and even interchangeable. Again, this interdependence is not described in terms of a totalizing synthesis of Apollonian and Dionysian forces, but in terms of a Mercurial metamorphosis from one to the other: by raising their glasses and emptying them of wine (*Nous haulsans et voidans les tasses*), they raise a wind that fills their sails. The “hidden natural sympathy” (*occulte sympathie de nature*) by which these sources of inspiration are linked is thus depicted by means of an imported double entendre, which comes to take on added meaning in this foreign, “literary” context of the quest for the Holy Bottle.

If the Holy Bottle is the destination of the Quest, it is also a symbol for what Rabelaisian prose is not: an unequivocal word from a privileged, sacred source. And yet the Holy Bottle itself does not ultimately fit this image either: Panurge does not in fact drink from the Bottle, whose word (“*Trinch*”) is elicited with bubbling steam and does not offer an unequivocal answer (a yes or a no) to his question. In the end, the Bottle too is full of hot air, and the “gloss” Bacbuc provides is essentially a restatement of Pantagruel’s advice to Panurge at the beginning of the *Tiers Livre*:

[“]The Divine Bottle sends you to it [drinking]. For the rest, you must be your own interpreters in the matter.”

“No one,” said Pantagruel, “could speak more cogently than this venerable priestess. That’s exactly what I said the first time you broached the subject. So *Trink!*” (617)⁷⁴

We are back where we started: the epic Pantagruelist digression that began in Chapter Seven of the *Tiers Livre* has been brought to a close. Thus, although the bottle serves as *telos* for the Quest, the actual encounter with the bottle is consistent with the books’ more general assault on teleological thinking and unequivocal truths.

In this context, it is worth noting the reappearance of Hermes Trismegistus during the final consultation with the Holy Bottle, which Panurge in fact praises as “la Bouteille trimegiste” (908).⁷⁵ The general underworld setting of Bacbuc’s realm also calls Hermes and/or Thoth to mind, since both served as guides for the dead. Interestingly, the syncretic figure of Hermes Trismegistus actually seems to have been less invested in this role than either his Greek or his Egyptian forbearer, perhaps suggesting his association with death became sublimated into his association with Divine Revelation (instead of leading souls into the underworld, he carries wisdom and knowledge out of it). Yet the Hermetic motif in these final chapters might suggest a new incarnation of Hermes Trismegistus, who instead of a figure of death and divine revelation now becomes a symbol of endless interpretation and the saturation of the semiotic field. Pushing the envelope, one might read this consultation as

⁷⁴ “La dive Bouteille vous y envoie, soyez vous mesmes interprètes de vostre entreprinse.

— Possible n’est, dist Pantagruel, mieux dire que fait ceste vénérable pontife. Autant vous en dis-je, lors que premièrement m’en parlastes. *Trinch* doncques” (909).

⁷⁵ Not only does Hermes Trismegistus appear in (the manuscript version of) the final chapter amongst a list of ancient philosophers and their companions, he is also implicitly referenced in Bacbuc’s description of God, which is identical to the one attributed to Hermes Trismegistus in the *Tiers Livre*.

depicting a turning point in the history of reading: the dream of totality, locked away in the underworld, is here surrendered by death, who concedes (via his oracle) the opening up of Christianity's single, afterlife-centered narrative to an earthier plurality of Pantagruelist tales. Yet at the same time this "surrender" itself proves ambivalent, since the dream of totality is revealed to be just that. The consultation with the Holy Bottle thus functions as another opening of Pandora's box: a threatening excess of meaning, an infinity of interpretations is loosed upon the world, and in the end we are left with only the "bon espoir" that our Pantagruelist courage affords us.

More positively, this movement from divine revelation to infinite interpretation can be seen as a movement from death to life. Whereas in Greek mythology eating or drinking in the underworld condemns one to stay there (as Persephone sadly discovers), in this case the Bottle's ambiguous yet joyful word sends its questers back to the surface. This may be why Bacbuc describes it as "the happiest, most divine, most certain message I have heard her give to anyone in all the time I have served" (616).⁷⁶ Drinking is for this life, a notion Bacbuc stresses by modifying the Aristotelian axiom with which *Gargantua* began: "And here we would argue that it is drinking, not laughter, which makes men human. Not that I mean simply imbibing fluids, because even animals do that: I mean drinking good, fresh wine" (617).⁷⁷ "Fresh wine," the sort of wine figured here as proper to man, is

⁷⁶ "le mot plus joyeux, plus divin, plus certain, qu'encores d'elle aye entendu depuis le temps qu'icy je ministre" (907).

⁷⁷ "Et, icy, maintenons que non rire, ains boire est le propre de l'homme: je ne dy boire simplement et absolument, car aussi bien boivent les bestes, je dy boire vin bon et frais" (908).

notoriously unpredictable, since its enzymes have yet to settle into a stable, reliable vintage. To enthusiastically consume new wine, to judge whether it is truly “vin bon et frais” (as opposed to merely “vin frais”) we must possess a prose literacy with respect to wine, a personal taste to accompany the Pantagruelist courage that allows us to cheerfully weather the excess of knowledge and meaning that the prosaic world imposes on us. This link between reading and drinking is made explicit in the “gloss” Bacbuc offers Panurge: “The philosophers, preachers, and learned men of your world stuff fine words into you, through your ears. Here, we actually incorporate our teachings through our mouths. So instead of saying to you, ‘Read this chapter, look at this explanation,’ I say, ‘Taste this chapter, swallow this fine gloss’” (*CL* 616).⁷⁸ The reader is here figured as a connoisseur rather than a silent, obedient pupil, an active and eager consumer of literature who grotesquely imports language via the same orifice that exports it.

The final consultation with the Bottle, and the return to Pantagruel’s flagship in the books’ final sentence—“enfin trouvasmes noz navires au port”—thus leaves us with a trice-majestic trinity, the sine qua non of Rabelaisian prose and indeed of modern novelistic prose in general. There is a threatening (but also playful and joyous) excess of meaning, knowledge, and interpretation. There is a happy (but also anxious and unpredictable) abundance of “bon et frais” Pantagruelist books. And

⁷⁸ “Les philosophes prescheurs et docteurs de vostre monde vous paissent de belles parolles par les aureilles; icy, nous realement incorporons nos preceptions par la bouche. Pourtant je ne vous dy: ‘Lisez ce chapitre, voyez ceste glose.’ Je vous dy: ‘Tastez ce chapitre, avalez ceste belle glose’” (907-8).

there is an endless ocean of intertextuality, on which—*après l'épilogue*—the *Thalamège* will presumably be launched once more.

1.8 Continuation (The Quest for Closure)

“At the end of the *Tiers Livre*, two possible continuations of Rabelais’s narrative might be envisaged. One would trace the story of Pantagruel, developing the outline suggested in the Pantagruelion chapters of the *Tiers Livre*. The other, the continuation actually adopted, follows the company’s vicissitudes as they quest for the word of the Holy Bottle. Panurge’s quest proceeds under the guise of parody and satire: parody because the search for truth is rendered comically futile by the character Panurge, and satire in that the *terre gaste* of the *Quart Livre* remains unconnected to any suggestion of potential restoration that might have been figured as the protagonist’s redemptive quest.

What gets displaced or masked in the narrative, however, is the residual dilemma posed by Pantagruel’s relation to his father. With Pantagruel [...] the narrative reaches an impasse: the story has already been written by the father. The quest for a totalization of meaning, a will to mastery reflected in the father’s exhortation of the early books, the son’s gigantic feats, and the exposition of the miraculous powers of the herb Pantagruelion, finds no avenue of expression through its hero. The text’s quest for its own meaning, in the impossibility of returning to an original meaning or source, and in the desire to constitute another universe of meaning, moves the narrative forward to a resolution, however artificial and ‘inauthentic.’”

—Carla Freccero, *Father Figures* (174-5)

In this brief concluding section, I would like to take a step back and offer a more holistic account of the narrative structure of the Rabelaisian novel.

It should first be reiterated that, within the historiography I am developing, the title of “first modern novel” does not fall to *Gargantua et Pantagruel* but to *Don Quixote*, the first novel I consider “finished” in a modern sense.⁷⁹ For Cervantes, as

⁷⁹ Outside this historiography, however, I have no essential objection to regarding Rabelais’s books as “novels,” and indeed feel that “the Rabelaisian novel” is an excellent term to describe the work as a whole.

we shall see in the next chapter, finishing his text allowed him to close off his fictional world and claim ownership of his characters in a way that Rabelais was unable and/or unwilling to do.⁸⁰ Although some “proprietary anxiety” can certainly be felt in Rabelais as well (particularly in his first two volumes), in his case this actually seems to have contributed to the unfinishability of his text insofar as it was a possible motivating factor for the double deferral of Pantagruel’s marriage, first through Rabelais’s appropriation of his own “parent text” (*Gargantua*) and later through the digressive quest narrative that displaces the question of marriage onto Panurge. Freccero has brilliantly theorized the links between authorial anxiety and narrative structure in Rabelais, links she describes in terms of genealogy and oedipal struggle:

The books of Rabelais begin by demystifying the legitimating function of genealogies; the story of the son inaugurates the new and repudiates the past. But only in part, for the story of the son turns to the father to find both its origin and the terms of its difference. [...] The narrative thus engenders a repetition of the story of succession it sought to escape: *Gargantua* follows *Pantagruel* and inherits its narrative structure, though the metaphors that govern it underscore its constructedness as a book. The Gargantuan afterthought is itself a story of filial succession, though in retrospect it cannot seem so, for it is the story of the father. (2-3)

⁸⁰ That Rabelais—whose own work begins as a continuation of the *Gargantuan Chronicles*—did not necessarily view continuation as such in a negative light is suggested by the fact that he re-works, but does not attack or repudiate, François Habert’s *Songe de Pantagruel*, a contemporary offshoot of his text that appeared in 1542. See Freccero for how Habert’s “work seems first to have copied Rabelais and then to serve as a subtext for him” (162-3). Yet in terms of the historical emergence of professional commercial authorship, it also does not seem irrelevant that authors of Pantagruelist texts tend to have day jobs, or at least tend not to be dependent upon their writing for their day-to-day existence: e.g. Rabelais (Doctor), Burton (Vicar), Sterne (Clergyman), Byron (Aristocrat), Hasek (Hobo).

In both *Pantagruel* and *Gargantua*, authorial anxiety is directed far more towards origin and legitimacy than it is towards closure and ownership.⁸¹ Moreover, whereas the books' inability to trace a clear origin is linked to their subversive parody of genealogy and history, the arbitrariness with which closure is enacted in the books points to their more open-ended celebration of the emergent category of prose fiction: "The end of the quest exposes the fictions of the text's own narrative process—that beginning and ending are the arbitrary but necessary boundaries of an 'espace littéraire.' But whereas in this Renaissance text the authority of tradition casts its genealogical shadow upon the origins of the work, the failure of its end opens a space for a 'new,' fatherless genre, that 'school for orphans' that is the novel" (7).

The shift in narrative structure that is inaugurated in the *Tiers Livre* (from genealogical-nationalist epic to endless semiotic quest) also seems to reflect authorial anxiety insofar as it halts the possible proliferation of the text as a series of homogenous giant stories. In this sense, the seventy-five additional books of "faits et motz de Pantagruel" we are told to expect can be seen as standing between the story of Pantagruel and the story of his son. On the one hand, the radical originality of the *Tiers Livre* (an undeniably hard act to follow) works to prevent the continuation of the Rabelaisian corpus as a series of giant chronicles, in which the story of Pantagruel would have been followed by the son of Pantagruel, then the grandson, etc. On the

⁸¹ Again, this is not to say that "ownership anxiety" is entirely absent in Rabelais, and indeed Freccero argues that the very move of following the story of the son with the story of the father is itself a strategy of appropriation. Freccero (48-49) also points to several changes made to *Pantagruel* between the 1532 and 1542 editions as indicative of a "strategy of authorial appropriation in the work."

other hand, the fact that Rabelais was now being published under the personal seal of the King of France suggests a more pragmatic motive for emphasizing his parody of the quest for meaning (already underway in *Gargantua*) and de-emphasizing (partly through a focal shift from royal Pantagruel to parentless Panurge) his parody of the legitimating functions of genealogy and history.

Between the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres* there is of course a “sea change” in the preferred method of narrative deferral, as the *Tiers Livre*’s Hermetic hybrid of dialogue and encyclopedia gives way to the *Quart Livre*’s mix of ancient (maritime) and medieval (Gaal) romance.⁸² While the Pantagruelion chapters still leave open the possibility of a chronicle-style continuation—a possibility that seems to be explicitly thematized in these chapters via the Olympian council on how to prevent the overgrowth of Pantagruel’s family tree (*TL* 552)—the more generically classifiable *Quart Livre* vastly circumscribes the possible avenues of continuation open to Rabelais’s literary heirs. Yet in both books, the text’s turn towards met fiction, towards an interrogation of its own (in)ability to “mean” anything, means that its continuation will be carried on less in the vein of Montalvo’s *Amadis de Gaula* than in that of Chretien’s *Conte du Graal*.

⁸² In both the *Tiers* and *Quart Livres*, of course, the primary model is Menippean Satire, and indeed the text the *Quart Livre* most closely resembles is clearly Lucian’s *A True History*. In general, however, Menippean satire does not speak to a generic template (or a specific mode of incompleteness) so much as to a process of importing such templates.

Since the shift from verse to prose in the Graal-continuations marks one of the seminal moments in the emergence of French literary prose, it is worth contrasting the textual status of these continuations with those of Rabelais:

Chrétien's *The Story of the Grail* breaks off in mid-sentence, probably due to the death of the poet. Sensing the incompleteness, at least four different authors subsequently attempted to account for the actions of the characters still upon the scene. Of the fifteen manuscripts containing Chrétien's poem, eleven contain one or more of the four continuations, and in most there is no break indicated and the handwriting of the *Continuations* is identical to that of Chrétien's poem. (*Arthurian Romances* 495)

There are also variant versions of these four continuations (the *First Continuation*, for example, ranges between 9,500 and 19,600 lines), as well as two distinct endings in the third and fourth continuations. While the early Continuations remain faithful to the spirit of Chretien's radically ambiguous text in their refusal to bring it to a conclusion (the first continues Chretien's digression on the adventures of Gawain, and the second returns to Perceval but breaks off right before the Fisher King can clarify the mysterious Grail symbols), the third and fourth Continuations might be described as inadvertently faithful insofar as they attempt to provide closure to the text (and clarify the meaning of its most obscure symbols) but arguably serve in the end to make the text even more radically unfinished, since it can now be said to have two distinct endings.

Yet Chretien's *Conte de Graal* did not only produce the four specific verse continuations that have been found attached to it: an entire edifice of Arthurian lore was also later constructed in the vast prose cycles that Chretien's romances inspired, particularly the vast *Lancelot-Graal* prose cycle on which Malory would base his own

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485). In both verse and prose, continuators eventually provided a revelatory conclusion for the unfinished Grail quest, first by providing a backstory for the Graal (which became Christ's cup from the Last Supper) and later (in the prose versions) by introducing a new knight (Galahad) who was not only more worthy of the Graal than sexually initiated knights like Gawain or Lancelot, but also more dignified (and, as son-of-Lancelot, more legitimately French) than the Foolish Perceval.

Like Rabelais himself, the continuator of the *Cinquième Livre* thus seems to have been poised between two models of authorship.⁸³ Like the verse continuators of Chretien, this author remains faithful to the open-endedness of the very text that he(?) brings to a conclusion. Unlike the later verse and prose continuations of Chretien, however, which work to clarify and demystify a radically unfinished and ambiguous text, the *Cinquième Livre* creates a conclusion in which the meaning and value of the quest itself are turned back upon the reader and his or her own personal taste:

The reading the Rabelaisian text produces is a story of reading whereby the end serves purely to situate the beginning and the direction of the narrative. The continuator, as a reader of the Rabelaisian books, supplies an ending that in fact assigns an origin to the quest. What the continuator of Rabelais's book reveals in his 'fiction of a conclusion' (Cave's phrase), is that the meaning of the quest, rather than being a divine revelation from above, is the quest for individual meaning. Beginning, quest, and ending thus become the inevitable fictions of narration, of writing and of reading, and of the construction of meaning itself—here ambivalently, later as defensively and triumphantly bourgeois. (Freccero 190)

⁸³ I am referring to Rabelais's continuator in the singular, though it is certainly possible that more than one person filled this role. However many hands were at work on the *Cinquième Livre*, however, what is most significant for my purposes is the fact that it was the only posthumous continuation of Rabelais.

While the precise valence of the continuator's appeal to a nascent bourgeois individualism is certainly open to interpretation, what seems undeniable is that this ending is clearly the product of a time in which models of literary production and consumption were undergoing radical change. Thus Bacbuc's words to Panurge (concerning her gloss on the words of the Holy Bottle) can be applied to the Rabelaisian reader as well, who is not handed explanations of divine signs but is asked to actively create meaning through literary consumption and the "jeu de palme" of textual interpretation. At the same time, however, Rabelais's continuator also seems genuinely invested (or at least more invested than Rabelais himself) in bringing the text to a clear conclusion, thereby drawing a definitive border around the work that has successfully impeded further continuation for nearly five hundred years. Poised between two models of authorship, the continuator of the *Cinquième Livre* seems simultaneously compelled to continue this important text and, by bringing it to an ironic, "Rabelaisian" conclusion, to respect the individuality and insure the integrity of the Rabelaisian oeuvre.

An emerging model of professional authorship is thus reflected in the current status of these texts: whereas Chretien's text produced several endings—not only the two endings given in the verse continuations, but also the end of "Chretien's" text and the prose cycles it inspired—in the case of Rabelais there is generally considered to be only a single choice, i.e. that between the "authentic" conclusion of Rabelais's *Quart Livre* and the "inauthentic" conclusion of the continuator. As Freccero notes:

If the Rabelaisian novel is read as concluding with the *Quart Livre*, then it may be said that the quest fails as a means of achieving narrative resolution.

Like its medieval predecessors, the Rabelaisian romance fragments into a series of disjointed episodic adventures that lead nowhere. This fragmentation is figured thematically; the companions drift from one island to another. Each episode reflects a darker version of the *terre gaste*; few signs are decipherable, and no redemption is in sight. The quest for the grail and its more earthy version, the Holy Bottle, dissipates once and for all in the confusion and chaos of an unredeemable world. (189)

Freccero goes on to argue, however, that the nature of the Rabelaisian quest is such that it could not have produced any other outcome than the one realized in the *Cinquième Livre*, and thus that the identity of the fifth volume's author is not particularly important in considering the conclusion of the work. Ironically, one could say that the continuator's Rabelaisian appeal to the taste of the reader at the end of the text is also an implicit authorization to reject the *Cinquième Livre* itself if one so wishes, and of course there are many readers today who consider the Rabelaisian corpus to extend no further than the *Quart Livre*. By providing an ironic-ambivalent conclusion, the continuator thus also creates a sort of rift in the text, which can now be said to have (at least) two endings.⁸⁴

What is at stake in these two endings? Not as much as might be supposed. If the *Quart Livre* is more clearly Lucianic, the *Cinquième Livre* is more clearly Aesopic (as is explicitly announced in its Prologue). There is of course a general softening of satiric tone in the *Cinquième Livre* (which has thus long had its authenticity championed by proponents of a Rabelais *moralisé*), as well as a clear (if ironic) narrative teleology that stands in stark contrast to the fragmentary *Quart Livre*, the most radically unfinished book of all. Yet these differences in style and tone are

⁸⁴ Given the difference between the published and manuscript versions of the *Cinquième Livre*, one could argue that there are in fact three conclusions to the text.

largely cosmetic, and reflect (albeit far more sharply) a more general internal conflict that can already be felt in Rabelais's earlier work. Moreover, although she does not specifically make this point, one could say that Freccero's reading of the ending of the *Quart Livre*, together with her defense of the legitimacy of the *Cinquième Livre*, implicitly reveals that the question of the *Cinquième Livre*'s "authenticity" does not in fact leave us with a stark either/or—i.e., which of the two is the "true" ending?—but rather with a trio of options. Instead of choosing to privilege one book or the other as constituting the legitimate ending of Rabelais's work, we can also choose to view the work as having two distinct conclusions, neither entirely compatible nor mutually exclusive, two equally legitimate endings that can be allowed to coexist within this radically unfinished and unfinishable Pantagruelist text.

We thus end with two conclusions: one in which the Pantagruelian fellowship (and a shit-stained Panurge) are left adrift somewhere near the "Island of Thieves," and one in which the word of the Holy Bottle provides an ironic-ambivalent revelation that sends the travelers back to their ships. In the first case, we have a cannonade to the Muses followed by the stink of fear, the magic of sophistry, the exhortation to drink, and the open ocean. In the second case, "le Bouteille trimegiste" surrenders the dream of totality and allows our heroes to return from the underworld, after receiving from Bacbuc a (rather anti-climactic) Aesopian moral assuring us that the "deux choses nécessaires" to a quest for the Good Life are "guyde de Dieu et compagnie d'homme," a moral the travelers carry back to the surface, passing through pastoral scenes en route to finding their waiting ships in port, ready to sail.

In either case, however, we end on the sea of prose.

CHAPTER TWO: THE BIRTH OF THE NOVEL FROM THE DEATH OF DON QUIXOTE

“All prose fiction is a variation on the theme of *Don Quixote*.”—Lionel Trilling

“Con estas razones perdía el pobre caballero el juicio, y desvelábase por entenderlas y desentrañarles el sentido, que no se la sacara ni las entendiera el mismo Aristóteles, si resucitara para sólo ello.”

“These writings drove the poor knight out of his wits; and he passed sleepless nights trying to understand them and disentangle their meaning, though Aristotle himself would never have unraveled or understood them, even if he had been resurrected for that sole purpose.”

—Miguel Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* (29, 32)¹

To speak of “the modern novel” is always to engage in a bit of magical thinking, since one hopes that by combining two terms with incredibly unstable meanings—but whose meanings are generally agreed to be essentially connected in some way—one will somehow arrive at a term that is more stable and susceptible to analysis than either of its constituent parts. Yet this is no excuse for abandoning the fray, and indeed I believe that the term “modern novel,” if well utilized, can have just this sort of effect. What must always be kept in mind, of course, is that there is not one history of the novel but several, and that to tell the story of the modern novel is not a matter of disentangling the true and undisputed history from the false ones, but

¹ Throughout this chapter, I will be referring to Cervantes’ novel variously as *Don Quixote*, the *Quijote*, and *El Quijote*. The first two uses should be considered fairly interchangeable, save that *Don Quixote* can refer to both the character and the book, whereas “the *Quijote*” (common parlance amongst Anglo-American Cervantistas) can only refer to the latter. *El Quijote* will be used in certain situations to denote not just Cervantes’ novel but also the unique—some might even say holy—complex of associations it has come to occupy in Western culture.

rather of sifting through and contributing to “that slow piling one on top of the other of thin, transparent layers” which Walter Benjamin describes as “the most appropriate picture of the way in which the perfect narrative is revealed through the layers of a variety of retellings” (“Storyteller” 93).

2.1 *El Quijote’s* Roles in the History of the Novel

The identification of *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* as the first modern novel has long been a critical commonplace. All true histories of the novel rightly acknowledge *El Quijote’s* heroic deeds, and those that don’t do so at their own peril. And yet there exists so vast and conflicting an array of opinions about the book that Hegel himself would hardly be able to synthesize them all, even if he had been resurrected for that sole purpose. John Allen eloquently summarizes a long-standing and on-going state of affairs: “Although it is generally agreed that *Don Quixote* is one of the world’s great novels, one can scarcely find critics who agree as to precisely where that greatness lies. Similarly, although it is widely held that *Don Quixote* is the first modern novel, each critic or theorist sees the central ‘novelty’ of the novel differently” (Allen 125). One hardly needs to make the point that both the greatness and the modernity of Cervantes’ book are most tellingly revealed precisely through this continuing heterogeneity of opinions about it, by the ingenious hidalgo’s remarkable adaptability to both the conflicting tastes of different eras and to the changing needs and values of literary theo-historians, even as the “facts” of his life stay exactly the same.

Yet the book's now universal acclaim was not always a given. It took two hundred years before Don Quixote—the character, at least, if not the book—was able to accumulate enough respectability to be enshrined alongside Hamlet as one of the two quintessential Western images of “Modern Man.” While probably the most famous specific instance of this enshrinement can be found in Heinrich Heine's prologue to an 1837 German translation of the book, to my mind it has never been better formulated than in Stephen Gilman's only slightly hyperbolic dictum: “*Cervantes confronted typographic man in the figure of Don Quixote*” (3). The rhetorical *gravitas* inherent in this statement speaks to a culture that has, since Cervantes' time, invested a great deal of cultural capital in “*typographic man*”—a notion that in Cervantes' day still had to be constructed as much as confronted. Before György Lukács could nominate *Don Quixote* (together with *L'Education Sentimentale*) as one of the two perfect exemplars of the novel form, as perfect in its own way as the best of the absolute past, Don Quixote himself (together with his author) had to recede into a **not quite** absolute past. Yet in this not quite absolute past—conveniently located somewhere in Spain's “*siglo d'oro*”—lie the origins of the modern novel. Or so my version of the story goes, anyway.

While an exhaustive analysis of *Don Quixote*'s place in the history of the novel and its theorization would probably run far longer than the book itself, it is certainly possible to sketch a brief overview of the prominent roles it has played in some of the most famous and influential 20th-century accounts of the novel. The example of *El Quijote* is useful here not only as a focal point or “*Atalaya*” for tracing

the historicization and theorization of the novel in general, but also for showing how theory and history become particularly intertwined in the case of the novel. Since all histories of the novel must account for *Don Quixote*, the ways in which they do so can reveal some of the theoretical assumptions that inform their approaches.

One may as well begin by acknowledging the most important history of the novel in which the *Quijote* does not play an important part: this is the French national tradition, which emphasizes the cultivation of a female reading public and generally reserves the title of first modern novel for Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), pointing to its psychological realism and its unprecedented portrayal of its characters' inner lives. The *Quijote* does not fit into this tradition for several reasons: first, it is not a *roman(ce)*.² Second, its world is still one of speeches and not one of inner monologues (Cide Hamete's inability to access his characters' inner lives is explicitly thematized in the "Cave of Montesinos" episode). Third, the creation of a female reading public was less important to the development of the novel in Spain than it was in France since, as *Don Quixote* shows, Spain already had a significant

²Spanish chivalric romances were called "books of chivalry" because the Spanish *romanzo* already designated a specific genre of short ballad. The word *novela* was not widely used in Spain in the sense of the English "novel" until the 19th-century; prior to that, it was always accompanied by a qualifying adjective (*novela bizantina*, *novela picaresca*, etc.). Although Cervantes consistently labels the *Quijote* as a "historia verdad," it is worth pointing out that he does in fact boast of being the first to compose *novelas* in Spanish in his introduction to his *Novelas ejemplares*, with the implication that his *novelas* should be considered "exemplary" in a literary as well as a moral sense.

group of male “disocupados lectors” to draw on due to its generally literate and frequently unemployable hidalgo class.³

Turning to the English-speaking world, Walter Reed’s *Exemplary History of the Novel* (1981) offers an excellent overview of the state of affairs in the novel’s theo-historicization up to the time of its composition. Writing at the same time Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination* essays were first being translated into English, Reed points to

two influential accounts of the history of the novel that dealt seriously with the question of origins, accounts that many readers find persuasive today. One is set forth by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel*: that the novel began in England in the early eighteenth century, as the product of epistemological and sociological changes, that its essential feature is the circumstantial narrative that Watt calls ‘formal realism.’ The other account is more philosophical, deriving ultimately from Hegel. It defines the novel in opposition to the epic, and locates its exemplary instance in *Don Quixote*. Lukács’s *Theory of the Novel* is one example of this historical argument. But it informs Ortega y Gasset’s *Meditations on Quixote* as well, and it has been brilliantly expanded by the Soviet critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The one account is nationalistic, the other cosmopolitan or ‘world-historical,’ in the Hegelian phrase. (Reed 19-20)

The continuing importance of Watt’s *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (1957) owes more (in my opinion) to its thorough and thought-provoking treatment of the historical shift in the English reading public’s

³ Madame de Staël, whose groundbreaking *De la littérature considérée dans ses rapports avec les institutions sociales* (1800) makes no mention of Cervantes, blames what she sees as Spanish literature’s failure to develop on the influence of the Arabs, who on the one hand had insured that no “élément de philosophie ne pouvoit se développer en Espagne” and from whom, on the other hand, the Spanish had failed to take any of the “inépuisables sources d’invention poétique que les Arabes apportoient avec eux” (165-166). One wonders what the sage Cide Hamete Benengeli would have to say about this.

“horizon of expectations” (to borrow H.R. Jauss’s useful phrase) than it does to Watt’s somewhat reductive theory of “formal realism,” which he defines as

the narrative embodiment of [...] the premise, or primary convention, that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience, and is therefore under an obligation to satisfy its reader with such details of the story as the individuality of the actors concerned, the particulars of the times and places of their actions, details which are presented through a more largely referential use of language than is common in other literary forms. (32)

For Watt, the “primary convention” of the novel resides in the novelist’s ability to present his narrative in terms of the same types of circumstantial evidence that might be used to convince a jury of a particular narrative’s veracity, together with the reader’s desire and ability to submit to such a convention. Thus, although Watt makes the questionable move of assuming his own conclusion on the first page of his book (i.e., that the novel was invented by Defoe and Richardson), this assumption does help to enable his linkage of the rise of the novel to the rise of philosophical realism, an empiricist movement that had, in direct contrast to the classical and medieval traditions of “realism,” begun to associate “reality” with particular facts rather than with universal truths.

That the specter of *Don Quixote* haunts the margins of *The Rise of the Novel* is most evident in Watt’s treatment of Fielding, where his insistence that Fielding’s rights to the title of novelist derive solely from his parody of Richardson can only be maintained by downplaying Fielding’s self-proclaimed Cervantine filiation—Fielding declares on the title page of *Joseph Andrews* that the book is “Written in Imitation of the *Manner* of Cervantes, Author of *Don Quixote*”—a connection that Watt

acknowledges only in order to dismiss.⁴ Another, more ironic consequence of Watt's insistence on the English origins of the novel is that, in attempting to define the novel in such a way as to highlight the unprecedented originality of Defoe and Richardson, he in fact arrives at a definition that could be applied with more-or-less equal validity to Spanish picaresque works such as the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554) or Mateo Alemán's *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599), books that predate not only Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) but also *El Quijote* itself. Reed makes this point quite clearly, and the identification of the Spanish picaresque as the first modern novel genre has been increasingly maintained by a number of English-speaking critics and an even greater number of Spanish-speaking ones.

Lukács, as is well known, privileges *Don Quixote* as “the first great novel of world literature,” the first book to create within itself an artificially totalized worldview as opposed to depicting an ancient world that was, according to Lukács, always already totalized in each of its parts. Lukács' *Die Theorie des Romans* (1916) helped legitimate and consolidate the now-commonplace narrative that tells of a modern displacement of an epic worldview by an encyclopedic one, a shift in human consciousness mirrored in the novel's displacement of the epic. The place of *El Quijote* in such a paradigm shift becomes crucial. Although Lukács' views on the future prospects of the novel seem gloomy, his elevation of *El Quijote* to the status of

⁴ Cf. Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, especially pages 239 and 251. Watt also denies the title of novelist to Aphra Behn—whose early novel *Oroonoko* (1688) is subtitled “A True History” in what is almost certainly a reference to the *Quijote*—on the grounds that her characters' names “carr[y] foreign, archaic or literary connotations which exclud[e] any suggestion of real and contemporary life” (19).

a world-totalizing text testifies to a remarkable increase in the respectability of the genre. Whereas for Hegel the *Roman* invariably represents an artistic degradation of the epic no less than a spiritual one, for Lukács the genre's essential value lies in its ability to artistically transfigure our spiritually degraded age. To make this argument, Lukács needed a book that was both depraved enough to qualify as quintessentially modern and at the same time endowed with sufficient *gravitas* to serve as a fitting successor to the epic. That *El Quijote* was able to fill this role speaks not only to the brilliance of the book but also to the successful inculcation and diffusion of the ideals of German romanticism that had been carried out over the previous century. Without this revaluation, who knows if even Don Quixote's melancholy death would have proven sufficiently serious material for Lukács to discover in the book a new manifestation of the epic spirit?

Walter Reed, wary of the lack of historicity for which Lukács himself eventually derided his *Theorie*, sagely asserts that "any history of the novel and any argument for its origins must mediate between the national and world-historical extremes" and, moreover, must "mediate between the tracing of an entity (the novel) that has no natural or positive existence, and the setting up of a canon (the great tradition or the great anti-tradition) which has no supra-historical validity" (Reed 22, 24). The *Quijote*'s status as the first novel, according to Reed, can only be understood in the context of its relation to the picaresque. Reed locates the origin of the novel in the *Quijote*'s self-consciousness of itself in relation to a literary canon, a canon that Cervantes more-or-less creates in the course of his novel (particularly in the case of

the picaresque, Reed argues [70-73]). Reed thus envisages a dialectical evolution of the novel that takes place between the poles of the picaresque—referring to all exclusive, rule-bound genres of the novel—and the Quixotic—representative of all inclusive, self-conscious novels—founded on his exemplary assertion that the “raison d’être of the novel is the ambiguity introduced into literature by the technology of the printed book” (25).

Reed’s book both benefits and suffers from the fact that he wrote it while Bakhtin’s *Dialogic Imagination* essays were still being translated. On the one hand, Reed demonstrates just how close American criticism had come to a Bakhtinian conception of the novel even as Bakhtin’s most important writings on the subject were first becoming available. On the other hand, Reed’s treatment of Bakhtin is inevitably oversimplified (and he seems to think Bakhtin is a Hegelian) as a result of Reed’s over-privileging of “Epic and Novel” (1940). This essay, one of Bakhtin’s most accessible and least scholarly, was written as the Russian thinker was moving towards his third theory of the novel, now considered less as a genre and more as the most prominent manifestation of a world-historical force: i.e., the force of novelness and carnivalization most fully articulated in *Rabelais and His World* (1965).

Although Bakhtin’s carnivalesque account of the novel certainly acknowledges *El Quijote*’s importance, the Don & Sancho take a decided backseat to *Pantagruel & Gargantua*, and the *Quijote* is even used in a few places to illustrate an early modern reduction in “authentic” carnival laughter, whose presence “rings out fully in Rabelais, somewhat less so in *Don Quixote*, still less in *The Praise of Folly*” (Morson

& Emerson 464). Julia Kristeva, expanding on Bakhtin's carnival theory in *Le Texte du Roman* (1970), actually links this "reduction" of carnival laughter to a more widespread carnivalization of the semiotic field in early modernity without which, she claims, the emergence of the novel would be unthinkable. Kristeva considers the *Quijote* as a seminal moment in this process of carnivalization since it marks to an even greater extent than Rabelais how the "novel has also borrowed from carnival this tendency to devalorize the text that precedes it and which, by the fact of its anteriority, has become the law of the genre."⁵

Yet the *Quijote* actually plays a far more pivotal role in Bakhtin's first two theo-histories of the novel than in his carnivalesque account. In "Discourse in the Novel," for instance, Cervantes' work is privileged side by side with Rabelais' as exemplifying the second of "two broad lines in the stylistic history of the novel, two rival traditions identified by the ways in which they exploit the resources of heteroglossia to create dialogized 'images of languages'" (Morson & Emerson 345). Whereas the first line, exemplified by Richardson and Rousseau, strives for a pure, finished style, the second "incorporates heteroglossia *into* a novel's composition, exploiting it to orchestrate its own meaning and frequently resisting altogether any unmediated and pure authorial discourse" ("Discourse in the Novel" 375). Similarly, in Bakhtin's second theory—advanced in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope"

⁵ "roman a emprunté au carnaval aussi cette tendance à dévaloriser le texte qui le précède et qui, de par le fait de son antériorité, est devenu la loi du genre" (Kristeva 175). My translation. See also pages 174-176 in general for Kristeva's brilliant analysis of the interplay between Bakhtinian carnival laughter and early modern textuality.

and “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance in the History of Realism”—*Don Quixote* is privileged for its encyclopedic scope, now understood not only in terms of its dialogization of various images of language but also in terms of its dialogization of a variety of chronotopes—literary images/conceptualizations of time-space—and particularly its blending of the “adventure time” characteristic of the (chivalric) romance with the “everyday adventure time” characteristic of the Spanish picaresque (though traceable to Apuleis and Petronius).

Victor Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* (1925), a masterpiece of Russian formalism that was unavailable in full English translation until 1990, also locates the origin of the novel in the *Quijote*. Shklovsky sees the novel as the end-result of a long process of story accumulation, and thus emphasizes the importance of works like the *Panchatantra* (c. 250 BCE), *The Book of the Thousand and One Nights* (c. 900), and (above all) Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1371) in the novel’s development. Novelistic plots, according to Shklovsky, are shaped by the need to combine otherwise heterogeneous speeches and stories. He thus reads the *Quijote* as a compilation of stories and speeches and emphasizes its revolutionary use of a central protagonist as the main vehicle for its frame narrative. Shklovsky’s emphasis on the importance of story-collections to the history of the novel has become increasingly influential, particularly since it acknowledges the influence of non-western texts on the western canon.

Another productive version of the novel’s history—probably most closely associated with Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities* (1983)—links the rise of

the novel to the rise of nationalism and the creation of a national identity within readers through the mediation of various national literary canons. Although it is doubtful that *El Quijote*'s nationalizing influence in its own day was comparable to that produced by the theatre of Lope de Vega, for instance—or even to that of *Amadis* itself, published shortly after the formal codification of the Spanish language by Antonio de Nebrija in 1492—its subsequent importance to the history and development of Spain's national self-consciousness is reflected in Jose Ortega y Gasset's *Meditations on Don Quixote* (1914):

Whenever a few Spaniards have been sensitized by the idealized poetry of their past, the sordidness of their present, and the bitter hostility of their future together, Don Quixote descends among them and the burning ardor of his crazed countenance harmonizes those discordant hearts, strings them together like a thread, nationalizes them, putting a common racial sorrow above their personal bitterness. (51)

One of the main problems with Spain and the Spanish, according to Ortega, is that they have yet to become sufficiently Quixotic, by which he means “realistic.” Ortega takes the theme of “Quixotism” as a starting point for an impassioned address to his countrymen, for whom, “en la circunstancia apremiante de España, Cervantes y El Quijote son—nada menos—una posible vía de salvación” (Salas Fernández 102). Where does this possible path of salvation lie? Simply in the ironic recognition of a fragmentary world that can no longer be unified, the ability to think within the framework of *El Quijote*'s famously dialogic structure, a structure that can seemingly sometimes serve “to provide its readers with an experience of what it is to look at things from the perspective of the state, that is, to perceive the limitations of each of

the individual discourses and the configuration of their addition” (Godzich & Spadaccini 94).

Many recent theo-historians of the novel have, finally, been (re)turning to questions about the nature of fictional narrative, and the origin of the novel has increasingly been tied to a historical investment in the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, or, more precisely, between “true” and “fictional” histories. As one might expect, *El Quijote* tends to assume a prominent place in this tradition as one of the best and earliest meditations on the line between fiction and reality ever written. Indeed, it is almost impossible for an educated Westerner to conceive of this distinction today without reference to some sort of Quixotic imagery.⁶

So, apart from its incredible entertainment value, what is it that makes *El Quijote* so attractive an origin for so many 20th-century theo-histories of the novel? We can point to several qualities, none of them unique to the *Quijote* but all of them essential to its exemplarity as a modern novel:

- 1) theme of fiction vs. reality
- 2) immense size, presence of inserted stories
- 3) dialogic, multiple points of view
- 4) realistic depiction of the world

⁶ A theory of fiction I have found particularly helpful is the one advanced by Remigius Bunia in *Faltungen*. Bunia’s theory of fiction is particularly relevant to my own project insofar as he stresses that the degree-zero for the closure of a fictional world is not any “sense of an ending” but rather the empirical boundaries imposed by the artistic medium.

- 5) encyclopedic totality, offering access to several distinct and unbridgeable realms of existence
- 6) critico-parodic relationship with and incorporation of other genres
- 7) association with the emergence of the first modern nation state and “*el siglo d’oro*” of Spanish Literature

Any history of the novel based on any of these factors must account for *El Quijote*, even if only as a way of getting around it.

In this chapter, I will suggest one more quality of *El Quijote* that should be considered fundamental *vis-á-vis* its importance to the history of the novel: the revolutionary change that Cervantes wrought on his hero as a literary image (and thus on “the literary image” in general) through the repentance and death of Don Quixote. This ending, besides providing an impediment to further continuators, imposes an organic (in this case biographic) unity on a book that was by no means destined for such a unity from its conception. This fact, I believe, has had profound consequences for the history of the novel and its theorization.

2.2 The Unity of *El Quijote*?

The historical narrative that I am following, of course, is focused on the development of that peculiar sense of an ending that the reader of modern novels has come to expect. This sense of an ending, and the pleasure that generally accompanies it, depends upon an assumption by the reader that the book (s)he is reading forms a self-contained totality, and that his or her lectorial efforts will eventually be rewarded

by some sort of Benjaminian *Finis*. It must be asked, however: was this the case with the *Quijote*? Immediately one sees a problem: there are, of course, two books (not counting Avellaneda's *Segundo Tomo*), the first of which is already divided into four parts in imitation of the original *Amadis de Gaula*. Contemporary Cervantes scholars rarely fail to acknowledge this fact, and in individual analyses most critics today refer to Cervantes' "two novels." Yet the fact that it is referred to as "el *Quijote*" with and without irony throughout the Spanish-speaking world attests to the tendency to view the book as a unified whole. This tendency is evident in nearly all of the histories referenced above, with the notable exception of Shklovsky's.

Let me be clear: my point is not to suggest that *El Quijote* is **not** a unity. Indeed, one could argue that the title "el *Quijote*" is performative as well as denotative: if the unified totality of the book was ever in question, its singular appellation puts all doubts to rest. Yet in what way(s) is this totality constructed... by Cervantes? By his readers? By the traditions of literary history? And how many totalities are there? For my own purposes, perhaps the most important question is this: how radical an effect did the death of Don Quixote have on our conception of the novel, i.e. on our presumption that novels should be finished, that they should provide a movement from beginning to middle to end as easily identifiable as that achieved by the death of our temporarily sane *caballero*?

Now certainly, one could point out that the book would have ended in any case, and that some form of completion would therefore have existed. But since the novel as a genre can only be created retrospectively—nobody ever set out to write

“the first novel”—our concept of what a “finished” novel is relies heavily on the structure of whatever novel we retrospectively project as foundational. Nor is an expectation of organic unity historically universal, even within a given age. This is evidenced by the 1605 *Quijote*’s own parodic portrayal of attempts to apply neo-classical principles to “books of chivalry, which Aristotle never dreamed of, St. Basil never mentioned, and Cicero never ran across” (*DQ* 29).⁷ This dialogic jab at both books of chivalry and neo-classical prudes can also be read as a preemptive strike against the narrator’s own imagined critics, since his book is in fact clearly structured on the model of its primary target, the first four books of *Amadis de Gaula*.

Indeed, if one considers the first four parts of *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha* on their own, one notices that what “has generally been considered random and shapeless in its plot [...] is in fact clearly structured according to the recreative pattern of withdrawal and return” (Reed 81). Put another way, the *Primera Parte* proceeds entirely in accordance with the traditional romance mode of incompleteness, a mode characterized by one’s continual movement towards or away from one’s love and/or spouse to be and observable from Heliodorus’ *Historia Aethiopica* to *Amadis de Gaula* and his many, many heirs. Shklovsky even goes so far as to argue (72-100) that the *Quijote* actually owes its famous encyclopedic structure to the plot demands imposed by its faithful parodic *imitatio* of *Amadis*. Even the inserted storylines and *novelas* of the *Primera Parte*, he claims, could be said to correspond to the random shifts between narrative strands so characteristic of those

⁷ “los libros de caballerías, de quien nunca se acordó Aristóteles, ni dijo nada San Basilio, ni alcanzó Cicerón” (13).

hated books of chivalry. Perhaps we should, as Ortega y Gasset suggests, take more seriously the full implications of Cervantes' claim that his sole intention was to write "una invectiva contra los libros de caballerías."

Yet the structure of the *Quijote* is also deeply indebted to Mateo Alemán's *Guzman de Alfarache* (1599/1604), a wildly successful (though unfinished) book that also includes inserted *novelas* and also attempts to provide an encyclopedic view of contemporary Spanish life (Alemán subtitled his own *Segunda Parte* "Watchtower on Human Life" [*Atalaya de la vida humana*]). Although Alemán's status as "the first novelist" is certainly open to question—due in large part to his failure to finish his book—he must be considered the founder of the picaresque genre at least insofar as he was the first writer to label his protagonist a "picaro." Much of *El Quijote*'s historical importance, as Bakhtin and many others have pointed out, lies in its dialogic fusion of these two narrative traditions, which I will label the chivalric and the picaresque.

These narrative traditions also embody the two most significant modes of incompleteness that *El Quijote* had to overcome *en route* to its miraculous and novel *Finis*. Michael Nerlich gives one of the most penetrating formulations of this in the first volume of his *Ideology of Adventure* (1977), a book that traces the origins of modernity to a shift in the concept of *a(d)-ventura*, a word which had originally described events, generally bad, which happened **to** a person—thus Job would be as much of an adventurer as Odysseus—but which was revalorized by a vagabond knightly class (always in search of wealthy heiresses) to describe heroic deeds that

one actively set out to perform. As Nerlich points out, much of the *Quijote*'s comedy stems from the fact that although Don Quixote sets out to have adventures like those undertaken by Amadis de Gaula (slaying giants, rescuing maidens, conquering kingdoms), the adventures he actually has are much closer to those undergone by Lazarillo de Tormes (beatings, hunger, more beatings).

Chivalric should thus imply Nerlich's idea of a modern change in adventure, since one place this change is observable in literature is in the shift from seafaring imagery (man at the mercy of the elements) to images of mounted knights who actively set out in search of adventure. The chivalric mode of incompleteness is thus a historically specific manifestation of the more general romance mode characterized by Bakhtinian "adventure time." Similarly, "picaresque" in my usage will refer both to the episodic-realist mode Bakhtin calls "everyday adventure time" and, in this chapter, to the situation of an unreliable narrator being unable to "finish" the story of his or her life. These modes are respectively exemplified in *Amadis de Gaula*, the trendsetting series of books of chivalry, and in *Guzman de Alfarache*, the first self-styled (auto)biography of a "picaro."

2.3 Roman and Novel

Before moving on to analyses of specific texts and their modes of incompleteness, I feel I must briefly address the "Roman v. Novel" question, particularly since I believe the modes of incompleteness we are about to discuss can be crudely but productively mapped onto (chivalric) **Roman** and (picaresque) **Novel** in

general.⁸ Although I am privileging Novel in this work—if only out of love for my mother tongue—I also believe that we need both words, and that Novel & Roman can in fact complement each other in a surprisingly thorough and rigorous fashion, if only we let them. It must be stressed, however, that the distinctions I am about to make are strategic rather than essential. In other words, my point is not to posit some essential distinction between these words but to suggest some ways in which their respective histories and differing connotations might be helpful in thinking about the notoriously amorphous entity that both are meant to designate: a genre-concept that is paradoxically characterized by both seriality and self-containedness.

Etymologically, Roman comes from the Latin adjective “Romanicus,” meaning “of or in the Roman style,” and the vulgar Latin adverb “romanice” (“romanice scribere” meant “to write in a romance language”). In Old French, “romanz” simply meant “verse narrative” and by the early 14th-century it had come to refer in French and English to “any story of a hero’s adventures” written in a “non-classical” language, first in verse but later increasingly in prose, as was discussed in our last chapter.

Abbé Huet, whose *Traité de l’origine des romans* (1670) is widely regarded as the first treatise on the novel, defines “Romans” as “fictions d’aventures amoureuses, écrites en Prose avec art, pour le plaisir & l’instruction des Lecteurs” (Huet 4-5). In contrast to epics and “Histoires véritables”—genres that deal with “masculine” matters like war and honor—Huet asserts that “*l’amour*” must be “le

⁸ In this section I will be capitalizing Roman and Novel when referring to the words themselves.

principal sujet du Roman,” a female-oriented genre that deals with “serious” subjects only as background (5). Similarly, Huet bases his claim that novels can be morally instructive on their alleged ability to hold the attention of their readers by means of their entertainment value. They are, in a sense, sermons aimed at the frivolous. Roman(ce) thus points to a distinction between romance histories that people read for pleasure and “serious” (though not necessarily any less fictional) Latin histories on which legal and genealogical claims might be based.

As a genre, Roman(ce) dates back to the age of Hellenism—the *koine* Greek-speaking empires formed after the death of Alexander—and the “erotici graechi” of Heliodorus and others. Unlike the later novellas, these were large, elegant, expensive books, from the ancient world until the time Alonso Quijano assembled his library. It seems significant that this prose genre arose in the same chaotic and cosmopolitan era in which Greek was, on the one hand, gaining currency as the *lingua franca* of the Mediterranean world and, on the other hand, being “vulgarized” through its imprecise adoption by conquered peoples. Both the literary and the etymological histories of Roman thus seem to reinforce the idea of romance languages as signifying a movement away from the epic worlds of pure, poetic Homeric Greek and Virgilian Latin into the mongrelized discursive codes of our own fallen and prosaic age.

One might suggest that if Roman more clearly connotes an opposition to epic that gets somewhat lost in Novel, Novel by contrast more clearly advertises its status as “the epic of the modern age.” The fact that we are able to talk about “epic novels” and “romance novels” at all, and the vastly different connotations of these terms,

would seem to support this claim. It should be noted, however, that Roman maintains its own mark of epic status via the mediating prism of German Romanticism. Indeed, it was in fact the Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schlegel who first asserted that the Roman “might become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age.”⁹ Although Schlegel is admittedly speaking here about “romantische Dichtart” in general, the definition of the novel that he offers in his *Brief über den Roman* (1800)—“**Ein Roman ist ein romantisches Buch**”—clearly indicates that it should be included in this category. Schlegel, who (with his wife Dorothea) actually wrote an unfinishable novel himself (*Lucinde*), was well aware of Roman’s etymology and wanted to re-emphasize and privilege *Romanicus* alongside *romanice* and thereby better utilize the ability of the noun Roman, as well as the adjective Romantic, to convey the genre’s simultaneous status as “high” and “low” art.¹⁰ Even today, Roman’s ties to the philosophical legacy of German Romanticism make its “modern epic” connotations much stronger in German than French, a fact that also holds true for most of the Slavic and Eastern European languages that imported Roman from the German literary tradition.

⁹ “gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen emgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden.” The quote is from *Athenaeum* (Fragment 116). In the same fragment, Schlegel claims that “Romantic Poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected” (*Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann*). Statements like this may help us to understand why Hegel takes pains in his lectures to insist that Schlegel and his brother are not “real philosophers.”

¹⁰ For the unfinishability of *Lucinde*, see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy’s *The Literary Absolute* (90).

Novel thus appears to lose out on both Roman's essential opposition to epic and its clearer ties to the philosophical legacy of romanticism, the very legacy upon which Novel's own claims to epic status are ultimately based. At the same time, Roman's highly over-determined status in a variety of semiotic fields (literary, historical, philosophical, religious) tends to obscure the materiality of the book that Novel connotes, its indissoluble connection to the history of the book and the age of the press.

Novel(la) first appeared in 14th-century Italy, where its meaning was something akin to "cheap little book." The original *novellas* were short, self-contained selections from the *Decameron* with easily identifiable morals conveyed through the teleology of a single narrative. Happily for my purposes, then, Novel seems to have implied from the beginning a self-contained book with a beginning and an end. These *novellas'* Boccaccian origins and supposed moral utility can also be linked to the modern state's investment in the figure of the author as guarantor of both moral authority and artistic value, an investment essential to the rise of the novel. Moreover, it is Novel (rather ironically) that best connotes the Shklovskian narrative of a gradual accumulation of short stories into an encyclopedic narrative text, a progression hinted at in Novel's loss/lack of a diminutive.

In addition, Novel cannot help but be infused with a sense of newness and novelness similar to the one Bakhtin spent so much time, ink, paper and energy attempting to invest Roman with. Partly for this reason, I would here like to offer "**A novel is a novelty book**" as my own meager supplement to and (hopefully)

productive mistranslation of Schlegel's definition. This second definition not only reinforces a sense of materiality, newness, and their indissoluble connection in the age of mechanical reproduction, but also, almost as a bonus, suggests the Bakhtinian image of Novel as a heteroglossic weave, a "novelty" of discourses.¹¹

Conceptualizing the relationship between Novel and Roman in a supplementary rather than an antagonistic fashion can help us to avoid some of the problematic binaries that have long plagued attempts to theorize the genre. For instance, whereas Novel has the advantage of connoting an essential modernity, Roman reminds us of an ancient and tangled lineage. Perhaps more importantly, Roman's wide-ranging historic and generic inclusiveness can allow English speakers to sidestep annoying questions about whether or not a given text is "really" a novel, and can help to show how hopelessly entangled in narratives of English exceptionalism such questions often are (as of course is Novel itself, to some extent). Making the terms supplementary can also help us to make sense of the genre's complicated relationship with history, and its simultaneous status as "high" and "low" art. While Roman maintains the sense of endless seriality characteristic of ancient and medieval chronicles as well as early modern romances, and still observable today in any number of serialized novel genres, Novel points to the more easily identifiable narrative teleology associated with biography, a genre whose movement from beginning to end is perhaps more clearly mapped out than any other. This connection

¹¹ Here I am using "novelty" in one of its more obscure senses, i.e. as "a weave consisting of a combination of basic weaves" or a fabric or garment "having a pattern or design produced by a novelty weave."

to biography informs Novel's association with "realism" as well—Robinson Crusoe and Lazaró de Tormes were believed to be real people, remember—in contrast to Roman, which became "realistic" only after the winnowing down of the fantastic and interminable *romans heroiques* and *romans de chevaliers*.

Roman and Novel can thus be seen to correspond to two seemingly contradictory modes of incompleteness characteristic of the printed novel: seriality (the *roman-fleuve* and the promise of another volume to come), and narrative suspense (what will happen next?) reinforced by the teleology implied by the book's front and back covers (how will it end?). The profound merger these modes would achieve in the modern novel is exemplified in the closing line of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind* (1936): "After all, tomorrow is another day." This line is at once a perfect Benjaminian *Finis* and a cliffhanger designed to arouse the reader's desire for another volume. The end of the novel brings to a close the book's central romantic dilemma (which man will Scarlett choose?) even as it introduces a new dilemma (can Scarlett win Rhett back?) that can serve as the subject for the next novel. Moreover, the fact that it took over fifty years for a continuation to be published to one of the most popular novels of all time (Alexandra Ripley's *Scarlett* was finally released in 1991) speaks to the monumental loss of prestige that the figure of the continuator has undergone over the last several hundred years—a devaluation Cervantes and *Don Quixote* played no small part in, as we shall see.

2.4 The Chivalric Mode of Incompletion

It must be stressed that neither *Amadis de Gaula* nor *Guzman de Alfarache* — the two most popular printed fictions in history when *Don Quixote* first appeared — can be considered “finished,” strictly speaking. This is not to suggest that either of these novels was “unfinishable” so much as that the concept of a “finished novel,” as we would think of it today, simply did not exist. Books appeared in series, and the promise of another volume to come, whether or not one actually intended to write one, was a perfectly respectable means of achieving closure, a trope dating back to antiquity when to “publish” a book meant to give a public reading of it. Indeed, it is a literary device of which Don Quixote himself is quite fond, even in the case of the much-scarred Don Belianís of Greece: “But, for all that, he admired the author for ending that book with the promise to continue that interminable (*inacabable*) adventure, and often the desire seized him to take up the pen himself, and write the promised sequel for him” (*DQ* 32).¹² This sentence testifies not only to the prevalence of this literary trope but also to the growing problems that it had begun to pose in an age of printed books and professional writers. Not only were books like *Belianis* themselves “inacabable” for tasteful readers, they were also capable of provoking idle and impressionable souls like Alonso Quijano, as well as less well-intentioned writers like Avellaneda, to “take up the pen,” an act that could pose serious problems for writers like Cervantes attempting to earn a living by their own pens. For Cervantes in

¹² “Pero, con todo, alababa en su autor aquel acabar su libro con la promesa de aquella inacabable aventura, y muchas veces le vino deseo de tomar la pluma y dalle fin al pie de la letra como allí se promete” (29).

particular, the problems posed by continuators seem to be aesthetic as well as financial in nature. In the prologue to his *Segunda Parte*, for instance—uncharacteristically written in Miguel de Cervantes' own first person, as he owns himself to be the author not only of both parts of the *Quijote* but of *Galatea* (1585) and the “forthcoming” *Persiles y Segismunda* (left unfinished at his death) as well—Cervantes clearly acknowledges one consequence of what Kristeva terms “the carnivalization of the semiotic field,” which is that mercantilist rhetoric can now be used to describe literary quality: “however good things are an abundance brings down the price, and scarcity, even in bad things, confers a certain value” (470).¹³ Quotations like this one demonstrate the degree to which Cervantes' attack on books of chivalry was also an assault on the time-honored task of the continuator, a task that was by no means yet an ignoble one. Indeed, the stay of execution granted to the first four books of *Amadis* in Chapter Six's literary *auto-de-fey* suggests that the *Quijote*'s scorn is directed less at Montalvo's “original” *Amadis* than at those who had “falsely” resurrected him in order to write “endless histories of his adventures” (*inacabables historias de sus hazañas*) (951; 1104).

At the same time, it should be noted that Garci de Montalvo's creation of the “original” *Amadis de Gaula* actually did require a resurrection much like the one Cide Hamete so emphatically forbids at the end of the *Segunda Parte*. In the pre-original, 14th-century, three-part *Amadis* (now lost), Amadis was eventually blinded by pride and beheaded by his son Esplandian (clearly a much more Spanish hero) after

¹³ “la abundancia de las cosas, aunque sean buenas, hace que no se estimen, y la carestía, aun de las malas, se estima en algo” (546).

refusing to ask his name before engaging him in combat. Montalvo, “translating” an older manuscript or manuscripts that were likely in *castellano*, changes the ending so that Amadis marries his beloved Oriana, has a few more adventures, and settles down to become ruler of the Firm Island, the existence of which Montalvo authenticates by inserting it into the beginning of the second book. Amadis agrees to retire because Urganda the Obscure causes a letter to appear telling him that Esplandian’s adventures will eclipse even his and that he had better settle down. Montalvo ends by promising to continue his tale in the forthcoming *Sergas de Esplandian*, the first book that the priest will assign to the flames in Chapter Six of *Don Quixote*.¹⁴

Much to the annoyance of Cervantes, however, Amadis was unable to enjoy his retirement for long. Over the course of the next century, a series of “translators” were able to unearth a rather improbable number of additional “ancient manuscripts” telling of Amadis’ further adventures. Marian Rothstein actually locates the origin of the novel in the French translation and continuation of the *Amadis* series, an avowedly nationalist project that also helped to encourage the reading of romances by making them available for the first time in Roman rather than Gothic print. Rothstein’s claim is particularly persuasive if one views the history of the novel in terms of its function as a technology for national-character building. This French *Amadis*, which includes translations of Spanish continuations like Feliciano de Silva’s

¹⁴ In an interesting historical footnote, the *Sergas* mark the first known appearance of the word “California,” which Montalvo apparently invented to designate a far-away island ruled by a bloodthirsty Amazon Queen, who uses visiting knights for sex before having them killed. Esplandian is thus able to do his part in Spain’s budding colonial enterprise by establishing a Christian patriarchy in California before it even existed.

Amadis of Greece (1530), was eventually stretched to twenty-four volumes, to say nothing of separate German and Italian continuations as well as innumerable imitations.

Again, as Ulrich Langer points out, it would not quite be accurate to say that this courtly romance is “unfinishable” so much as that it

refuses to comply to the demands, formulated very tardily in France in any case, for unity of action or of story. [...] Another, doubtless more determinant reason plays a role in this persistence of the *roman-fleuve*: it is that its structure seems to conform to two Renaissance criteria for agreeable narrative: *copia*, the plenitude, richness, or abundance of discourse, and *varietas*, the variety of its elements.¹⁵

The principles that a story should have an identifiable beginning, middle and ending, and/or that its events should “lead up to” a conclusion, are by no means givens. Although it is widely accepted that many of the “translators” of these romances were guided by humanist poetic principles, it is also clear that Aristotle’s newly rediscovered *Poetics*—with its emphasis on “a single action” as the proper subject/object of poetic discourse—had not yet supplanted reigning Renaissance poetic virtues of *copia* and *varietas*.¹⁶ Moreover, the seemingly random leaps from one narrative strand to another that characterize chivalric romance—so offensive to neo-classical tastes and so often off-putting for today’s readers as well—were likely

¹⁵ “refuse de se plier aux exigences, d’ailleurs formulées très tardivement en France, de l’unité de l’action ou de l’histoire [...] Une autre raison, sans doute plus déterminante, joue dans cette persistance du roman-fleuve: c’est que sa structure semble se conformer à deux critères renaissants de la narration agréable: *copia*, la plenitude, richesse, ou abondance du discours, et *varietas*, la variété de ses éléments” (437-438). My translation.

¹⁶ For more on this, see Rothstein’s seminal study *Reading in the Renaissance* (1999).

themselves a source of suspense for Renaissance audiences. Since questions like “who is going to win?” are largely foreign to the world of Amadis, much of the “novelty” of these books likely consisted precisely in sudden leaps from the narrative strand of Amadis to that of Don Galaor (for instance). The operative mode of incompleteness here is like that of a sitcom: a few formulaic plots are replayed again and again, and the suspense and “novelty” of the work depends almost entirely on how the elements and details of a plot are rearranged in a given instance. This constant reshuffling of the literary deck is reinforced by the name changes these heroes undergo, as Amadis becomes “Beltenebros” or “the Knight of the Dwarf” for a hundred pages or so, presumably to keep his readers and listeners from getting bored.

Thus, however shocking some humanist critics seemed to find them, the strange and chaotic poetic principles on which these books of chivalry were based did not appear to bother their consumers. For further evidence of this, one need only look to Chapter 32 of the first part of the *Quijote*, which stages an argument between the priest, an (illiterate) innkeeper, and the various listeners at the inn who all offer their respective reasons for valuing or devaluing these books of chivalry: a conversation from which we can clearly discern “that all those listeners are oblivious to the totality of the work” (Godzich & Spadaccini 89).¹⁷ The totality of a book like *Amadis de Gaula*, itself presumably much different from the totality of the now lost oral ballads on which it is based, is neither neo-classical (organic unity) nor encyclopedic (incorporating a wide range of viewpoints and discourses). Moreover, since *Amadis*

¹⁷ Godzich and Spadaccini offer a much more in-depth reading of this scene than I am able to give here.

exists in so many volumes, the “book” as a whole cannot even rely on that most meager of unities assured by all front and back covers.

At the same time, the struggle for a more “historical” or church-sanctioned unity can frequently be felt within *Amadis* itself in its many moralizing digressions, which serve to explain and connect the books’ events via the structuring force of a moral-theological causality. This notion of moral causality (i.e., that knights win battles not because they are stronger than their opponent but because they are more honest, chaste, etc.) is likely responsible for the constant interventions of “jealous enchanters” who become necessary if the virtuous and therefore invincible hero is to suffer any misfortunes at all.¹⁸ Cervantes’ decision to attribute his book to an Arab author was likely motivated at least in part by a perceived need to justify the lack of moralizing digressions in his own “true history,” since audiences expected (and apparently enjoyed) such sermons not only in books of chivalry but in picaresque narratives as well.

Indeed, the structuring force of such moralizing digressions is nowhere more pronounced than in *Guzman de Alfarache*, a work whose once-staggering popularity definitely ties it to a time when sermons were still considered a form of public entertainment. It is notable that Alemán’s digressions, in contrast to those of Rabelais and Sterne discussed in our previous chapter, actually serve a conservative and centrifugal function, informing the reader how the story should be read and what

¹⁸ It should be noted that this sort of moral causality determined the structure not merely of books of chivalry but also of history in general, a Christian enterprise primarily dedicated to revealing how the will of God had been realized in the course of human events.

moral should be drawn from it. These digressions play a particularly crucial role in *Guzman*'s second part, as Alemán must constantly assert the moral and literary superiority of his own pen to that of his rival continuator, much as Cervantes would be forced to do a decade later. Unlike Cervantes, however, Alemán was unable to kill off his own protagonist due to the laws of first-person narration. As we shall see, this inability of first-person narrators like Lázaro de Tormes and Guzman de Alfarache to “finish” the stories of their lives actually had profound consequences for the histories of the texts that bear their names.

2.5 The Picaresque Mode of Incompletion

At this point one is entitled to ask: when, where and why in this our age of mechanical reproduction did this strange new demand for endings arise? Or, put another way: how did the vital and positive modes of incompletion discussed in our previous chapter, epitomized in Rabelais but still observable in the chivalric romances to some extent, come to be perceived as problematic? One answer to this question can be found in the rediscovery and neoclassical enshrinement of the first half of Aristotle's *Poetics*. Ulrich Langer, studying the shift from the “roman courtois” to the “roman baroque” in terms of the changing conception of an ending in France in the 1550s, emphasizes the importance of Aristotle's *Poetics* in arguing that the “sentimental novel of Denisot thus responds *to the outline* for a new poetics of the novel, calculated not according to the chronicles and endless series of adventures

(*perpetua rerum gestarum historia*), but on the principle of the *fini*.”¹⁹ In the case of the *Quijote*, the Aristotelian opinions of the Canon, as well as a few direct references to the Philosopher himself, suggest that Cervantes was familiar with the newly available text, although whether and to what extent the Canon is an object of ridicule is unclear. As to whether neoclassicism’s unprecedented espousal of wholeness and unity being inspired by the discovery of **half** a text has genuine critico-historical significance or is “merely” ironic: let the reader decide.

For the purposes of my own project, the best answer to the question of how the need for endings arose can be found precisely in Cervantes’ *Segunda Parte* and its success as both a *coup de grace* to books of chivalry in general (the last of which was actually published in 1604) and a specific literary riposte to Avellaneda’s *Segundo Tomo*, two roles in which it was so successful that it left the once proud title of continuator tarnished forever, perhaps even justifying Cide Hamete’s closing boast:

and I shall be proud and satisfied to have been the first author to enjoy the pleasure of witnessing the full effect of his own writing. For my sole object has been to arouse men’s contempt for all fabulous and absurd stories of knight errantry, whose credit this tale of my genuine Don Quixote has already shaken, and which will, without a doubt, soon tumble to the ground. (940)²⁰

¹⁹ “roman sentimental de Denisot répond donc à l’esquisse d’une nouvelle poétique du roman, calquée non sur les chroniques et la succession sans fin de l’aventure (*perpetua rerum gestarum historia*), mais sur le principe du *fini*” (Langer 445). My translation.

²⁰ “y yo quedaré satisfecho y ufano de haber sido el primero que gozó el fruto de sus escritos enteramente, como deseaba, pues no ha sido otro mi deseo que poner en aborrecimiento de los hombres las fingidas y disparatadas historias de los libros de caballerías, que por las de mi verdadero don Quijote van ya tropezando y han de caer del todo sin duda alguna” (1106).

To set the stage for the epically consequential authorial battle fought over *Don Quixote*, let us briefly recount the textual histories of *Lazarillo de Tormes* and *Guzman de Alfarache* in order to illustrate how and why the intimately related problems of literary closure and authorial property were achieving new heights of problematicity even as Cervantes was beginning work on his revolutionary “historia verdad.”

The anonymous *La vida de Lazarillo de Tormes, y de sus fortunas y adversidades* first appeared in 1553 or 1554 and, like *Robinson Crusoe*, was by all accounts widely accepted as a true story. Francisco Rico actually asserts that “*Lazarillo* is not an anonymous work by an unknown pen but rather apocryphal, attributed to a false author, Lázaro de Tormes” (Rico 149). *Lazarillo* offers a first-person account of the life of a cuckolded town crier and his brutal road to adulthood, and is considered revolutionary for its realistic portrayal of a lower-class existence. In 1555 a new edition of *Lazarillo* appeared, this time “complete” with a *Segunda Parte* in which Lázaro tells of his transformation into a fish and his adventures in an underwater kingdom, allowing its likewise anonymous author to direct satirical jabs at the ruling classes via the ancient tradition of animal allegory. Although this sequel is rarely read today and has been historically vilified for its alleged abandonment of its predecessor’s realism, Reyes Coll-Tellechea claims that the addition of this *Segunda Parte* was directly responsible for both parts of *Lazarillo* being placed on the Inquisition’s *Index* of 1559, since it was only in the *Segunda Parte* that

the story of Lázaro had taken a turn toward political criticism of the court, which the Spanish authorities could not tolerate. The inquisitors realized that

the circulation of the two parts of the novel highlighted certain antinobiliary tones already present in the 1554 text. That is to say, reading the *Segunda Parte* alerted the inquisitors to the political heterodoxies already present in the 1554 text. (78)²¹

Coll-Tellechea highlights the fact that the Inquisition not only took the first part of *Lazarillo* off the Index in 1573 but *actively re-released* it the same year in a *castigado* version edited by Juan López de Velasco, who added nothing new to the text but stripped it of its two most virulently anti-clerical chapters as well as of most first-person satirical reflections by Lázaro on his “social betters.” By doing this, the powers-that-be were able to reinforce the ban on *Lazarillo*’s politically subversive *Segunda Parte* while simultaneously co-opting the still-popular “original” text by redirecting its satire against its own narrator, now no longer the source of the book’s satiric reflection so much as the occasion for it. In 1603, this *Lazarillo Castigado* would attain its widest circulation yet as “an appendix to a Spanish translation of an Italian courtesy manual, *El Galatea*,” leading Seth McDaniel to claim “that the original readership for the picaresque was a specifically courtly one” (McDaniel 52), concerned above all with acquiring strategies and techniques for social advancement (how to lie, cheat, etc.). According to the editors of *The Lazarillo Phenomenon*, the 1555 and 1573 *Lazarillos* can thus be read as two distinct readings of the 1554 text, with each adapting it to its own political and ideological purposes.

²¹ Since I do not have the space to do it full justice, allow me here to express my admiration for Coll-Tellechea and McDaniel’s essay collection *The Lazarillo Phenomenon* (2010), which represents in my opinion a shining example of how the “unfinishedness” of a text can be made critically productive, in this case via a “sociological” approach that rejects long-fruitless attempts to reconstruct an “original” text in favor of attempting to track the various influences and effects produced by the texts actually available to us.

In any case, Lazaró-Lazarillo was clearly not a literary character in the sense of being the private property of his author. Rather, he seems to have functioned as a folk character, or as the common property of folk storytellers, church dogmatists and humanist satirists alike. Thus, even if Juan de Luna, the political exile who penned a “second” *segunda parte* to *Lazarillo de Tormes* from Paris in 1620, had somehow been able to force Lázaro to tell the story of his own death—as he jokingly promises to do, telling his reader to await “la Tercera Parte con la muerte y testamento de Lazarillo, que es lo mejor de todo” (7)—there would have been nothing to prevent some other continuator from raising *Lázaro* from the dead again or even from telling the story of his death again, in an alternate version. Yet the inability of Lázaro the first-person narrator to “finish” the story of his life does not appear to have been a problem either for Luna or for the understandably anonymous author(s) of the first and (original) second parts. Rather, it appears to have become a problem for aristocracy, church and state *circa* 1559, a problem that they dealt with first by banning and later by re-issuing *Lazarillo*.

The difficulties of overcoming the picaresque mode of incompleteness would prove even more frustrating for Mateo Alemán, whose struggles to translate his literary success into a financial one provoked a far more bitter and personal battle than the one fought over *Lazarillo*. The first *Guzman*, published in 1599, became almost instantly the most successful book in Spanish history and would later rival the *Quijote* for some time. As most of its editions were pirated, however, the most tangible benefit that Alemán seems to have derived from its authorship was his use of

500 copies of his book to buy his way out of debtor's prison in 1603. To make matters worse, a continuation to *Guzman* had appeared in 1602 (while Alemán was busy fleeing his creditors) under the name "Mateo Luján de Sayavedra." Alemán would later identify its author as Juan Martí,

an obscure Valencian lawyer... about whose life little is known. Alemán declares that Martí plagiarized his completed manuscript for Part II, and that he consequently had to rewrite his authentic continuation, in order to make it different from the fraudulent work. It seems more likely, however, that Martí knew only the general outline of part of Alemán's book, which was probably still incomplete at the time Martí commenced his writing. (McGrady 26)

While we may never know the full story behind Martí's continuation, we do have ample evidence of the literary revenge Alemán took on him, most notably by introducing a surrogate character named "Sayavedra" who is made to flamboyantly repent for his unoriginal sins before hurling himself into the sea.

Alemán published his own continuation to *Guzman de Alfarache* in 1604, with its new subtitle "Atalaya de la vida humana" calling attention to its moral purpose and the towering literary superiority of its own author. In his prologue, Alemán accuses Martí of perverting his own true intention by cutting

the thread before the web were woven; contrary to that which is pretended in this Historie of his Life; which was only to serve as a sentinell, to discover all sorts of Vices, and to draw treacle out of divers poysons: That is to say; To describe unto you a man, perfect in his parts and person, punished with troubles, and afflicted with miseries, and falling afterwards into the basest roguerie, is put into the Gallies, where his wings were clipt, that he could not get thence in haste. (III, 5)²²

²² "el hilo a la tela de lo que con su vida en esta historia se pretende. Que sólo es descubrir como atalaya toda suerte de vicios y hacer atraca de venenos varios un hombre perfecto, castigado de trabajos y miserias, después de haber bajado a la más ínfima de todas, puesto en galera por curullero della" (185).

Alemán goes on to make the rather unconvincing claim that he has already completed a third part, which he will offer to his public “muy en breve” (185). While Alemán does manage to achieve a redemptive closure of sorts to his own *Segunda Parte*, as Guzman is granted his freedom after betraying his fellow galley slaves and foiling their attempt to seize the ship, without the promised third part it remains open to question whether Guzman’s “conversion” is sincere or not, and one could easily claim that all Guzman’s actions are guided solely by his personal desire for liberty.²³ Alemán’s attempt to transition from autobiography to hagiography is thus ultimately unsuccessful, in large part because Guzman—“nuestro picaro”—does not like Augustine have the title of Saint to lend credence to his tale of conversion.

Francisco de Quevedo seems to have been acutely aware of this picaresque dilemma—i.e., an unreliable narrator’s inability to suddenly and/or convincingly become reliable and virtuous over the course of his narrative—in writing *El Buscón*. Quevedo’s skepticism regarding the moral utility of such books is evidenced by the fact that he successfully prevented the publication of his own manuscript (thought to have been completed by 1608) until 1626, and that after its publication he went so far as to denounce his own book to the Inquisition, a move that may have been designed to thwart potential continuators as well as to take revenge on his unsolicited publishers. In stark contrast to Alemán, Quevedo noticeably strips his protagonist Don Pablo of all redeeming virtues, and ends his book not with any tale of conversion but simply with Don Pablo leaving for the New World, where, we are told, things get

²³ Cf. Joan Arias’ *Guzman de Alfarache: The Unrepentant Narrator* (1977).

worse rather than better: “as they always will for anybody who thinks he only has to move his dwelling without changing his life and ways” (*como v. m. verá en la segunda parte, pues nunca mejora su estado quien muda solamente de lugar, y no de vida y costumbres*) (214; 176, my bold).²⁴

Cervantes directly dramatizes the problematic of the picaresque mode in the first Gines de Pasamonte episode of the *Quijote*, where the errant *hidalgo* questions the shackled *picaro* about his book, an autobiography Gines claims is so great that it will put to shame “*Lazarillo de Tormes*” along with “everything in that style that has ever been written or ever will be” (*para todos cuantos de aquel género*):

“And what is the title of the book?” asked Don Quixote,
“*The Life of Gines de Pasamonte*,” replied that hero.
“Is it finished?” asked Don Quixote.
“How can it be finished,” replied the other, “if my life isn’t? What is written begins with my birth and goes down to the point where I was sent to the galleys this last time.” (176-177)²⁵

In this passage, Cervantes clearly and humorously articulates the twofold problematic of the picaresque mode of incompleteness: 1) the narrator’s inability to “end” the story of his life, and 2) the audience’s inability to credit the moral exemplarity of a life still being lived, as seen by the fact that Gines is on his way back to the galleys (consider

²⁴ Perhaps understandably, the English translator chooses here to leave out the promise of a second part, to which the Spanish edition attaches a footnote informing the reader that Quevedo never intended to write a second part and is only alluding to the classical trope of ending with the promise of another volume.

²⁵ —Y cómo se intitula el libro?—preguntó don Quijote.
—*La vida de Ginés de Pasamonte*—respondió el mismo.
—Y está acabado?—preguntó don Quijote.
—Cómo puede estar acabado—respondió él—, si aún no está acabada mi vida? Lo que está escrito es desde mi nacimiento hasta el punto que esta última vez me han echado en galeras” (206).

no man moral til he dies). Interestingly, this passage seems to judge the autobiography of Pasamonte (a real-life personage whom Cervantes had met in prison) under the rubric of Cervantes' own aesthetic standards of originality and "verdad," and even seems to mockingly acknowledge Pasamonte's book as an improvement over *Lazarillo* since it is based on the truthful bedrock of Pasamonte's genuinely picaresque life.

At the same time, one could argue that the satire in this passage is directed not only against the "real" Gines de Pasamonte but also against the unnamed Mateo Alemán who, much like Cervantes' Pasamonte, had used his book to buy his way out of prison. Moreover, the very fact that Alemán is not mentioned could be read as an insinuation that Alemán's book is not as original as he would like us to think, since he was in fact only following in the generic footsteps of *Lazarillo* (*de aquel género*). This relatively unprecedented emphasis on originality, which is found in Alemán's work as well, is essential to understanding the stakes of the battle between Cervantes and his own continuator Avellaneda, whose true identity Cervantes (in contrast to Alemán) never discloses, and seems never to have discovered for certain.²⁶ The fact that neither Martí nor Avellaneda appears to have profited much financially from his

²⁶At present, a popular choice for the identity of Avellaneda is in fact Gines de Pasamonte. For this argument, as well as a thorough survey of the long list of candidates that have been offered in the past, see Martín de Riquer's *Cervantes, Pasamonte y Avellaneda* (1988). Riquer believes that Cervantes was "almost sure" that Pasamonte was the culprit, and points to inserted episodes like the theft of Sancho's ass as "clues" left by Cervantes. Although I am neither particularly concerned with the true identity of Avellaneda nor fully convinced that the *Segundo Tomo* was the work of a single writer, I will say that for my part I tend to favor James Iffland's characterization of the continuator as likely an aspiring writer of Quevedo's generation from the lower nobility (see *Fiestas y Aguafiestas* pp. 582-84).

efforts makes these cases even more exemplary in terms of signaling a shift in the concept of literary originality itself, from the courtly virtues of *imitatio* towards a more proprietary (bourgeois) standard of authenticity, now (re)conceived in terms of priority, uniqueness and ownership, or what I will be calling proprietary originality.

2.6 The Battle for the *Quijote*: *Segundo Tomo* vs. *Segunda Parte*

It took nine years for a sequel to *Don Quixote* to appear. Cervantes seems to have had an incredibly difficult time deciding how to end his book, and his first publication after *Don Quixote* was actually his *Novelas Ejemplares* (1613). Given the conditions of authorship at the time, then, Cervantes could not have been too shocked to learn of the publication in 1614 of a *Segundo Tomo* to *Don Quixote* by one Alonso Fernández de Avellaneda, the pseudonym of an apparently Aragonese writer who insinuates in his prologue that he is Lope de Vega. This continuation picks up a year after the end of Cervantes' book, and follows the course promised by Cervantes by taking Don Quixote to the jousts at Saragossa. Avellaneda's *Segundo Tomo* also follows the lead of Cervantes' first volume by offering itself as "la quinta parte" of Don Quixote's adventures, and it leaves off at the end of its seventh part with Don Quixote confined in an insane asylum, awaiting his deliverance at the hands of some other continuator.

Avellaneda's book is certainly well written and even quite funny, though its shift in satiric focus is reminiscent of the *Lazarillo Castigado*. Don Quixote himself is not so greatly changed—indeed, the Don Quixote of Cervantes' *Segunda Parte* seems

at least as different from the original *hidalgo* as Avellaneda's Quixote is, although the change is certainly in a different direction—but Sancho is unrecognizably reduced to a crude stupid glutton whose sole redeeming virtue seems to be the endless mirth he provides his social betters. Another notable difference is Avellaneda's wholehearted endorsement of the very anachronistic knightly culture that the ex-soldier Cervantes seems genuinely concerned with denouncing. The tournament at Saragossa is full of "real" knights and other characters who would not be out of place in a traditional book of chivalry, and everyone save the Don and Sancho is in on the joke of the mad knight's participation. Don Álvaro Tarfe, the Avellaneda-figure who manipulates Don Quixote throughout the book and whom Cervantes brings into his own *Segunda Parte*, not only gives Don Quixote a real suit of armor but convinces a Judge to rig the ring-lancing competition so that Don Quixote can win and everyone can be amused by his insanity. The narrator claims that it "is not unusual on such festive occasions for the knights to bring lunatics into the plaza, dressed up and adorned, wearing fanciful headdresses, and have them do tricks, tilt, joust, and carry off prizes, as has been seen sometimes in big cities and in Zaragoza itself" (95).

Moreover, it seems obvious that Don Álvaro's manipulations of Don Quixote—bringing him to the jousts, placing him in an asylum, etc.—are meant to be read at least on some level as meta-fictional echoes of Avellaneda's own manipulations of Cervantes, whom the continuator freely invites to "complain about my work because of the profits I take away from his second part. At least he cannot refuse to admit that we have but one aim, which is to banish the harmful lesson of the

inane books of chivalry so common-place among rustics and idle people” (3). Unlike in Cervantes’ book, however, where the hero is constantly alternating between wisdom and madness and it is the ridiculous chivalric ideal that is truly mad, Avellaneda creates a sharp division between the characters who are meant to be objects of ridicule and those who are not. In other words, it is always apparent which Don the reader is meant to be laughing with (Álvaro) and which Don the reader is meant to be laughing at (Quixote).

Following in the footsteps of *The Lazarillo Phenomenon*, one might well read Avellaneda’s *Segundo Tomo* and Cervantes’ *Segunda Parte* as two different readings of the 1605 text *El ingenioso hidalgo don Quijote de la Mancha*. Avellaneda declares:

Let nobody complain because printing of such books is permitted, for this one does not teach lewdness but rather not to be crazy. When so many *Celestinas*, mother and daughter, are now permitted to roam about the public squares, a Don Quixote and a Sancho Panza may well be allowed into the fields, for they were never known to have any vice: rather, they had the commendable desire to right injustices done to orphaned girls, undo wrongs, etc. (5)

Avellaneda believes that Cervantes’ duo is more worthy of a continuator’s attention than *Celestina* because the Don and Sancho are not only instructive through their madness and stupidity but are also good hearted. Clearly, Avellaneda is trying to cast Don Quixote and Sancho in the folkloric mold of Lazaró de Tormes: as characters they belong to the public literary domain, and it should not matter if Avellaneda’s sequel “varies somewhat from [Cervantes’] First Part because my disposition differs from his, and *in matters of opinion about anything historical, and as authentic as this is, each can strike out in the direction he pleases*” (5; my emphasis). Avellaneda portrays his task as filling out the Manchegan archives posited by Cervantes, and

invents his own Arabic historian (Alisolán) who—although only mentioned once—could well have paved the way for future continuators to invent further “true histories” by other fictional sages, as was the case with Amadis.

The fact that this did not happen, despite the popularity of Avellaneda’s sequel, speaks to the success of Cervantes’ *Segunda Parte* as both a specific response to Avellaneda and a parodic literary overcoming of the continuator-friendly chivalric mode of incompleteness. From a contemporary vantage point, with *El Quijote* so implacably entrenched atop the Western canon, it is difficult to appreciate the magnitude of the battle being fought in the *Segunda Parte*. As this chapter has hopefully shown, however, the possibility that Cervantes’ *Don Quixote* might have suffered a fate similar to that of *Amadis* or *Lazarillo* was quite real.

Moreover, leading scholars on the Avellaneda question have suggested that the conflict over the *Quijote* was as much about the ideological orientation of the work as about Cervantes’ “ownership” of its two main characters. If one credits James Iffland’s argument (as I believe we should) that Avellaneda was “a good reader” of Cervantes rather than “a bumbling *epigone*,” one might also agree that Avellaneda:

realizes perfectly well that the better part of that potentially unsettling message [of the 1605 *Quijote*] is transmitted not by means of direct messages, but through the very mechanisms of comicality of the work. He intuits that the dynamics of reversibility which lie at the heart of Don Quijote, that “lococuerdo,” and Sancho Panza, that “tonto-listo,” produce a disquieting, even liberating, variety of laughter [...] He perceives the latent destabilizing power of our duo’s physical mobility and its links to the desire for *social* mobility. Finally, he perceives the profound and provocative ambivalence that marks the specific variety of our *hidalgo*’s madness, which serves as the driving force of the entire work.

And having read well, and feeling especially irked by the slippery nature of all these unsettling elements, Avellaneda decides to put together his counter-offensive. But he does so by fighting on the same terrain occupied by his opponent, that is, within the parameters of the comic. By means of his own particular mobilization of the comic and laughter, methodically controlled from the top downwards by aristocratic characters, he will strive—whether consciously or unconsciously—to neutralize or rechannel all those worrying currents pointed out above so as to engender a work which will embody an ideology much closer to his own. (“Do We Really Need to Read Avellaneda?” 75)

I offer this quote at length not only because I think it provides an excellent account of the ideological stakes involved in Avellaneda’s attack on Cervantes’ book, but also because it highlights some of the qualities of the *Quijote* that Cervantes explicitly seeks to recover and even accentuate in his *Segunda Parte*.

Cervantes’ response to Avellaneda in the *Segunda Parte* takes place on several levels. Most obvious are the many direct references and jibes made at the supposedly Tordesillan author’s expense, the most famous of which is Cervantes’ comparison of Avellaneda to a “dog-inflater” in his prologue, which is largely devoted to answering Avellaneda. Elias Rivers describes this prologue as “strangely disconcerting” and even “somewhat disappointing,” since it seems mainly concerned with “creating an aggressively defensive image of [Cervantes] as an injured author, with the reader maneuvered into the position of referee” (170-171). While one assumes Rivers’ disappointment here springs from the prologue’s blatant disregard for the timelessness one expects from a literary classic, one might also find in the “strangely disconcerting” vehemence of Cervantes’ “defense” additional evidence of just how unlikely *Don Quixote*’s canonization must have seemed at the time. One

should also remember that slinging mud at one's literary rivals was a thriving and well-established literary genre in its own right.²⁷

After the prologue, there is no mention of Avellaneda until Chapter 59, where Cervantes actually incorporates a copy of the *Segundo Tomo* into his own sequel. This allows a variety of characters to denounce the book, with Altisidora even describing a vision in which the book is being lambasted and used as a tennis ball by devils at the gates of Hell. And, of course, there is Cervantes' abduction of Avellaneda's Don Álvaro Tarfe in Chapter 72, where the befuddled nobleman is easily persuaded to sign an affidavit stating that he

did not know Don Quixote de la Mancha, also there present, and that it was not he who was written of in a history entitled *The Second Part of the Exploits of Don Quijote de la Mancha*, composed by a certain Avellaneda, native of Tordesillas. [...] The declaration was made judicially to the great satisfaction of Don Quixote and Sancho, as if such a declaration were of great importance to them, and the acts and the deeds of the two Don Quixotes and the two Sanchos did not clearly show the difference between them. Many civilities and offers of service passed between Don Alvaro and Don Quixote, in which the great Manchegan showed so much good sense that Don Alvaro Tarfe was convinced he had been deceived. He even suspected that he must have been enchanted, since he had touched two such different Don Quixotes with his own hands. (*DQ* 928-29)²⁸

²⁷ And, after all, Avellaneda does make fun of Cervantes' war wound (Avellaneda 3)!

²⁸ “no conocía a don Quijote de la Mancha, que asimismo estaba allí presente, y que no era aquel que andaba impreso en una historia intitulada *Segunda parte de la don Quijote de la Mancha*, compuesta por un tal de Avellaneda, natural de Tordesillas. [...] la declaración se hizo con todas las fuerzas que en tales casos debían hacerse, con lo que quedaron don Quijote y Sancho muy alegres, como si les importara mucho semejante declaración y no mostrara claro la diferencia de los dos don Quijotes y la de los dos Sanchos sus obras y sus palabras. Muchas de cortesías y ofrecimientos pasaron entre don Álvaro y don Quijote, en las cuales mostró el gran manchego su discreción, de modo que desengañó a don Álvaro Tarfe del error en que estaba; el cual se dio a entender que debía de estar encantado, pues tocaba con la mano dos tan contrarios don Quijotes” (1092).

Passages like this one illustrate not only the great annoyance that Avellaneda's *Tomo* must have caused Cervantes and his characters, but also the undeniable fecundity of the new source material that Cervantes suddenly found himself provided with, allowing him to complicate even further his book's meditation on the difference between "true" and "false" histories. By introducing but keeping offstage a "false" Don Quixote, Cervantes complicates the meaning of his own "true history"—the truth of which now rests not only on its "real world" setting and its inclusion of down-to-earth details about sleeping arrangements, defecation, etc., but also on its claim that there is only **one** "true" Don Quixote, and that his story can only be told by one author (Cide Hamete).²⁹ Thus, though Vladimir Nabokov bemoans "the chance Cervantes missed" to have the true Don Quixote defeat the false one in a joust (Nabokov 81), the more legalistic victory that Don Quixote and Sancho achieve over their doppelgangers in the passage above is arguably much more profound and unquestionably more in keeping with the central themes and problematics of Cervantes' book.³⁰

While any reader of the *Quijote* can observe the influence of Avellaneda in the direct comments and explicit subplots pointed to above, the *Segunda Parte* is also filled with more subtle responses that seem aimed exclusively at readers of

²⁹ This has even led to the suggestion that Cervantes wrote the *Segundo Tomo* himself (cf. R. Martínez Unciti's *Avellaneda es Cervantes* [1915]), a suggestion that would seem to tell us more about the history of the author-function than it does about the *Quijote*.

³⁰ Indeed, it is tempting to suggest that Nabokov's suggestion sounds like what Avellaneda would likely have done, had his and Cervantes' positions been reversed.

Avellaneda's version. Although Don Quixote himself declares that he will not read the spurious sequel, several episodes suggest that Cervantes had read it quite thoroughly. Without offering an exhaustive list, it should suffice to point to an episode in Chapter 69 in which Don Quixote and Sancho are spirited back to the castle of the Duke and Duchess in order to take part in an elaborate farce, similar to several scenes in Avellaneda in which our heroes are victims of similar pranks.³¹ Whereas in Avellaneda's version Sancho has a shirt with painted devils placed upon him and acts as if he is really being attacked, in Cervantes' text a devil-covered *mitre* is placed on Sancho (together with a shirt painted with flames), in response to which

Sancho surveyed himself from head to foot and saw that he was ablaze with flames, but as they did not burn him he did not care two pins for them. He took off the mitre and saw that it was painted with devils. Then he put it on again, saying to himself: 'Well, well, the flames don't burn and the devils don't carry me off.' (DQ 910)³²

Here, Cervantes reinforces the very different character of the "true" Sancho against his "false" double, while also showing that he can compete with Avellaneda in his own mini-genre of elaborate theatrical tricks played by aristocrats on madmen. Indeed, given the abundance of such scenes in Avellaneda's book and the previously posited ideological divide between it and Cervantes' text, one might well read as Avellaneda-inspired Cide Hamete's remark as Don Quixote and Sancho are leaving

³¹ Those desiring an exhaustive list should go to Iffland's *De fiestas y aguafiestas. Risa, locura e ideología en Cervantes y Avellaneda* (1999), which offers the most thorough and comprehensive treatment to date of the relationship between the 1605 *Quijote*, the *Segundo Tomo*, and the *Segunda Parte*.

³² "Mirábase Sancho de arriba abajo, veíase ardiendo en llamas, pero como no le quemaban no las estimaba en dos ardites. Quitose la coraza, viola pintada de diablos; volviósela a poner, diciendo entre sí: —Aun bien que ni ellas me abrasan ni ellos me llevan" (1071).

the castle of the Duke, that he “considers the mockers were as mad as the victims, and the Duke and Duchess within a hair’s breadth of appearing fools themselves for taking such pains to play tricks on a pair of fools” (916).³³

While the influence of Avellaneda is more or less indisputable in the examples noted above, there are also some greyer areas regarding the influence of the *Segundo Tomo* on three essential developments in Cervantes’ *Segunda Parte*. These are:

1) the immense character changes that Cervantes’ protagonists, particularly Sancho Panza, undergo over the course of the book,

2) the increasing investment in the figure of Cide Hamete Benengeli, who plays a much larger role in the *Segunda Parte* than in the 1605 *Quijote*, and, finally

3) Cervantes’ ultimate decision to end his book by killing Don Quixote.

As to 1), it is certainly debatable to what extent the more sophisticated character development of the *Segunda Parte* should be attributed to Avellaneda’s depiction of its main characters as incapable of any development whatsoever. Personally, I do not think we need Avellaneda to explain the maturation Sancho undergoes over the course of the *Segunda Parte*, which is in many ways the primary storyline of the book. At the same time, I agree with Iffland that it is a mistake to assume that all the changes Cervantes made in response to the *Segundo Tomo* can be found in or after Chapter 59. There are a number of speeches throughout the *Segunda Parte* (such as Don Antonio’s in Chapter 27) devoted to emphasizing and clarifying Don Quixote

³³ “tiene para sí ser tan locos los burladores y que no estaban los duques dos dedos de parecer tontos, pues tanto ahínco ponían en burlarse de dos tontos” (1077).

and Sancho Panza's respective statuses as *loco-cuerdo* and *tonto-listo*, speeches that could certainly have been inserted at a later date.

The final word on the distinction between Cervantes' Sancho and Avellaneda's, however, seems to be given to Don Álvaro Tarfe, who responds thusly to Sancho's claim that he is the "real" Sancho:

By God, I believe you [...] for you've said more good things in the four sentences I've heard you utter than the other Sancho Panza in all I heard him say, which was a great deal. He was more of a guzzler than a wit. In fact there's no doubt in my mind that the enchanters who persecute Don Quixote the Good have been trying to persecute me with Don Quixote the Bad. (927)³⁴

Besides clarifying once and for all the distinction between his Sancho and Avellaneda's, Cervantes in this passage pulls Don Álvaro into the same realm of madness and enchantment in which his own protagonists operate. Rather than orchestrating elaborate "enchantments" as jokes to play on the Don and Sancho, Don Álvaro now finds that the joke is on him as he has been drawn into their world of manipulation and "persecution."

This growing power of the enchanters who persecute Don Quixote—at first they affect only him, but gradually they are invoked by a variety of characters to explain a variety of situations—parallels Cervantes' increasing investment in his own author-figure Cide Hamete Benengeli, who is of course the primary "enchanter" of the text. The book plays on this homology of author and enchanter from the

³⁴ "-Por Dios que lo creo [...] porque más gracias habéis dicho vos, amigo, en cuatro razones que habéis hablado que el otro Sancho Panza en cuantas yo le oí hablar, que fueron muchas! Más tenía de comilón que de bien hablado, y más de tonto que de gracioso, y tengo por sin duda que los encantadores que persiguen a don Quijote el bueno han querido perseguirme a mí con don Quijote el malo" (1091).

beginning of the *Segunda Parte*, when the Don and Sancho are shocked to discover, only a month after returning from their first sally, a copy of the their adventures, written by Cide Hamete Benengeli.

The increasing tendency in the *Segunda Parte* to blame things on enchanters can thus be read as an increasing assertion of the author's presence and importance, no longer as a far-removed *auctoritas* whose wisdom can only be meted out through translation, but as an active manipulator (if not quite owner) of his characters. Only this kind of author is capable of producing a "true history," since only he is aware of the "true" psychology of his characters and the "true" details of their lives (because he invents both). Not only, Cide Hamete claims, are Avellaneda's pair a poor imitation of his own (i.e., Avellaneda's portrayal is psychologically false), but this false historian also makes many assertions that are factually incorrect within the fictional world that Cide Hamete has created. Avellaneda does not know the "true" name of Theresa Panza or Alonso Quijano, and so the characters he is writing about must be different, especially since the "real" Don Quixote makes it a point never to go to Saragossa once he hears that he had been preceded there by his false shadow. To be able to make this decision, however, Don Quixote must encounter Avellaneda's book... which he does, thanks to the intervention of the "jealous enchanter" watching over him.

2.7 Cervantes and the Invention of Proprietary Originality

It is fascinating to speculate that all of these literary pyrotechnics might never have occurred if Cervantes had simply had the intellectual property rights to his characters. Contemporary Spanish law afforded two options to a writer who had finished a book and wished to publish it: he could either sell it to a printer outright, usually for a marginal amount, or claim half the volumes produced by the first printing. In either case, the “author’s rights” (not yet an operative concept in any case) did not extend beyond the first printing of the book, after which the printer was no longer required to requite the writer. Once a book had been published, other licensed printers were free to print their own copies, and even outright “piracy” was rarely punished so long as it did not involve books that had been placed on the Index. Indeed, the case of Quevedo and *El Buscon*, illegally “pirated” from him even by the standards of the time, suggests that it was easier (or at least more effective) to appeal to the Inquisition than it would have been to take whatever legal recourse was then available.

Since England (following the lead of Venice) was the nation where modern notions of literary copyright and intellectual property were formulated earliest and most rigorously, this seems like a good place to make a brief digression into the history of English copyright. Mark Rose’s *Authors and Owners: The Invention of Copyright* (1993) presents this history more-or-less in terms of the liberation of the writing subject, with English Law progressing from an oppressive “marriage” of “censorship and trade regulation” (Rose 13) put in place by the Stationer’s Act of

1557—which gave the Stationer’s Company the right to sell all printing rights as well as the responsibility of deciding what was “fit to print”—towards the eventual “divorce of copyright from censorship” (48) with the passage of the “Copyright Act of 1710,” which established the author for the first time as “a legally empowered figure in the marketplace” (4).³⁵ Jody Greene’s *The Trouble with Ownership* (2005) takes issue with some of this commonly accepted liberal historiography and offers in its place what she terms a “paranoid theory of copyright”: “Scholars of the book,” says Greene, “have failed to acknowledge what all early modern commentators on the topic, whatever their political stripe, took for granted: that ‘owning’ one’s book was synonymous with owning up to it, and that literary property was thus inseparable from regulation” (Greene 4). Far from marking a “divorce” of copyright and censorship, Greene argues, “by holding out the incentive of literary property and its attendant benefits, the Act of Anne succeeded—as 150 years of legislation and royal prerogative had not—in luring authors into owning their part in what was still, in 1710, a surprisingly risky business” (6).

The Trouble with Ownership also demonstrates some potential consequences of describing the lives of authors in terms of the lives of heroes (to paraphrase Foucault). Not only do literary histories “tyrannically centered on the author” (“Death of the Author” 50) obscure the vital roles played by a wider community of printers,

³⁵ Although “Copyright Act of 1710” is commonly used today, it is “something of a misnomer, since the term *copyright* was virtually unknown when the act came into being” (Greene 220). Legally titled *8 Anne c. 21* (or “The Act of Anne”, as Greene refers to it), at the time it was formally known as “The Act for the Encouragement of Learning.”

book-sellers, and co-authors, they can also work at times to obscure the actual historical impact that actual historical authors may have had. The notion of the inseparability of rights and responsibility regarding literary property, for instance, was articulated at length by Daniel Defoe in his 1704 “An Essay on the Regulation of the Press” in which he claims that it would “be unaccountably severe to make a Man answerable for the Miscarriages of a thing which he shall not reap the benefit of” (Qtd. in Greene, 109).³⁶ While it is generally acknowledged that Defoe’s essay played a role in the formulation of the Copyright Act, Defoe’s importance is downplayed on the very grounds that he still advocates a connection between ownership and liability, and the place of honor in the narrative of authorial empowerment is instead given to a 1693 memorandum by John Locke.³⁷ Although the language of the Act of 1710 does focus exclusively on the investment of property rights, this should not imply a rejection of Defoe’s insistence on the inseparability of rights and responsibilities, but rather a more strategic reformulation of Defoe’s proposed model, a model that encourages authors to “own up to” their works even as they are granted the possibility of “owning” them for the first time.

More importantly for my own purposes, *The Trouble with Ownership* also offers the most thorough illustration to date (at least in the Anglophone context) of

³⁶ This essay, which is the focus of Greene’s third chapter, was written after Defoe had not only been fined, imprisoned and pilloried for his pamphlet “The Shortest Way with the Dissenters” (1702), but had at the same time seen a pirated edition of “his” works put out (including works that he had not written but that were now attributed to him).

³⁷ Although, as Greene points out (129-30), Locke himself contends that conferring property rights on authors would have the advantage of making it easier to make them accountable for what they had written.

the truth of Foucault's assertion that "Texts, books, and discourses, really began to have authors (other than mythical, 'sacralized,' and 'sacralizing' figures) to the extent that authors became subject to punishment, that is, to the extent that discourses could be transgressive" ("What Is an Author?" 211-12). The very conception of "the author" as the sole intellectual origin and "prime mover" behind the production of books originates not in the wake of the Copyright Act but rather in the two hundred years of legal discourse that preceded it, a discourse devoted to halting (or at least regulating) the proliferation of what Henry VIII, in a proclamation of 1538, dubbed "naughty printed books." Whereas at first legal penalties were directed only at those who possessed, imported, and printed such books, attention gradually shifted to the author, whom Roger L'Estrange (Charles II's infamous "bloodhound of the press") would eventually designate in 1663 as "the *Fountain* of our troubles" (qt. in Greene, 25). Although negatively valorized here, we can see how the rhetoric depicting the author as the sole origin of literary works arose from "practical" legal considerations as much as anything else.³⁸

Of course, this notion of author as "Prime mover" did not remain negatively valorized for long: once authors had been granted rights it became increasingly necessary for states to invest in "the author" as the sole locus of literary virtuosity, moral rectitude and artistic truth, three things the Foucauldian author-function ties together. The same L'Estrangian rhetoric that had marked the author as the

³⁸ In another phrase that strangely anticipates the Author-centered rhetoric of proprietary originality that was soon to arise, L'Estrange also argues that one reason it is so important to track down authors is that "There are not many of them in an Age, and so the less work to do" (*ibid.*).

“Fountain” of naughty printed books would soon, with slight adaptations, be used to mark the author as the sole origin of national masterpieces, thereby functioning to check what Foucault describes as the “cancerous proliferation of meaning” that such masterpieces might otherwise engender. To observe this increasing valorization of the author, we need only turn to the preface to a 1708 English translation of *Guzman de Alfarache*. In their dedication to their patron, the translators choose not to offer “a tedious Discourse of the Goodness of our Author, whose Merit and Fame speak more for him, than we can say in this vindication” (“Prefaces” A3). In their introduction to “the vulgar,” however, the translators do indeed proceed to offer just such a discourse (A11-12), a discourse filled not only with omissions but also with what might generously be termed “fictions.” This apparent need to portray the picaresque Aléman as a “Fountain” not just of literary creativity but of Christian wisdom and moral rectitude as well speaks to the growing importance of the author-function nearly a century after the publication of the *Segunda Parte*.

For Cervantes, however, this proprietary author-function was not yet available, at least not as a legal entity. With no such author-function available to him, Cervantes was forced to invent his own proprietary author-figure in Cide Hamete Benengeli, whose functioning Cervantes justifies on the grounds of artistic virtuosity since no legal grounds exist within the world of the text. Indeed, the difficulty of Cervantes’ struggle to articulate some concept of literary-intellectual property in the *Segunda Parte* clearly reveals the absence of any contemporary legal terminology capable of doing so. This absence is particularly apparent in the Don Álvaro episode

and in the last chapter, where in order to verify the identity of the “true” Don Quixote Cervantes introduces an array of contemporary legal documents, presenting his readers first with the legal testament of Don Álvaro, then finally with the will and death certificate of Alonso Quijano.

Interestingly, this lack of literary property rights can also be felt in Cervantes’ own “theft” of Don Álvaro Tarfe, who is necessarily represented as the “same” character as in Avellaneda’s book. Avellaneda’s inability to write about the true Don Quixote thus does not seem to prevent Cide Hamete from writing about the true Don Álvaro. Moreover, one might point to the preservation of Avellaneda’s text, not just as a necessary scholarly supplement for those who would study the end of Cervantes’ *Segunda Parte*, but as a literary villain to be ritually brought forth and vilified (or, at best, as a “decent” work of literature whose main value lies in its ability to show us the incomparable superiority and magnificence of Cervantes’ text). Like Greene’s account of Defoe—in which the need to create a historiography that depicts the author’s liberation necessitates a glossing over of Defoe’s “complicity” in the system he was supposedly being liberated from—attempts to make a hero of Cervantes by vilifying Avellaneda can actually work to obscure the full impact that the writings of Miguel de Cervantes actually had, since to acknowledge this impact we would be forced to acknowledge the virtuosity of Avellaneda’s continuation.

Going further, one might even argue that the need to insist anachronistically on the proprietary originality of an author like Shakespeare, nearly all of whose work is based on an *imitatio* model of originality and most likely a collaborative model of

authorship as well, has worked to obscure the role Miguel de Cervantes played in the development of the concept of literary originality. This role is not limited to the well known originality (“in the modern sense”) of the 1605 *Quijote*’s cast of characters, but can also be seen in the *Segunda Parte*’s victory over a continuation that was both blatantly antagonistic and extremely well-mounted according to the prevailing *imitatio* aesthetic of the times.³⁹ While perhaps no other writer at the time could have written a passable imitation of Sancho, Don Quixote himself is remarkably amenable to imitation and could easily have been fair game for continuators if he had remained “alive.”

We thus need to account for his “death,” an event that changed the terrain of European prose fiction and that can still be felt in our notion of what it means to be a literary character and what it means to create a fictional world, notions we would probably think quite differently without the end of *Don Quixote*. Whether or not one believes that Cervantes’ decision to kill Don Quixote was a direct response to Avellaneda’s continuation, the ending’s success as an obstacle to further continuations is undeniable. Moreover, even if one considers my own claims for the importance of *Don Quixote*’s end to be perhaps overly romantic, it would be difficult not to credit James Iffland’s claim that “without Don Quijote’s death [...] many of the philosophizing treatments of the novel in the Romantic and post-Romantic mode—

³⁹ Indeed, there was a period of time (late 17th to early 18th century) when Avellaneda’s *Quijote* was the officially preferred text. This could be compared to the century long ascendancy of Nahum Tate’s “happy-ending” *King Lear*, and both might be considered useful in tracking the development of the Foucauldian author-function as well as the development of modernity’s not quite absolute past.

i.e., the one still dominant today—would have had much less raw material on which to work” (80). Don Quixote’s death brings to a conclusion the “true history” of his life, now legally attested and made fit material for future generations to romantically idealize. Everything needed for the creation of *El Quijote* is there.

2.8 The End of *Don Quixote*

Now, at long last, we have come to the climax of our history: the finishing of the *Quijote* through the death of Don Quixote. Following his overthrow by the Knight of the Moon, the elaborate “disenchantment” of Altisidora at the Palace of the Duke and Duchess, Sancho’s “3300 lashes” and the testimony of Don Álvaro Tarfe, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza at last return to their village, the name of which, we are finally informed, “Cide Hamete was unwilling to indicate exactly, so that every town and village of La Mancha might contend for the honor of fathering and possessing him, as the seven cities of Greece did for Homer” (939).⁴⁰ Here Don Quixote plans to serve out his year of forced retirement—“which he intended to observe to the letter, without infringing it by an atom, as befitted a knight errant bound by the rules and orders of his profession” (932)⁴¹—living with his friends the priest, the barber, and the bachelor Sampson Carrasco as “love-stricken shepherds” (*enamorados pastores*) (933; 1097).

⁴⁰ “no quiso poner Cide Hamete puntualmente, por dejar que todas las villas y lugares de la Mancha contendiesen entre sí por ahijársele y tenérsele por suyo, como contendieron las siete ciudades de Grecia por Homero” (1104).

⁴¹ “cual pensaba guardar al pie de la letra, sin traspasarla en un átomo, bien así como caballero andante obligado por la puntualidad y orden de la andante caballería” (1096).

Don Quixote's niece and housekeeper wisely advise against this plan, even warning him "mejor es ser caballero andante que pastor" (1098) since the pastoral life is particularly ill-suited to a frail old man such as himself. Indeed, immediately upon returning to his house Don Quixote is seized by a fever (*se le arraigó una calentura*) and taken to bed by the ladies of his house. There he lingers for six days, after which he recovers his senses and his "true" name of Alonso Quijano, renowned as "el Bueno," which the good hidalgo himself finally pronounces for the first time as his friends are coming through the door to visit him:

'Congratulate me, good sirs, for I am Don Quixote de la Mancha no longer, but Alonso Quixano, called for my way of life the Good. Now I am the enemy of Amadis of Gaul and of all the infinite brood of his progeny. [...] Now, by God's mercy, I have learnt from my own bitter experience and I abominate them.' (936)⁴²

After heaping one last round of invective on "todas las historias profanas de la andante caballería" that had led him to his previous state, Alonso Quijano el Bueno disposes of his soul and his possessions in a good Christian manner and, after lingering for three days more, he dies amongst the "compasiones y lágrimas" of all those in attendance. Alonso's death is officially witnessed and attested to, at the request of his friend the Priest, by a law clerk, who also freely declares that he "had never read in any books of chivalry of a knight errant dying in his bed in so calm and

⁴² "Dadme albricias, Buenos señores, de que ya yo no soy don Quijote de la Mancha, sino Alonso Quijano, a quien mis costumbres me dieron renombre de <<bueno>>. Ya soy enemigo de Amadís de Gaula y de toda la infinita caterva de su linaje; [...] ya, por misericordia de Dios escarmentando en cabeza propia, las abomino" (1100-01).

Christian a manner as Don Quixote” (938-939).⁴³ Finally, before Cide Hamete’s closing declaration to his quill—which we shall treat at length—we are given a ten-line epitaph by Samson Carrasco, who emphasizes the immortal fame that Don Quixote’s adventures have won him (*que la muerte no triunfó / de su vida con su muerte*) and ends his ode with a succinct reminder of his friend’s deathbed repentance (*morir cuerdo y vivir loco*).

.....

What is the cause of Don Quixote’s death? The text leaves the reader to decide whether his illness is caused by “la disposición del cielo” or whether, as the doctor believes, “melancholy and despair were bringing him to his end” (*melancolías y desabrimientos le acababan*) (933; 1099). Those desirous of a more materialist explanation could also point out that Don Quixote catches his fever shortly after giving Sancho his cloak and exposing himself to the elements (like a shepherd) during the episode of the 3300 lashes. Assuming, however, that the diagnosis *del médico* is correct... what is the cause of Don Quixote’s “melancholy”? Is it sorrow over his

⁴³ “nunca había leído en ningún libro de caballerías que algún caballero andante hubiese muerto en su lecho tan sosegadamente y tan cristiano como don Quijote” (1104).

Though here one might point to the example of *Tirant lo Blanc* (1490), the pinnacle of the chivalric genre according to Cervantes, whose hero falls sick and dies at the height of his success, just as he is about to be married: “but Fortune decreed otherwise, for God created us to attain bliss not in this world but in the next” (*Tirant* 601). Indeed, as Jordi Aladro points out in “La muerte de Alonso Quijano, un adiós literario” (2005), *Don Quixote*’s deathbed scene can be read as one final performance by a master of literary *imitatio*, a performance now modeled not on Amadis or Orlando but on Tirant lo Blanc, the knight who (at least according to the priest) dies a more Christian death than any other (Aladro 187-188). Even Tirant, however, after drawing his will and making confession, asks to be moved from his bed and actually dies on the road *en route* to see his lady Princess Carmesina one last time.

defeat and/or over the (im)possibility of Dulcinea's disenchantment, as his friends believe? Is it Romantic despair over his inability to conquer the world through the power of fiction? Is it realizing the utter inanity of his plan to become an enamored shepherd? One might even suggest that the *ingenioso hidalgo*'s melancholy is "really" a sort of epic-heroic boredom brought on by the repetitious life of "inacabable aventura" that the profession of knight-errantry demands.

Alternatively—assuming that "la disposición del cielo" is indeed to blame—then is the end of *Don Quixote* a more-or-less random act of God, similar to the one that brought the much-praised *Tirant lo Blanc* to his/its end? Or, as textual evidence would seem to suggest, is the knight's death the result of a more proprietary will seeking to ensure that no "otro autor que Cide Hamete Benengeli" would be able to resurrect his hero and write "inacabables historias de sus hazanâs" (1104)? Even if we could somehow prove that Cervantes himself was the sole proprietor of the divine will in question, however, we still would not know whether Don Quixote's death was a direct response to Avellaneda or a more deep-seated artistic necessity arising "organically" from his textual assault on books of chivalry. Moreover, even if we did assume that Don Quixote's death was always already in the works, so to speak, we still would not know how "seriously" we should take the last scene of the book: is it meant to be sad, funny, or both? Does it signify a true repudiation by Alonso Quijano of his alter-ego, or is Alonso Quijano el Bueno himself merely a Tirant-inspired character that fuses "Alonso Quijano—el lector de novelas de caballerías—y don Quijote de la Mancha—el sueño realizado del hidalgo manchego" and ensures that

the hidalgo's death, like his life, will be "una muerte literaria, condicionada y dictada por los libros" (Aladro 190, 187)?⁴⁴

All of these explanations, it seems to me, are valid. As with Cide Hamete's disclaimer regarding Don Quixote's account of the Cave of Montesinos:

You, judicious reader, must judge for yourself, for I cannot and should not do more. One thing, however, is certain, that finally he retracted it on his deathbed and confessed that he had invented it, since it seemed to him to fit in with the adventures he had read of in his histories. (624)⁴⁵

Ironically, this famous passage actually contributes less to the ambiguity surrounding the matter under discussion (since it seems pretty clear that Don Quixote is lying about the Cave of Montesinos) than it does to the ambiguity surrounding the knight's death. The fact that *Don Quixote's* end is foretold in Chapter 24 (i.e., well before Chapter 59) would seem to indicate that it had been planned long before the appearance of the *Segundo Tomo*. And yet the passage above could just as easily have been altered or inserted at a later date, perhaps even inspired by an anxious Bloomian desire to allay any suspicion about the possible "influence" of Avellaneda. Such speculations, diverting as they may be, inevitably reach a point of diminishing returns quite quickly. Fortunately, we are less concerned here with discovering the

⁴⁴ For a survey of some of the more famous interpretations that have been given to the final scene of *El Quijote*, see Aladro's "La muerte de Alonso Quijano, un adiós literario," pages 179-180. Allow me to gratefully note here that some of the ideas in this chapter have been taken or adapted from Professor Aladro's lectures for his *Don Quixote* course, which I attended at UC Santa Cruz, Fall 2010.

⁴⁵ "Tú, lector, pues eres prudente, juzga lo que te pareciere, que yo no debo ni puedo más, puesto que se tiene por cierto que al tiempo de su fin y muerte dicen que se retractó de ella y dijo que él la había inventado, por parecerle que convenía y cuadraba bien con las aventuras que había leído en sus historias" (734).

true historical cause of Don Quixote's death than we are with theorizing some of its effects on the history of fiction. Which leads us to our next question...

What is accomplished by Don Quixote's death? The title of this chapter offers one answer, albeit a vague and hyperbolic one. On a much more basic level, of course, the death allows Cide Hamete to finish his true history, Cervantes to complete his book, and the pair of them to thwart any further continuations (an intention that is explicitly announced more than once). Equally important, Don Quixote's death transfigures the narrative arc of both parts of "the" *Quijote*, encouraging readers to think of the book(s) as a unified work with a complete(d) biographic teleology. The history of Don Quixote's life, which began by parodying its own reliance on decidedly non-Aristotelian principles of composition, can now be read, just like the life of its main character, as "siempre en declinación de sus principios hasta llegar a su último fin" (1099). Finally, the death of Don Quixote marks a change in his status as a literary character, a change that (on a "world-historical" scale) can be seen to predict and even to precipitate a more widespread European shift from courtly and folkloric models of literary production to a more nationalized and nationalizing model based on the figure of the author and bolstered by an emerging bourgeois aesthetic of proprietary originality.

Consider the statement "every novel is a rewriting of *Don Quixote*." Much of the proverbial wisdom this phrase offers us today stems from the fact that novels are precisely re-writings (or "variations," as Trilling has it) and NOT continuations. Before *El Quijote* could be created and endlessly rewritten, the *Quijote* had to be

finished in such a way that it could not be continued. At the same time, the nature of the rewritings suggested by the above statement points to a historical change in the concept of literary originality: rather than recycling the stories and characters of peers and predecessors in an original way as per the *imitatio* model, a novel that purports or is purported to be a rewriting of *Don Quixote*—*Madame Bovary*, *The Idiot*, *A Confederacy of Dunces*, etc.—must possess its own “original” stories and characters (at least until Pierre Menard’s *Quijote*, anyway).

To illustrate the scope of this change, we need only look to Henry Sullivan’s “Don Quixote: Analyzable or Unanalyzable?” (1998). In this famous article, Sullivan attacks critics who claim that it is impossible to psychoanalyze literary characters like Don Quixote on the grounds that they never existed, never had a childhood, etc. Sullivan responds first by invoking Umberto Eco’s “law of fictional worlds,” whereby “we may assume anything in the heterocosm (or fictional universe) that fails to contradict what we know about the historical universe, holds equally in both the fictional world and the empirical world of sense experience” (Sullivan 5), then by pointing out that

any attempt to write a theological and psychoanalytic account of the career of Philip II would present similar dilemmas to those thrown up by the psychoanalysis of literary fiction, even though the Spanish monarch was the so-called “real person” and Don Quixote was not. [...] All the material for the King’s psychoanalysis would have to be mediated, as in a novel, through language and imagery: letters, diaries, royal decrees, contemporary accounts, paintings, marble busts, statues, and the like. (13)

Frankly, I think Sullivan’s focus on analyzability blinds him to another insight implied by his paper: namely, that our knowledge of the life of Don Quixote is in fact

more complete than our knowledge of the life of Philip II could ever be. Whereas it is not only possible but likely that new facts about Philip II's life may emerge in the future through the discovery of hitherto unknown cultural artifacts, it is categorically impossible that any new historical facts about Don Quixote's life will ever be discovered, since the single true history of his life is already in our possession. This is not to say that we know everything about Don Quixote's life, we certainly do not, but rather that we have facts and ambiguities, and each are set in stone.

One might respond that this is true of all literary characters, or at least of all those whose stories have been "finished." While today this may be true, however, it certainly was not the case in early 17th-century Spain, where the notion of "fictional worlds" having "laws" would have seemed incoherent if not ridiculous. Certainly, many of Sullivan's assertions about "literary characters in general" would not hold true for characters like Lazaró de Tormes or Amadis de Gaula. Potential psychoanalysts of Lazaró or Amadis would face problems less like those posed by the psychoanalysis of a historical personage and more like those posed by the psychoanalysis of a Greek god. If one attempted to psychoanalyze Dionysus, for example, one would have to decide (amongst other things) whether Dionysus was the son of Semele, torn from the thigh of Zeus, or the son of Zeus and Persephone (or, in some versions, Zeus and Demeter). In the mythological tradition, of course, more than one genealogy can be valid. Similarly, anyone attempting to psychoanalyze Lazaró de Tormes would be faced with the fact that there are **two** "second parts"

written about the same character, without any sure criteria for deciding which sequel is about the “real” Lazaró.

Nor is it necessary to invoke psychoanalysis to make my point. Consider the case of Lancelot and Guinevere. The first known account of Sir Lancelot’s affair with Queen Guinevere is in Chrétien de Troyes’ *Le Chevalier de la Charrette* (c. 1177): prior to this the story apparently did not exist.⁴⁶ After the completion and circulation of this text, however, the love affair became central to the entire Arthurian cycle—today it is probably its best-known storyline—much as if someone tomorrow were to unearth a cache of love letters proving that Philip II had had a love affair with Elizabeth I, or some other notable Lord or Lady. Literary characters in pre- and early modernity, it seems, were treated in much the same manner as historical personages, at least insofar as it was possible to “discover” and accumulate new facts about their lives.

This was not the case with Don Quixote, as we have seen. Yet the knight’s death alone would hardly have been enough to bring about the historical effects I have attributed to it, or even to justify the grandiosity of my chapter title. Three other accomplishments must be acknowledged as essential to the ending of the *Quijote*, to the birth of the novel in general, and to the sense of an ending that *El Quijote* would one day achieve. These are:

⁴⁶ It is thought that the storyline was actually conceived and given to Chrétien by Marie de Champagne, his patron, who theorized that love needed to be freely given and therefore could not exist between a husband and wife. Some have speculated that it was Chrétien’s supposed distaste for such a story that led him to give the poem to a continuator—“Godefroi de Leigni”—to finish.

- a) *El Quijote*'s overcoming of the chivalric mode of incompleteness, by which I refer both to its overcoming of the chivalric genre through its effectiveness as a satire AND to its self-transformation from a potentially endless series of volumes into a two-part narrative with a clear biographic teleology;
- b) *El Quijote*'s overcoming of the picaresque mode of incompleteness and its double-edged dilemma of the unreliable first-person narrator, who can neither "finish" his story nor make it morally exemplary;
- c) The creation of a fictional prototype for Foucault's modern author-function in the character of Cide Hamete Benengeli, who in this case could almost literally be described as the name by which Cervantes marks his fear of the "cancerous and dangerous proliferation" of "inacabables historias" about his hero.

Partly because these accomplishments have already been discussed individually, and partly because they are extremely difficult to disentangle in the first place, rather than treating them separately we will instead examine some specific literary strategies that enable them. Which brings us to our final question...

How is the ending of *Don Quixote* accomplished? Together with Don Quixote's death, there are three crucial artistic maneuvers at the end of the book that must be taken into account when considering the sense of an ending *El Quijote* achieves. These are: 1) Don Quixote's transformation (*a punto de muerte*) from "don Quijote de la Mancha" into "Alonso Quijano el Bueno"; 2) the introduction, at the

end of the book, of certain facts, documents and ambiguities; and 3) Cide Hamete Benengeli's closing address to his quill, a pivotal and to the best of my knowledge unprecedented moment in the history of prose fiction. We will examine each of these tropes in turn, focusing on how they enable (variously and together) the three accomplishments already listed.

First, sanity: if the example of *Amadis de Gaula* teaches us anything, it is that death alone cannot put an end to the adventures of a true knight-errant... (particularly if those adventures continue to be profitable). Rather than simply attempting to put an end to a potentially interminable series of "partes" through death, the final restoration of the hidalgo's "juicio" endows the book with a clear salvational structure and an organically unified biographic teleology. Although we know little of Alonso Quijano's life other than how it ends, his appearance at the end of the book changes the structure of *Don Quixote's* life: rather than the life of Alonso Quijano being a prelude to the history of Don Quijote de la Mancha, the life of Don Quijote de la Mancha can now be seen as an interruption within the life of Alonso Quijano. Yet because it is an interruption, one can now read the book's two parts as offering the entirety of Don Quixote's life, which we can follow from his "birth" in the first chapter to his "death" in the last. Moreover, the history's "declinación" acquires a positive, salvation-oriented structure since it proceeds not merely from birth to death but from madness to sanity.

This deathbed repentance also allows Alonso Quijano to lay a curse on the books that have led him astray. As Don Quijote de la Mancha has hitherto laid low

the once proud genre of *libros de caballerías* through his ridiculous actions, so Alonso Quijano el Bueno will now drag it into the grave with him once and for all through his wise words:

My judgment is now clear and free from the misty shadows of ignorance with which my ill-starred and continuous reading of those detestable books of chivalry had obscured it. Now I know their absurdities and their deceits, and the only thing that grieves me is that this discovery has come too late, and leaves me no time to make amends by reading other books, which might enlighten my soul. I feel, niece, that I am on the point of death, and I should like to meet it in such a manner as to convince the world that my life has not been so bad as to leave me the character of a madman; for though I have been one, I would not confirm the fact in death. (935-936; my emphasis)⁴⁷

These final attacks on books of chivalry—and, more importantly, the “factual truth” of Alonso’s repentance together with his stated desire not to be remembered as a madman—are all reinforced in this scene by the emotional *gravitas* of a dying man’s request to his niece.⁴⁸

Second, the facts: whereas the *Segundo Tomo* begins by assigning a definite proper name to Don Quijote (there designated “el señor Martín Quijada,” a name carrying connotations of both foolishness and lunacy), the *Segunda Parte* waits until

⁴⁷ “*Yo tengo juicio ya libre y claro, sin las sombras caliginosas de la ignorancia que sobre él me pusieron mi amarga y continua leyenda de los detestables libros de las caballerías. Ya conozco sus disparates y sus embelecocos, y no me pesa sino que esta desengaño he llegado tan tarde, que no me deja tiempo para hacer alguna recompensa leyendo otros que sean luz del ama. Yo me siento, sobrina, a punto de muerte: querría hacerla de tal modo, que diese a entender que no había sido mi vida tan mala, que dejase renombre de loco; que, puesto que lo he sido, no querría confirmar esta verdad en mi muerte*” (1100).

⁴⁸ At the same time, Alonso does make the rather ridiculous stipulation in his will that his niece shall be disinherited if she insists on marrying anyone who is even aware of the existence (*sabe qué cosas sean*[!]) of those dangerous and detestable books of chivalry, a fact that Jordi Aladro cites as evidence that the final chapter should not be seen as abandoning the omnipresent sense of irony that pervades the rest of the work.

the final chapter to reveal the name of Alonso Quijano.⁴⁹ Alonso Quijano's good name is thus kept as free as possible from any stain of insanity, since we learn it only after he has already committed all his acts of insanity, and after he has already begun to repent of them (he declares his sanity and begins to denounce books of chivalry to his niece, but does not speak his name until his friends arrive in the next paragraph).⁵⁰ Moreover, this self-evident goodness of Alonso Quijano allows Cervantes to resolve or at least ameliorate the picaresque dilemma regarding the morality of his narrator: since Cide Hamete is writing the history of a good Christian man, we do not have to take on too much faith the genuine goodness of his own Moorish intentions. By thus settling for telling the story of a good man rather than creating "un hombre perfecto"—as Aléman promised to finish doing in his unfinished third part—Cide Hamete is able to attain the more modest moral exemplarity available to an ancient *auctoritas* like Plutarch, who though a pagan was able to judge other pagans good or bad within the organically unified confines of his own exemplary *Bios*. The second aspect of the picaresque mode of incompleteness is thus overcome here not so much through a major change in the character of the narrator as through the adduction of good Christian documents such as Alonso Quijano's will together with the official documentation of his death that his friend *the priest* insists on having drawn up.

⁴⁹ The 1605 *Quijote* offers three possible names for the old gentleman who becomes Don Quijote de la Mancha. For a study of contemporary connotations that these names were likely to have inspired, see Augustin Redondo's "El personaje de don Quijote: tradiciones folklórico-literarias, contexto histórico y elaboración cervantina." For a study of the connotations of Martín Quijada, see Thomas Lathrop's "Avellaneda y Cervantes: el nombre de don Quijote."

⁵⁰ There is also some Christian numerology at work here: Alonso Quijano recovers his senses on the seventh day and then lies in bed for three days more before dying.

The fact that Cide Hamete bothers to record (in full detail) the text of such documents also speaks to his strange and complicated nature as a true historian. On the one hand, Cide Hamete is a true historian because (unlike most historians) he admits to making his history up. On the other hand, Cide Hamete is a true historian in that he makes no moralizing digressions and presents himself as an impartial presenter of the historical record available in the “Manchegan archives.” This impartial status is further reinforced throughout the *Segunda Parte* by the introduction of legal documents and the inclusion of vaguely locatable historical events such as the expulsion of the Moriscos, all of which further serve to “adorna[r] y acredita[r] esta grande historia” (1094; my emphasis) in concert with its meditation on the nature of fact and fiction, a meditation that is necessarily deepened through the *Segunda Parte*’s dialogue with the *Segundo Tomo* and without which the history of the modern novel would doubtless be told in different terms.

Yet Cide Hamete is not merely an impartial recorder of the facts of his fictional world, he is an active creator of them (at least from the beginning of the *Segunda Parte*). This speaks to the complications involved in Cervantes’ updating of Lucian’s original *True History* (c. 70). In “modernizing” the Cretan Liar into the Arab Historian, Cervantes not only makes the move from the first to the third person and adds an element of “impartiality” (both essential to overcoming the picaresque mode of incompleteness) but also complicates the notion of prose fiction itself by making his true historian less of “a true story-teller” (the Lucianic true historian) and more of “a true enchanter” (in keeping with the specific target of Cide Hamete’s satire). In

contrast to other chivalric “translators,” who blame so many of their books’ events on “jealous enchanters”—who are needed to introduce tension and keep the action going as well as to throw the occasional monkey-wrench into the laws of moral causality by which these fictional worlds operate—Cide Hamete takes responsibility not only for his prose style but also for being the primary “enchanter” of his text: the one who chants or, in this case, writes the magic words that move the plot forward.⁵¹

And here one should not forget the importance of Cide Hamete’s characterization as “a modern no less than a true historian”⁵²—which is to say, one should not forget his location in the present. While the fact that he is still supposedly read “in translation” allows Cide Hamete to maintain some of the authority of a more classical author-function, there was doubtless a great deal of humor (no longer available to us today) inherent in this notion of “a modern author”—which is to say, a relatively unquestionable source of authority and veracity located not in an absolute past but in a **not quite** locatable present. For it seems that an element of ambiguity is also crucial here: whereas Avellaneda begins his book by specifically naming Don Quixote’s La Manchan village as Argemasilla, Cide Hamete ends his book by explaining his intentional refusal to name the village. Thanks to Cide Hamete’s most prudent silence regarding the name of Don Quixote’s village, his present remains not

⁵¹ Enchanter, *encantador*, etc., all come from the Latin *incantator*, from *incantare* (“to chant the magic words”), coming from *cantare* (“to chant”) and *canere* (“to sing”).

⁵² This phrase actually comes from Avellaneda, who applies it to his own fictitious sage Álisolan (4).

quite locatable in both a spatial and a temporal sense: it takes place, in other words, in the time-space of the modern novel.

Still, if the book ended with Carrasco's epitaph there would have been nothing to prevent some other continuator from assuming the character of Cide Hamete and thereby resuming the knight's adventures that way. To prevent this, a final monologue is needed:

Y el prudentísimo Cide Hamete dijo a su pluma:

And said the most prudent Cide Hamete to his pen:⁵³

(Who is recording this, one wonders? From what point in time-space is Cide Hamete being observed and recorded? Is this a new literary formality that Cide Hamete must employ, like the promise of another volume in antiquity? Or is this some outside force, perhaps the Cervantes of the prologue, returned to record an event that is by its very nature unrecordable? Whatever the answer, this opening statement cleverly sidesteps a number of linguistic, artistic and metaphysical dilemmas. Cide Hamete, who will soon tell us that he only exists while writing, is about to be "speaking," in "the present" of the novel, as indicated by the phrase above and the quotation marks that follow):

<<Aquí quedarás colgada de esta espetera y de este hilo de alambre, ni sé si bien cortada o mal tajada peñola mía, adonde vivirás luengos siglos, si presuntuosos y malandrines historiadores no te descuelgan para profanarte.

'Here you shall rest, hanging from this rack by this copper wire, my goose-quill. Whether you are well or ill cut I know not, but you shall live long ages

⁵³ For this very important final speech, I will be giving the Spanish in the main body along with the English. The speech can be found on pgs. 1105-06 (Spanish) and 939-40 (English); all italics are my own.

there, unless presumptuous and rascally historians take you down to profane you.

Cide Hamete begins with some interesting deixis: when and where is this “*aquí*”? We are given an answer that is at once very vague and very specific, since “*espetera*” and “*hilo de alambre*” (“thread of wire”) locate the *aquí* on a specific type of table (with hooks for hanging things) and in a time period when such tables were commonly used.⁵⁴ The fact that words like *espetera* and *péñola* (“goose-quill”), which originally testified to the book’s contemporaneity, have now themselves become archaic, requiring footnotes in the Spanish edition, speaks to *El Quijote*’s dual citizenship in both the not quite present of the modern novel and the not quite absolute past in which the origin of the modern novel (and indeed of modernity itself) has since been placed.

It should also be noted that Cide Hamete’s expression of (false?) modesty here is almost immediately counter-balanced by his statement that his pen will hang “*luengos siglos*,” which speaks both to the fact that Cide Hamete himself will not be the one to take it down and, if the book does not achieve eternal fame (or at least remain in print), that it will not be his fault but rather the fault of whatever dastardly continuators have profaned his pen. This reiterates Cervantes’ contention in his prologue to the *Segunda Parte* that “however good things are an abundance brings down the price, and scarcity, even in bad things, confers a certain value.”

⁵⁴ There is also probably a play on *espetar* and *alambico*, which together connote (in the context of writing) a springy, joke-filled narrative written in an elaborate and overwrought prose style.

It thus appears that the book needs two epitaphs, with an epitaph for (or from?) Cide Hamete's *peñola* in addition to Carrasco's epitaph for Don Quixote:

Pero antes que a ti lleguen, les puedes advertir y decirles en el mejor modo que pudieres:

—Tate, tate, follonicos!
De ninguno sea tocada,
Porque esta empresa, buen rey,
Para mí estaba guardada.

But before they approach you, warn them as best you are able:

Beware, beware, you scoundrels,
I may be touched by none:
This is a deed, my worthy king,
Reserved for me alone.

The second two lines of this little stanza play on a popular *romanzo* about King Fernando of Grenada and thus again reinforce Cide Hamete's location in a not quite present, since here he is both playing with a popular contemporary ballad and tying himself to a relatively recent past (i.e., before the expulsion of the *moriscos*).

Even more interesting to my mind is the way in which Cide Hamete, in the person of his pen, next performs his own death as an author, a theme that he succinctly and beautifully articulates in a sentence that anticipates Barthes' "Le Morte d'Auteur" by over three hundred years:

Para mí sola nació don Quijote, y yo para él: él supo obrar y yo escribir,

'For me alone Don Quixote was born and I for him. His was the power of action, mine of writing.

Here Cervantes finally discovers a way to make his picaresque narrator tell the story of his own death, by owning up to his true status not only as the primary enchanter of his text but as its author-function as well. Of everything going on in this amazing

monologue, nothing is more important than this explicit linking of Don Quixote and Cide Hamete(’s pen), who can only live together and must therefore necessarily die together.⁵⁵ One might even say Cervantes does here with Cide Hamete precisely what Cide Hamete is doing with his pen.

Moreover, since this statement is a prelude to a direct attack on Avellaneda, it seems that one of the profounder statements in the entirety of the *Quijote* arose directly in response to Avellaneda. In order to win his petty feud with his rival continuator, Cide Hamete must anticipate Barthes and Bakhtin in declaring that

solos los dos [i.e., Don Quixote and Cide Hamete] *somos para en uno*, a despecho y pesar del escritor *fingido* y tordesillesco que se atrevió o se ha de atrever a escribir *con pluma de avestruz grosera y mal deliñada* las hazañas de *mi* valeroso caballero, porque no es carga de sus hombros, ni asunto de *su resfriado ingenio*;

Only we two are at one, despite that fictitious and Tordesillan scribe who has dared, and may dare again, to pen the deeds of *my* valorous knight *with his coarse and ill-trimmed ostrich feather*. This is no weight for his shoulders, no task for *his frozen intellect*;

All this serves to reinforce an idea that has been in play since the prologue to the *Segunda Parte*, where Cervantes tells us that a book cannot be good unless it is good in all respects (468; 544). Cide Hamete here functions partly as a standard of artistic quality: the “*resfriado ingenio*” of the Tordesillian scribe is simply not up to the task of writing about Cide Hamete’s hero. The true Don Quixote is the more well-written one, and thus artistic value and artistic truth are explicitly linked by the laws of Cide Hamete’s fictional world. The magic word is necessarily *le mot juste*.

⁵⁵ This is also the central thesis of Bakhtin’s early essay “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (1924).

Moreover, the true don Quijote de la Mancha (or “Don Quijote el bueno,” as Don Álvaro Tarfe describes him) is here linked not only to the specific prose style of Cide Hamete but to his activity of writing as well. This link between Cide Hamete and Don Quixote is thus reinforced in two ways, both of which seek to validate Cide Hamete’s proprietorial and exclusive relationship with the “genuine” *Don Quixote*. The story of Don Quixote can only be written by the supple goose-quill (*péñola mia*) that Cide Hamete is now hanging up, and not by Avellaneda’s “*pluma de avestruz grosera y mal deliñada*,” which cannot help but make him and his writing “*fingido*”;

a quien advertiras, si acaso llegas a conocerle, que deje reposar en la sepulture los cansados y ya podridos huesos de don Quijote, y no le quiera llevar, contra todos los fueros de la muerte, a Castilla la Vieja, haciéndole salir de la fuesa donde real y verdaderamente yace tendido de largo a largo, imposibilitado de hacer *tercera* jornada y salida nueva:

and should you chance to make his acquaintance, you may tell him to leave Don Quixote’s weary and mouldering bones to rest in the grave, nor seek, against all the canons of death, to carry him off to Old Castile, or to bring him out of the tomb, where he most certainly lies, stretched at length and powerless to make a *third* journey, or to embark on any new expedition.

This insistence on *two* sallies is also a major theme throughout the *Segunda Parte*, which conveniently seems to forget that the 1605 *Quijote* already speaks of two adventures and ends by promising a third. Moreover, Cide Hamete never refers to the “false sequel” as the *Segundo Tomo* but always as another *Segunda Parte*, thus using even the “falseness” of Avellaneda’s sequel to reinforce the idea that the *Quijote* (true or false, good or bad) follows a two-part structure.

This two-part structure is also presented as an essential element of Cide Hamete’s satiric intention:

que para hacer burla de tantas como hicieron tantos andantes caballeros, bastan las *dos* que él hizo tan a gusto y beneplácito de las gentes a cuya noticia llegaron, así en éstos como en los extraños reinos.

For the *two* on which he rode out are enough to make a mockery of all the countless forays undertaken by all the countless knights errant, such has been the delight and approval they have won from all to whose notice they have come, both here and abroad.

Despite Avellaneda's claim that Cervantes cannot take too much offense from his book because they "have the same object of banishing harmful books of chivalry," Cide Hamete asserts here that he can indeed take offense since he has already accomplished their supposedly "shared" intention, and since therefore any further continuations could only undermine the moral outcome that the conclusion/completion of his story has already achieved.

–Y con esto cumplirás con tu cristiana profesión, aconsejando bien a quien mal te quiere,

Thus you will comply with your Christian profession by offering good counsel to one who wishes you ill,

(Here Cide Hamete demonstrates his understanding of Christian doctrine and reaffirms his own Moorish nature, paving the way for a decidedly prideful and immodest boast in the next line, which I have already quoted elsewhere):

y yo quedaré satisfecho y ufano de haber sido *el primero* que gozó el fruto de sus escritos enteramente, como deseaba, pues no ha sido otro mi deseo que poner en aborrecimiento de los hombres las fingidas y disparatadas historias de los libros de caballerías, que por las de *mi verdadero don Quijote* van ya tropezando y han de caer del todo sin duda alguna.>>

and I shall be proud and satisfied to have been *the first author* to enjoy the pleasure of witnessing the full effect of his own writing. For my sole object has been to arouse men's contempt for all fabulous and absurd stories of knight errantry, whose credit this tale of *my genuine Don Quixote* has already

shaken, and which will, without a doubt, soon tumble to the ground. Farewell.’

This insistence on the moral intention of his story not only helps to ease Cide Hamete’s ascension to author-function status, but also reinforces his proprietary claim to his hero’s story and his warning to “presuntuosos y malandrines historiadores.” Since Cide Hamete’s intention is partly accomplished by the *Quijote*’s newfound salvational movement from madness to sanity, to resurrect his hero would be not only morally purposeless but would now in fact be actively immoral since it would undermine the book’s already accomplished aim of placing “en aborrecimiento de los hombres las fingidas y disparatadas historias de los libros de caballerías.” The organic unity and “truth” of Cide Hamete’s work, this passage suggests, is tied to the successful fulfillment of its author’s good intentions.

Finally, beyond the last quotation mark (at least in the Spanish edition), there is one final Latin word of farewell:

*Vale.*⁵⁶

Here we have a genuine Benjaminian *Finis*, even if the fullness of its “Lebenssinn” would not perhaps be felt for another two hundred years; not until old age had given the book sufficient respectability to be enshrined in a not quite absolute past; not until fiction had grown sufficiently respectable for Abbé Huet to write a treatise on it; not until “the spirit of Cervantes” had crossed the channel and infected English prose; not

⁵⁶ Again, we are left to wonder who wrote this word. Is this the same hand that informed us that Cide Hamete would be speaking to his pen?

until the writing subject had been theorized and endowed with rights in the form of the author; not until the author had begun to function in the modern sense of the term.

In 1615, however, the author was not functioning, at least not as a legal entity. Since no author-function exists, Cervantes is here forced to invent one. Yet because his author-function is fictitious, he must be justified by extra-legal means. This paragraph makes it abundantly clear that the peculiar truth of this “true history” is inextricably tied to its virtuous intentions and to its artistic virtuosity, all of which originate from the same authoritative source of fictional facts, the law-maker for this fictional world: Cide Hamete Benengeli. In this *Vale* the True, the Good, and the Beautiful are bound together by the only force capable of doing so in a Lukáscian modernity: by the laws of a fictional world. Yet to ensure that these laws remain operative and intact, the death of Don Quixote (the reader-hero) must be requited by the death of Cide Hamete Benengeli (the author-enchanter). Thus are modern novels born.

PART II. THE MODERNIST NOVEL

Historians of the novel generally acknowledge the late eighteenth through the early twentieth century to be the zenith of the genre's popularity and influence. This period was characterized by largely realistic novels (following Watt's definition) with linear plotlines and clear beginnings and endings. While several factors no doubt played a role in this ascendancy, it is hardly a coincidence that this period coincides with the heyday of the nation-state and the ideology of Progress.¹

In this sense, it is also no coincidence that the metaphysical market crash of *fin-de-siècle* Europe was accompanied by a crisis of endings that produced what I have labeled "The Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels" (c. 1880-1942). Even as the liberal metanarrative of Progress proved increasingly unable to sustain the faith of its faithful, so many great novelists found it increasingly difficult to provide the "sense of ending" expected of them. This problem was compounded, no doubt, by the modernist movement itself: as faith in "reality" grew weaker, more and more hope was placed in "art." As the stakes grew higher, the novel needed to do more, and consequently it grew increasingly difficult to provide the sorts of revelatory conclusions that novels were expected to promise. At the same time, Progress's investment in the author-figure, and the rise of the *Nachlaß* genre, ensured a window of opportunity for the truly committed artist, since writers like Pessoa, Kafka, Proust and Musil could endure (and even embrace) commercial failure in their lifetimes with

¹ Here and elsewhere, my use of "Progress" is meant to indicate both the abstract noun itself and the many ideals and metanarratives to which it is linked: nation, race, democracy, equality, economy, science, education, freedom.

a respectable hope of posthumous “discovery.” The result was a statistically significant historical cluster of unfinishable novels, each a spectacular “failure” for complex reasons of its own.

Since the inalienable specificity of each and every unfinishable novel means I can only sketch a broad outline of possible reasons for this historically unique literary trend, I have chosen in this section to focus on four novels—Flaubert’s *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, Kafka’s *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, and Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*—although other unfinishable novels will certainly be discussed as well. In each case, I will be attempting to follow the “prosaic” method outlined in my Introduction, combining close readings and textual histories while continuing to trace my backdoor historiography of the genre.

By looking at these texts, both on their own terms and in terms of the more general history of the modern novel through historicizing examinations of their modes of incompletions, we can gain a better sense not only of this Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels but also of many of the problematics that underlay literary modernism in general. Moreover, in each of these texts we shall see how unfinishability in fact enables an otherwise impossible aesthetic project: whether in the rhizomatic-encyclopedic project of the *Sottisier*, the allegorical ruins of *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, or the radical essayism of Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, the third volume of which unworks even the fragmentary de facto closure historically characteristic of the unfinished work as such. Furthermore, we shall see in the critical histories of these works how the valences attached to the

unfinished label have affected their histories as texts, as well as their reception and interpretation.

One might note the rather odd fact that my “historiography” of the novel largely skips over the period I have just claimed to be the genre’s heyday. Since so much excellent work has already been done on the novel in this period, however, I believe it is not only pardonable but advantageous to look at the hundred-fifty year ascendancy of the realist novel not as the “natural state” of the genre but rather as an anomaly in the history of prose fiction. In other words, the Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels does not only represent a crisis and collapse of long dominant narrative forms... it also marks a return to the possibilities of prose fiction, possibilities circumscribed by the finalizing tropes of realism that will here be opened to exploration once more.

CHAPTER THREE: EVERYTHING IN ITS RIGHT PLACE

“For in much wisdom is much vexation, and those who increase knowledge increase sorrow.”

—*Ecclesiastes* 1:18

ENCYCLOPÉDIE (l’): Tonner contre. En rire de pitié, comme étant un ouvrage rococo.

ENCYCLOPEDIA (The): Laugh at it pityingly as an outdated work, and even thunder against it.

—Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (BP 512; 297)

In the second quote above—which refers to the famous *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d’Alembert (1751-72)—Flaubert takes aim at a fashionable pretension of mid-nineteenth century Frenchmen who sought to imply their own erudition by disparaging the previous century’s most famous compendium of knowledge. Completed as early as 1850, Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire* was meant to be a key document in what he called “le Sottisier,” the unrealized second volume of his unfinished final novel *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the entirety of which was originally conceived as an “Introduction” to the earlier *Dictionnaire*. Since the *Dictionnaire* (and apparently much of the rest of the *Sottisier*) was meant to be a collection of popular stupidities—jokingly intended to cow its readers into silence “for fear of coming out with one of the statements it contains”—one might assume that the call to “tonner contre” the *Encyclopédie* should be read ironically: if to be praised in the *Dictionnaire* is an insult, then surely to be insulted in it is a form of praise? Indeed, the very idea that an Encyclopedia can become “outdated” (*rococo*) might actually be attributed to the *Encyclopédie* (or rather the ideal of the Encyclopedia developed in d’Alembert’s

Preliminary Discourse and Diderot's entry "Encyclopédie"), which here becomes a victim of its own call for permanent self-critique and frequent revolution in the knowledge industry, even as its role as progenitor of this Enlightenment ethos seems already to have been forgotten.

At the same time, however, the definition offered above might also be said to reflect the project of Flaubert's novel as a whole, which not only mercilessly mocks its title characters' attempts to master the totality of human knowledge, but can also be read as dramatizing what might be described (to channel Marx and Wittgenstein) as the secret of the Encyclopedia: the fact that different "calculi of truth functions" can be seen to operate independently in different areas of knowledge, that knowledge itself contains contradictions, and moreover that these contradictory truths can be seen to function independently—in an Encyclopedia, sometimes quite literally side-by-side—without doing irreparable damage to one another. Just as the very existence of a commodity implies a secret disjunction between labor and exchange value, so the existence of an Encyclopedia with multiple authors—each with his or her own area of specialization—implies an inherent incommensurability between their specialized modalities of knowing. In this sense, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* can be said to dramatize a far more fundamental shift in the history of knowledge (its theory and organization), a transformation that Umberto Eco has described as a movement "From Tree to Labyrinth."

In *Dall'Albero al Labirinto* (2006), Eco sketches a history of the Dictionary and the Encyclopedia as "two models and two conceptions of *semantic*

representation, models that refer to a general representation of knowledge and/or the world.”¹ Eco associates these models with the Porphyric Tree and the Labyrinth, respectively.² Whereas dictionary definitions strive to capture the essence or “ontologie” of a concept by providing “only those properties *necessary and sufficient* to distinguish that concept from others,”³ encyclopedias seek to establish some sort of provisory hierarchy whereby all available human knowledge can be organized, localized, indexed and cross-referenced, thus creating potentially infinite interconnections amongst the facts and discourses contained in the finite encyclopedic text. Although Eco readily admits that few “flesh and blood” dictionaries or encyclopedias can be considered pure incarnations of these models of semantic representation—some amount of hybridity is inevitable—he believes it is important to mark a distinction between them as “regulating ideas.”

In this sense, the transformation suggested by Eco’s title seems in fact to refer to two processes. In the first process, the internal logic of the dictionary itself

¹ “due modelli e due concezioni della *rappresentazione semantica*, modelli che rinviano a una rappresentazione generale del sapere e/o del mondo” (13). All translations of this text are my own.

² For an excellent account of the process of classification known as “the Porphyric Tree,” see Isidore of Seville’s entry in his *Etymologies*—Europe’s most important medieval encyclopedia—on “Porpyhry’s *Isagoge*” (II.xxv) which “contains in itself a demonstration of the first principles of any thing as to what it may be, and the thing is explained with its own solid and substantial definition. First we posit the genus, then we subjoin the species and other things that can be allied, and we separate them by particulars they hold in common, continually introducing the differentiae until we arrive at the individual character (*proprium*) of the thing whose identifying properties we have been investigating by means of a definition that marks it out. For example: a human being is an animal, rational, mortal, land-dwelling, bipedal, capable of laughter” (80-81).

³ “solo quelle proprietà *necessarie e sufficienti* a distinguere qual concetto da altri” (13).

produces a movement from tree to labyrinth, insofar as attempts to construct pure dictionary models of semantic representation seem inevitably to collapse under their own weight:

if we follow its own internal logic, the tree of genre and species, however it might be constructed, explodes in an infinite turbine of accidents, into a non-hierarchizable network of *qualia*. The dictionary necessarily dissolves itself, by internal force, into a potentially orderless and limitless galaxy of elements of knowledge about the world. It therefore becomes an encyclopedia, and it becomes one because of the fact that it was an encyclopedia that was ignorant of itself, that it is a contrived artifice for masking the inevitability of the encyclopedia.⁴

In the end, attempts to discover (or create) a perfect, natural, “primitive” language (i.e., one that would require no “extra-linguistic” knowledge to understand and operate) lead to the realization that “linguistic competence is always *encyclopedic*, and that it is not possible (except in a fashion that is in the final analysis provisory) to make distinctions between linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world.”⁵ This insight would seem to be reflected in the text of the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* not only in the sense that it spawned a much longer (encyclopedic) novel that now contains it (reinforcing Eco’s general subordination of the dictionary to the encyclopedia), but also insofar as the “essences” captured in Flaubert’s *Dictionnaire*

⁴ “se ne seguiamo la logica interna, l’albero dei generi e delle specie, comunque venga costruito, esplose in un turbine infinito di accidenti, in una rete non gerarchizzabile di *qualia*. Il dizionario si dissolve necessariamente, per forza interna, in una galassia potenzialmente disordinata e illimitata di elementi di conoscenza del mondo. Quindi diventa una enciclopedia e lo diventa perché di fatto era una enciclopedia che s’ignorava, ovvero un artificio escogitato per mascherare l’inevitabilità dell’enciclopedia” (27).

⁵ “la competenza linguistica sia sempre *enciclopedica* e nella rappresentazione semantica non si possano porre (se non in modo provvisorio e ai fini di determinate analisi) distinzioni tra conoscenze linguistiche e conoscenza del mondo” (30).

stem not from any “essential ontologies” of the defined objects themselves, but rather from popular (i.e., stupid) clichés circulating about these objects in mid-nineteenth century France, thus continually reminding us that even “essence” (what is considered essential at a given time and place) cannot be separated from historicity and knowledge of the world.

The second process that *Dall’Albero al Labirinto* describes is the historical transformation of the encyclopedia itself, a transformation that Eco depicts in terms of historical variations on the figure of the labyrinth, from the inexorable ancient labyrinth (a variation on the thread of fate, in which the only road leads to a Minotaur) to the rhizomatic “open labyrinth” of the information age, epitomized by a “world wide web” that undergoes continuous re-mapping on both local and global scales. Eco distinguishes the modern encyclopedia (or “Enciclopedia Massimale”) from its Baroque, medieval, and ancient predecessors in three ways: 1) its future-oriented conception of knowledge; 2) its recognition of the need for arbitrary (alphabetic) principles of organization; and 3) its more sophisticated understanding of “fiction.”⁶ Although Eco locates the true birth of “L’Enciclopedia Massimale come

⁶ Although Foucault (in *The Order of Things*) claims that it was only in the sixteenth century that encyclopedias began to be concerned with “fictional” knowledge, Eco shows that the accumulation of legends and other important discourses lacking the status of “factual truth” is traceable at least back to Pliny. According to Eco, the major difference between Pliny’s *Natural History* and the Encyclopedia Britannica (for instance) in this regard “is simply the critical attention that is devoted to separating legendary notions from scientifically proven ones (but only because today this difference in ontological status is something that any educated person should be aware of)” (“è semplicemente l’attenzione critica che si dedica a separare le nozioni leggendarie da quelle scientificamente provate (ma

idea regolativa” in the Copernican revolution, he turns to the *Encyclopédie* to illustrate subsequent changes in the figuration of knowledge:

The discourse of D’Alembert still suffers from an irresolvable tension between a model of the tree and a model of the map. The entirety of our knowledge (current, but also, as Leibniz would have it, future) is figured as a geographic map without borders, in which infinite possibilities are covered. But as l’*Encyclopédie*, in its quality as editorial object, it is organized alphabetically, thus acknowledging the necessity of resorting to some reductive artifices.

But we find here already a gesture towards the ideal model of an encyclopaedia, and that is as a hypothetical register of *all* the knowledge of a culture.⁷

Bouvard et Pécuchet can be said to reflect this tension in its own curious interplay of form and content. On the one hand, the wide-ranging knowledge that the title characters (and the reader) gradually acquire over the course of the novel marks it as encyclopedic in both the generic and etymological senses of the word.⁸ On the other hand, there is the biographical organization of the novel as novel: in contrast to the expedient artificiality of alphabetical organization, an encyclopedic novel must co-

soltanto perché anche questa differenza di carattere ontologico, oggi, fa parte di ciò che la persona educata dovrebbe conoscere”) (36).

⁷ “Il discorso di D’Alembert soffre ancora di una tensione irrisolta tra modello dell’albero e modello della mappa. Si avverte che l’insieme delle nostre conoscenze (attuali, ma anche, come voleva Leibniz, future) si articola come una carta geografica senza confini, in cui sono possibili infiniti percorsi. Ma siccome l’*Encyclopédie*, in quanto oggetto editoriale, è ordine alfabetico, si sa di dover ricorrere ad alcuni artifici riduttivi.

Però troviamo già qui un accenno al modello ideale di una enciclopedia, e cioè a un regesto ipotetico di *tutte* le conoscenze di una cultura” (55).

⁸ In Ancient Greek *enkyklios paedia* designated a “complete education,” though “complete” in the sense of “standard,” rather like a Bachelor’s degree today. The “B.A.” analogy is also useful for underscoring a key difference between ancient and modern education, since whereas a standard education in antiquity was standardized for everyone (*trivium* + *quadrivium* for all) the explosion of information characteristic of modernity has led to specialization (choosing one’s major) becoming an essential part of what is now considered a “standard” education.

ordinate its presentation and organization of knowledge with the unfolding of its narrative, thus mapping the information it contains onto a (generally) organic and anthropocentric history that determines its structure and movement. In *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, however, even the narrative itself can be said to reflect a tension between the novel-as-map (in which each chapter “fills-in” a particular area of knowledge), and the novel-as-tree, in which a singular, continually reiterated narrative logic—Bouvard and Pécuchet’s inability to master one area of knowledge inevitably leads to their moving on to the next—serves simultaneously to drive the novel’s plot forward, and to organize and demarcate the fields of knowledge contained within it. This comic engine utilizes and embraces the bad infinity of the novel itself.

3.1 The Encyclopedic Mode(s) of Incompletion

Before turning our full attention to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, we will first reflect more generally on the encyclopedic modes of incompletion that arose, primarily in the nineteenth century, due to massive changes in the theory, volume, and organization of knowledge in Western society. For our purposes, the encyclopedic mode of incompletion thus needs to be thought in **two** broad historical contexts: the history of the novel genre, on the one hand, and the history of the organization of knowledge on the other. While it is fair to say that these histories have long been interconnected, one of their most significant historical convergences can be located precisely in the construction of the *Encyclopédie* by Diderot, d’Alembert, and many, many others.

From a literary-generic standpoint, the *Encyclopédie*'s importance to the history of the novel is threefold. First and foremost, it marked (outside of China) the first truly canonical model for the Encyclopedia genre—a fungible series of volumes into which the sum total of human knowledge available at a given time and place had been compressed. The mere image of the *Encyclopédie* could serve, even/especially for those who had never read it, as an implicit guarantee for all knowledge imparted in the French language. Second, the *Encyclopédie* represented a move towards the democratization of knowledge: no longer hidden away in jealously guarded tomes or the mind of the Master, every literate person now theoretically had access to the same body of knowledge, written in comprehensible French by experts for laymen. Third, the inclusion of literature in general (and fictional literature in particular) as an independent and important body of knowledge would help to shape how nineteenth century novelists conceived of their own work in relation to their nations, their fellow Europeans, and the “momentous interventions that a national spiritual education/intellectual culture (*Geistesbildung*) can make in the destiny of states and the course of universal progress.”⁹

These three observations point to a deep connection between the project of the *Encyclopédie* and the project of literary realism, broadly conceived. Within an encyclopedic ethos in the vein of Diderot and d’Alembert, knowledge is a map with known areas and unknown areas, and with the unknown areas waiting to be filled-in

⁹ The phrase comes from the dedication to the 1815 edition of Friedrich Schlegel’s *Geschichte der Alten und Neuen Literatur*: “bedeutend eine nationale Geistesbildung oft auch in den Lauf der großen Weltbegebenheiten und in die Schicksale der Staaten eingreift” (4). My translation.

and completed by the addition of hitherto undiscovered and/or unprocessed knowledge. Within the project of literary realism—as exemplified by Balzac’s *La Comedie Humaine* (1829-1850)—this task of mapping the unknown regions of knowledge is supplemented by the task of map-ping every possible aspect of human experience within the confines of a fictional world of ink and paper, of constructing a psychological-historical encyclopedia of the human condition by creating living, speaking prototypes for every variation of “human being.” Like the Schillerean ideal of an “aesthetic state” created by like-minded consumers of literature, realism’s teleological promise of an encyclopedic *Comedie Humaine* helps to create a larger sense of communal self-identity, even as it simultaneously works to construct a reading public capable of submitting to its own narrative conventions.

Along with the emergence of a sort of second-order Encyclopedic mode of incompleteness as a structuring principle for the project of realism—i.e., any realist novel can be seen as contributing to the psychological-historical encyclopedia envisioned by the realist enterprise, and this in addition to whatever mode(s) of incompleteness the novel’s narrative actually follows—one can also speak of an “epic-encyclopedic” mode of incompleteness as a structuring principle for individual “epic novels.” The encyclopedic mode of incompleteness can thus be said to operate on two levels: first, as an asymptotic *telos* for the project of realism, the Encyclopedic mode of incompleteness can be seen as a sort of overarching banner under which all realist novels unfold themselves, thereby gaining validation for their own particular narrative teleologies from the horizon promised by liberalism’s Progress

metanarrative: the image of a future in which cultural advances (both scientific and spiritual) have enabled total social emancipation. This accomplishment is henceforth linked in the Euro-American imaginary to the fulfillment of realism's own encyclopedic project, as Russell Berman argues in *The Rise of the Modern German Novel*:

the rules of liberal bourgeois literature purport to be the objects of rational scrutiny and therefore take on the character of laws generated by a self-determining literary public. The transcendental guarantors of pre-bourgeois literature are grace and eschatology; the hidden telos of bourgeois literature is social emancipation. The stratified, hierarchized collectivity of presecularized culture, stretched between monarch and beggar, heaven and hell, is replaced by the bourgeois cultural optimism of a collectivity of equal individuals, a literary republic. (56-57)

In practice, of course, this collectivity has tended to be less interested in the equality of individuals as such than in the equality of property-owning males of European descent.

The epic-encyclopedic mode of incompleteness, by contrast, carries on the ancient project of the epic in modern novel form by attempting to "provide an integrated picture of the world and life, [to] reflect the *entire* world and *all* of life. In the novel, the entire world and all of life are given in the cross section of *the integrity of the epoch*. The events depicted in the novel must somehow *substitute* for the total life of the epoch" ("History of Realism" 43). A particularly famous example of this would be Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), with both its structural reliance on Homer's *Odyssey* and its focus on "a day in Dublin" delimiting in advance the "cross section" of the epoch it seeks to capture. Following a vaguely Porphyric logic, one can again speak of two species of or sub-modes within the epic-encyclopedic mode of

incompletion, depending on whether the novel is A) constructed primarily through the viewpoint or “education” (*enkyklios paedia*) of a single character, whether in the third person as in Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* (1796; 1829) or the first person as in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*¹⁰ (1851); or B) constructed as a sort of Panopticon in which the reader is given intimate access to the inner lives and discourses of a vast panoply of characters, as in Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1862) or Eliot’s *Middlemarch* (1872). These two poles, of course, are almost never realized in their “pure” forms, and most epic-encyclopedic novels can be seen as combining them in some form. Indeed, since a *Bildungsroman* like *Wilhelm Meister* only becomes “epic-encyclopedic” by virtue of a certain historical scope and abundance of characters—a short novel like Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916), for instance, could be said to follow a *Bildungsroman* mode of incompletion but not an epic-encyclopedic one—the very process of a *Bildungsroman* spilling over into an epic-encyclopedic mode of incompletion can always already be seen as deconstructing this distinction to some extent.

The emergence of a genuinely modern epic-encyclopedic mode of incompletion, together with concomitant changes in the theory and organization of knowledge, is dramatized by Bakhtin in “The *Bildungsroman* and Its Significance In the History of Realism,” a book that was tragically un-finished by German bombs and Russian matches. Bakhtin places special emphasis on the importance of *Wilhelm*

¹⁰ In *Moby-Dick*, however, it is the reader who is educated in—or, perhaps better, gradually initiated into—the secrets of the whaling trade by a narrator with “insider” status.

Meister, the pair of *Bildungsromans* in which, for the first time in literature (Bakhtin claims) “the integrity of the world and life in the cross section of the epoch” were presented within a newly “concretized, graphically clarified, and complemented real world,” a world in which “facts were linked to permanent visual images” (45, 44). In this sense, it is no coincidence that *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* was published twenty years after the completion of the *Encyclopédie*, as Goethe’s ability to present an encyclopedic tale of personal becoming now backed for the first time by a “*model of the world whole*” (45) was due not simply to his artistic genius but also to the fortuity of his historical moment, as his artistic talents coincided perfectly with his historical time and place:

The process by which the real world was rounded out, filled in, and integrated first reached its culmination in the eighteenth century, precisely by Goethe’s time. The earth’s position in the solar system and its relation to other worlds in this system were determined; it became subject to interpretation and, in a real sense, historical. It is not just a matter of the quantity of great discoveries, new journeys, and acquired knowledge, but rather of the new *quality* in the comprehension of the real world that resulted from this: from being a fact of abstract consciousness, theoretical constructs, and *rare books*, the new, *real* unity and integrity of the world became a fact of concrete (ordinary) consciousness and practical orientation, a fact of ordinary books and everyday thoughts. (44)¹¹

Importantly, it is not so much the quantity of knowledge that is bound up in *Wilhelm Meister* that marks it as the first authentically encyclopedic novel for Bakhtin, but rather the theory of knowledge on which it is founded and the organizational model

¹¹ Thus, even while claiming that any “important novel of any epoch” can be considered encyclopedic, Bakhtin nonetheless argues that “even to select what was essential and round it into a novelistic whole was a different project before the middle of the eighteenth century (before Fielding, Sterne, and Goethe) from what it later became” (ibid.).

from which it draws, since this “new, complemented world always stands behind the world of the novel. Each part of it transmits to the novel its representatives and deputies, who reflect its new and real fullness and concreteness (geographic and historical in the broadest sense of these words). Far from everything is mentioned in the novel itself, but the compact wholeness of the real world is sensed in each of its images” (44-45). Although his insistence on “the new, *real* unity and integrity” of this world is perhaps open to question, Bakhtin’s cartographically inflected language fits well with Eco’s account of a shift in the figuration/conception of the encyclopedia in this period, a shift towards the encyclopedia as “world-map” (*mappomondo*) that is both prefigured in and exemplified by d’Alembert’s preliminary discourse.

It should perhaps be noted that Eco himself is not entirely consistent on this point, since the history of the encyclopedia he offers in *Dall’Albero al Labirinto* is in fact a revision and expansion of a section from his *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (46-86).¹² In both cases, however, the Enlightenment’s figuration of the encyclopedia as world-map is not represented as an endpoint so much as “a midway solution” between the Porphyric Tree of antiquity and the Deleuzian rhizome to come. Thus *Wikipedia*, for instance—the rhizomatic text *par excellence*—would be unthinkable without an encyclopedic model through and against which to define itself: “Trying to transform the tree into a map, the eighteenth century encyclopedia, the encyclopedia of Diderot and d’Alembert, made in fact the rhizome thinkable”

¹² Although the main ideas are similar, there are some subtle terminological differences between the two works that I do not have space to go into here. Eco himself notes some of these differences in his survey of recent literature on the Encyclopedia in *Dall’Albero al Labirinto* (61-65).

(*Semiotics* 82). What makes the *Encyclopédie*'s structuring image of "the tree of knowledge" so revolutionary, Eco claims, is firstly

the hypothetical nature of the tree: it does not reproduce the presumed structure of the world, but presents itself as the most economical solution with which to confront and resolve a particular problem of the re-unification of knowledge. In the second place, the encyclopedist knows that the tree organizes, yet impoverishes, its content, and he hopes to determine as precisely as he can the intermediate paths between the various nodes of the tree so that little by little it is transformed into a geographical chart or map. (ibid.)

Eco follows this assertion with a reading of d'Alembert's preliminary discourse, in which d'Alembert alternately "develops the metaphor of the tree" and "puts it into question, speaking instead of a world-map and a labyrinth," and moreover "says with great clarity that what an encyclopedia represents has no center. The encyclopedia is a pseudo-tree, which assumes the aspect of a local map, in order to represent, always transitorily and locally, what in fact is not representable because it is a rhizome—an inconceivable globality" (82, 83). This method of "assuming the aspect of local map" can be said to reflect not only the changing nature of the theory and organization of knowledge at this time, but also the encyclopedic mode of incompleteness, whether on the grand scale of realism's "Comédie Humaine" or on the smaller (but still grand) scale of individual epic-encyclopedic novels and the "cross-sections" of their epochs they seek to capture. In this sense, one might say that Goethe becoming Goethe required not only that he have the good fortune to be born well after the Copernican revolution, but also to be born before—as Nietzsche puts it in *The Birth of Tragedy*—"the spirit of science ha[d] been pursued to its limits, and its claims to universal validity destroyed by the evidence of these limits" (106). The "*model* of the world

whole” that stood behind Goethe’s fiction had not yet been exposed as one model among others.

3.2 The Self-De(con)struction of an Encyclopedic Ethos in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*

Flaubert, by contrast, actually dramatizes and enacts the process of this exposure in *Bouvard*. Moreover, he does so in a truly encyclopedic fashion, since his protagonists do not merely pursue some single delimited (or hopelessly abstracted) “spirit of science” to its limit, but instead pursue a series of sciences to their respective spiritual limits (or at least to the limits of Bouvard and Pécuchet’s comprehension of them), thus eventually mapping out something akin to a genuine encyclopedia... arguably the first and quintessential “encyclopedia for dummies.” The novel tells the story of a pair of copy-clerks—each endowed with fine handwriting, slightly above average intelligence, and truly heroic curiosity—stumbling their way through nearly every branch of nineteenth-century knowledge. With the exception of the first chapter (in which they meet, Bouvard receives an inheritance, and they purchase a country estate), the entire movement of *Bouvard* is structured around the model of an encyclopedia, as each subsequent chapter depicts the characters’ attempts to master one or more branches of contemporary knowledge. In each case, however, their **inability** to master each branch of knowledge leads directly to their moving on to the next branch (in this sense the novel is particularly reminiscent of Rabelais’s *Tiers Livre*), until finally their many years of study and self-improvement lead them to withdraw from society and devote themselves to the

education of two village waifs. This too fails of course, in yet another of the novel's many skewerings of the Schillerean ideal of "Aesthetic Education."

Thus, even as *Bouvard et Pécuchet* follows an epic-encyclopedic mode of incompleteness—utilizing both the Pedagogic and Panoptic sub-modes—it simultaneously works to deconstruct the very theories of knowledge, culture, and education that initially inspire its heroes to undertake their quest for knowledge. In this sense, one could also say that *Bouvard* follows an immoralist mode of incompleteness, a parasitic narrative template in which a conscientious, dedicated pursuit of a particular ideology leads directly to a violent rejection of that ideology.¹³ In *Bouvard*, this immoralist mode of incompleteness can be seen to operate on three levels: 1) the encyclopedic ethos of the Enlightenment (knowledge as "world-map"); 2) the project of realism (as reflected in the Panoptic mode of incompleteness); and 3) the Schillerean ideal of aesthetic education. Dealing with each of these in turn, we will see how the novel's narrative structure paradoxically works to undermine these cherished eidetic paradigms of the Enlightenment through rigorous (and not entirely unsympathetic) fidelity to them.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the encyclopedic ethos that is undermined in *Bouvard* is a certain optimistic faith in the progress of knowledge itself, a faith that is gradually eroded by our heroes' repeated discovery of what I have

¹³ "Immoralism" is (of course) a Nietzschean term, and refers to a process of self-transformation in which an uncompromising pursuit of morality leads one to reject the system of morality in which one had initially believed, and (sometimes) to erect and/or embrace an antithetical ideology in its place. For more on immoralism and the immoralist mode of incompleteness, see Chapter Four.

already termed the secret of the encyclopedia: in every case, Bouvard and Pécuchet's researches lead them not to mastery over their subject but rather to the discovery that even so-called "experts" cannot agree on some of the most fundamental assumptions of their branch of learning. Amongst historians, for instance, there is "no consensus about the antiquity of the Chaldeans, the century of Homer, the existence of Zoroaster, or the two Assyrian empires" (106).¹⁴ In the end, every nook and cranny of the sciences (human or otherwise) is found to be riddled with errors, ignorance, and contradiction.

The following exchange, beginning with Pécuchet's indignant summary of what he has gleaned from months of research into fruit farming, provides a microcosm for the structure of the novel as a whole:

"The authors recommend stopping up the ducts. If not, the sap gets blocked and the tree suffers. To thrive, it really shouldn't bear fruit at all. Still, the ones that are never pruned or manured produce better fruit—smaller, maybe, but more flavorful. I demand that someone tell me why that is! And it's not just each variety that requires specific care, but each individual tree, depending on the climate, the temperature, and God knows what else! So then, where's the rule? And what hope do we have of any success or profit?"

Bouvard answered, "Gasparin says the profit cannot be greater than one-tenth the investment. We'd be better off putting the money in a savings bank. At the end of fifteen years, we'd have twice as much just from the accrued interest, without driving ourselves crazy."

Pécuchet lowered his head.

"Fruit farming might just be a joke!"

"Like agronomy!" Bouvard shot back. (38-39)¹⁵

¹⁴ "pas d'accord sur l'antiquité des Chaldéens, le siècle d'Homère, l'existence de Zoroastre, les deux empires d'Assyrie" (189).

¹⁵ — « Les auteurs nous recommandent de supprimer tout canal direct. La sève, par là, se trouve contrariée, et l'arbre forcément en souffre. Pour se bien porter, il faudrait qu'il n'eût pas de fruits. Cependant, ceux qu'on ne taille et qu'on ne fume jamais en produisent – de moins gros, c'est vrai, mais de plus savoureux. J'exige qu'on m'en donne la raison! – et, non seulement, chaque espèce réclame des soins

Since much has already been made of the image of “the tree” in this chapter, I would be remiss not to point out that Pécuchet’s soliloquy on the irreducible idiosyncrasy of “each individual” tree echoes the tension that Eco reads into d’Alembert’s discourse on the tree of knowledge. Whereas the Porphyric tree organizes itself in accordance with a singular methodical logic, a process through which all subjects can theoretically be categorized and defined, d’Alembert’s tree by contrast acknowledges a fundamental split in the theory and organization of knowledge itself—the division of sciences vs. humanities, with all the subdivisions this implies and enables—a methodological chasm whose very existence in a sense marks the death of the harmonizing Porphyric model.¹⁶ Pécuchet, similarly, looking for the ideal system by which to organize and cultivate all his fruit trees, comes to the realization that, ideally, each tree should have its own system. Moreover, since the best system for the fruit farmer is clearly not the best system for the tree itself (*Pour se bien porter, il*

particuliers, mais encore chaque individu, suivant le climat, la température, un tas des choses! où est la règle, alors? Et quel espoir avons-nous d’aucun succès ou bénéfice?»

Bouvard lui répondit:

— « Tu verras dans Gasparin que le bénéfice ne peut dépasser le dixième du capital. Donc on ferait mieux de placer ce capital dans une maison de banque; au bout de quinze ans, par l’accumulation des intérêts, on aurait le double sans s’être foulé le tempérament. »

Pécuchet baissa la tête.

— « L’arboriculture pourrait bien être une blague? »

— « Comme l’agronomie! » répliqua Bouvard. (99)

¹⁶ In the modern encyclopedia, alphabetization serves an analogous function to the logic of the Porphyric tree, with the major difference that alphabetization admits (and even calls attention to) its own artificiality, and hence also to the lack of any “natural” organizational principle that could mediate between all the different modalities of knowing. Like co-authorship, then, alphabetical order is in fact another tacit admission of the secret of the encyclopedia.

faudrait qu'il n'eût pas de fruits), it also becomes clear that, even in an arena of knowledge as tightly circumscribed as fruit farming, there are multiple competing values, logics, and “calculi of truth functions” at work.

Of course, Bouvard and Pécuchet would never be able to reach such subversive conclusions if it were not for the boundless intellectual optimism with which they are initially endowed. Solid bourgeois that they are, they share their wonder at the progress of human knowledge during their first encounter: “they praised the advances of the sciences: so many things to know, so much research—if only one had the time! Alas, one’s livelihood absorbed it all” (6).¹⁷ Here we see an idealized notion of the encyclopedia as *mappomondo*: all the knowledge is already there (or soon will be), and it is only the mundane demands of day-to-day existence (*le gagne-pain*) that prevent amateur enthusiasts like our heroes from learning all there is to know. It is only after they have acquired means to devote years to their “recherches” that the clerks begin to realize the truth: that the impossibility of “knowing everything” is due not simply to a lack of time but to the nature of knowledge itself. To continue to have faith in the “limitless potential” of human knowledge, one must either remain superficial in one’s studies (the dilettante) or else confine one’s learning to a single modality of knowing (the specialist), because the hard truth is that in the accumulation of erudition one inevitably reaches a point of diminishing returns... a point after which it becomes clear that the more one learns, the less one knows. Bouvard himself seems to concede this point near the end of

¹⁷ “ils glorifièrent les avantages des sciences: que de choses à connaître! que de recherches – si on avait le temps! Hélas, le gagne-pain l’absorbait” (55).

Chapter Three (on the sciences): “Science is based on data supplied by a small corpus of knowledge. Perhaps it doesn’t apply to all the rest that we don’t know about, which is much more vast, and which we can never understand” (69).¹⁸ Yet to even be able to make such a statement, one must first have sufficient erudition to be aware of “tout le reste qu’on ignore, qui est beaucoup plus grand.” Absolute faith in the encyclopedic ethos of the Enlightenment, in the details of the *mappomondo*, can only be maintained if one refrains from examining those details too closely, from learning what has been left out.

Bouvard et Pécuchet can also be said to undermine the project of realism insofar as it satirically utilizes the Panoptic epic-encyclopedic mode of incompleteness, undeniably capturing a “cross-section” of its epoch through its depiction of over a decade in the village of “Chavignolles.”¹⁹ The Panoptic nature of the novel is both observable in and undermined by the extremely caricatured nature of more-or-less every character in it (Coulon, Marescot, Foureau, etc.). The mayor, the farm girl, the doctor, all speak in a language appropriate to their station and to the basic psychology one would expect from their superficial descriptions, and although one does occasionally get somewhat touching glimpses into their lives (such as the housekeeper’s crush on Pécuchet), for the most part every character we encounter is banal, boring, clichéd. Indeed, the clerks themselves are somewhat shocked to

¹⁸ “La science est faite, suivant les données fournies par un coin de l’entendue. Peut-être ne convient-elle pas à tout le reste qu’on ignore, qui est beaucoup plus grand, et qu’on ne peut découvrir” (138).

¹⁹ Interestingly, *Bouvard* covers more-or-less the same historical period as *L’Education Sentimentale*.

discover the contrast between the bevy of stereotypes who inhabit their own “real world” (Chavignolles), and the marvelous psychological variety they find in contemporary fiction: “The works of Balzac filled them with wonder, both as a kind of Babylon and as specks of dust under a microscope. New facets emerged from even the most banal events. They had not suspected modern life of being so profound” (118).²⁰

Sitting in an armchair, with a novel in one’s hand, it is fairly easy to reflect on the “profundity” of modern life and the fascinating undiscovered facets that each individual unexamined life must contain. Yet just as contact with Balzac leads them to reflect on the hidden profundities of modern life, so contact with modern life causes Pécuchet to cast a critical eye on Balzac and (by extension) the realist project in general: “his bourgeois aren’t bourgeois, they’re giants. Why inflate something so flat and describe so much foolishness? He’s written a novel about chemistry, another one about banking, and another about printing presses... Before long we’ll have one about every trade and region, then about every town and the story of every house and every individual in it, which won’t be literature anymore but statistics or ethnography” (118).²¹ Without sharing Pécuchet’s dour appraisal of literature’s

²⁰ “L’oeuvre de Balzac les émerveilla, tout à la fois une Babylone, et comme des grains de poussière sous le microscope. Dans les choses les plus banales, des aspects nouveaux surgirent. Ils n’avaient pas soupçonné la vie moderne aussi profonde” (205).

²¹ “ses bourgeois ne sont pas des bourgeois, mais des colosses. Pourquoi gonfler ce qui est plat, et décrire tant de sottises? Il a fait un roman sur la chemie, un autre sur la Banque, un autre sur les machines à imprimer... Nous en aurons sur tous les métiers et sur toutes les provinces, puis sur toutes les villes et les étages de chaque maison et

tendency to overflow its disciplinary boundaries, and granting that there is undoubtedly some Flaubertian self-mockery going on in this speech, it should suffice to point out that what Pécuchet is critiquing here is precisely the encyclopedic ethos of realism, or what I have already described as the “second-order” Encyclopedic mode of incompleteness.

Nonetheless, as their critical insights above might already suggest, the novel’s titular pair—especially when considered **as** a pair—do constitute something of an exception to the iron laws of stupidity that determine the behavior of all other characters in the book. In contrast to a typical *Bildungsroman* mode of incompleteness, in which a protagonist journeys from latency to potency according to the internal logic of his or her individual becoming, in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* it is only the protagonists’ dialogic status as a duo that allows them to break free of the stereotyping qualities that would otherwise determine their destinies as literary characters. Although each is himself somewhat representative of a stereotype (liberal widower and conservative bachelor), their friendship complicates these stereotypes and makes them capable not merely of change but of emotionally affecting the reader as well. All this is thematized in their initial encounter, which is described as a sort of mutual rebirth: “Each one, listening to the other, rediscovered forgotten parts of himself. And although they had passed the age of naïve emotions, they both felt a

chaque individu, ce qui ne sera plus de la littérature, mais de la statistique ou de l’ethnographie” (205).

new pleasure, a kind of blossoming, the charm of affections newly born” (5).²² In the end, however, even the “wisdom” to which Bouvard and Pécuchet’s dialogic renaissance leads them serves only to reinforce the novel’s overarching denunciation of human stupidity, since the wisdom they finally acquire takes the form not of serenity but of bitter misanthropy. This becomes abundantly clear in Chapter Eight (on philosophy) in what is probably the novel’s most significant turning-point, when the titular duo suddenly develop

a piteous faculty, that of perceiving stupidity and being unable to tolerate it. Insignificant things saddened them: newspaper advertisements, a burgher’s profile, an inane comment overheard by chance. And reflecting on what was said in their village, and on the fact that one could find other Coulons, other Marescots, other Foureaus stretching to the ends of the earth, they felt upon their shoulders the weight of the entire world.

They no longer went out, received no visitors. (205-206)²³

Here we can witness the ultimate deconstruction of Schiller’s “Aesthetic Education of Man,” as the protagonists’ path of self-cultivation, pursued to its ultimate end, eventually leads them straight past Enlightened citizenship and all the way to reclusive misanthropy.

Of all the deconstructions of Enlightenment paradigms performed in *Bouvard*, that of “aesthetic education” is perhaps the most complex. On the one hand, it is

²² “Chacun en écoutant l’autre retrouvait des parties de lui-même oubliées; – et bien qu’ils eussent passé l’âge des émotions naïves, ils éprouvaient un plaisir nouveau, une sorte d’épanouissement, le charme des tendresses à leur début” (54).

²³ “une faculté pitoyable..., celle de voir la bêtise et de ne plus le tolérer.

Des choses insignifiantes les attristaient: les réclames des journaux, le profil d’un bourgeois, une sottise réflexion entendue par hasard.

En songeant à ce qu’on disait dans leur village, et qu’il y avait jusqu’aux antipodes d’autres Coulon, d’autres Marescot, d’autres Foureau, ils sentaient peser sur eux comme la lourdeur de toute la terre.

Ils ne sortaient plus, ne recevaient personne” (319).

clearly an ideal that Flaubert retains a great deal of sympathy for (as one would hope and expect from a novelist). On the other hand, there is probably also no ideal that is more rigorously undermined by the narrative structure of the novel, which does not directly attack this ideal so much as cause it to implode under its own weight. Consider, for instance, this Schillerean dictum: “Each individual man, we can say, bears, in disposition and determination, a pure ideal man within himself; and the great task of his existence is to harmonize in all his variety with its inalterable unity” (Schiller 12). Considered on the level of plot, *Bouvard et Pécuchet* does not so much contradict this dictum as raise disturbing questions about it, questions like: what if the ideal man inside me is a swine? Or, what if the ideal me that necessity has forced me to suppress all these years is actually much closer to my present self than I would like to believe?

The first of these questions is raised by one of the final episodes in the book, the attempted education of the orphans “Victor et Victorine” in Chapter Ten. After failing repeatedly to pass on even the basics (reading, writing, arithmetic), our heroes are finally able to teach the children reading and writing only by appealing to their “basest” instincts (gluttonous Victor learns to read in order to revel over cookbooks, while Victorine is told she will receive a new dress when she can write to the store and order it). Even more importantly, the opportunities for self-development that these long-neglected orphans suddenly find themselves presented with—the leisure time and material comfort necessary to discover their “ideal selves”—actually allows them to develop their vices to the full: Victor, after beating up the mayor’s son,

appears to have become a successful thief (they find twenty francs in his room), while Victorine is caught *in flagrante delicto* with Romiche, an itinerant hunchback tailor.

The second (and probably more profound) question, however, is raised by the history of Bouvard and Pécuchet themselves, who after all their trials, travails and researches finally settle for building a double-sided desk (their first “successful” invention) and sitting down to resume what they finally realize to be their lives’ true calling: copying. In a sense, then, the entire education Bouvard and Pécuchet undergo only leads them to the conclusion that the “pure ideal man” in each of them is in fact a copy clerk, that copying in fact marks the “inalterable unity” at the core of their existence, a unity they must now try to reconcile with the undeniable “variety” they have acquired over the course of their studies.

In any case, it is not unfair to describe *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as an immoralist *Bildungsroman*, in which our two forty-seven year old heroes are given leisure to drink to the dregs everything their culture has to offer until, having fully enlightened themselves with an aesthetic education, they come to reject (or at least denounce the stupidity of) nearly all of the ideas and values associated with the Enlightenment and aesthetic education. Recall the earlier quotation in which the clerks dismiss fruit farming and agronomy as “blagues”: in this passage, the structure of an immoralist *Bildungsroman* is incarnate. After acquiring their estate, Bouvard and Pécuchet’s earliest researches are quite reasonably directed towards the “most advanced” methods for improving their farm and garden, and although their ill-fated ventures in these fields lead them to squander half of their original capital with few tangible

agricultural results, their failures do eventually endow them with a certain perverse wisdom... they are indeed wiser than when their studies began. At the same time, the passage clearly exemplifies an immoralist mode of incompleteness insofar as its central “epiphany” in fact marks a recognition of the uselessness of the knowledge they have acquired (*on ferait mieux de placer ce capital dans une maison de banque*). This epiphany, moreover, leads directly to the protagonists rejecting the study of fruit farming and agronomy, allowing them to move on to the next topic (in this case, architectural gardening) and thereby pushing the narrative forward, ever forward... to the *Sottisier*.

3.3 Imagining the *Sottisier*: *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as Unfinishable Novel

The immoralist education Bouvard and Pécuchet undergo reflects the novel’s clear indebtedness to Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759), whose closing maxim “Cultivons notre jardin!” (“Let us cultivate our garden!”) Flaubert famously praised as “the greatest moral lesson that exists.” Be that as it may, *Bouvard* seems to undermine even this exhortation when (in Chapter Eight) the clerks find they are no longer able to take pleasure in gardening after having overburdened themselves with metaphysical conundrums and soul-crushing erudition: “After that, they thought about their poor garden. Bouvard undertook to clear the arbor and Pécuchet to trim the espalier... After a quarter of an hour, they stopped. One closed his pruning knife, the other put down his shears, and slowly they began walking... Thoughts had surfaced during their meditations. They walked towards each other, afraid of

forgetting them—and the metaphysics resumed” (198).²⁴ Echoing the end of *L’Education Sentimentale*, the two friends will later reflect on how their earlier struggles to create the perfect garden, spectacularly unsuccessful as they were, marked the happiest time of their lives, before the edge of their optimism had been entirely blunted by all their failures and discoveries.

Yet this implicit critique of Voltaire only takes place on the most superficial level (i.e., that of the literal “garden”), and is specifically connected to the protagonists’ study of philosophy and thus to the specific immoralist narrative logic of Chapter Eight (which eventually ends in attempted suicide, as the clerks are about to hang themselves when a sudden religious awakening overtakes them and serves as segue into Chapter Nine). Moreover, in Flaubert’s sketches for the unfinished portion of Chapter Ten we are explicitly told that when the townspeople eventually flock to Bouvard and Pécuchet’s chateau to arrest them “their garden[...] is now well-maintained and the townspeople are envious” (*leur jardin[...] est maintenant bien tenu et la population en est jalouse*) (278; 413).

Furthermore, the “garden” we are advised to cultivate at the end of *Candide* is of course not only a literal garden (though it can be that as well), but also a metaphor for the small sphere of affairs over which we each have some control, our ability to cultivate personal relationships and exert some small influence over whatever portion

²⁴ “Ensuite, ils pensèrent à leur pauvre jardin. Bouvard entreprit l’émondage de la charmille. Pécuchet la taille de l’espalier... Au bout d’un quart d’heure, ils arrêtaient, l’un fermait sa serpette, l’autre déposait ses ciseaux, et ils commençaient doucement à se promener... Dans cette méditation, des pensées avaient surgi; ils s’abordaient, craignant de les perdre; et la métaphysique revenait” (309-10).

of the *mappomondo* our existence has been consigned to. In this sense, one might say that the true garden of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is not the one on their estate, the one they expend so much money and energy attempting to cultivate in Chapter Two, but rather the unrealized *Sottisier*, the encyclopedia of human stupidity that Bouvard and Pécuchet's education has (by the end of Volume I) given them the desire and ability to compile. This view is anticipated in the sketches for a new Preface to the novel (for the Gothot-Mersch edition) that Raymond Queneau left unfinished at his death: "*Bouvard and Pécuchet* is an *Odyssey*, Madame Bordin and Mélie are the Calypsos of this wandering across the Mediterranean of knowledge and the final copying is Ithaca where, after having massacred all the pretenders, they undertake with a wisdom-filled enthusiasm to breed the pearly swine of human stupidity. Just like *Candide*, they cultivate their garden."²⁵ At the end of the narrative proper, beyond the first volume of the novel, this is the garden they cultivate.

This radically unfinished second volume, "le projet du 'Sottisier,'" also raises the question of whether *Bouvard et Pécuchet* might properly be described as an "unfinishable novel," or a novel that could only be "finished" by the literal death of its author. In any case, any potential "unfinishability" that might be ascribed to *Bouvard* would reside not in its narrative (i.e. the first volume) but rather in its "Postscript," a project that could conceivably have been carried on in a rhizomatic

²⁵ "*Bouvard et Pécuchet* est une *Odyssee*, madame Bordin et Mélie sont les Calypso de cette errance à travers la Méditerranée du savoir et la copie finale est l'Ithaque où, après avoir massacré tous les prétendants, ils font avec un enthousiasme plein de sagesse l'élevage des huîtres perlières de la bêtise humaine. Tout comme *Candide*, ils cultivent leur jardin" ("Un préface de Queneau" 47). My translation.

fashion (undergoing continuous re-mapping) even if it had been formally “completed” during the six-month timeframe Flaubert envisioned. As is well known, the “histoire” of Bouvard and Pécuchet was meant to serve as introduction to at least two other documents: the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* and the *Catalogue des opinions chics*. Although the *Catalogue* exists only in outline, Flaubert had completed the *Dictionnaire* as early as 1850 and planned for many years to write a novel that would function as a “Prologue” to the piece, a plan that was eventually (almost) realized as *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. In this sense, the entire “story” of the novel can be read as an explanation of how the credulous copy-clerks we meet in Chapter One could have developed into the skeptical copy-authors of the documents we find in Volume II. As Raymond Queneau’s seminal 1947 preface to the novel puts it: “There is in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* the signs of a kind of pragmatism—and the famous ‘stupidity’ of our two heroes has no other origin than their desire for the absolute, which they believe they can satisfy with manuals and superficial studies; they do not become wise (and do not completely become one with their creator) until they compile their ‘Album’ and their ‘Dictionary,’ and stop aiming at a final conclusion” (xxxiii). Yet this undoing of conclusion in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is itself inconclusive. While it is now generally accepted that the *Dictionnaire* and the *Catalogue* were meant to form part of the novel’s second volume, there are other documents such as *L’Album de la Marquise*—a satiric review of contemporary literature left unfinished by Flaubert’s friend and fellow novelist Jules Duplan, and which may or may not have been intended for the *Sottisier*—whose statuses are more uncertain. Even today,

then, the “true” structure of the novel as a whole remains unknowable and unfinalizable.²⁶

It might therefore strike one as odd that Bakhtin, in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, actually singles out *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as a countertype to Dostoevsky's “polyphonic novels” on the grounds that in it Flaubert “unites material of the most heterogeneous content, but this heterogeneity does not function in the structure of the novel itself and cannot so function in any well-defined way—because it is subordinated to the unity of a personal style and tone permeating it through and through, the unity of a single world and single consciousness” (15). Bakhtin here cites Flaubert's novel not as a whipping boy but rather as the supreme counter-example to what he believes to be Dostoevsky's own artistic vision, and in this he is quite right: Flaubert's uncompromising quest for “le mot juste,” together with his well-known theory of the “Author-God,” clearly align him with the monologic novel as Bakhtin defines it, as does the fact that the process of character development Bouvard and

²⁶ The two standard critical editions of the second volume are Geneviève Bollème's *Le second volume de Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Paris: Denoël, 1966) and Alberto Cento and Lea Pennarola's *Le second volume de “Bouvard et Pécuchet”: le projet du “Sottisier”* (Napoli: Liguori Editori, 1981). Bollème was perhaps the first to conclusively establish the fundamental importance of the Second Volume—whose existence was then still a matter of debate—to the novel as a whole, though her conception of the *Sottisier* is somewhat more conservative than my own. At the same time that Bollème's volume appeared, Cento had just begun his own extremely ambitious version of the text, which actually tracked down all the prospective references contained in Flaubert's notes. Cento's premature death in 1968, however, delayed the completion and release of this text until 1981. Claudine Gothot-Mersch also offers an excellent summary of the history of the debate over the organization of the second volume in her introduction to her edition of the novel (7-43), along with various critics' speculations on Flaubert's own conception for how the second volume was to have been organized.

Pécuchet undergo in the novel brings them closer and closer to Flaubert's own point of view (as Queneau and many others have pointed out).²⁷ In this sense, even the unfinished and (arguably) unfinishable project of the *Sottisier*—which Bakhtin does not reflect on—would seem to offer a clear example of how “authors [of monologic novels] cast a mantle of objectivity over every point of view they do not share, turning it, to one degree or another, into a thing” (68). Indeed, this last quote might even be read as describing the goal of the *Sottisier*, in which both author and heroes attempt to sublimate their nausea over human stupidity into the finalizing satiric satisfactions afforded by copy-artistry.

At the same time, however, the possible unfinishability of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* complicates matters: how monologic can a novel be, after all, if after a hundred and thirty years critics are still debating about which documents “belong” to it? If we consider the possibility of the *Sottisier* as an unfinishable project, a way of dealing with the stupidity of the world over the course of a lifetime, then one might claim that although *Bouvard* is not “polyphonic” itself, it nonetheless arrives, as an unfinishable novel, at a position quite similar to the one Bakhtin finds underlying all of Dostoevsky's polyphonic fiction, the belief that “*nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of and about the world has not yet been spoken*” (166). Indeed, this position seems quite similar to one taken by Flaubert himself in an

²⁷ For a book-length study of the relationship between Flaubert and his two protagonists (their increasing closeness, etc.), see Roger Kempf's *Bouvard, Flaubert et Pécuchet* (1990).

1850 letter to Louis Bouilhet, a letter that (not coincidentally) includes a discussion of Flaubert's recently completed *Dictionnaire*:

Ineptitude exists in wanting to conclude. We tell each other: but our base is not fixed; which of the two will be right? I see a past in ruins and a future in embryo; the one is too old, the other too young. Everything is in a state of confusion. But this means wanting only noon or midnight; it means not understanding twilight...

Yes, stupidity consists in wanting to conclude. We are a thread and we want to know the pattern. That goes back to those eternal discussions about the decadence of art. Now one spends one's time telling oneself: we are completely finished, we are at the very end, etc., etc. What mind of any strength—beginning with Homer—has ever come to a conclusion? [Let us content ourselves with the tableau, it is thus, fine.] (xxxiii-xxxiv)²⁸

Since Flaubert's critique of "wanting to conclude" in this letter is explicitly connected to his discussion of his *Dictionnaire*, one might assume (by extension) that it is an opinion shared by the purported compilers of the *Dictionnaire*, the Bouvard and Pécuchet of Volume II, who (at least in Queneau's reading) have stopped "aiming at a final conclusion." We might also take note of the maxim Flaubert opposes to "à vouloir conclure": "Contentons-nous du tableau, c'est ainsi, bon." The various meanings of *tableau* seem significant here: whereas the primary sense of the word might suggest that "contenting ourselves" with a *tableau* would mean settling for a

²⁸ "*L'ineptie consiste à vouloir conclure.* Nous nous disons: mais notre base n'est pas fixe; qui aura raison de deux? Je vois un passé en ruines et un avenir en germe, l'un trop vieux, l'autre trop jeune, tout est brouillé. Mais c'est ne pas comprendre le crépuscule, c'est ne vouloir que midi ou minuit..."

Oui, la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure. Nous sommes un fil et nous voulons savoir la trame. Cela revient à ces éternelles discussions sur la décadence de l'art. Maintenant on passe son temps à se dire: nous sommes complètement finis, nous voilà arrivés au dernier terme, etc., etc. Quel est l'esprit un peu fort qui ait conclu, à commencer par Homère? Contentons-nous du tableau, c'est ainsi, bon" (*Correspondance* 2 76). With the exception of the final sentence (which Queneau does not cite and I have translated myself), the English is taken from Crowder's translation of the portions of this letter contained in Queneau's Preface.

generalized “picture” of the world without obsessing too much over the details, *tableau*’s more schematic connotations as data table, chart, or blackboard (*tableau noir*) might also suggest the image of something like an open-ended data bank, an unending flux of information that we must content ourselves with processing to the best of our abilities. In other words: “Let us cultivate our garden.”

Recalling my characterization of the *Sottisier* as the “garden” that Bouvard and Pécuchet’s education (in Volume I) inspires and enables them to cultivate in Volume II, one might say that Flaubert shares with (Bakhtin’s) Dostoevsky a sort of “gardener’s ethos” that in this case transcends the monologic/polyphonic divide. For a gardener, the stupidity of “aiming at a final conclusion” should be obvious, since the only possible “final conclusion” to a garden would be its utter and irrevocable destruction. For the gardener, there is not only the recurring cycle of the seasons to take into account (the yearly movement from life to death and back again), but also activities like weeding that must be continuously repeated if the garden is to prosper. Creating a garden, one might say, is only a prelude to the task of maintaining it, and indeed both these tasks are already implied by the verb “to cultivate.” Thus, in contrast to the *Encyclopédie*, which posits a “map without borders” but which due to its finite and finalized physical existence can only point to the limitless vistas of future knowledge that will one day render it “rococo,” a garden is by its very nature rhizomatic... particularly from a diachronic point of view. While it may well have fixed external boundaries, the internal boundaries of a garden are necessarily subject to (or at least threatened by) constant flux.

In this sense we might imagine the two volumes of *Bouvard* in terms of Eco's distinction between "closed" and "open" labyrinths. The first volume, a ten-chapter novel, forms a closed narrative (or would have, had it been finished) that follows a combination of the epic-encyclopedic and immoralist modes of incompleteness. The first volume also displays a certain generic fidelity to the formal template of the encyclopedia as closed labyrinth, insofar as each chapter focuses on a particular area of knowledge. The second volume, however—at least as I imagine it, taking the *Dictionnaire* and *Catalogue* as its paradigmatic documents—would seem closer to one of Eco's *labirinti aperti*, insofar as its contents could conceivably have been formally completed while still remaining "open" to future editions and revisions. Since its structure is defined less by a predetermined narrative thread than by the potentially endless alphabetical re-shuffling of the rhizome, Flaubert could conceivably have completed (i.e., finished the basic framework of) the second volume in a mere six months—as per the timetable he announces in an 1878 letter to Madame Genettes—and at the same time could have *continued* working on the second volume until his death, adding entries to the individually unfinishable documents even if he had lived for several years more.²⁹

I should point out that this is both a relatively unprecedented reading of Flaubert's plan for the second volume and a particularly speculative one, since Flaubert was keenly aware of his own failing health and was undoubtedly attempting to publish the novel before his death. It is unclear, however, whether he intended to

²⁹ For the letter see Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance 5 (1877-1880)* (94-95).

publish the two volumes as a single text. Yet even if one views the second volume as a “finishable” project, its unfinalizable structure would nonetheless seem to reinforce a distinction between the desire to conclude (a drive towards totality and the Absolute) and the necessity of providing a conclusion, a serviceable tableau.

The possible “unfinishability” of the novel might also appear to be undermined by the ending for the second volume contained in Flaubert’s notes.³⁰ In it, the clerks discover a letter from the doctor to the local prefect, who had written to inquire whether Bouvard and Pécuchet should be committed (as many villagers seem to think). The doctor replies that they are “just two harmless imbeciles,” and after briefly debating this position (thus reviewing the novel for the reader) the two clerks set themselves to copying this letter as well. I shall give the French in the main text:

Pas de réflexion! copions! Il faut que la page s’emplisse, que « le monument » se complète. – égalité de tout, du bien et du mal, du Beau et du laid, de l’insignifiant et du caractéristique. Il n’y a de vrai que les phénomènes. –

Finir sur la vue des deux bonshommes penchés sur leur pupitre, et copiant. (443)

No time for reflection! Let’s copy! The page must be filled, the ‘monument’ completed. All things are equal: good and evil, beautiful and ugly, insignificant and characteristic. [There is no truth except phenomena.]³¹

End with a view of our two heroes leaning over their desk, copying. (281)

Rather than “wrapping things up,” however, this ending provides an image of activity moving forward into the future, an activity that is moreover responsible for the generation of documents that the reader of Volume II has already encountered.

³⁰ Actually, the notes contain at least three endings, but the final one chronologically speaking (i.e., the one reproduced below) does seem definitive.

³¹ I have here corrected a rather major error in Polizzotti’s otherwise excellent translation, which has “There is no truth in phenomena” for “Il n’y a de vrai que les phénomènes.”

In this regard, the “necessity of completion” (*Il faut que la page s’emplisse, que «le monument» se complète*) alluded to here is particularly deceptive, since it actually appears to be directly opposed to the previously vilified “desire to conclude” insofar as it is not directed towards bringing their “project”—the *Sottisier* in its entirety—to a conclusion, but simply at filling the page in front of them (*la page s’emplisse*). After which, presumably, there will be another page, and then another, etc., etc. In this sense, this conclusion can actually be seen as enabling the “unfinishability” of the novel, which could have proliferated indefinitely under the aegis of this final tableau, thereby arguably anticipating later “open-middled” unfinishable novels like Kafka’s *Der Prozeß* or Proust’s *La Recherche*, monuments that could only be completed by the deaths of their authors.

Insofar as “la bêtise consiste à vouloir conclure,” the second volume’s lack of a clear path to its conclusion not only reinforces its ideology but even provides an ironic note of optimism. Enlightened by their aesthetic education, the Bouvard and Pécuchet of Volume II have not only discovered the “ideal man” in each of them to be a copy-clerk, they have also discovered a truly inexhaustible topic with which they can preoccupy themselves at their double-sided desk for the rest of their lives. There will always be more text to copy from the Great Book of Human Stupidity, there will always be new idiocies to denounce (one has only to open the morning paper). Thus, even if “bêtise” seems to function for Flaubert as a sort of inner secret of existence, a horrifying travesty of the “fixed point” on which Archimedes famously promised to move the world, it at least has the advantage of existing in endless permutations—

again showing its kinship to the asymptotic project of realism—and thus of being able to hold “conclusion” at a permanent arm’s length even as it continually satisfies the copyists’ desire for “completion” on the level of the page. Within the project of the *Sottisier*, within the final *tableau* of the novel—Bouvard and Pécuchet, sitting at their double-sided desk, copying—there is endless work to do. *C’est ainsi, bon*. Like *bêtise* itself, the novel will go on.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE IMMORALIST'S DILEMMA

“We can allow bad things to remain finally bad only on our deathbed.”

—Franz Kafka, Letter to Max Brod (84)

“Allegories are, in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things.”

—Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (178)

“Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That’s how the light gets in

That’s how the light gets in”

—Leonard Cohen, “Anthem”

“Unsere Kunst ist ein von der Wahrheit Geblendet-Sein: Das Licht auf dem zurückweichenden Fratzensgesicht ist wahr, sonst nichts.”

“Our art is a way of being dazzled by truth: the light on the grotesquely grimacing retreating face is true, and nothing else.”

—Franz Kafka (Aphorism 63)¹

The collected work of Franz Kafka might be imaginatively arranged as a sort of Divine Comedy. At the top, in *Paradiso*, would be the finished or “vollendet” works, the slim collection of stories and novellas that Kafka published during his lifetime.² In the middle, in *Purgatorio*, would be the novels, which remained unfinished and unfinishable during Kafka’s lifetime but would (after considerable labor on the part of Max Brod) quickly establish his posthumous reputation by the

¹ To simplify cross-referencing, Kafka’s Aphorisms and Diaries will be cited by number and date, respectively. Kafka’s letters will be cited only in English translation, since they are not included in the Fischer edition of Kafka’s “Gesammelte Werke” that has served as my guide. The faults and benefits of Fischer’s so-called manuscript edition will be discussed in the forthcoming “Kafka & Co.” section of this chapter, along with my reasons for using it.

² The German verb “vollenden” means, variously or simultaneously, “to finish,” “to perfect,” and “to complete” (or, a bit more literally, “to bring to fullness/perfection by ending”); for my purposes, the adjective *vollendet* thus has the advantage of denoting not only finishedness and completion, but perfection as well.

early 1930s. And at bottom, in *Inferno*, would be the letters, journals, and other “confessional writings” in which readers can conjure up the personal hell of Franz Kafka the artist-as-man, for whom writing is “a reward for serving the devil” (Letter to Brod 333).

Walter Benjamin, who will provide the guiding light for much of this chapter, famously described the ‘Finis’ of a novel as a place where the reader is invited to sit back and enjoy “a divinatory realization of the meaning of life,” a phrase which led me to suggest in my introduction that an unfinished novel might be thought of as a novel in which the meaning of life is missing. This being the case, it is small wonder that Franz Kafka was one of the most prolific unfinished novelists of all time, since his novels are concerned precisely with describing the search for a revelatory meaning (the Law, the highest court, *das Schloß*) that his characters are unable to reach. As Umberto Eco famously put it in *The Open Work*, Kafka’s writing deals with “an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws[...] being replaced by a world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogmas are constantly being placed in question” (9). Kafka’s unfinishable novels explore and dramatize, negatively and/or positively, earnestly and/or ironically, their own inability to reach a meaningful conclusion.³

³ The unfinishability of *Der Prozeß* (*The Trial*) and *Das Schloß* (*The Castle*) will be the subject of this chapter. Kafka’s first novel, *Der Verschollene* (*The Man Who Disappeared*), retitled *Amerika*, is also unfinished but is not in my opinion unfinishable. (Indeed, has not Karl Rossman more-or-less disappeared by the end?) More than one reading is certainly possible in this regard, however, and I think there

There is a sense in Kafka's work, often made explicit in passages like the final introductory quote above, that truth cannot be reached by language... that speaking of the truth can only get us farther away from it, and everything else is only "the grotesquely grimacing face" of our bedazzlement. In this view, whatever truth there is in Kafka is to be found in the beginning of his works, not the end—or, perhaps better, in the central images themselves rather than in their subsequent elaboration and denouement (or lack thereof). A strange ethos for a novelist, perhaps, but apparently quite a productive one for an author of unfinishable novels since, as Benjamin claims in a much-quoted letter to Gerschom Scholem:

To do justice to the figure of Kafka in its purity and its peculiar beauty one must never lose sight of one thing: it is the purity and beauty of a failure [*Gescheiterten*]. The circumstances of this failure [*Scheiterns*] are manifold.

is a tension nicely expressed in the book's two titles: *Amerika* vs. *Der Verschollene*. Ironically, it is Brod's title (*Amerika*) that would seem to suggest that the novel still has some way to go, all the way to California perhaps, though Brod himself contends that Kafka had planned a happy ending in Oklahoma that the book had almost reached. There is evidence to suggest, however, that Kafka's abandonment of the novel had less to do with any structural or thematic unfinishability inherent to the work itself than it did with Kafka's opinion that *Der Verschollene* simply wasn't "Kafkaesque" enough for his widely awaited debut novel. Several years after abandoning the novel, Kafka would accuse himself of writing "a sheer imitation of Dickens [...] Dickens' wealth and carelessly powerful sweep, but in consequence passages of horrible powerlessness, in which the only thing he does is to muddle up together what he has already achieved. Barbaric is the effect of the senseless whole, a barbarism which I, thanks to my weaknesses and taught by my epigonism, have at least avoided" ("einen Dickens-roman [...] Dickens' Reichtum und bedeckenloses mächtiges Hinströmen, aber infolgedessen Stellen grauenhafter Kraftlosigkeit, wo er müde nur das bereits Erreichte durcheinanderrührt. Barbarisch der Eindruck des unsinnigen Ganzen, ein Barbarentum, das allerdings ich danke meiner Schwäche und belehrt durch meine Epigonentum vermieden habe") (Diary 10.8.1917). While it is unclear whether the "er" in this sentence refers to Karl Rossman, the hero of *Amerika*, or to Dickens himself, in either case this diary passage seems to suggest that it was precisely *Amerika*'s Dickensian "finishability" that led Kafka to abandon it, since his "epigonism" had taught him that tying up loose threads can create "ein Babarentum."

One is tempted to say: once he was certain of eventual failure [*Mißlingens*], everything worked out for him *en route* as in a dream. There is nothing more memorable than the fervor with which Kafka emphasized his failure [*Scheitern*]. (RK 144-145)⁴

Until Max Brod's publication of *Der Prozeß* in 1925, the year after Kafka's death, Kafka was indisputably a failed novelist, in his own eyes and in the eyes of the world. Indeed, his failure to finish his first two novels was precisely what sealed his fate in terms of a professional writing career, a career that remained a real possibility right up to the point when Kafka abandoned *Der Prozeß*.⁵ Even after Kafka had abandoned the novel, Brod, who had subsequently acquired the manuscript from him "by persuasion or by guile" ("Postscript to the First Edition" 326), frequently begged Kafka to be allowed to edit and publish the novel as it was. Kafka, however, always refused, seemingly preferring to await a posthumous purgatory in which "bad things can be allowed to remain finally bad."

⁴ This letter, which is included in expurgated form in the English version of *Illuminations* as "Some Reflections on Kafka," will be cited as (RK). For the German, see pages 267-273 of Benjamin's correspondence with Scholem.

⁵ Although Kafka was well known amongst the Prague literati of his day, financial independence remained unobtainable so long as he failed to produce a larger, more marketable volume. Kurt Wolff, Kafka's publisher, tells Kafka as much in this letter from 1921: "Every manuscript that you can bring yourself to send us will be welcome, and will be published in book form with love and care. If, in the course of time you could once send us, together with collections of short prose pieces, a long connected story or novel—I know, after all, from yourself and from Max Brod how many manuscripts of this kind are nearly finished, or perhaps quite finished—we should welcome it with special gratitude. *It must also be taken into consideration that the public for a connected, comprehensive prose work is naturally much greater than for a collection of short prose pieces.* That is a banal and senseless attitude on the part of the reader, but there it is. *The stir which a long prose work would make would at least enable us to achieve incomparably greater sales than we have so far done, and the success of a book of this kind would also make possible a livelier trade in those already published*" (qtd. in Brod's *Kafka*, 136-137; my emphasis).

While Kafka did publish a chapter (“Der Stoker”) and a fragment (“Ein Traum”) from his first two novels, respectively, their “failure” as a whole romantically embodies Bernardo Soares’ reflection on *King Lear*: “To write a masterpiece large enough to be great and perfect enough to be sublime is a task no one has had the fortune or divine capacity to accomplish. Whatever can’t be done in a single burst suffers from the unevenness of our spirit” (Pessoa 247). Both the dazzling beauty and the empirical failure of Kafka’s unfinished novels stem from their uncompromising pursuit of perfection in a world in which only various shades of imperfection are possible. The ruins of Western civilization depicted in Kafka’s writings are recursively echoed, reiterated on another scale, by the ruins of his actual literary estate, paradoxically allowing for a more totalizing and *vollendet* depiction of “ruinedness” than would otherwise be possible. If the unfinishability of Kafka’s novels is based in part on their author’s unwillingness to settle for an imperfect offering, this very imperfection (*Unvollendetkeit*) could also be said to provide the cracks—to reference Leonard Cohen, another artist whose work straddles the supposed chasm between secularism and religiosity—through which the light gets in.

4.1 Kafka as Novelist... “Is this Modern?”

“A difficult case. Am I a circus-rider on two horses? Alas, I am no rider, but lie prostrate on the ground.”

—Franz Kafka, regarding whether he should be classified as an expressionist or a primarily Jewish writer (Letter to Felice Bauer 517)

As objects of critical inquiry, Kafka’s allegorical novels have the perverse advantage of being ruins not only in the realm of thought but also in the realm of

things. As works of literature, they offer an uncanny illustration of Benjamin's theory of allegory, which might be condensed into the formula "symbols infected with time."⁶ Unlike most novels, Kafka's longest works of fiction do not proceed from an intriguing beginning to a revelatory conclusion but rather from an overwhelming "Let there be Light!" to an inevitable throwing up of the hands and the consignment of a once-perfect offering to the flames, or at least to the purgatory of a writerly afterlife (*Nachlaß*) in which "bad things can remain finally bad."

On a more tangible level, Kafka's inability to bring his novels to a conclusion also points to the contingent circumstances of a particularly dark period in Western history: the outbreak and aftermath of the first World War. The impact that the War had on Kafka's writing career is almost impossible to exaggerate. Shortly before the events in Sarajevo, Kafka had finally decided to leave his parents' apartment and move to Berlin to become a writer. He had informed his father and his employer of his decision and even set a date for his departure. The date he set was July 28, 1914—the exact day that war was declared.

Taken together, all this points to the peculiar advantages that Kafka's novels enjoy as representations of what might be called "the metaphysical market crash of

⁶ According to Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, allegories fragment the transcendental unity of the symbol via the introduction of written script and historical time, and thus allow for a sober philosophical truth that symbols actively obscure: "In the field of allegorical intuition the image is a fragment, a rune. Its beauty as a symbol evaporates when the light of divine learning falls upon it. The false appearance of totality is extinguished" (176). It should be noted that Benjamin's description of allegories as "ruins" is meant to be positive, at least insofar as it denotes an "artistic phenomenon" that strives for "the exuberant subjection of antique elements in a structure which, without uniting them in a single whole, would, in destruction, still be superior to the harmonies of antiquity" (178-79).

fin-de-siècle Europe”—that series of spiritual crises and physical catastrophes that has probably found its most enduring formulation in Nietzsche’s (in)famous pronouncement: “**Gott ist tot.**” Less well known than this statement itself is the fact that it is pronounced by Nietzsche (as opposed to Zarathustra) only once, in passage 108 of *The Gay Science*:

New Struggle—After Buddha was dead, his shadow was still shown for centuries in a cave—a tremendous, gruesome shadow. God is dead: but given the way men are, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown.—And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.⁷

Kafka’s fiction casts a light that illuminates the “tremendous, gruesome shadow” of an absent Law-giving Tetragrammaton and allows it to flicker on the cavern-walls of our consciousness. Yet the peculiar brilliance of Kafka’s light is the double nature of its illumination: it illuminates the outline of God’s shadow even as it reveals its status **as** mere shadow. Unlike Nietzsche, Kafka has no wish to vanquish this shadow, and yet he often seems to vanquish it in spite of himself. As is frequently the case, one finds that Benjamin has already said it best:

he sacrificed truth for the sake of clinging to its transmissibility, its haggadic element. Kafka’s writings are by their nature parables. But it is their misery and their beauty that they had to become *more* than parables. They do not modestly lie at the feet of doctrine, as the Haggadah lies at the feet of the Halakah. Though apparently reduced to submission, they unexpectedly raise a mighty paw against it. (RK 144)

⁷ “*Neue Kampf*—Nachdem Buddha tot war, zeigte man noch jahrhundertlang seinen Schatten in einer Höhle—einen ungeheuren schauerlichen Schatten. Gott ist tot: aber so wie die Art der Menschen ist wird vielleicht noch jahrtausendlang, in denen man seinen Schatten zeigt.—Und wir—wir müssen auch noch seinen Schatten besiegen!”

Here, Benjamin is referring to the Judaic theological distinction between the Law or *Halakah* (literally: “the way of walking”), which is drawn from the 613 *mitzvot* of the Torah as well as from certain legalistic Talmudic and Rabbinic texts, and which includes the customs and traditions maintained within the Jewish community, and the *Haggadah* (literally: “tales” or “lore”) which includes the homiletic texts and exegeses found in the Talmud and the Midrash. Benjamin seems to suggest here that in Kafka’s work a parable about the *Halakah* can suddenly and unexpectedly transform into a condemnation of it... a theme we shall revisit in the pages to come.

My decision to focus on Kafka in this chapter is largely motivated by his well-known double nature as a man both thoroughly **of** his times and thoroughly incapable of living **in** his times. As Benjamin famously describes it, Kafka’s work is neither purely mystical nor purely secular but is rather like “an ellipse” determined by “the twin foci” of “mystical experience (in particular, the experience of tradition) on the one hand” and “the experience of the modern big-city dweller on the other” (RK 141). Kafka’s writing is informed by a traditionalist theology infected with aestheticism, even as it is driven by a modernist aestheticism infected with theology. Kafka’s desire to serve God—which for him seems inseparable from becoming a father and the head of a family—is rendered impossible by his writing, which he alternately describes as a gift from God that it is his duty to develop, and as a nightly transgression against the Almighty: “God does not want me to write—but I... I must”

(Letter to Franz Pollack 10).⁸ At the same time, Kafka's peculiar aestheticism seems to aim less at "beauty" than at "truth": "I can still have passing satisfaction from works like "A Country Doctor" [...] But happiness only if I can raise the world into the pure, the true, and the immutable" (Diary 9.25.17).⁹ Kafka is driven by a desire to raise his writings to the level of scripture, even as he is tormented by the sacrilegious nature of his artistic ambitions.

The apparent reluctance of Kafka's will-to-Jehovacide may stem partly from his lack of confidence in the modern world's ability to provide any suitable substitutes. In contrast to the aesthetic cults promulgated by more socially prominent modernists like Oscar Wilde and Richard Wagner, in which the perfect artwork replaces the absent God, in Kafka's work the inadequacy of the artist can actually be said to function as an essential element of his art. Kafka's novels are not only symptomatic of a European consciousness struggling to come to terms with the death of God, but are also somewhat ahead of their time in decrying the inadequacy of "the artist" as a potential agent for "forging the unwritten conscience" of some glorious

⁸ Although Kafka's Judaism will not be a major subject of this chapter—partly out of deference to my own goyish ignorance—it should be pointed out that Kafka's "guilt" over his own "Schriftstellersein" (Kafka's word for his "writer's being") should not be taken in a Christian context. Kafka's guilt over his writing, in other words, stems not from any moral objection to literature itself, or any puritanical hatred of the physical world of bodies and desires, but rather from the bachelor's existence he felt his writing condemned him to, an existence that prevented him from following God's first command to Adam and Eve ("Be fruitful and multiply!") and that he felt excluded him from the path of familial tradition and thus from the community in general. Strange as it may sound to Christian ears, Kafka's guilt over his writing is primarily guilt over the (holy, procreative) sex that he is not having.

⁹ "Zeitweilige Befriedigung kann ich von Arbeiten wie »Landartz« noch haben [...] Glück aber nur, falls ich die Welt ins Reine, Wahre, Unveränderliche heben kann."

future civilization.¹⁰ Kafka's unfinishable novels powerfully express the essential inadequacy of both these notions, the author-God as well as the God of the Torah, even as they wage a desperate Quixotic struggle against their knowledge of this inadequacy... which is equally the knowledge of their own inadequacy. And yet it is precisely the failure of this struggle, observable in the empirical unfinishedness of the novels, which allows for such a powerful portrayal of the inadequacy of the modern world in general. One is faced not merely with the fact that all gods are dead and all artists inadequate, but also with the fact that we do not and cannot ever know this for a fact. In *Der Prozeß* (1914-15) and *Das Schloß* (1922), this struggle and its inevitable failure can be described in terms of a double infection of what I am labeling the decadent and the immoralist modes of incompleteness, two modes that in these novels prove to be both radically incompatible and ultimately inseparable.

The decadent mode of incompleteness, as defined in our Introduction, is marked by a desire to take aesthetic responsibility for one's inaction, the very sort of responsibility idealized in Oscar Wilde's quip: "When man acts he is a Puppet. When he describes he is a Poet" ("Critic as Artist" 1024). The ethos that informs this mode holds that decadence —here an umbrella term that encompasses the sedentary life of

¹⁰ The reference is of course to the end of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist* (1916) when Stephen Dedalus declares his intention "To forge the unwritten conscience of my race in the smithy of my soul" (253). In its most grandiose manifestations, a decadent *kunstreligion* is believed to lay the foundations for a glorious future state (generally conceived along racialized lines), as in Wagner's "Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft" ("The Artwork of the Future") (1849), and/or to pave the way for a more cosmopolitan renewal of "the Soul of Man," as in Wilde's "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (1891). Stephen Dedalus would seem to fall somewhere between these two poles.

reading and writing, the pleasures of hedonism, the pleasures of asceticism, indifference to or outright rejection of the patriotic obligations of citizenship, hanging about in cafes, etc.—can be redeemed through the creation of artistic masterpieces, things of such enduring and transcendent beauty that they can mold reality and ennoble the world, thereby justifying the artist’s withdrawal from “reality” into the realm of art and artifice. An immoralist mode of incompleteness, on the other hand, is marked by the pursuit of a genuinely moral mode of existence—something akin to what Kafka calls “The True Way”—but it is a pursuit so uncompromising that it eventually leads the seeker to a rejection of whatever (s)he had originally considered “morality” to be. Considered as a structural and/or thematic principle that informs and determines a literary work, an immoralist mode of incompleteness can be defined as enacting the self-transformation of an ethos.

Before showing how double infections of the decadent and immoralist modes inform and determine *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, it seems like a good idea to locate these modes in the broader historical context of literary modernism in *fin-de-siècle* Europe. To this purpose, I think it might be useful here to (re)consider what I have been calling “modes of incompleteness” in the light of Benjamin’s theory of “aesthetic genres” or “literary forms.” In the context of the history of the novel, I feel that Benjamin’s “aesthetic genres” and my “modes of incompleteness” can be considered fairly synonymous. Discussing the epistemo-critical validity of the concept of aesthetic genres in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin makes a distinction between works that “incarnate” a form and those that give it its

“characteristic expression” (58).¹¹ Claiming that a work incarnates the idea of tragedy, for instance, is quite different from claiming that it offers a characteristic expression of the structural laws of the tragic genre. Benjamin argues that such “characteristic expressions” are often “incomparably more [distinct] in the laborious efforts of minor writers” (58), and moreover that it is “precisely the more significant works, inasmuch as they are not the original and, so to speak, ideal embodiments of the genre, which fall outside the limits of genre. A major work will either establish the genre or abolish it; and the perfect work will do both” (44).¹²

One might well replace “the perfect work” in this sentence with “an unfinishable novel,” since the publication of any unfinishable novel marks a similar double-sided moment of origin and abolition. As with Benjamin’s “perfect works,” unfinishable novels should not be thought of or used as norming examples in the

¹¹ Benjamin’s theory of genre is founded on a distinction between “Ideas”—which he associates with truth and essence—and “Concepts”—which he associates with knowledge and coherence. This distinction can be thought in terms of the philosophical systems of Plato on the one hand and Hegel on the other. Literary forms are concepts for Benjamin insofar as they are susceptible to literary-historical analyses that examine their objective forms and bring them together “in order that they might be relativized in evolutionary terms” (38). At the same time, Benjamin believes that the form of every aesthetic genre, although perhaps never purely incarnated, points to an essential Idea “that exist[s] in irreducible multiplicity” (43).

¹² If one were looking for a “characteristic expression” of the “whodunit” mode of incompleteness, for example, one would be far better advised to browse the shelves of an airport bookstore than to read Dostoevsky’s *Brothers Karamazov* (1880), despite the fact that Dostoevsky’s novel is indeed structurally determined, at least in part, by this mode of incompleteness. At the same time, the very fact that Dostoevsky utilized a whodunit mode of incompleteness as a structuring principle for his epic theodicy could be said to provide fertile ground for critical inquiry insofar as the book is “a document in the life” of “a particular, objectively necessary artistic structure” (*Origin* 48) and thus speaks to the generic possibilities of its historically specific time and place, as well as to Dostoevsky’s conception of his reading public.

study of any particular novel-genre and its characteristic mode of incompleteness. Not only are unfinishable novels singular entities by their very nature, marking in each case the simultaneous birth and abortion of a genre, but the modes of incompleteness that they “fail” to overcome represent trans-generic ideas that cannot finally be simplified into axiomatic historical schema or ironclad laws of genre.

Nonetheless, I strongly believe the unprecedented Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels characteristic of literary modernism (see Chapter Five) can be read both as sign and symptom of the already alluded to metaphysical market crash of *fin-de-siècle* Europe. Lukács’ “world abandoned by God” shines darkly forth from the unfinished novels of his era, as well as from more *vollendet* works like Baudelaire’s “Le Cygne” (1857), in which a swan in the dirty streets of Paris evokes a sense of modernity’s distance from the full presence of an Olympian symbology, or even Kafka’s own story “Der neue Advokat” (1919), in which the calling of “Dr. Bucephalus” to the bar leads the narrator to reflect:

Nowadays—it cannot be denied—there is no Alexander the Great. There are plenty of men who know how to murder people; the skill needed to reach over a banquet table and pink a friend with a lance is not lacking; and for many Macedonia is too confining, so that they curse Philip, the father—but no one, no one at all, can blaze a trail to India. (*A Country Doctor* 135)¹³

Reversing the trope that glorifies ancient heroism at the expense of modern bourgeoisness, the narrator of this fragment suggests that the gulf between the modern

¹³ “Heute—das kann niemand leugnen—gibt es keinen großen Alexander. Zu morden verstehen zwar manche; auch an der Geschicklichkeit, mit der Lanze über den Bankettisch hinweg den Freund zu treffen, fehlt es nicht; und vielen ist Macedonien zu eng, so daß sie Philipp, den Vater, verfluchen—aber niemand, niemand kann nach Indien führen” (*Ein Landarzt* 199).

world and the ancient one has not so much resulted from any great change in human nature (from barbarism to civility, for instance) as it has from changes in maps and, perhaps even more importantly, in the concept of “India” itself, a word that once carried an entire host of exotic connotations that have since been lost to us. The map has been filled-in and mass-produced, India has been degraded from an ancient symbol of Eastern treasures into a modern allegory of Western exploitation, but men remain as brutal and barbaric as ever.

Like Baudelaire’s “Le Cygne,” Kafka’s story-fragment about Dr. Bucephalus provides us with a relatively pure incarnation of a decadent literary form attempting to convey the unbridgeable distance between a modern present and an imagined past. From a more prosaic standpoint, however, the very “purity” of such brief works might actually be said to undermine their critical value as recursive echoes of the times in which they were written. Indeed, since it is not always possible to rigorously separate certain modes of incompleteness—some trace of immoralism, for instance, could always be said to inform a decadent ethos attempting to supplant a Judeo-Christian one—one might suggest that attempting to isolate aesthetic genres/modes of incompleteness into their purest forms is in the end less worthwhile than examining works in which their complicated relationships can be tracked and considered *as* relationships.

Which brings us back to Kafka and the modernist novel. As should be clear by now, the impossibility of fully disentangling the decadent and immoralist modes of incompleteness in Kafka’s novels does not present a stumbling block to my

investigation so much as it provides a launching pad for it. In my introduction I already noted the all-pervasiveness of the decadent mode of incompleteness in Pessoa's unfinished *Book of Disquiet* (1935), and one can also observe its relatively unadulterated operation in a number of finished novels such as the first volume of Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* (1843), Rilke's *Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910), or Joyce's *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916). And while Kafka's novels certainly stand far removed from the most fervent and grandiose expressions of the decadent ethos espoused in these works, it is nonetheless true that a decadent mode of incompleteness does inform them, particularly *Der Prozeß*.

In thinking of how the decadent mode of incompleteness informs Kafka's work, it might be helpful to compare Kafka's career with that of Pessoa, whose "semi-heteronym" Bernardo Soares claims in *The Book of Disquiet* that "the truly noble destiny belongs to the writer who doesn't publish. Not who doesn't write, for then he wouldn't be a writer. I mean the writer in whose nature it is to write, but whose spiritual temperament prevents him from showing what he writes" (Pessoa 185). Soares' conception of "the truly noble destiny" here should be read in the light of his own

Aesthetics of Discouragement—Since we can't extract beauty from life, let's at least try to extract beauty from not being able to extract beauty from life. Let's make our failure into a victory, into something positive and lofty, endowed with columns, majesty and our mind's consent. (261)

For Soares, and presumably Pessoa as well, aesthetic decadence marks a tragic ethos in which the mundane failure of the artist in life is finally transfigured into a beautiful victory in death. The daily drudgery of the little clerk is redeemed as the self-sacrifice

of the artist whose “truly noble destiny” is realized only by the discovery of the thousands of pages left behind in his trunk, and published (almost literally) over his dead body.

There are obvious parallels with Kafka here, and one might even read Kafka’s aphorism “In the struggle between yourself and the world, second the world” (*Im Kampf zwischen Dir und der Welt sekundiere der Welt*) (Aphorism 52) as a reformulation of Soares’ decadent aesthetics of discouragement. Yet for all their apparent similarities, I believe Kafka’s career can be better illuminated by focusing on their differences. For one thing, whereas the depiction of Pessoa as a Chaplinesque little clerk has some basis in fact, Kafka’s is pure mythology.¹⁴ Moreover, while Pessoa seemed to genuinely view his deathbed as the place where his “failure” would finally be redeemed as “victory,” the situation for Kafka was considerably more complex. While the possibility of a posthumous victory of this sort seems to have alternately delighted and tormented Kafka throughout his career, it is nonetheless a possibility that he finally, emphatically, rejected. At the same time, Kafka’s “rejection” of this possibility could easily be described as half-hearted at best, since he entrusted the posthumous immolation of his work to a man (Max Brod) whom he knew for certain would be utterly incapable of carrying it out, a man who also was better equipped than anyone else Franz Kafka knew to ensure his canonization.

¹⁴ Kafka had an important and increasingly well-paid position at the Worker’s Insurance Office in Prague, and played a major role in one of the most important cases in the Office’s history. For a rather gleeful demolition of many of the myths surrounding Kafka’s life, see James Hawes’s *Why You Should Read Kafka Before You Waste Your Life* (2008).

Turning our full attention now to the immoralist mode of incompleteness, it seems prudent to begin by re-addressing the question: what is an immoralist? Like many of Nietzsche's coinages, the word "immoralist" is frequently misunderstood. Often the title is thought to designate an amoralist, someone who rejects morals and consequently devotes him or herself to the pleasures of transgression for its own sake: less Zarathustra than the Marquis de Sade, whose unfinished novel *120 Days of Sodom* (1785) could be said to exemplify an amoralist mode of incompleteness.¹⁵ One encounters this version of the so-called immoralist in a number of modernist novels, perhaps most famously in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Yet the protagonist of Wilde's novel is not in fact an immoralist in the Nietzschean sense, but rather an amoral aesthete committed to experiencing all the pleasures of humanity's hedonist rainbow regardless of the consequences. The novel is thus not determined by an immoralist mode of incompleteness so much as by a combination of the amoralist and decadent modes: on the one hand, the moral code handed down by a non-existent God informs and determines the novel by providing a checklist of commandments to be transgressed (the amoralist mode). On the other hand, the pleasures of transgression experienced by author, reader, and protagonist are ultimately "redeemed" by the aesthetic merit of the work of art in which these pleasures are

¹⁵ This is less a statement about de Sade's philosophy, which is certainly more complicated than the "amoralist" label would suggest, than about de Sade's final novel, which is structured as a filling out of all the possibilities of sexual transgression available within the promised "120 Days" of the novel.

housed (the decadent mode).¹⁶ Christian morality is not demolished in the novel, however, and in fact its presence can be continuously felt in the pleasure of transgressing it. A more borderline case can be found in Andre Gide's *L'Immoraliste* (1902), which combines the amoralist and immoralist modes of incompleteness. Although Gide's novel is partially structured as a checklist of moral transgressions, the protagonist's flight into sensual experience eventually leads him to the conclusion that "we think we possess, and we are possessed," as freedom from societal mores only entangles him further in the demands of his body.

What, then, is an immoralist? An immoralist is someone whose conscience obliges him or her to reject morality itself as immoral. Genuine immoralists are obsessed with morality, just as genuine atheists are obsessed with God.¹⁷ Within an immoralist ethos, transgression cannot be its own goal nor can it be justified by aesthetic achievement alone. In the field of modernist literature, some of the purest examples of the immoralist mode of incompleteness can be found in the plays of

¹⁶ It should be pointed out that Wilde's own philosophy actually represents a profound merger of decadence and immoralism, since his philosophical ideal of living one's life as a work of art led him to reject a philosophy centered solely on pleasure for one that embraced suffering as well. Wilde's immoralism cannot be said to extend to his protagonist Dorian Gray, however, and indeed it is precisely the hideousness of Dorian's life as a literal work of art that causes Dorian to destroy himself, allowing the beauty of his painting to be restored through a self-immolating Benjaminian Finis.

¹⁷ Exemplary here are Nietzsche's attempts to "overcome" guilt and pity: the continuing seriousness with which he pursues this task also marks its difficulty, the stubborn persistence, in himself, as well as in the Judeo-Christian world in general, of these secular remnants of what he terms "the slave revolt in morality." For Nietzsche, who dubs himself "the first immoralist," the goal of his critique of Christian morality is not the pleasure of transgression but rather the creation of a new morality that would no longer condemn the real world in the name of an imagined one and would thus not be "irreconcilable with an ascending, Yes-saying life" (*Ecce Homo* 784).

George Bernard Shaw, e.g. *Mrs. Warren's Profession* (1893), *The Devil's Disciple* (1897), and perhaps above all *Major Barbara* (1905), in which the eponymous heroine gradually comes to realize that the saving of souls is impossible without her industrialist father's "Money and Gunpowder," and thus is forced to the conclusion that "The path of life lies through the factory of death!" (*Major Barbara* 152).¹⁸

Another book that (unsurprisingly) exemplifies an immoralist mode of incompleteness is Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* (1883-85): "Am I understood?—The self-overcoming of morality, out of truthfulness; the self-overcoming of the moralist, into his opposite—into me. This is what the word Zarathustra means in my mouth" (*Ecce Homo* 784). Nietzsche's "Book for All and None," originally planned for six volumes, was cut short at four, and in fact the fourth book was published only privately in a tiny edition of fifty volumes. In this case, the cutting short of the book and Zarathustra's return to the mountains marks an overcoming of the immoralist mode of incompleteness: rather than continuing in the vein of the first two books, in which an evangelical Zarathustra preaches to the people in grand prophetic style, the third and fourth books center around Zarathustra's own overcoming of his two great personal dilemmas: nausea over the spirit of gravity, and pity for the higher men who cannot affirm the eternal return. The way in which Zarathustra learns to overcome his pity for the higher men is through laughter, a

¹⁸ Although they are not novels, Shaw often emphasized that he considered his plays as texts to be read (hence his lengthy introductions that are in some cases longer than the plays themselves). Moreover, Shaw's playwriting can itself be seen to reflect the immoralist trajectory of his own career, since he abandoned his preferred literary genre (he began as a novelist) for one that he felt would allow him to speak to and influence a larger audience.

laughter that allows him to return to the mountains and stop preaching his new morality to people. *Also Sprach Zarathustra* thus provides a fine example of an immoralist mode of incompleteness insofar as its narrative trajectory is determined by the self-transformation of an evangelical ethos—or, in a more Nietzschean vocabulary, by the self-overcoming of one.

Kafka's immoralism, as one might expect, differs markedly from Nietzsche's, not least because the morality through and against which Kafka defines himself is a Jewish rather than a Christian one. Indeed, in speaking of immoralism in Kafka one might well replace the word "morality" with "Halakah." Early in Kafka's career, when his artistic ambitions were more grandiose, his immoralism can actually be seen as leading him towards aesthetic decadence, as in 1903 when he writes "God does not want me to write, but I... I must." Yet by the time Kafka abandons *Der Prozeß*, as we shall see, a new immoralist mode has asserted its presence in such a way and to such an extent that it necessitates a rejection of the very ideal of aesthetic decadence that had originally driven *Der Prozeß* itself. For Kafka, God's abandonment of the world cannot in the end justify mankind's abandonment of God.¹⁹

In *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, the interaction/double infection of the decadent and immoralist modes of incompleteness can be thought in terms of what

¹⁹ Cf. Brod's reading of Kafka as Job (180-84). In Brod's account, Kafka is presented as a type of Jewish saint whose career is determined by a narrative of increasing religious awakening. Although the many shortcomings of Brod's *Kafka* have been extensively documented—indeed, denouncing Brod seems to have become almost a *sine qua non* for all serious Kafka scholarship—every major school of Kafka criticism acknowledges some sort of religious shift in Kafka's writing and thought around 1917.

Stanley Corngold calls “Kafka’s Double Helix,” an image that may prove helpful in thinking how the decadent and immoralist modes interact with, undermine, and deconstruct one another in Kafka’s two unfinishable novels:

Kafka’s career now appears in its essential direction as an always involved *double* helix. The first is renunciatory: “The desire to renounce the greatest human happiness for the sake of writing keeps cutting every muscle in my body” (LF 315). The second is exemplary: “If there is a higher power that wishes to use me, or does use me, then I am at its mercy, if no more than as a well-prepared instrument; if not, I am nothing, and will suddenly be abandoned in a dreadful void” (LF 21). In the first instance, to be nothing is to be good for writing; in the second, it is to be good for nothing. Everything there was to be sacrificed has been sacrificed; there is no more bodily life to burn. No further reward can be won by the calculus of renunciation, for it is a finally mercantile *quid pro quo*. If there was a time when everything Kafka wrote already had perfection—“When I arbitrarily write a single sentence, for instance, ‘He looked out the window,’ it already has perfection” (DI 45)—now he need only look out the window and *he* has perfection. That is to say, precisely to the same extent that what he wrote was already radically imperfect, being a “communication” of the truth and hence a lie, so too what he now is is radically imperfect, being the imperfection of the creature. But this is the imperfection of a creature who knows his divided identity and lives this truth; as a writer and as one who in all other ways testifies to it, he is, could be, an exemplary witness bearer. (*Necessity of Form* 109)

On the one hand, there is a decadent drive towards self-immolation through writing. On the other hand, there is an immoralist desire to justify this self-immolation as service to a higher power, to transform the “*Non serviam*” of the decadent artist into a necessary step in the life of a “well-prepared instrument” of writing. Corngold sees Kafka’s writing as driven by this pair of helixes, with each always twisting and turning in harmony with the other but with neither ever able to directly touch its partner. This double helix image, which is rather like a synthesis of Hegel’s good and bad infinities, provides an apt description of how the decadent and immoralist modes

of incompleteness interact in Kafka's two unfinishable novels, with each mode eventually rendering the overcoming of the other mode impossible.²⁰

In both *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, this double helix results in an unfinishable novel. Moreover, in each of these cases the particular unfinishability of the novel can be said to testify precisely to Kafka's status as "an exemplary witness bearer" of his times. *Der Prozeß* can even boast of the rare distinction of having its unfinishability openly acknowledged in the preface to its first edition of 1925, where Max Brod points out that "in a certain sense the novel could never be terminated—that is to say, it could be prolonged into infinity" (*Trial* 334). With this in mind, it is hardly surprising that the "unfinishable" qualities of *Der Prozeß* have been widely acknowledged and commented upon. To a lesser extent, this is true of *Das Schloß* as well, which Harold Bloom (introducing his edition of *Modern Critical Interpretations* of the novel) describes as "an unfinished and unfinishable autobiographical novel" (18), speaking powerfully to Kafka's status as the unfinishable novelist *par excellence*. While the precise nature of their unfinishability naturally differs, I believe both *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß* can be described in terms of the self-immolation of a decadent ethos.

²⁰ This double helix image can also be read in terms of Corngold's theory of metaphor in Kafka. Corngold argues that the relationship between metaphorical layers in Kafka is neither aporetic nor dialectical, but metamorphic, with metaphors constantly metamorphosing back and forth into one another (the segments connecting the two helices). In *Der Prozeß*, for instance, the Law of tradition can metamorphose into the Law of the state and back again, and this constant shifting simultaneously pushes the reader to assume a particular interpretive framework and prevents any final synthesis of these metaphorical layers.

4.2 *Der Prozeß* Of The Decadent Mode

“[H]abe ich doch einen Sinn bekommen, mein regelmäßiges, leeres, irrsinniges, junggesellenmäßiges Leben hat eine Rechtfertigung.”

“I have the feeling that my monotonous, empty mad bachelor’s life has some justification.”

—Franz Kafka, two months into *Der Prozeß* (Diary 8.15.14)

The history of Kafka’s rejection of aesthetic decadence as an ideal is inscribed on the ruins of *Der Prozeß*, the abandonment of which can be seen to mark Kafka’s shift from an espousal of literary decadence to a renunciation of it (albeit a rather aporetic one). Ultimately, the unfinishability of the novel arises from the impossibility of separating—at least in any “pure, true, immutable” (*Reine, Wahre, Unveränderliche*) way—the philistine bachelor’s existence of Joseph K. from the “truly noble destiny” of his author. The bourgeois decadence of the bachelor Joseph K. must be condemned in the name of something higher, but in the end nothing high enough can be found.

I should probably begin by addressing the fact that *Der Prozeß*, rather atypically for an unfinishable novel, actually has an ending. Indeed, it would be difficult to argue that the novel’s famous closing line, beginning with Joseph K.’s indignant exclamation as a dagger is twisted twice into his heart—“‘Like a dog!’ he said; it was as if the shame of it must outlive him” (*‘Wie ein Hund!’ sagte er, es war, als sollte die Scham ihn überleben*) (DP 286; 241)—does not carry the force of a Benjaminian *Finis*. Yet since there is a potentially interminable gap between the novel’s ultimate and penultimate chapters, one might also argue that *Der Prozeß*

exemplifies Benjamin's definition of a story (as opposed to a novel) insofar as it would "always [be] possible to ask how it may have been continued" ("Storyteller" 100).

Moreover, it is not even clear which chapter should in fact be the penultimate one. While most editions follow Brod in placing the "In the Cathedral" (*Im Dom*) chapter before the "Ende" chapter, internal evidence suggests that the unfinished "Dismissal of the Lawyer" (*Kündigung des Advokaten*) chapter actually takes place after Joseph K.'s visit to the cathedral, a fact noted by Herman Uyttersprot over half a century ago.²¹ Yet unlike "In the Cathedral," which can boast of a clear internal teleology of its own, "Dismissal of the Lawyer" breaks off in mid-confrontation and leaves the reader uncertain as to whether Joseph K.'s lawyer has in fact been successfully dismissed or not. Thus, although the penultimate placement of "In the Cathedral" is generally considered to be more aesthetically satisfactory and has by now acquired the force of tradition, it also unquestionably works to de-accentuate the novel's clear susceptibility to what the painter Titorello calls "indefinite postponement" (*der Verschleppung*). Deleuze and Guattari go so far as to argue that even the novel's "Ende" chapter should not be considered "le chapitre final," but should instead be placed amongst the fragments as "a premature, inserted, aborted ending" (*une fin prématurée, rapportée, avortée*) (80).

One might in fact do well to conceive of the unfinishability of *Der Prozeß* in terms of the three possible legal goals that Titorello presents to Joseph K.: "There are

²¹ Cf. Uyttersprot's seminal study *Eine neue Ordnung der Werke Kafkas?* (1957).

three possibilities, that is, definite acquittal, ostensible acquittal, and indefinite postponement” (*DP* 191).²² Definite acquittal (*die wirkliche Freisprechung*) is clearly not a possibility, either in the world of the novel—“As far as I know, there is no single person who could influence the verdict of definite acquittal” (191)²³—or in Kafka’s writing of it, since the fact of Joseph K.’s guilt can be considered as immutable an element of the book as is the utter inscrutability of what exactly he is guilty of. Ostensible acquittal (*die scheinbare Freisprechung*), while arguably a possibility for Joseph K., would certainly have required a rejection of the ending that Kafka actually wrote, and one might question whether it would be possible to represent such an acquittal in the form of a finished novel at all.²⁴ As Brod’s acknowledgement of the novel’s “interminable” nature clearly suggests, however, “der Verschleppung” actually seems to be a fair description of the process of writing *Der Prozeß* itself, even if it too ultimately proves unavailable to Joseph K. as a legal option (his trial lasts only one year, after all).

One might say that the central image of the novel—its “Let there be light!” if you will—is composed of both the arrest and the execution of Joseph K. This assertion would seem to find support in the fact that *Der Prozeß*’s final chapter was actually the second chapter Kafka wrote, as if “he needed to make sure that Joseph K. would be destroyed” as well as “to make certain that *The Trial* should have an

²² “Es gibt drei Möglichkeiten, nämlich die wirkliche Freisprechung, die scheinbare Freisprechung und die Verschleppung“ (160)

²³ “Es gibt meiner Meinung nach überhaupt keine einzelne Person, die auf die wirkliche Frei-sprechung Einfluß hätte” (160).

²⁴ Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, this is to some extent the question that drives *Das Schloß*.

ending” (*Lambent Traces* 42, 43). The procession of the novel, and the process that proved unfinishable for Kafka, is driven by the necessity of linking the end to the beginning in such a way that it would no longer be possible to ask how the novel might have been continued. For the novel’s decadent mode of incompleteness to be overcome, “the author’s superiority to his hypocrite brother Joseph K.” would have to be immutably established (43). The guilt of the narrator, here synonymous with Flaubert’s author-God and/or the decadent artist as such, can only be overcome through the total condemnation of Joseph K., a condemnation that must achieve not merely the linear coherence of a well-wrought novel but the immutable necessity (*Unveränderliche*) of scripture. Such an overcoming proves impossible, and it is this impossibility that marks *Der Prozeß* as an unfinishable novel. In contrast to the narrator of “The Judgment” (*Das Urteil*), who is able to achieve a complete separation from his protagonist in the story’s final sentence, the narrator of *Der Prozeß* is never able to fully detach himself from its main character and in fact the two seem to grow closer together as the novel progresses.²⁵ Eventually the guilt of Joseph K. proves too great a burden for the shoulders of this little bachelor, and cannot be confined to his character alone: it spills over, and the “shame” that

²⁵ In comparing the endings of “Das Urteil” and *Der Prozeß*, one might also point out that Joseph K., unlike Georg Bendemann, fails to perform the suicidal act that he recognizes to be his duty: “K. now perceived clearly that he was supposed to seize the knife himself, as it traveled from hand to hand above him, and plunge it into his own breast. But he did not do so, he merely turned his head, which was still free to move, and gazed around him” (“K. wußte jetzt genau, daß es seine Pflicht gewesen wäre, das Messer, als es von Hand zu Hand über ihm schwebte, selbst zu fassen und sich einzubohren. Aber er tat es nicht, sondern drehte den noch freien Hals und sah umher”) (*DP* 285; 241).

“outlives” Joseph K. becomes the shame of the narrator and of an irredeemably guilty mankind as well.

As with much of Kafka’s writing, it is almost a cliché to say that *Der Prozeß* is part comedy and part horror story, and that there is an undecidable tension between these two modes of literary being in the novel. For the novel to be fully comedic, it would have been necessary for the narrator to maintain the comic tone of the first chapter, a chapter that unabashedly partakes of the Zarathustrian brand of laughter Nietzsche defines as “being *schadenfroh*, but with a good conscience” (*The Gay Science* 172). Yet in Kafka, of course, there is ultimately no good conscience to be found: even as the will to achieve an artistic “good conscience” drives *Der Prozeß* from beginning to end, the novel’s failure to get from beginning to end marks the narrator’s inability to maintain the ironic distance that such a decadent conscience demands. Moreover, since the inconsequential clerk Joseph K. is not grand enough to assume the burden of existential guilt that has been placed upon him, his defiance cannot even assume the force of tragedy—we as readers may acknowledge the fact that he is guilty, of leading a wasted life or whatever, but the disproportionate vastness of the machinery arrayed against him cannot help but arouse our sympathy for him, just as the legal secretary Leni cannot help but be smitten by each and every guilty man who passes by her desk.

Der Prozeß thus dramatizes the potential danger of inadvertently following an immoralist mode of incompleteness: to insist on Joseph K.’s condemnation by the Law could potentially lead to a condemnation of the Law itself, the same sort of self-

immolating condemnation enacted in Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie*—probably the most purely “horrific” story he ever wrote.²⁶ For the novel to be fully horror story, we would have to side completely with the little man in his struggle against the impersonal machinations of an allegedly transcendent, but apparently petty and dysfunctional, Law... a Law before which no one seems to be entirely innocent. While an aesthetic justification of this Law might redeem the narrator and the book itself via an overcoming of the decadent mode, the pursuit of such a justification proves just as Quixotic and impossible as Joseph K.'s own attempts to push his way into the Highest Court. The central metaphor of the novel metamorphoses beyond the control of the narrator, and the Law of tradition degenerates into the martial law of the wartime state (it should not be forgotten that the novel was written against the backdrop of the Great War).

This growing inability to distinguish between “the Law” and the law of the state, the same inability that Corngold reads as the primary signifier of Joseph K.'s own guilt throughout the novel, can be seen to increasingly infect the narrative process and to mark the narrator's growing disillusionment with and dissolution of the ideal of aesthetic decadence. Yet this self-immolation of *Der Prozeß*'s decadent mode of incompleteness actually results from the metamorphic intrusion of another mode of incompleteness, an immoralist mode that transforms a potentially transcendent redemption of “the Law” into a potentially shocking condemnation of it. This

²⁶ Cf. Corngold's chapter “*The Trial*/'In the Penal Colony': The Rigors of Writing” in *The Necessity of Form*, an essay that has supplied many of the major ideas for this section.

infection by the immoralist mode renders the overcoming of the decadent mode impossible, as the truth-laden symbol of arrest and execution with which the compositional process began is increasingly “ruined” by the time demanded for the process of composition.

In the end, we are left with the ruins of a novel, ruins that recall the Chaplain’s remark about his parable “Vor dem Gesetz” (“Before the Law”): “it is not necessary to accept everything as true, one must only accept everything as necessary” (*man muß nicht alles für wahr halten, man muß es nur für notwendig halten*) (DP 276; 233). This statement can take on different meanings depending on whether one applies it to the fragment itself or *Der Prozeß* as a whole. In the first instance, it suggests the necessity of scripture, its immutability: one can question the meaning of the Word, but not the Word itself. In the second case, it suggests the impossibility of fully and truly raising a novel to the level of scripture, of creating a text “large enough to be great and perfect enough to be sublime.” This impossibility is what is inscribed on the ruins of *Der Prozeß*, much as the vanity of human ambition is inscribed on the ruined statue of Ozymandias in Percy Shelley’s “immortal” poem of the same name. Yet given the scriptural status accorded to Kafka’s work today, one might go so far as to suggest that Kafka’s most famous novel paradoxically succeeded in becoming scripture... precisely through its unique dramatization of its own failure to do so.

4.3 The True Way Of *Das Schloß*

“Der wahre Weg geht über ein Seil, das nicht in der Höhe gespannt ist, sondern knapp über dem Boden. Es scheint mehr bestimmt stolpern zu machen, als begangen zu werden.”

“The true way is along a rope that is not spanned high in the air, but only just above the ground. It seems intended more to cause stumbling than to be walked upon.”

—Franz Kafka (Aphorism 1)

In *Das Schloß*, Kafka's final novel, the interplay of the decadent and immoralist modes of incompleteness results once again in unfinishability. In this case, however, the dynamics of this interplay are strikingly different: whereas Joseph K. remains steadfast in his desire to fully vindicate himself and gain access to the Highest Court, as well as in his refusal to recognize his own guilt, “K.”—the hero of *Das Schloß*—changes considerably over the course of the novel and gradually compromises his demand to be admitted to the Castle and to be fully recognized and accorded the respect his title of “Land-Surveyor” (*Landvermesser*) deserves. By the end of the novel, K. has more or less given up on being admitted to the Castle and seeks instead to find a place for himself within the community of the village.

First, it should be pointed out that *Das Schloß*, like Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (the subject of the next two chapters), is to some extent a post-mortem epic of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.²⁷ Kafka, as is often pointed out, was born an Austro-Hungarian citizen and died a Czechoslovakian one, and it is no stretch

²⁷ The fall of Austro-Hungary seems to have produced (at least) three major unfinishable novels: Kafka's *Das Schloß*, Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, and Hašek's *The Good Soldier Svejk*.

to read *Das Schloß* as an allegorical account of the plight of a Jewish professional living in a Czech province in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, caught between a condescending aristocracy and a resentful peasantry. K.'s status as a person "neither of the village nor the Castle" is also a reflection on his membership in the Empire's "Mandarin class," the small number of lawyers, bureaucrats and technicians who were responsible for much of the Empire's day-to-day functioning.²⁸ Since many of the members of the Mandarin class were indeed Jewish (or had recently converted), both these parallels reinforce K.'s status as a man caught between two communities (and, in Kafka's case, two languages), each of which simultaneously acknowledges and excludes him.

Yet K.'s title of *Landvermesser* also seems well suited to mark him as an allegorical figure for "the writer" in general. Much could be written on this (and doubtless has been), but I will confine myself here to three observations. Firstly, it marks K. as an observer, as one who both records and establishes "the lay of the land" and who writes down his findings, tracing figures on the land that no one else can see but nonetheless have a real authority. While K. never actually seems to do any "land-surveying" in the novel, his conversations with villagers like Frieda, Hans, Amalia, Pepi and (especially) Olga can all be seen as a kind of "land-surveying" themselves. Secondly, the title of *Land-vermesser* is a literal German translation of the Greek

²⁸ Austro-Hungary had no real middle class to speak of, and even at the start of World War I the vast majority of the Empire's population was composed of peasants, a class that still made up more than ninety-nine percent of the population in some regions. For an account of the Empire's "Mandarin" class, see David Luft's *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942*.

Gaea-metron, and is also something of a modern updating of the title of Plowman—a plowman is certainly a *Landvermesser* of sorts—often used as a symbol for the poet in medieval literature. Keeping this in mind, one might read K.’s title as one more instance of the appearance of modern technology in the village (the electric lights, the fire-engine, etc.). Like the telephone in the *Herrenhof*, which rings everyday but delivers messages that no one is able to fully understand, K.’s title produces both deference (*Herr Landvermesser*) and incomprehension. No one in the village knows why they would need a *Landvermesser*, and although some villagers are willing to concede that they might need one, no one understands what such work entails or even whether K. is actually doing it or not. This incomprehension apparently extends not only to the villagers but to the gentlemen of the Castle as well, for Klamm himself informs K. that “The surveying work that you have carried out thus far has been appreciated by me”... despite the fact that no such work has actually begun to take place (*DS* 154).²⁹

This mixture of deference and incomprehensibility could be read as a satiric commentary on the status of modernist literature in general, the practitioners of which often claimed an increasing importance for themselves even as their actual writing grew more and more incomprehensible to the general reading public (here one might point to expressionism, one of the many movements that would claim Kafka for its own). Anyone can recognize a Plowman, what he does and why it is necessary, but what exactly is a *Landvermesser*? What does he do? Why is he needed? These are

²⁹ “Die landvermesserischen Arbeiten, die Sie bisher ausgeführt haben, finden meinen Anerkennung” (147).

questions that K. never fully attempts to explain to anyone until the very end of the novel, though he nonetheless seems to expect, at least in the beginning, to be accorded all the respect that his title deserves. K.'s status as *Landvermesser* means that he belongs neither to the village nor to the Castle, and is viewed with suspicion by denizens of both. Moreover, in a situation that in some ways parallels the implicitly conservative ideology of the *l'art pour l'art* movement, K.'s status as a servant of the Castle is made most evident precisely by his aloofness and alleged objectivity, by a supposed scientific impartiality that in fact functions to keep open a process that the state has no interest in bringing to a close. This can also be read as a reflection on the legal function of a *Landvermesser* in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, who would keep legal processes open and prevent property disputes from becoming "vollendet."

In my reading, *Das Schloß* explores the question of the writer's place within the community.³⁰ The immoralist mode that drives the novel enacts a self-transformation of the ethos of the self-important artist-technician K., an ethos that initially causes him to feel that everyone else should be obliged to make way for him so that he can do his work. Surprisingly, perhaps, K. actually seems able to accomplish this, to transform his Land-surveyor morality after a thorough surveying of the land. The same cannot be said of the novel's narrator, however, who ultimately seems to find it (aesthetically?) unacceptable to end his book with K. lying

³⁰ This is true of much of Kafka's late work and particularly his final story-collection *Ein Hungerkünstler* (1924), in which three out of the four stories ("Erstes Leid," "Ein Hungerkünstler," and "Josefine, die Sängerin, oder Das Volk der Mäuse") explicitly deal with an artist's role/place within a community.

contentedly on the soiled mattress that the landlady has thrown his way at the end of Chapter 24. In direct contrast to the end of Joseph K. in *Der Prozeß*, the fate promised to K. in *Das Schloß*—some sort of acceptance (*die scheinbare Freisprechung*) within the enclosure of the community—is made unrealizable through the metamorphic intrusion of a decadent mode of incompleteness, a mode that demands the same sort of transcendent perfectionism that the novel's dominant immoralist mode had hitherto led K. himself to reject. This intrusion ultimately makes the novel's immoralist mode of incompleteness impossible to overcome.

Once again, we are left with the ruins of a novel. Yet once again, the ruinedness of the book actually contributes to its “purity and beauty,” a purity and beauty which are inextricably tied to the novel's empirical failure. It is somewhat strange to note that *Das Schloß* does not seem to be determined by what Judith Butler, in a brilliant formulation, describes as Kafka's “poetics of non-arrival” (Butler 3). In fact, *Das Schloß* begins with K.'s arrival—“It was late in the evening when K. arrived” (*Es war spät abend als K. ankam*) (DS 3; 9)—so his arrival is a given from the first sentence of the novel. At the same time, it would be equally misleading to assert that the theme of “non-arrival” is “absent” from *Das Schloß*, and it might be more accurate to describe the book as charting “the anxious vicissitudes of non-arrival” experienced by one who has already arrived (Butler 3). More a prosaics of non-arrival, in this case, than a poetics of it, since the question of K.'s arrival remains an open one throughout. And while K. spends much of the novel attempting to secure a full acknowledgement of his arrival from the Castle itself, he gradually comes to

realize the greater importance of achieving an “ostensible” (*scheinbare*) arrival by being recognized by the villagers: above all, the “Wirtin” (landlady/female innkeeper). Although the *Wirtin* is acknowledged as K.’s personal enemy throughout most of the novel, near the book’s end K. finally seems to be establishing a rapport of sorts with her, and in the final chapter they even appear to be flirting.

The final three chapters of the novel, which were not included in Brod’s first German edition of 1926 or in any of the early translations, begin with K. consuming a flask of rum that Frieda had left out for him before locking her door and retiring to bed with his former assistant Jeremiah. Here is Brod’s original ending of the novel:

There was a little door down there, still lower than the doors in the passage—not Jeremiah only, even Frieda had to stoop on entering. Within, it seemed to be bright and warm; a few whispers were audible, probably loving cajolements to get Jeremiah to bed; then the door was closed [*geschlossen*]. (*DS* 330)³¹

It seems that Brod recognized not only a commercial necessity in ending the first edition of “Kafka’s” novel with a finished chapter, but also an aesthetic advantage in ending *Das Schloß* (which in German means the fortress, the castle and the lock) with the word “geschlossen” (closed, locked), a final word that could be said to maximize the novel’s endowment of organic unity.

But what is K. locked out of? It is not the Castle that is *geschlossen* here but rather Frieda’s room in the Herrenhof, the Inn that seems to serve throughout the

³¹ “Man sah unten ein kleine Tür, noch niedriger als die Türen hier im Gang, nicht nur Jeremias auch Frieda mußte sich beim Hineingehn bücken, innen schien es hell und warm zu sein, man hörte noch ein wenig Flüstern, wahrscheinlich liebeiches Überreden um Jeremias ins Bett zu bringen, dann wurde die Tür geschlossen” (*DS* 308).

novel as a signifier for the community of the village. Following K.'s final confrontation with Frieda, which is one of the most powerful scenes in all of Kafka in terms of interpersonal emotional drama, our long-suffering *Landvermesser* now finds himself locked out from the peace (*Frieda*) he had unappreciatively been enjoying all along amidst his Quixotic attempts to gain entrance to and recognition by the Castle. At this point, I believe, the nature of K.'s quest changes: the quest for transcendent recognition becomes a quest for Frieda, the person and/or the abstract noun. This change in the nature of K.'s quest becomes manifest in the following chapter, when K. actually stumbles upon his first real opportunity to gain entrance to the Castle in the form of Bürgel, a Castle official with whom K. is unexpectedly forced/allowed to share a bed, and who attempts to explain to K. that the best (and perhaps the only) way to be successfully admitted into the Castle is precisely through the type of random encounter that K. is presently experiencing:

[B]ut pay attention, there are sometimes, after all, opportunities that are almost not in accord with the general situation, opportunities in which by means of a word, a glance, a sign of trust, more can be achieved than by means of lifelong exhausting efforts. (*DS* 337)³²

An ally with access to the Castle, precisely what K. has misguidedly sought in the person of Barnabas, now finally seems to have appeared here in the person of Bürgel... yet K. no longer seems to care.

³² “[A]ber merken Sie auf, es ergeben sich dann doch wieder manchmal Gelegenheiten, die mit der Gesamtlage fast nicht übereinstimmen, Gelegenheiten bei welchen durch ein Wort, durch einen Blick, durch ein Zeichen des Vertrauens mehr erreicht werden kann, als durch lebenslange, auszehrende Bemühungen” (315).

K., who is exhausted, seeks only sleep and ignores the hints that Bürgel throws his way. In his excellent essay “To Deny Whatever Is Affirmed,” Ronald Gray reads this as an ironic paradox—admittance to the Castle can only be offered at a time when one is unwilling/unable to accept it—and blames K.’s failure to recognize the importance of Bürgel’s hints entirely on K.’s exhaustion. Such a reading, however, ignores both K.’s emotional distress over the recent scene with Frieda and the fact that K. is drunk. Such an oversight becomes rather glaring if one notes the great significance that scenes of drunkenness can take on in Kafka’s work, all the more so for the fact that they are relatively rare. One thinks of the short story “A Report to an Academy” (1919), in which the ape Red Peter is suddenly able to understand human speech after taking a long draught from a bottle of schnapps offered him by one of his sailor-captors. Drunkenness in Kafka can take the form of a kind of Zarathustrian *untergehen*, a going down amongst the people as a form of perishing, and this indeed is precisely what happens in the final three chapters of *Das Schloß*.

Moreover, it is precisely K.’s drunkenness that first wins him something akin to sympathy from his “Feind” the *Wirtin*, who finally allows him to spend the night on a mattress on the floor of her Inn:

“Come on!” the landlady said to the landlord, “Don’t you see he’s drunk, the lout? Leave him here to sleep it off!” and she even ordered Pepi, who on being called by her emerged out of the dark, tousled, tired, idly holding a broom in her hand, to throw K. some sort of cushion. (*DS* 374)³³

³³ “‘Komm,’ sagte die Wirtin zu Wirt, ‘er ist ja betrunken, der Lümmel. Laß ihn hier seinen Rausch ausschlafen,’ und sie befahl noch Pepi, die auf ihren Ruf hin aus dem Dunkel auftauchte, zerrauft, müde, einen Bessen lässig in der Hand, K. irgendein Kissen hinzuwerfen” (346).

Doubtless, there is something of the magnanimity of the victor in the *Wirtin*'s actions here, since she more than anyone has been responsible for Frieda's break with K. But there also seems to be an acknowledgement of K.'s willingness to lower himself, to appear as a fool before everyone and lie prostrate on the floor. Similarly, the *Wirtin* seems much more amenable to K.'s flirting in the final chapter after K. concedes his own ignorance in the fields of dresses and dressmaking. This final encounter with the *Wirtin* demonstrates K.'s growing recognition of who holds real power in the Village—"You are not only a landlady, as you pretend" (*Du bist nicht nur Wirtin, wie Du vorgibst*) (DS 411; 378)—and of who must be won over if he is to attempt to win Frieda back. Interestingly, this conversation is the only place in the novel where K. actually attempts to explain what his work as a *Landvermesser* entails (though K.'s actual explanation is not included in the text). Just as importantly, K. has grown wise and/or humble enough by this point not to take offense when his explanation occasions nothing more than a "yawn" (*gähnen*) from the *Wirtin*.

According to Brod, Kafka's plan for ending the novel would have allowed "the ostensible land surveyor [to] find partial satisfaction at least":

He was not to relax his struggle, but was to die worn out by it. Round his deathbed the villagers were to assemble, and from the Castle itself word was to come that though K.'s legal claim to live in the village was not valid, yet, taking certain auxiliary circumstances into account, he was to be permitted to live and work there. (*The Castle* xxviii)

Recalling Titorello's three options, this ending seems almost like a textbook definition of "ostensible acquittal" (*scheinbare Freisprechung*). Usually, this unrealized ending is seen as a compromise of sorts: transcendent entry into the Castle

is denied, but some sort of recognition is granted. Yet such an ending also implies that K. would have already achieved something akin to “an ostensible arrival” in the village—the fact that he has a bed to die on, for example—and except for the fact of his death one might even read this unaccomplished ending as a successful conclusion to K.’s second quest. The main question regarding how the novel would have been continued, it seems to me, is not so much how K. would have continued his quest to gain entrance to the Castle as it is if and how K. would have attempted to win Frieda back.

As one might expect, much of the critical literature on *Das Schloß* is devoted to the question of what exactly “the Castle” stands for. Most often, this question is framed in terms of whether the Castle is meant to represent an image of 1) transcendent meaning and truth, 2) heavenly power, or 3) worldly power. Personally, I feel the Castle is best understood in terms of the third option, secular *Macht*. I also believe, however, that this question is less important than it is often portrayed to be, since the story of *Das Schloß* is less about the Castle itself, or even K.’s attempts to enter it, than it is about life in the Village, the community in the shadow of the Castle. For this reason, I feel questions about the meaning of the Castle can be better surveyed in these terms: is the Castle transcendent or immanent?³⁴

Undoubtedly, K. himself seems to attribute transcendent properties to the Castle at many points in the novel. But how do the villagers view the Castle? More importantly: when, where and how does the power of the Castle manifest itself? K.’s

³⁴ Deleuze and Guattari frame their discussion of “the Law” in similar terms in their reading of *Der Prozeß* (81-93).

conversations with various villagers seem to reveal that the power of the Castle is not something that remains aloof and locked away, flowing unimpeded from some all-knowing inner chamber that one could or should attempt to penetrate. Rather, the power of the Castle in *Das Schloß* seems to be reminiscent of the power of the Law in *Der Prozeß*, at least as it is described by Deleuze and Guattari: “if the law remains unknowable, it is not because it is withdrawn into its transcendence, but simply because it is denuded of all interiority: it is always in the side bureau, or behind the door, *ad infinitum*.”³⁵ The power of the Castle is immanently suffused over nearly every aspect of the villagers’ lives, even if this is sometimes made most evident precisely through the villagers’ desire to see the hand of the Castle in everything. One thinks here of the ostracization of Barnabas’ family, an ostracization that we learn was caused not by any direct command from the Castle but rather by the villagers’ own emotional reaction to the rejection of the Castle official Sortini by Barnabas’ sister Amalia.³⁶ The Castle continuously informs the thoughts of the villagers who live in its shadow, and the fact of Amalia’s rejection of a Castle official distresses them insofar as it challenges their “normal” picture of the world. This is particularly true of Frieda, Klamm’s onetime “Geliebt” (mistress, lover, beloved).

For all the psychological power that they wield, however, the Castle and its officials do not stand irrevocably removed from life in the Village like God and His

³⁵ “si la loi reste inconnaissable, ce n’est pas parce qu’elle retirée dans sa transcendence, mais simplement parce qu’elle est dénuée de toute intériorité: elle est toujours dans le bureau d’à côté, ou derrière la porte, à l’infini” (82). My translation.

³⁶ As one might expect, the situation of Barnabas’ family is often read through the lens of Kafka’s Judaism.

heavenly cohort, or even like “A Company of Gnostic Demons” as in Erich Heller’s striking phrase. The officials of the Castle are real men—significantly, one does not hear of any women in the Castle—men with their own bodies, desires, eccentricities and stupidities. Moreover, the name of the Castle’s acknowledged Lord, “Count WestWest,” clearly seems to have secular connotations. And although neither K. nor the reader ever actually encounter Count WestWest, this fact alone can hardly justify readings of the Count as a stand-in for God or even a degenerated image of Him. How many rural citizens of the Austro-Hungarian Empire would ever have seen or met their Emperor?

The fact that Count WestWest and his officials are men, however, does nothing to detract from the power they wield over everyday life in the village, whether in the form of the daily telephone calls to the Herrenhof, the irregular and contradictory messages delivered by servants like Barnabas, or the portraits that cover the walls of the Inns and the impressions that they make. And if the power wielded by the Castle is that of a petty bureaucracy, it is by no means any less powerful for this reason. Yet the petty nature of this power, exemplified by the bureaucratic maelstrom that K. stumbles upon in the novel’s penultimate chapter, might actually lead one to question the moral value of gaining access to the seat of such power, and to ask oneself whether such a quest should not ultimately be secondary to an individual’s obligation to find a place for him or herself within a community formed by ethical bonds between real human beings (*Menschen*).

In this sense, one might read the gradual transformation that K. undergoes as a novel-length illustration of Kafka's aphorism: "Association with human beings lures one into self-observation" (*Verkehr mit Menschen verführt zur Selbstbeobachtung*) (Aphorism 77). Taking up the standard identification of K. as a seeker, one could say that his search for "The True Way" ultimately leads him, after many twists and turns, not to the Castle but to the mattress on the floor of the Herrenhof. In a reversal of the immoralist mode that drives Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, K.'s search for the True Way gradually leads him towards a realization of his duty, which is here not to attain the "truly noble destiny" of a tightrope-walker high in the air, but rather to humbly take up his task near the ground and stumble his way with/in/to the community of the village.

K.'s rejection of "the Castle" as the *Telos* for his quest is precipitated by a shift in his conception of the Castle, which gradually transforms in his mind from an immanent image of transcendence (the signs of a higher truth are everywhere) to a transcendent image of immanence (the influence of worldly power pervades everything). In such a world, ostensible acquittal is enough. The power of the Castle, like that of the secular governments of the world, is by no means purely malevolent, but neither can it finally function as an uncontaminated symbol for "the pure, the true, and the immutable." And while it might have been possible to overcome the immoralist mode of incompleteness that drives *Das Schloß* by abandoning K.'s Quixotic self-immolating Quest in favor of a more modest one, such a potential settling of events seems to have caused a new decadent mode of incompleteness to

infect the process of narration, leading eventually to Kafka's abandonment of *Das Schloß* at the end of 1922.

One way to read this abandonment is as a rebellious act of self-immolation on the part of the narrator, who apparently found the transformation K. was undergoing to be artistically unsustainable. The unfinishability of *Das Schloß* thus raises the question of whether walking along "The True Way" and raising the world into "the pure, the true, and the immutable" could ever be considered truly compatible artistic goals. Like Kafka's description of The True Way and perhaps like *Das Schloß* itself, such a question seems in the end better suited to cause stumbling than to be walked upon.

4.4 Kafka & Co.: A Case Study in the Traffic (*Verkehr*) of Unfinishedness

"In diesem Augenblick ging über die Brücke ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr."

"At this moment an unending stream of traffic was just going over the bridge."

—Franz Kafka, Closing sentence of "Das Urteil"

Speaking of his career as a whole, one might say that for Kafka posthumous success was neither a tragic accident nor an unfortunate by-product of his meteoric rise to the top of the Western Canon, so much as an essential element of it. Given the well-known role that Max Brod played in shaping Kafka's posthumous oeuvre, the numerous re-organizations that Kafka's complete work has undergone since Brod's death, the continuing release of "new" works by a writer who has been dead for

nearly a hundred years—here I am thinking especially of the recent publication of Kafka’s *The Office Writings* (2010)—and the fact that a large percentage of “Kafka’s” oeuvre is in fact composed of his correspondence with others—most prominently Felice Bauer, Milena Jesenská, Ottla Kafka, and Max Brod—it seems all-in-all rather inappropriate to think of Kafka’s oeuvre as the work of a single writer. As with Shakespeare (currently the only author more written-on than Kafka), it might actually be more appropriate to think of a Kafka Corporation or, as we shall be referring to it here: Kafka & Co.³⁷ In direct contrast to Shakespeare, however, who produced an exceptionally large number of plays and poems but left us with almost no evidence concerning the details of his personal relationships or the workings of his “inner life,” the physical majority of Kafka’s oeuvre is in fact made up of precisely such evidence, whether in the form of Kafka’s voluminous correspondence or in the form of his diaries and notebooks.

With all this in mind, it must now be asked—how is it that poor Franz Kafka, the brilliance of his work aside, has come to be seen as **the** quintessential modern author? While no single perfect answer could ever be given to such a question, we can happily offer up a number of imperfect ones by returning to the “Divine Comedy” image with which this chapter began, and by speaking of this image in terms of the unique reading pleasures and critical advantages that Kafka & Co. offers its public. While the critical advantages of Kafka’s allegorical *Purgatorio* have already been much discussed in this chapter, one can for instance also point to the very brevity of

³⁷ For a treatment of Shakespeare along these lines, see Stanley Wells’ *Shakespeare & Co.* (2007).

Kafka's *vollendet* works as a factor in his rise to literary immortality, since this brevity helps to make these texts less intellectually daunting than some other "high modernist" works one could mention: unlike *Ulysses*, *La recherche du temps perdu*, or *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, almost anyone can make it through *The Metamorphosis*. Yet despite their brevity, their relatively coherent plotlines, and their relatively simple prose, to finish even one of Kafka's *vollendet* works gives one a justifiable feeling that one has just read something incredibly complex. One need only cite Einstein's famous quip regarding Kafka's tales: "The human mind is not complicated enough" to understand things of such "perversity." Kafka's *Paradiso* is both accessible to all and inaccessible to all, and therein (I believe) lies much of its charm.

As for Kafka's *Inferno*, once one has ventured into it there is no turning back: biography and fiction have become irrevocably intertwined.³⁸ Deleuze and Guattari,

³⁸ This would seem like a good place to indulge in a brief autobiographical digression of my own. I will begin by confessing that prior to beginning work on this chapter, I had never seriously delved into any of the texts in Kafka's *Inferno*. I can even recall seriously believing that my ignorance of Kafka's biographical texts gave me an advantage over better informed readers by freeing my readings from any potential interpretive tyrannies that biographical knowledge might have imposed. And indeed, once one knows the facts of Kafka's life it is usually relatively easy to read even his most fantastic texts biographically (e.g. young clerk, incapable of moving out of his parents' house, feels he is turning into a vermin). Such readings, however, merely add another interpretive layer to Kafka's work and are perfectly capable of coexisting with other readings without tyrannizing over them. More recent experience has convinced me that knowledge of Kafka's *Inferno* immensely enriches one's interaction with the rest of his oeuvre, and I have even been struck by a certain eerie similarity between Kafka and Wagner in this regard: both of their works are easy to read biographically once one understands the main characters and plotlines, so to speak, but in both cases this self-referentiality also serves as a means to highly charged allegory and allows for the construction of historicized modern Everymen

hardly proponents of biographical criticism, are actually amongst the most fervent in stressing the centrality of Kafka's letters and diaries to his oeuvre as a whole. Not only do they assign the letters a primary place as the first of Kafka's three "components of expression"—followed by the "nouvelles" and "romans," respectively—they also acknowledge the impossibility of fully disentangling biography and fiction in Kafka's work by claiming that the diaries (which they describe as "the rhizome itself") underlie and connect all three of the other components.

Here again, I believe that the richness of Kafka's *Nachlaß* is a key component to the attractiveness of his oeuvre as a whole, not only because of the undeniable pleasures of biographical reading, but also because Kafka's diaries allow one to chart the creative process of "the artist" at work (or at least they are often marketed on these grounds). Kafka has long held a privileged place in the public imagination as a figure for both the tortured literary artist-as-genius, and for the Chaplinesque little clerk caught up in the vast machinery of modern life. Whatever their actual truth-value, these images of Kafka have both power and staying power. Like many modernists, Kafka struggled to live up to the mantle of genius he had placed upon himself and its corollary call for perfection. He found that the nightly burdens of this struggle, together with the daily terrors of modern life, left him not a "circus-rider on

and reflections on Western culture on a grand scale. Yet whereas Wagner's self-referential allegories strive for a world-historical perspective, Kafka's are mainly preoccupied with the universal problem of being an individual in the world—in all its terrible specificity. In any case, I feel it is safe to say that the character who emerges from Kafka's diaries, letters, and notebooks is by far the most complex and endearing character to be found in all of Kafka's work.

two horses” but rather “prostrate on the ground.” Yet one might suggest that Kafka’s very “prostration,” here conceived partly in terms of the fragmentariness/unfinishedness of his *oeuvre* as a whole, humanizes him and makes him more accessible to readers. In this sense, the large number of unfinished works that Kafka left behind can be seen to offer a seductive pleasure of their own, since in reading Kafka’s stories we cannot help but be confronted with the story of Kafka, a story that in this case is not the property of academia alone but of the reading public in general. Like the keyhole through which the denizens of the village can catch a glimpse of Klamm at his desk, Kafka’s *Inferno* provides a romantic peephole into his own “Schriftstellersein.”

All in all, then, the shortness of Kafka’s stories, the unfinishedness of his novels, and the intimacy of his *Nachlaß* can each be seen to have contributed to his posthumous success, arguably even enabling his ascension to the level of scripture. In considering Kafka’s *Divine Comedy* as a whole, moreover, it goes almost without saying that the justly famous ambiguity of Kafka’s work, an ambiguity that traverses his entire *oeuvre* and manifests itself in many different ways, has proven to be another key element in Kafka’s extra-ordinary canonization. As Umberto Eco points out in “The Open Work,” the amorphously allegorical nature of Kafka’s writing clearly seems to appeal to certain (post)modern democratic ideals by offering a great deal of freedom to Kafka’s readers and allowing us to establish something akin to “personal relationships” with him.

This essential fragmentariness/unfinishedness of Kafka's work, including its amenability to multiple interpretations, also provides endless grist for the critical mill and fuels a still proliferating editorial-industrial complex that feeds on the privileging, de-privileging, and re-privileging of various assets of Kafka & Co.³⁹ The rich profundity of Kafka's *Nachlaß*, like a mass of scripture, offers scholars a boundless sea of ambiguous and potentially contradictory quotes on which to base "their" Kafka... as for example in the various heading quotes used in this chapter. And yet, despite the undeniable territoriality that often surfaces in Kafka studies, one also still (amazingly) gets the sense that there remains enough Kafka to go around.

This being the case, it should come as no surprise that Kafka is claimed by such a wide variety of literary traditions, both national (German, Jewish, and Czech) and artistic (he has been read as exemplifying modernism, postmodernism, Zionism, anti-Zionism, expressionism and mysticism, amongst other things). Yet even as the plethora of national and scholastic investments that have been made in Kafka & Co. insures that there will always be interested parties *vis-à-vis* his work, Kafka & Co.'s continuing resistance to the hegemony of any single interpretive tradition also marks

³⁹ To give one example: while Brod explicitly privileges the collection of aphorisms that he (perhaps misleading) entitled "Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope, and the True Way" as representative of a turning point in Kafka's increasing religious awakening, Deleuze and Guattari explicitly exclude these aphorisms from their breakdown of Kafka's "Components of Expression" on the grounds that they believe them to have been written during a bout of clinical depression. This example is useful not only because it offers a clear contrast between two very different readings of Kafka, but also because both texts openly acknowledge their bias towards certain aspects of Kafka's oeuvre.

Kafka as a superb figure for the sorts of “de-territorializing” readings espoused by Deleuze and Guattari and, more recently, by Judith Butler.

The irreducible multiplicity of Kafka & Co. can be observed not only in the competing stances taken up by various critics, but also in the publication histories of the works themselves. For instance, Kafka’s “complete work” is now available in three separate German editions, each of which presents readers with significant differences in organization. Besides the original Schocken edition (essentially Brod’s edition), one can now also get the Fischer edition, allegedly based on Kafka’s “original handwriting” (*in der Fassung der Handschrift*), or go online to the more interactive but still incomplete “Kafka Project,” which includes (for example) photocopies of the entire original manuscript of *Der Process* (sic). While the differences in actual content between the three editions are relatively minor (except for the letters), the mere fact of their co-existence offers scholars interested in the uses and implications of the unfinished label a fascinating opportunity for reflecting on the rich and complicated relationship between organization and content that arises whenever the complete works of a canonical author are published. While a truly rigorous examination of all of the critical implications arising from the (re-)editing of Kafka’s *oeuvre* would far exceed the scope of this chapter, I feel I would be remiss not to raise some questions that a prosaics of unfinishability might be able to open up in this context. While I will not be “answering” these questions (some of which are more rhetorical than others), I offer them up as possible avenues of future inquiry:

- 1) What happens when more recent editions of *Der Prozeß* expurgate Brod's original preface to the novel, the preface that includes Brod's *apologia* for his refusal to obey Kafka's last request? Should not this preface by now be considered as part of "Kafka's" oeuvre? And if so, should it still be included in *Der Prozeß* or should space be made for it elsewhere in the complete works?
- 2) Exactly what is at stake in drawing the boundaries of Kafka's "complete" work? What is at stake, for instance, in the Fischer edition's decision to exclude Kafka's letters from its *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden*, an edition that nonetheless includes the full text of Kafka's undelivered letter to his Father? Do letters cease to be works of literature once they have been delivered? One might also ask: what impact can marketing decisions have on our understanding of genre?
- 3) How does the absence of nearly all letters not by Kafka influence our understanding of Kafka's own letters? Above all, how much does Kafka's incineration of all letters by Jesenská, a gifted writer in her own right who wrote to Kafka almost exclusively in Czech, hang over and inform Kafka's *Letters to Milena*? Has the addition of some of Jesenská's own essays and letters to Brod in more recent editions changed our general understanding of the work? If so, how?

- 4) What is at stake in Fischer's claim that their so-called manuscript edition is based on "Kafka's own handwriting" (*In der Fassung der Handschrift*)? Such a statement seems to make little sense, since one must still make major editorial decisions in dealing with the handwritten manuscripts that Kafka left behind. To give the most glaring example of the Fischer edition's inconsistency, in Kafka's original *Der Prozeß* manuscript "Process" is consistently spelled with a c and a double s, as opposed to "Prozeß" as in the Fischer edition. One could easily assume this to be a motivated choice on Kafka's part insofar as it accentuates the double meaning of the German word (trial/process) by highlighting its similarity to its English cousin. Is not this precisely the sort of thing that a supposed "manuscript edition" should attempt to bring to light?
- 5) How does the alleged freedom of the Kafka Project's online edition change the status of language in Kafka's work? Is there something Kafkaesque in being confronted with an immutable text? Is there something Kafkaesque in not being confronted by an immutable text? Could the existence of the Kafka Project lead to a change in the meaning of "Kafkaesque" itself?
- 6) Assuming that they should be included at all, where should the passages that Kafka deleted from his novels and stories be placed? In brackets within the main text? As endnotes? In a separate volume

within the complete works? What effects do such decisions have on one's reading experience? Since it is impossible to "unread" something once one has read it, are such inclusions not themselves blatant examples of co-authorship, indeed unwanted co-authorship, since Kafka himself clearly indicated that he wanted these passages removed? On the other hand, should the reader of *Das Schloß* (for example) be made aware of the history of its publication, e.g. that the original edition ended with Frieda's locking of the door at the end of Chapter 22? If so, how and where should this be noted?

- 7) Finally, what are the consequences of viewing and marketing Kafka's work as simultaneously 1) exemplifying the work of a truly original and inimitable artist, a writer so unique that he requires his own adjective; and 2) offering readers and aspiring writers a more general insight into the creative process via Kafka's diaries and manuscripts? In the Modern Literature Museum in Marbach, for instance, where the original manuscript of *Der Process* is displayed under heavy glass, the audio tour guide spends over five minutes discussing the fact that Kafka crossed out "nehmet" in the novel's famous opening sentence and replaced it with "verhaftet." Although the room is literally filled with famous manuscripts, no comparable amount of time is devoted to a specific word choice by any other writer. The audio tour guide claims that this word choice offers both

an insight into what makes Kafka's work so unique and an example of good writing in general. Obviously, there is a contradiction here: Kafka cannot exemplify both absolute uniqueness and standard good form at the same time... or can he? Is there perhaps something insightful and productive in this contradiction, or is it merely a manifestation of the forces of the market and the economics of bookselling? Are these two choices mutually exclusive?

Questions of *buchstäben* and editorial minutiae aside, the fact that scholars have deemed it necessary not only to re-organize Kafka's complete works but to do so twice within the span of a decade (the Fischer edition was published in 1988, and the Kafka Project was launched in 1997) illustrates both the high stakes and the commercial viability involved in editing and publishing Kafka.

In the end, however, there is perhaps no better evidence that Kafka's writing has indeed attained the level of scripture than the passion, the devotion, the erudition, and (occasionally) the pettiness that can be gleaned from the ongoing struggles over the proper status, interpretation, and organization of Kafka's work. The almost absurdly high stakes of this struggle were exemplified in a recent custody battle over Kafka's remaining unpublished literary remains. The beginning of the story is well known: Kafka, after burning much of his work in the days before his death, left the remainder of his papers to Max Brod together with a request that Brod burn them unread. Brod, of course, did not burn them, and what he didn't publish he packed in a trunk and took with him to Israel, where upon his own death he left the papers to his

secretary Esther Hoffe, who eventually left them to her own daughters after selling the original manuscript of *Der Process* in 1988 for over two million dollars. Her daughters, Eva and Ruth, tried to sell the papers (sight-unseen and by weight) to the highest bidder, but were sued by the National Library of Israel, which claimed to represent the interests of both “the public good” in general and “the Jewish People” in particular. This provoked an intriguing literary custody battle between the Hoffe sisters, the National Library of Israel and the German Literary Archive in Marbach (the proverbial highest bidder), which houses the majority of Kafka’s papers and claimed that Kafka’s *oeuvre* should not be needlessly endangered or fragmented any more than it already is. In the end, after privately viewing the contents of the archive—the vast majority of which was written by Brod himself—the presiding judge decided in favor of Israel on the grounds that Brod had left the papers to Hoffe “in trust,” and not as personal property.

Judith Butler’s article “Who Owns Kafka?” (2011) raises and addresses a number of interesting questions concerning this (then on-going) legal battle, including: how **did** Kafka become such a valuable literary commodity, almost literally “a new gold standard” as she puts it (Butler 3)? Although Butler is “prepared to accept that the management of his papers requires a decision regarding their stewardship, and that the problem of legal ownership has to be solved so the papers can be inventoried and made accessible,” she also believes that “if we turn to his writings to help us sort through this mess, we may well find that his writing is instead most pertinent in helping us to think

through the limits of cultural belonging, as well as the traps of certain nationalist trajectories that have specific territorial destinations as their goal” (5).

As this sentence suggests, Butler’s main concern seems to be reading Israel’s claim on Kafka’s literary remains as an attempt to tie this latest completion of his oeuvre to a Zionist narrative of homecoming, a narrative that is inconsistent with what we know of the beliefs of Franz Kafka the man, and seems downright antithetical to Kafka’s work as a writer. As Butler puts it:

in Kafka’s parables and other writings we find brief meditations on the question of going somewhere, of going over, of the impossibility of arrival and the unrealisability of a goal. I want to suggest that many of these parables seem to allegorise a way of checking the desire to emigrate to Palestine, opening instead an infinite distance between the one place and the other—and so constitute a non-Zionist theological gesture. (8)

There is a part of me that believes (as Butler seems to imply but never states outright) that a traveling suitcase filled with unread fragments of Kafka (a wandering *oeuvre* one might say) might actually be the most appropriate way of keeping open a body of work that certainly does seem preoccupied with the theme of “non-arrival.” Moreover, I believe Butler’s “poetics of non-arrival” offer a genuine alternative to the tragic poetics of failure often associated with the unfinished label.

I also feel, however, that the whole battle over “Who Owns Kafka?” has given short shrift to the importance of Max Brod, who must be acknowledged not only as Kafka’s editor and executor but also to some extent as his co-author.⁴⁰ Although Butler provides a fascinating reading of Kafka’s last request to Brod, showing the

⁴⁰ Brod is not only the presumptive co-author of Kafka’s unfinished novels but also the literal co-author of their early abandoned collaborative novel *Richard & Samuel* (1912).

impossibility inherent in his request that “everything,” which would seem to include the letter itself, should be “burnt unread,” she allots virtually no space to reflecting on what she calls “Brod’s compromise with himself” (3). In Butler’s case, this offhand denigration of Brod is consistent with her own aim of highlighting the anti-Zionist thematic she feels pervades Kafka’s work, since Brod, a committed Zionist, not only worked tirelessly to highlight the supposed Jewish character of Kafka’s work but was also the one who brought Kafka’s papers to Israel in the first place. Yet one might also have expected Butler, one of the world’s most renowned Derrideans, to have acknowledged the “Corporation of Limited Responsibility” Kafka created through the double nature of his final request: by both naming Brod as his literary executor and asking Brod to burn everything he had written, did Kafka not force Brod to assume a share of the responsibility for Kafka’s *oeuvre*?

The question Butler clearly fails to ask, it seems to me, is “Who owns Max Brod?” This is particularly strange since this question lay at the heart of the actual legal battle (as the judge clearly recognized).⁴¹ Was not this final, mysterious, unread and unburnt collection of papers rather representative of Brod’s share in the Kafka corporation? Butler’s article thus offers an excellent example of the rhetorical versatility of the unfinished label, since even as she espouses a Kafkaesque “poetics of non-arrival” over and against traditional poetics of unfinishedness, Butler also makes use of the unfinished label’s rhetoric of transgression through her implicit appeal to its

⁴¹ The National Library’s claim that Brod left the papers “in trust” can actually be seen as something of a compromise, since it alleges to respect Brod’s will while still maintaining that no individual person should be allowed to own Kafka.

portrayal of Brod as a nefarious interloper—or, at best, a well-intentioned muddler/mediator—who stands between the reader and Kafka’s work, rather than an essential collaborator who is in some way responsible for the very existence of Kafka & Co. In any case, the strangely violent rhetoric aimed at the Hoffe sisters—nearly all of the articles I read describe their apartment as “cat-infested,” and most use some form of the word “hoarding” (!) as well—is typical of the rhetoric surrounding unfinished works, a rhetoric whose primary function is to distract us from the fact that **no one** has **ever** produced a text **entirely** by him or herself. First and foremost, the unfinished label works to obscure this fact, although it does so by paradoxically working to highlight this same fact in certain “special cases,” cases that are presented as infested with special circumstantiality.

And yet... does stripping Brod away actually get us any closer to an “authentic” Kafka? Considering that it was supposedly Brod who managed to convince Kafka to publish at all, it seems rather unjust to sever the two of them completely since, without Brod, there would be no Kafka. Moreover, what would an authentic Kafka be? Stanley Corngold opens *Lambent Traces* with the question: “What if Max Brod had obeyed Kafka’s last request and burned everything?” (1). One might also ask: what if just the novels had been published? What if just the novels, the parables, and the aphorisms? In any of these cases, the stock of Kafka & Co. would be nowhere near as high as it is today, although most likely poor Franz Kafka would also be a little less horrified about the gleeful thoroughness with which we scholars continue to rifle through his drawers. Given the almost unparalleled importance that Kafka & Co. enjoys in so many branches

of literary studies, and the numerous scholastic battles that continue to be fought over the proper status and interpretation of Kafka's work, all these questions seem in the end to lend an unimpeachable legitimacy to the now eternal question: whose Kafka are we talking about here?

4.5 Concluding Fragment: "The Immoralist's Dilemma"

"Dearest Max, my last request—everything I leave behind, to be burnt unread."

—Franz Kafka's last request

When I first conceived of this chapter, its title—"The Immoralist's Dilemma"—was meant to refer to Kafka's dilemma in writing his novels (to finish or not to finish? to publish or not to publish?). While I still feel that this title is an appropriate description for the dilemma whose irresolution is inscribed on the ruins of Kafka's three unfinished novels, this phrase has also acquired an added significance for me during the course of my research and during the writing process. As consumers of literature, the very fact of Kafka & Co.'s existence confronts us with an immoralist's dilemma of our own, since in reading Kafka's *Nachlaß* we are transgressing his commandment that everything he left behind was to be "burnt unread." It should not be forgotten that in seeking to establish a "personal relationship" with Kafka, we are each of us doing damage to his person—to be his friend one must begin by being a bad friend indeed. I believe that attempts to wipe the fingerprints of Max Brod from Kafka's work are primarily attempts to erase the evidence of our own transgressions. Even worse, they often seem to make a scapegoat

of Brod, who is not only called to task for specific editorial decisions and for misunderstanding Kafka in general but is also made to shoulder all guilt for his original sin of publication. While there is certainly good reason to argue that Brod should shoulder much of this guilt, it must also be acknowledged that Franz Kafka left his best friend with an immoralist's dilemma as great as, if not greater than, any that Kafka himself ever faced.

To justify our tacit affirmation of Max Brod's decision to publish, an affirmation that we inevitably make whenever we decide to read anything that Brod saved from the flames, requires that we ourselves embrace an ideal of aesthetic decadence to some extent. We must tell ourselves that the value of Kafka's work as an artist outweighs the personal wishes of Franz Kafka the man. Yet to expect Max Brod to shoulder all of the guilt for our actions suggests, if nothing else, a very poor reading of Kafka, because if Kafka's work teaches us anything it is that we are all guilty. In fact, the only group who might be regarded as completely innocent in the face of Kafka's last request is the Nazi Party, which actually did make a sustained effort to carry out Kafka's wishes and burn all of his works unread.⁴²

Obviously, innocence is not the answer either. In this case, I believe that an ethics of unfinishedness (which is always already an ethics of canonization) requires that we embrace Brod's original sin—at its core, the sin of reading Kafka—but without totally embracing it, and certainly without acquitting ourselves of all guilt in

⁴² Kafka's works were amongst the first to be placed on the "decadent list" by the Nazis after the 1933 election, and some unread works by Kafka were in fact lost forever to the fires of the Third Reich.

the matter. We must remember that we are reading Kafka over Franz Kafka's dead body, and we should be cognizant of the ethical implications of this fact. And while one certainly hopes that Kafka is enjoying his last laugh (on Max Brod, on the Nazis, and on us), it seems highly unlikely that his laughter would be in good conscience. Nor should our reading be, at least not entirely. If nothing else, one must take the time to say: "Kafka does not want me to read, but I... I must."

CHAPTER FIVE: *DER MANN OHNE EIGENSCHAFTEN* IN THE GOLDEN AGE OF UNFINISHABLE NOVELS

“Die Geschichte dieses Romans kommt darauf hinaus, daß die Geschichte, die in ihm erzählt werden sollte, nicht erzählt wird.“

“The story of this novel amounts to this, that the story that ought to be told in it is not told.”

“Mancher wird fragen: Welchen Standpunkt nimmt denn nun der Autor ein u welches ist sein Ergebnis? Ich kann mich nicht ausweisen. Ich nehme das Ding weder allseitig (was unmöglich ist im Roman), noch einseitig; sondern von verschiedenen zusammengehörigen Seiten. Man darf die Unfertigkeit einer Sache aber nicht mit der Skepsis des Autors verwechseln. Ich trage meine Sache vor, wenn ich auch weiß, daß sie nur ein Teil der Wahrheit ist u. ich würde sie ebenso vortragen, wenn ich wüßte, daß sie falsch ist, weil gewisse Irrtümer Stationen der Wahrheit sind. Ich tue in einer bestimmten Aufgabe das Möglichste.”

“Many will ask: What viewpoint is the author taking, and with what results? I can't give a satisfactory account of myself. I take the matter neither from all sides (which in the novel is impossible) nor from one side, but from various congruent sides. But one must not confuse the unfinished state of something with the author's skepticism. I expound my subject even though I know it is only part of the truth, and I would expound it in just the same way if I knew it were false, because certain errors are way stations of the truth. Given a specific task, I am doing what I can.”

—Robert Musil, *The Man Without Qualities* (1937; 1760)¹

Widely held up alongside James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913-27) as the German-language member of the Holy Trinity of high modernist prose, Robert Musil's *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (1931/33/43) can make a legitimate claim to the title of most unfinishable novel ever written. Like *Der Process* before it, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (or *MoE* for short) is one of those rare books whose unfinishedness is widely recognized to be essential

¹ Both quotes can be found on the same page in both the German and English texts.

to its very structure, with Frank Kermode describing it as “multidimensional, fragmentary, without the possibility of narrative end” (Kermode 126). As it exists today, *MoE* consists of two lengthy “finished” Volumes (*Buchs*), together with a third volume consisting of over three thousand pages of subsequent chapters, variants of chapters, sketches, and notes... over six hundred pages of which have been translated into English. Intriguingly, it is this last section, *Aus dem Nachlaß*, that in some ways most closely resembles Musil’s plan for the novel, which was meant to have had an “open architecture” that would have allowed different narrative strands to diverge from a single point, thus giving rise to alternate realities that could then coexist within the text. Burton Pike, who translated the *Nachlaß* and is probably more intimately acquainted with Volume III than any other scholar alive, describes the situation thusly:

Musil did not finish *The Man Without Qualities*, although he often said he intended to. There is no way of telling from either the parts published in his lifetime or his posthumous papers how he would have done so, or indeed whether he could have done so to his own satisfaction. This is because of the novel’s rigorously experimental structure, consisting of an ‘open architecture’ that could be developed in many directions from a given point. The novel does contain coherent individual threads and incidents, but Musil firmly rejected the idea of a plotted narrative whole. Therefore, while the drafts of the twenty chapters in Part 1 of ‘From the Posthumous Papers’ carry on from where ‘Into the Millennium’ left off, the material in Part 2 is not preliminary to a final version in the usual sense, but consists rather of notes, sketches, and drafts that Musil was keeping in suspension for possible use in some form at some place in the ultimate text, a version he never decided upon and that must forever remain the object of tantalizing speculation. (Pike xi)²

² As is generally the case with unfinished works and unfinishable novels, it is worth reiterating that Pike’s Preface here in a sense constitutes part of the novel itself, rather like Musil’s own notes in the *Nachlaß*.

In fact, Musil was forced to publish the first two volumes of his novel for financial reasons, and is said to have complained that in doing so he had been forced to distort the shape of the book. *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* thus marks a peculiar event in the history of unfinished works: a radically unfinishable novel whose author was forced to compromise his artistic vision by completing parts of it. As it stands, it is hard to imagine how the book could ever have been finished even in its more conservative, “compromised” present form, as the title character (Ulrich) moves in and out of several intersecting narrative strands, each populated by a host of characters seeking in some way to impose their own meaning and narrative order on the world, thus painting the fragmented portrait of a world increasingly shattered into specialized and unbridgeable viewpoints—a world impervious to totalization.

5.1 The Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels

Fittingly, the birth and death of Robert Musil (1880-1942) can be seen to bookend with eerie precision both what David Luft calls “The Crisis of European Culture”³ and what I am calling “The Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels,” two phrases that in this dissertation have already been more-or-less bound together under the umbrella phrase: “the metaphysical market crash of *fin-de-siècle* Europe.” Indeed, as we saw in Chapter Four, it is not unfair to describe “Golden Age” and “Crisis” here in the same terms as the “Siamese twin” relationship that Ulrich and his younger

³ Cf. Luft’s *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture 1880-1942* (1980), the standard intellectual biography of Musil in English, and a major contribution to Musil studies in its own right in terms of its culturo-historical location of Musil within the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s “Mandarin class.”

sister Agathe will seek to construct in *MoE*'s second volume: "The Unseparated and Not United" (*Die Ungetrennten und Nichtvereinten*) (1398; 1337). Indeed, with the standard caveat that periodizing is always dangerous, I would suggest that the best way to distinguish between an unfinished and an unfinishable novel in this period is precisely to ask whether its unfinishedness can be read as sign and symptom of its times, as in *Der Prozeß* and *Das Schloß*, or whether it reflects "only" contingent historical circumstances such as alcoholism and pneumonia, as in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Last Tycoon* (1940).⁴

The causes of this Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels are both relatively easy and more-or-less impossible to identify. Impossible, because like any unfinished work each and every unfinishable novel has a story unique to it alone. Easy, because once one gives into the temptation to think in broad historical strokes it becomes difficult to miss a certain grand convergence between 1) the increasingly ambitious projects of literary modernism and 2) a growing mistrust in the totalizing (or even explanatory) powers of narrative, a mistrust that could be said to mark the earliest rumblings of the more widespread "crisis of narratives" that Jean-François Lyotard would later mark

⁴ Although an unfinishable novel like Pessoa's *The Book of Disquiet* can of course reflect all these things. Nor do I wish to suggest that a study of *The Last Tycoon* as an unfinished work—it was finished by Fitzgerald's friend Edmund Wilson in 1940 but then "restored" (or un-finished) to Fitzgerald's original fragmented outline and republished as *The Love of the Last Tycoon* in 1996—would have nothing to teach us. Yet while the unfinishedness of *The Last Tycoon* is mainly of interest in terms of the book's publication history and the perspectives it offers for reflecting on the ethics of canonization, a genuinely unfinishable novel like *MoE* offers not only a rich textural history but in addition provides fertile grounds for symptomatic close readings, and for thinking the philosophical and generic problematics of closure, in ways that "merely unfinished" novels do not.

as the onset of “The Postmodern Condition”: “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards meta-narratives” (Lyotard xxiii, xxiv). A primary contention of this dissertation is that Lyotard’s collapse of metanarratives was both precipitated and accompanied, in the context of the history of the novel, by a collapse of more traditional narrative forms: by the end of the linear realist novel, not as a genre (there are still certainly plenty of them being written today), but as an artistic backbone that could support the liberal ideology of Progress that dominated nineteenth century Western thought. The narrative premise that Watt designates as the “primary convention” of the realist novel, the idea “that the novel is a full and authentic report of human experience” (Watt 32), simply no longer held water for a majority of Europeans, and particularly not for a generation of WWI veterans who “returned from the fields grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience” (“Storyteller” 386). This of course is a central theme in Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1924), amongst other novels from this period.

The year of Musil’s birth, 1880, saw the death of Gustave Flaubert and with it the (first) completion of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. Conversely, the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov* that same year followed by the death of Dostoevsky the next meant that the second volume that Dostoevsky had intended to write would remain forever unrealized—though the unfinished status of that great epic novel has never been much acknowledged. Two years before the end of Musil’s life, 1940, saw the death of Mikhail Bulgakov, whose novel *The Master and Margarita* would remain in a drawer from 1939 until 1966, when his wife Elena was finally able to get it

published ten years after Stalin's death.⁵ In between, from 1880-1942, the world not only witnessed the deaths of a number of canonical novelists together with the "completion" of their unfinished and/or unfinishable novels, but also the full flowering of "Nachlaß" ("posthumous papers") as a literary genre in its own right, a phenomenon Henry James treated in his classic novella *The Aspern Papers* (1888).⁶ The year before Musil died, moreover, saw the publication of Borges' *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*, a watershed of postmodernism (see Chapter Six) that, although not unfinishable itself, contains a number of stories that revolve around unfinishable novels.

We have already dealt at length with Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881), Kafka's *Der Process* and *Das Schloß* (1925, 1926), and Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet* (1935), but special mention should also go to Jaroslav Hašek's *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Adventures in the Great War* (1921-23), a novel that is not only unfinished in the traditional sense—Hašek died while writing it, though it was already

⁵ Although neither structurally nor thematically unfinishable, *The Master and Margarita* was certainly unpublishable within Stalin's Soviet Union and thus meets my working definition for an unfinishable novel, in this case a novel that could only be finished (published) posthumously. There is some room for debate on this point, however, as Bulgakov did in fact "publish" his book in the ancient sense of the word by giving a (secret) public reading of the novel to a circle of his friends on May 14, 1939—shortly before depositing the manuscript in a special drawer containing a number of other unpublishable works. *The Master and Margarita* is thus another strange literary phenomenon, being simultaneously a finished work and an unfinishable novel. It is not unique in this regard, however, and indeed the Russian phrase "written for the drawer" (*pisat' v yashchik*) came to designate something like a subterranean genre in itself.

⁶ The late nineteenth century was a period in which numerous *Nach-* words were added to the German lexicon, as for instance in the title to Adalbert Stifter's three-volume *Der Nachsommer* (1857), arguably **the** classic nineteenth century Austrian novel.

being published serially at the time—but that is also widely regarded to be the national epic of the Czech Republic, where images of Svejek can still be found on tavern walls. Since it is difficult to imagine how the novel could possibly have ended—both the end of the war and the death of Svejek seem unthinkable in the world Hašek depicts—it also certainly seems fair to label *Svejek* unfinishable.⁷ The unfinishability of *Svejek* stems not only from its insurmountably picaresque mode of incompleteness, but also from an essential Pantagruelism... the novel's "failure" to reach a conclusion is inseparable from Svejek's "failure" to reach the Eastern front, here easily identifiable with death. At the same time, however, *Svejek*'s Pantagruelism is tinged with nihilism: unlike Rabelais or Sterne, Hašek's refusal to offer up "a meaning" to his readers does not appear to be tempered by good faith, or even nostalgia (as in Musil). *Svejek* is at once a polemic against the modern condition (or, perhaps more accurately, against the modern state and its various ideological apparatuses) and a digressive, unfinishable depiction of one man's heroic attempt to shirk the most concrete and horrific manifestation of that condition—the trenches.

Another child of the Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels that cannot be overlooked is Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Begun as a one-volume novella written in the third person, Proust's mighty *roman-fleuve* gradually widened, encompassing the original text within an expanding first-person narrative

⁷ Actually, Karel Vanek did "finish" the novel (working with Josef Lada, Svejek's original illustrator), but his sequel was not particularly popular and its virulently anti-Russian tone insured that it would not be adopted into the canon of communist Czechoslovakia. Bertolt Brecht's play *Schweyk im Zweiten Weltkrieg* (*Svejek in the Second World War*), written in California in 1943, fared somewhat better.

that stretched to two, three, and eventually seven volumes. Proust self-published the first volume (*Du côté de chez Swann*) in 1913, but the outbreak of war prevented the publication of the two other volumes he had written at that point and, as the war went on, Proust gradually expanded the novel into its present, seven-volume form. Although it is perhaps debatable whether *La recherche* is truly unfinishable, since it has an ending and follows a clear decadent mode of incompleteness (at the end the Narrator is ready to tell his story and become a great artist), one could argue that *La recherche* is not open-ended but “open-middled,” rather like Kafka’s *Der Process*. Yet whereas in *Der Process* it was the indefinite proliferation of chapters between beginning and end that rendered the novel unfinishable (or “capable of being prolonged into infinity,” as Brod puts it), in Proust’s case the unfinishability of his *roman-fleuve* is tied to the indefinite proliferation of entire novels (in two cases, two volume novels) between *Du côté de chez Swann* and *Le Temps retrouvé* (the second book written). For Proust, moreover, it is not an intrusion of the immoralist mode that renders his novel-project unfinishable so much as an interminable re-thinking, expansion, and re-orientation of *La recherche*’s own, individualized, epic-encyclopedic mode of incompleteness.

Amongst all these fine unfinishable novels, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* stands out, so much so that my own project would have to be considered a failure if I did not account for it. Why is Musil’s unfinishable novel so appropriate a poster-child for the Golden Age that its publication brought to a close? For one thing, there is its strange relationship to both World Wars. Although the novel takes place in 1913 and

recounts events leading up to the first Great War, the published portions were written against the backdrop of the rise of the Nazi party: Musil was in Berlin from 1930 until the 1933 elections, in Vienna until the *Anschluß*, and spent the rest of his life in exile in Switzerland. Musil believed that the ongoing crisis of European Culture was largely the result of *fin-de-siècle* Europe's failure to construct an ideology adequate to the world with which it was faced, and that this intellectual failure had ensured that the catastrophe of the war years would continue on the ideological front until the next, Greater War, with Fascism and Communism rising in the meantime to fill the void left by the collapse of the liberalism's own Progress metanarrative.⁸ Although he died near the turning point of the Second World War, Musil had long since come to see his project as an attempt to establish, within the laboratory world of his novel, a worldview capable of looking the twentieth century in the face, perhaps even of helping to fill the void to come: no longer the crisis of Versailles or of Munich, but the crisis of Auschwitz (an unspeakable past) and Hiroshima (an impossible future).

5.2 Progress, Realism, and the Novel

Before speaking of *MoE* in the context of Lyotard's collapse of metanarratives and the history of the novel, it is important to make clear certain strong connections between the ideology of liberalism, the realist novel, and the emergence of literary history as an object of intellectual inquiry. Ironically, since no German nation would

⁸ Cf. Musil's many essays and speeches from the interwar period, particularly "Die Nation als Ideal und als Wirklichkeit" ("Nation as Ideal and as Reality," 1921), "Das Hilflose Europa oder Reise vom Hundertsten ins Tausendste" ("Helpless Europa," 1922), and "Über Dummheit" ("On Stupidity," 1937).

officially exist until 1871, the fundamentally nationalist discipline of Literary History can trace its beginnings to the Jena branch of German Romanticism and, more specifically, to Friedrich Schlegel's *Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern* (1802) in which Schlegel articulated for the first time an understanding of literature as "the comprehensive essence of the Intellectual Life of a Nation" (Schlegel ix). Schlegel believed that a re-valorization of the German language over the last half-century had paved the way for a "renewal" of German literature, which could in turn pave the way for the emergence of a genuine German Nation.⁹ This in contrast to two previous centuries when

Keppler and Leibniz wrote, for the most part, in Latin: Frederick the Second [Frederick the Great] read, wrote, and thought only in French. The learned and the noble alike neglected their mother tongue. National recollections and feelings were abandoned to the guardianship of the people, among whom still lingered some remnants of the good old time, however feeble and mutilated; or they remained sacred to youthful enthusiasm and the daring speculations of a few poets and authors, who began to project a new order of things. Yet so long as these efforts were individual, irregular, wanting in combinative force, even youthful enthusiasm could not always claim the triumph of complete success, or produce unequivocal results. (Schlegel 2)

⁹ Here and elsewhere, my use of the phrase "German Nation" is meant to designate not only the three historically distinct German nation-states we shall be dealing with in this chapter—German Empire (1871-1918), Weimar Republic (1919-1933), and Third Reich (1933-1945)—but also the vital and persistent notion of a future Germany that has yet to emerge (or, from another perspective, the re-emergence of what was once called "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation") and with it a future German reading public that is waiting to be brought into being. This notion of literature as directed towards a future audience that it must also produce is essential not only to an understanding of German Idealism, but also to an understanding of Musil's view of his own project. While Musil did not see himself as writing "for" Austria or any of the nations listed above, he did see himself as *Dichter* for a German Nation that was (hopefully) still to come, a task he felt overrode his obscurity and poverty.

The “triumph of complete success” in this context would seem to be the production of an authentically German national literature, a literature capable of providing the necessary spiritual bedrock for the implied goal of such a project: the “unequivocal result” of a German Nation. Already the shining examples of Goethe and Schiller, together with A.W. Schlegel’s virtuosic new translations of Shakespeare and Calderon, were ready to stand guarantee for the literary virtuosity of the German language. Moreover, the German *Geist* was portrayed as the place where all the various virtues and accomplishments of “the four most cultivated nations of the West” could finally in the future be brought together:

we see in the Italians, imagination and a love of art; in the French, reason and oratory; in the English, keen perception and historic powers; and in the Spaniards, intense nationality and poetic feeling. But the German mind [*Geist*] explores the more profound hidden springs of the inner life, where those elementary forces no longer appear disunited, but the entire power of living consciousness, both in thought and act, proceeds from one common root. Even here, not very long since, those heights and depths of *reason and imagination* [...] were in a state of severed isolation. But the great turning point is already distinctly visible *in the regions of psychology, at which both of these elements will bend without losing any of their vital force*, and whence a permanent and *historical* spiritualism will embrace all the spheres of intellectual life. (Schlegel 395; my italics)

We might start by pointing to some binaries that “reason and imagination” were linked to in the German imaginary at this time: not only science and art, industry and culture, philosophy and poesy (*Dichtart*), but also North and South, Berlin and Vienna, as one can readily observe in the contrasting virtues attributed to France & England vs. Italy & Spain above. Thus, the ability to unite the virtues of the Western

nations may also suggest here the ability to unite the virtues of all the northern and southern German states within the *Geist* of the German Nation to come.¹⁰

Most important for my purposes in this passage, however, is Schlegel's identification of "*psychology*" as the realm where "*reason and imagination*" might be combined, leading finally to a "permanent and *historical* spiritualism" that would "embrace all the spheres of intellectual life." This assertion can be considered a foundational principle for the project of realism, broadly conceived. As an art/science hybrid, realism provides a breeding ground where the two great progress narratives of liberalism—progress towards absolute knowledge via science, and progress towards total social emancipation via democratic politics—can come together under the banners of psychology and history, here considered as "emancipatory sciences." This need to tie together technological modernization and social emancipation was particularly intense in German-speaking Europe where, in contrast to the nations Schlegel lists above, a process of **re**-feudalization had actually taken place after the Renaissance as a result of the Thirty Years War, and which thus saw itself both as needing to catch-up to the Western nations (*en route* to overtaking them, of course), and as having the advantage of being able to impose Enlightenment and democratic

¹⁰ Friedrich Schlegel himself would soon reject all specifically nationalist viewpoints, possibly in reaction to some intensely anti-semitic strains of proto-German nationalism that his lectures had helped inspire. After leaving Jena and devoting himself to the study of Indian languages for several years, Schlegel eventually moved to Vienna and converted to a universalist Catholicism with his wife Dorothea, daughter of Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn.

change on itself in a rational, top-down fashion that would avoid the excesses of the French Revolution.¹¹

It might seem strange that such a foundational principle of Realism should have found so early an articulation in such a foundationally Romantic-Idealist text. Yet although realism and idealism are often opposed, the fact is that “even realism relies on idealist assumptions and an understanding of the work of art as an autonomous text mediating between individual authors and recipients without immediately penetrating everyday practices” (Berman 57). Russell Berman gives a particularly clear account of how Realism and Idealism come together in *Crisis and Charisma: The Rise of the Modern German Novel* (1985), where he points out that

Despite all the marked ideological differences between the classicist vision of an aesthetic education and the romantic program of a universal poetry, both are grounded in a shared belief in the possibility of progress and the desirability of change, which is always a privileged stance in a society based on the exchange principle of the market. Both, furthermore, organize change and progress in terms of a dialectical tension between universal and particular categories; the individual participates in society in terms of the ideology of a free-market competition guided by an invisible hand. Contemporary literary communication, and its various manifestations, derives its categories from the same basic tropes of bourgeois life: individuality, legal regularity, change and exchange. (56)

In other words, the conditions necessary for the emergence of the realist novel had more to do with changes linked to the rise of the bourgeoisie (increase of literacy, expansion of markets, commodification of literature) than they did with contemporary changes in philosophical outlook or the generation of “new” aesthetic forms, three

¹¹ Cf. Berman (1-24), who tracks a post-1871 shift in the German imaginary from North/South to East/West, as Prussia’s gaze, in search of a new Other, moved from Vienna to Paris.

things which are here hardly separable in any case. Teaching the emerging middle class to be good readers, good consumers, and good citizens was part and parcel of the same task, the development of a “liberal communicative pattern” founded on the “shared assumptions that support the panoply of early capitalist literary modes—the possibility of rational communication, the priority of reasonable rules, the exchange of meaning between equals, and the transparency of language” (56). In Germany, particularly around 1871, the Enlightened citizen, beneficiary of a humanist education, and the authentic German, created by a Romantic German literature, would finally be synthesized in the bourgeois consumer of realist novels.

An excellent theo-historical account of the “liberal communicative pattern” described above is given by Wlad Godzich in *The Culture of Literacy* (1994), which places the rise and fall of “the culture of literacy” (Godzich’s own pseudonym for modernity) in the context of historical changes in the theory and organization of knowledge, changes linked to a process associated with

the major upheavals of early modern times: the so-called revival of learning known as the Renaissance; the emergence of the modern European nations; the advent of the modern form of the state; the development of humanistic ideology; and certainly not least, the vast expansion of markets on regional, national, and even transcontinental scales. The introduction of print technology ensured that the ideological commitment of humanism to linguistic universalism would receive the purport of literacy, itself a requirement of the vast expansion of the state and of the economic sphere.

Under these conditions of expansion, the experience necessary for effective praxis in society exceeded the capacities of direct individual acquisition and thus had to be increasingly mediated by language, as in, for example, learning from books and, more generally, through (literate) education. Language in turn had to be treated as universal so that experiences that were repertoried, coded, transmitted and interpreted in it could be assumed by its users regardless of their degree of immediacy to these experiences. Thus, in opposition to the prior linguistic heterogeneity that was

intended to acknowledge, if not produce, social differentiation and local autonomy, the new linguistic universalism of the epoch of literacy required assertions of human dignity, the co-valence of individuals, and centralism. (Godzich 7)

Unfortunately, Godzich argues, the increased efficiency that widespread literacy has enabled in a variety of spheres has been increasingly offset by a tendency towards specialization within the culture of literacy itself. This drive towards heterogeneity can be seen to threaten the ideals of liberal humanism on which the epoch of literacy is founded, since

The very existence of spheres of practice marked by special languages is legitimate in accordance with the tenets of the ideology of literacy only if these specialized languages can be translated into a universal language and if the resulting translation is universally understandable, so that it permits the functioning of a polity based upon humanistic universalism and articulated in it. If these conditions fail and belief in their prevalence cannot be sustained, then the various spheres of practice, and those engaged in them, become literally incommunicable to each other, and the social realm begins to grow precarious unless it is ensured by other means. (8-9)

This passage provides an accurate description of the world in which *MoE* was written, and perhaps an even more accurate description of the fictional world created within it.

Indeed, both the comedy and the profundity of *MoE*'s famous opening paragraph are fueled by the growing specialization of discourse within the culture of literacy:

A barometric low hung over the Atlantic. It moved eastward toward a high-pressure area over Russia without as yet showing any inclination to bypass this high in a northerly direction. The isotherms and isotheres were functioning as they should. The air temperature was appropriate relative to the annual mean temperature and to the aperiodic monthly fluctuations of the temperature. The rising and setting of the sun, the moon, the phases of the moon, of Venus, of the rings of Saturn, and many other significant phenomena were all in accordance with the forecasts in the astronomical yearbooks. The water vapor in the air was at its maximal state of tension, while the humidity

was minimal. In a word that characterizes the facts fairly accurately, even if it is a bit old-fashioned: It was a fine day in August 1913. (*MoE* 3)¹²

This paragraph enacts a translation of “special languages” (meteorology, statistics, astronomy) into the “universal language” of the realist novel—“Es war ein schöner Augusttag des Jahres 1913”—an opening line that would be not merely “a bit old-fashioned” but downright clichéd were it not for the preceding sentences that it clarifies. Yet even as it translates, this paragraph simultaneously reveals Musil’s ambivalent relationship to Realism’s project of universal mediation, since the “success” of this final sentence clearly resides in its sublimation rather than its explication of the specialized sentences that proceed it, sentences that point equally to the countless conditions necessary for “ein schöner Augusttag” to occur and to the many idioms that “it was a nice day” can potentially be translated into. The paragraph thus succeeds in providing a sort of mediation by acknowledging with ironic good nature the sorts of compromises required for its own “success.”

This ironic skepticism regarding the possibility of universal mediation corresponds both to Lyotard’s crisis of narratives and to what Berman calls “the crisis

¹² “Über dem Atlantik befand sich ein barometrisches Minimum; es wanderte ostwärts, einem über Rußland lagernden Maximum zu, und verriet noch nicht die Neigung, diesem nördlich auszuweichen. Die Isothermen and Isotheren taten ihre Schuldigkeit. Die Lufttemperatur stand in einem ordnungsgemäßen Verhältnis zue mittleren Jahrestemperatur, zur Temperatur des kältesten wie des wärmsten Monats und zur aperiodischen monatlichen Temperaturschwankung. Der Auf- und Untergang der Sonne, des Mondes, der Lichtwechsel des Mondes, der Venus, der Saturnringes und viele andere bedeutsame Erscheinungen entsprachen ihrer Voraussage in den astronomischen Jahrbüchern. Der Wasserdampf in der Luft hatte seine höchste Spannkraft, und die Feuchtigkeit der Luft war gering. Mit einem Wort, das das Tatsächliche recht gut bezeichnet, wenn es auch etwas altmodisch ist: Es war ein schöner Augusttag des Jahres 1913” (9).

of realism.” Whereas realism had maintained that the two progress narratives of liberalism would mutually reinforce one another, historical fact increasingly suggested that one goal, increased power and efficiency through the pursuit of Absolute Knowledge, would be ruthlessly pursued at the (often direct) expense of the other goal, increased social emancipation through wider access to education and more equitable distribution of wealth. Berman, who describes his book as an attempt to “construct a literary sociology capable of understanding how the modern novel, as a paradigm for modern literature in general, attempted to intervene in the social crisis” (Berman v), treats the rise of the realist novel as foreground for the crisis of realism and the rise of the modernist novel, a rise that Berman links to the crises of liberal ideology occasioned by the events of 1848 and 1871:

In the second half of the nineteenth century, realism undergoes a process of external and internal erosion: external because industrialization aggressively transforms the structure of the literary public; internal because the immanent categories of the realist texts diverge increasingly from the character of monopoly capitalistic society. Individuality and exchange, progress and emancipation lose their substantive relevance and thereby the vigor necessary to generate a viable literary program. *This process of literary collapse, the reification of realism, mirrors the social crisis of laissez-faire liberalism and the corollary rise of postliberal social forms.* (57; italics added)

As increasing commodification of literature dampens belief in its transcendent powers, and as the monetary policies of liberalism begin to diverge more noticeably from its democratic principles, realism and the horizon of the End of History under which it labors become increasingly subject to Lyotardian incredulity. Berman describes the modernist novel as a response to this crisis and collapse:

When realism loses its cultural viability, a space opens up in which, after 1900, new ways of writing, the competing versions of modern literature, begin

to flourish. The social delegitimation of the individual undermines discursive communication, which in liberal culture is a dramatic exchange of meaning between individuals, so that the omniscient narrator, still credible in realism, gives way to alternative solutions, such as the epic collectivity of Alfred Döblin or the tentative individuality, perpetually rescinding itself in irony and narrative unreliability, of Thomas Mann. (58)

In other places, as we have seen, the modernist literary projects generated by this process of “social crisis” and “literary collapse” gave rise not only to “alternative solutions” but to unfinishable novels as well. One might already note a few differences in emphasis between Berman’s version of the story and my own: his geography is focused on Weimar and his history on the formation and collapse of the German Empire, mine on Vienna/Prague and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire—a collapse that, if nothing else, seems to have inspired a number of fine unfinishable novels.¹³ One may notice as well that our tales have different heroes: Thomas Mann and Robert Musil, a contrast almost as clichéd in German literary criticism as the prose of Fitzgerald and Hemingway has become in American High School pedagogy.

Since Musil continues to rely on a great number of realist tropes, Berman’s preference for the term “postliberal” over “antirealist” seems particularly fitting for *MoE*, which is certainly “postliberal” in a number of ways. For one thing, the novel explicitly casts itself as a sort of post-mortem epic of a vanished state—a state that *MoE*’s narrator, in a trademark Musilian blend of mockery and affection, labels “KaKania.” This title is both a shortening of the Empire’s motto “Kaiser und König”

¹³ As Deleuze and Guattari point out (45-48), Austro-Hungary was one of history’s greatest breeding grounds for minor literatures.

and a jab at the acronyms and nonsense jargon (yes, “Kaka”) that saturated the Empire’s bureaucracy, a bureaucracy that was both nightmarish (cf. Kafka) and in many ways a model: “the best bureaucracy in Europe, which could be faulted only in that it regarded genius, and any brilliant individual initiative not backed by noble birth or official status, as insolent and presumptuous” (*MoE* 33).¹⁴

Not only historically postliberal, the first volume of *MoE* in particular leaves the very idea of Progress trampled in the dust. For one thing, the book is set in 1913, making the reader painfully aware at all times of just *what* exactly the characters are “progressing” towards, even if most of them seem to remain blissfully unaware throughout. Moreover, since the *telos* of the novel’s “Parallel Aktion” is not in fact 1914 but 1918 (the 70th anniversary of the ascension of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Franz Joseph, who would die just before 1917), the “goal” of the Parallel Campaign can be associated both with the general collapse of European society (World War I and its aftermath) and with the more specific historical collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Perhaps most importantly, however, one can link the failure of the Parallel Campaign to the cultural failure of Europe to construct a worldview that would have been capable of looking the post-1918 world in the face, of creating a better postwar Europe. In retrospect, this cultural failure can be seen as particularly embodied in the liberal Weimar Republic’s suicidal “progress” from its

¹⁴ “der besten Bürokratie Europas, der man nur einen Fehler nachsagen konnte: sie empfand Genie und genial Unternehmungssucht an Privatperson, die nicht durch hohe Geburt oder einen Staatsauftrag dazu privilegiert waren, als vorlautes Benehmen und Anmaßung” (29).

formation in 1919 to its death-by-democracy in 1933, the year Musil published Volume II of *MoE*.

Yet although Musil rails against the idea of Progress as an abstract noun aligned with such vaguely grandiose ideas as historical necessity and *Weltgeist*, he remains committed to the concept of progress in concrete instances so long as there is an identifiable goal, a direction that has been intelligently adopted after ratioed and/or non-ratioed consideration.¹⁵ Indeed, in the absence of a goal it is highly unlikely that progress is desirable, and this is in fact the didactic lesson that Musil attaches to “der Parallel Aktion” in the *Nachlaß*:

Once again the uppermost problem: To be advanced more completely than both “Pseudorealities,” therefore externalized: collapse of the culture (and of the idea of culture). This in fact is what the summer of 1914 initiated.

Now it turns out that this was the great idea the Parallel Campaign was searching for, and what happens is an unfathomable flight from culture. [...] All states claim to stand for something spiritual, which they don’t define and summarily call culture. It turns out to be utopian in my assessment too. And that’s what people no longer have confidence in. (*MoE* 1757)¹⁶

¹⁵ Ratioed/non-ratioed is Musil’s more sophisticated re-formulation of the objective/subjective distinction. Musil believed there are types of knowledge that benefit from attempts to bracket affectivity, and other types of knowledge that benefit from affectivity itself. In a medical context, one might point to the difference between general practitioners, whose work benefits from an emotional attachment to their patients, and surgeons, at their best when viewing their patients as pieces of meat. One of Musil’s primary concerns was that he felt ratioed and non-ratioed thinking had been hopelessly confused and consistently applied to the wrong activities. World War I marked the *summa* of this confusion, as an emotionally charged but politically irrational rush into war was followed by years of heartlessly “objective” battlefield calculations by the various High Commands, who were often quite happy to exchange thousands of their soldiers’ lives for dozens of inches of ground.

¹⁶ “*Nochmals Oberstes Problem: Faßlicher als die beiden >Seinesgleichen< (S 1), also nach außen vorzuschrieben ist: Zusammenbruch der Kultur (u. des Kulturgedankens). Das ist in der Tat das, was der Sommer 1914 eingeleitet hat.*

Nun stellt sich heraus, daß das die große Idee war, die von der // gesucht wurde, und was sich ereignet, ist die unabsehbare Flucht aus der Kultur. [...] Alle

The mad rush to progress, Musil suggests, arises from a dissatisfaction with (and hence flight from) the present, but the sense of panic that this flight inspires means that rather than pursuing a rational plan for our own collective betterment, we unthinkingly double down on the very same bankrupt ideas that are causing our present dissatisfaction, deferring their fulfillment to the future we are fleeing towards.

Formulating the statement a bit more positively, one could say that it is the goal that determines whether progress is desirable or not, and that provides grounds for making what (for Musil) is the more important decision: whether or not a given task (*Aufgabe*) should be affirmed. This emphasis on the task as what provides meaning and value to progress, rather than on the achievement of a goal as what provides meaning and value to a task, is essential to understanding Musil's attitude towards his own novel, an attitude eloquently expressed in the opening quotation to this chapter: "But one must not confuse the unfinished state of something with the author's skepticism. [...] Given a specific task, I am doing what I can" (*Man darf die Unfertigkeit [notice Musil does not say "Unvollendetkeit"] einer Sache aber nicht mit der Skepsis des Autors verwechseln. [...] Ich tue in einer bestimmten Aufgabe das Möglichste*) (1760; 1937).

Staaten geben vor, für etwas Geistiges da zu sein, das unbestimmt ist u das sie summarisch Kultur nennen. Es erweist sich auch in meinen Ansätzen als utopisch. Und das ist es, worein kein Vertrauen mehr besteht" (1904).

5.3 The Ongoing History of a Peculiarly Modern Text

The composition and publication history of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is a story unto itself; indeed, to a great extent it is the story of Robert Musil's life. At the same time, we should remember that *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is the life's work of (at least) three individuals. After a few abortive attempts to improve on Peter Wortsman's elegant three-paragraph bio from his translation of Musil's *Nachlass-zu-Lebenzeit* (*Posthumous Papers of a Living Author*, 1936), I shall simply reproduce it:

Born in the provincial town of Klagenfurt, Austria, in 1880, the son of a "clear-headed," albeit rigid, academic engineer and a "curiously muddled mother, like slumbering hair upon a handsome face," (according to another diary notation), Robert Musil took a circuitous educational path, attending military boarding school and, to his parents' great chagrin, promptly abandoning a career in the military, only to pursue and drop studies in mathematics, engineering, philosophy and behavioral psychology, respectively. Conscripted as an officer in the Imperial Austrian army during World War I, he edited a military newspaper. A brief stint as a drama critic after the war was one of his last attempts at gainful employment before finally settling into the uncertain life of an independent author.

While his first book, *Die Verwirrungen des Zöglings Törless* (Young Törless), a novel published in 1906, was an immediate and smashing success, subsequent works were less well received. Two volumes of short fiction, *Vereinigungen* (Unions), 1911, and *Drei Frauen* (Three Women), 1924, received respectable notices but did not sell well. A play, "Die Schwärmer" (The Enthusiast), 1921, was honored with the prestigious Kleist prize two years later, but bombed at the box office. Another play, "Vincenz und die Freundin Betedtuender Männer" (Vincenz and the Girlfriend of Influential Men) didn't do much better. Undaunted, Musil devoted much of the rest of his waking consciousness for the remainder of his days to the composition of his epic novel, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (The Man Without Qualities) [...] The first volume was published in 1931 to much acclaim but modest sales, followed by another installment in 1933, the same year Hitler came to power—an inauspicious year for serious intellectual endeavors in the German language.

Though essentially apolitical, Musil was constitutionally averse to the philistinism of the Third Reich. His wife Martha's Jewish parentage added another complication. The Musils, who resided in Berlin at the time, moved back to Vienna, and thereafter, following Austria's annexation to the Reich,

fled to Geneva, where Musil died in 1942. His widow released the unfinished conclusion of his magnum opus in 1943. The entire work was finally issued in three volumes, as edited by Adolf Frisé, from 1952 to 1957. Sophie Wilkins' and Burton Pike's landmark English translation was published in New York in 1995. (172-74)

There are, of course, some major details to be filled in: for one, there is Musil's somewhat irregular dual citizenship (or dual non-citizenship) in the literary communities of both Vienna and Berlin. Unlike Kafka, who spent his life in or around Prague but whose eyes were always directed towards Berlin, who was mainly read through a Prussian base and whose planned move to Berlin was thwarted only by the outbreak of war, Musil did in fact move to Berlin to become a writer in 1903, where he published *Young Törless* in 1906 and defended his doctoral dissertation on Ernst Mach's philosophy (*Beitrag zur Beurteilung der Lehren Machs*) in 1908. In 1911, however, Musil's parents decided they would no longer support the thirty year-old ex-graduate student and self-proclaimed "Dichter," who had yet to hold a job but had already turned down promising careers in the military, engineering, and academia, and they forced Musil to take a position in Vienna as an archivist and to marry (though this required the couple's official conversion to Protestantism). Though Musil returned to Vienna after the war and spent most of his life there, his work was primarily published in Germany and it was only "practical considerations" that

forced him to spend the Weimar years in Vienna. As a critic and defender of democracy, as a writer for Fischer and Rowohlt, and as a veteran of the blossoming of modernism in pre-war Berlin, Musil belonged to the liberal culture of Weimar. He shared its tendency to write for an audience that did not yet exist and its opposition to fanatical nationalism and prophecies of despair. [...] But Musil lived on the periphery of Weimar culture and became in practice a figure in the cultural world of Vienna. His closest friends [...] were primarily figures of Vienna rather than Germany. They gathered regularly at

the ultimate coffee-house of the Viennese intellectual, the Café Central [...] Except for visits to Berlin and one brief stay there between 1931 and 1933, Musil lived in Vienna until 1938. By necessity rather than preference, his world was not the raucous modernism of Berlin but the quieter world of Vienna. There he lived as the prototype of the homeless modern man, not quite belonging in Berlin or Prague or Brno or Vienna. (Luft 141)

Musil, according to Luft, “did not define literature or culture in terms of states. For him there was simply European culture and, within that, the German language” (294); after World War I, certainly, Musil did not consider himself either Austrian or German so much as one of Nietzsche’s “Good Europeans.” All this seems to raise a Kafkaesque question: if Robert Musil was indeed a *Dichter*, whose *Dichter* is he?

Aside from being the recognized center of German literary life and the favored destination for young writers aspiring to escape their parents’ apartments, Berlin was for Robert Musil the city where he met Martha Marcovaldi—*née* Heimann, Martha Musil after 1911—by far the most important emotional-intellectual attachment of his life. Seven years his elder, a widow at 21 and separated from her second husband Enrico Marcovaldi (for whom she had converted to Roman Catholicism) since 1903, Martha was living the life of a decadent painter and single mother of two when she met Robert, for whom “her life epitomized the cutting edge of cultural change: cosmopolitan autonomy, modern art, sexual Bohemianism, and feminism” (Luft 74).

The novel project with which Musil’s name will be forever associated began to be formulated soon after the war, with the protagonist named first “Achilles” and

then “Anders.”¹⁷ Yet although the “fundamental structure of the novel was clear by the mid-1920s,” the “actual working-out of this project turned out to be an overwhelming task” to the extent that “[b]etween 1924 and 1933 Musil hardly existed apart from his struggle with his endlessly unfolding novel” (208). Throughout these years the Musils were “almost completely dependent on publisher’s advances from Ernst Rowohlt, and as early as December, 1925, he was already late with the novel and running into conflicts with his publisher” (209). Yet while the publication of *MoE*’s first volume in 1931 did (briefly) bring Musil the fame that eluded him for most of his life, it did not bring him financial security: the Musils would remain dependent on the support of friends and literary well-wishers for the rest of their lives.¹⁸

¹⁷ Luft provides a succinct account of the novel’s genesis: “While there are no sharp breaks among these conceptions or the stages in which the materials developed, it is possible to delineate three main periods of evolution, based on Musil’s conception of the hero. Roughly speaking, the Achilles period (the years just after the war) emphasized the hero’s relation to the age as a whole, to the war and ideology (in *Spion, Panama, Katacombe*). The Anders period (the mid-1920s) began to draw more on the material of the love-story and the autobiography (from the *Archivar, Der Teufel, Der Krähe*). Finally, in the late 1920s came the crisis of holding all this material together, when Ulrich was introduced and the first volume was brought to completion” (203).

¹⁸ Indeed, one of the bitter ironies surrounding Musil’s resentment of the success of Thomas Mann was that Mann was one of the small circle of artists and intellectuals who recognized Musil’s importance and, because of his celebrity, Mann was able to become one of the primary fundraisers whose efforts kept Musil alive and writing in his later years. Mann, together with other ex-patriot members of the PEN society in London, tried to convince Musil to emigrate from Switzerland during the war. Yet despite Musil’s willingness “to risk the transit to the United States if a stipend without conditions could be arranged,” and despite the efforts of such distinguished American admirers as Albert Einstein and Ernst Cassirer, a sufficient sum could not be raised (Qtd. Luft 273).

Yet the publication of the first volume in 1931 can definitely be considered “successful” not only in terms of its critical reception but also insofar as it allowed Musil to tie-together and set aside all of the material on “der Parallel Aktion” that had been growing beyond his control for the past seven years. By completing the first volume and its focus on the Parallel Campaign, Musil became free to introduce and develop the Brother-Sister relationship that had been central to his thinking about the novel since the mid-1920s (*MoE*’s working title in 1926 had been *Die Zwillingschwester*). One could even say that the busy, bustling Panoptic world of *Seinesgleichen Geschichte* (Volume I) was necessary as a backdrop for the sibling utopia of *Ins tausendjährige Reich* (Volume II)—something to escape from, and something threatening to impinge (General Stumm waiting in the wings...).

Unfortunately, the publication of the Second Volume in 1933 carried no such silver lining. With Rowohlt in danger of going out of business, Musil “agreed to publish a fragment of the love-story of Ulrich and Agathe” in “response to the pleas of his publisher and his own financial desperation,” although this

solution disappointed critics who had been excited by the first volume. For Musil, the publication of the second volume in 1933 was forced and artificial, and he suspected that it represented a dead end: ‘For unless something unexpected happens, I will not be in a position to finish this work.’ The simultaneous appearance of the partial rendering of Musil’s “*Ins tausendjährige Reich*” and Adolf Hitler’s half-truth of the Third Reich presented with appropriate irony the relationship of this lost poet to German history. (Luft 212-213)

Despite a number of despairing comments like the one quoted above, however, it is important to remember that Musil did plan to finish the novel, and never seems to have completely abandoned hope of “something unexpected” happening and his

somehow being able to do so. Indeed, Musil's withdrawal from the press of twenty additional chapters of Volume II in 1938 seems to have been designed in large part to preserve the possibility of finishing the novel as he intended it, rather than letting editors and publishers impose some half-baked sense of an ending that might compromise the novel's rightful place in literary history.

To understand Musil's ability to maintain such an attitude towards his own work, the ironic, cheerfully tragic stance of a writer whose last pre-posthumously published book was entitled *Nachlass-zu-Lebenzeit*, one must consider the pivotal role that Martha Musil played in the *MoE* project. Like Bulgakov—but unlike Flaubert, Hašek, Pessoa, or even Kafka—Musil had the advantage of an intellectual life-partner who was committed to overseeing the posthumous publication of his work. Along with Adolph Frisé (whom Martha would appoint to edit the novel after the war), it is certainly fair to label Martha Musil a coauthor of *MoE* since she was not only the novel's first reader and editor during and after Robert's lifetime, but also because her existence provided him with a horizon of completion under which to pursue his unfinishable task. Like Max Brod, Martha Musil saw the need to present the literary public with something akin to a finished package. Yet Martha's first completion of the novel, her self-publication amidst relative poverty of *MoE*'s “final” twenty-four chapters in 1943, was less an attempt to “finish” the novel than to revive interest in it and insure that the chapters would survive the war, even if she herself did not.

In stark contrast to Max Brod and his immoralist's dilemma, moreover, Martha Musil remains one of the few trustees of an immense and important posthumous literary estate who has never been vilified by the academic establishment. This lack of drama and vitriol surrounding the editing and publication of *MoE* is itself rather amazing. Unlike most people placed in similar situations, Martha Musil (who remained the official custodian of Robert's literary estate until her own death on August 24, 1949) has never been accused of distorting or corrupting her husband's work, nor have there ever been any attempts to "restore" *MoE* from its "corrupted" state to the author's "original text," no doubt in part because "*the historical fact is simply that Musil never resolved this question himself*" (Luft 213).

In the context of my own project, I believe that the story of *MoE* can be held up as a canonical example for how to edit an unfinishable novel, and that the hero of this story is Adolf Frisé (1910-2003). Remarkably, Frisé was responsible for editing the first three "definitive" editions of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*: the first complete edition (i.e., containing all three previously published volumes) of 1952, the revised and expanded edition of 1978, and the CD-ROM edition of 1992. Although it would not be accurate to say that the 1952 edition attempted to force closure on the novel, the first edition did cut out a number of chapter variants and alternate narratives and clearly demarcated the "finished" chapters from the (much smaller) *Nachlaß*. In response to rising criticism as well as to Frisé's own considered reflections on the novel's "unfinishability"—see his seminal essay "Unvollendet—Unvollendbar? Überlegungen zum Torso des *Mann ohne Eigenschaften*" (1978-80),

which in addition to properly textual reflections includes recollections of conversations with the Musils—Frisé released a new edition of the novel in 1978, two years after his release of Musil’s diaries. This larger edition sought to accentuate rather than smooth over the novel’s “Unvollendbar” character.

Nonetheless, readings of the 1978 edition began to generate new questions, such as: why were some of Musil’s reflections on the novel included in the text while others were relegated to the Diaries, also edited by Frisé? Not to be outmaneuvered, Frisé in 1992 released a CD-ROM edition containing all existing versions of Musil’s notes, drafts, plans, reflections, and comments on the novel.¹⁹ With the conscientious examples of Martha Musil and Adolf Frisé before us, we might say that the only potential villain in the history of this peculiarly modern text becomes Robert Musil himself, who seems never to have made a firm decision regarding how it should finally be organized. While it is relatively easy to forgive the man, the editor of *MoE* is forced to reconcile Richard Zenith’s appropriate (if necessarily somewhat compromised) will to essayistic fragmentariness, and Max Brod’s critical-commercial imperative to establish/remain-true-to some form of a plotline. In this case, these tasks were gloriously compromised by the literary corporation of Musil, Musil, & Frisé.

¹⁹ Although, as Bunia notes in *Faltungen* (265), this initial CD-ROM publication was highly schematized and (unlike the next CD-ROM edition or the present online edition) did little to take advantage of potential hypertextual possibilities.

5.4 *MoE*'s Critical Reception: A Triumph for Anticipatory Plagiarism

In the 1960s, the French literary group Oulipo (*Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle*) developed a notion of “anticipatory plagiarism,” an accusation it humorously slung (for example) at the Grand Rhetoriquers of the 16th century. The Grand Rhetoriquers, Oulipo claimed, had formulated the same project as Oulipo but the conditions had not yet been right for that project to reach its full potential. Robert Musil, who carried the pre-posthumously unpublishable variants of his early chapters into exile with him in Switzerland, might be accused of anticipatory plagiarism in relation to his own work. In any case, it seems clear that some time had to pass before the conditions were right for the critical establishment to grapple competently with *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.

In a lecture entitled “Literary Fiction and Reality” first given at Oxford in 1966 (now Chapter Five of *The Sense of an Ending*), Frank Kermode performs an in-depth reading of Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Nausea* (1938) in which he claims that Sartre’s attempts to depict contingency in his novel are ultimately undermined by the nature of the artistic genre in which he is attempting to depict it. Since “no novel can avoid being in some sense what Aristotle called ‘a completed action,’” Kermode argues, the very act of completing a novel must inevitably destroy exactly that sense of contingency that Sartre is seeking to depict (Kermode 138). Yet while I find Kermode’s reading of *Nausea* thorough and convincing, I also find it somewhat surprising that he began his lecture with a brief discussion of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*; surprising, not because *MoE* is irrelevant to the issues Kermode is

discussing, but rather because *MoE* can itself be seen to provide a “solution” to the very paradox Kermode develops in his lecture—i.e. the paradox inherent in any novel’s “attempt to include contingency in a form which is, insofar as it succeeds, the destroyer of contingency” (Kermode 137). Precisely because it is unfinishable, however, one could say that *MoE* avoids this dilemma: it is complete, but the very fact of its completion points to a series of contingent historical circumstances—above all Musil’s sudden death from a stroke on April 14, 1942—circumstances that went a long way toward determining the final shape of the novel. The final form of *MoE* thus bears the historical signatures of chance and contingency as well as the finalizing, form-giving, *vollenden*-ing hand of “the artist.” Since in this case the completion of the novel could itself be said to represent contingency, one might perhaps amend Kermode’s axiom and suggest that it is not so much the quality of being “complete” that banishes contingency from a novel, as it is the quality of being “finished” (*vollendet*).

Still, one wonders: why would Sir Frank Kermode, a masterful reader who obviously had *MoE* on his mind while composing this lecture, fail to make such a seemingly obvious connection? The reasons become clearer after reading Kermode’s comments on *MoE*, comments that actually place him at the forefront of contemporaneous existential and aesthetic *MoE* criticism, but that clearly illustrate the influence of the tragic rhetoric of failure commonly applied to unfinished works, as well as what I have elsewhere labeled “the poetic prejudice”:

Musil belonged to the great epoch of experiment; after Joyce and Proust, though perhaps a long way after, *he is the novelist of early modernism*. And as

you see he was prepared to spend most of his life struggling with the problems created by the divergence of comfortable story and the non-narrative contingencies of modern reality. Even in the earlier stories he concerned himself with this disagreeable but necessary disassociation; in his big novel he tries to create a new genre in which, *by all manner of dazzling devices and metaphors and stratagems, fiction and reality can be brought together again. He fails; but the point is that he had to try*, a skeptic to the point of mysticism and caught in a world in which, as one of his early characters notices, no curtain descends to conceal ‘the bleak matter-of-factness of things.’ (Kermode 127-28; my italics)

Kermode’s beautifully written reflection on Musil’s project seems to reveal some standard critical prejudices of his time, above all a failure to rethink the literary meanings of success and failure in the wake of the successes and failures of literary modernism. The identification of Musil as an early modernist and the characterization of his task given above would seem far more applicable to Musil’s pair of novellas *Vereinigungen* (1911), an intensely modernist text of which Kermode is one of **the** excellent readers.²⁰ But *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is not *Vereinigungen*, and I would argue that in Musil’s later work any attempt to “combine” literature and reality must necessarily be doomed to failure, because the two are always already connected. *MoE* thus does not attempt to tie fiction and reality “together again,” as *Vereinigungen* does, but rather attempts to explore and establish a more ethical relationship between them—*Ungetrennten und Nichtvereinten*.

²⁰ Cf. Kermode’s Preface to *Five Women* (1986), an English translation of Musil containing both *Vereinigungen* and *Drei Frauen*. Although I do not have space here to reflect on it thoroughly, Musil’s own planned forward for a future edition of *Vereinigungen* seems quite relevant to this dissertation: “What is wrong about this book is that it is a book. That it has a binding, spine, pagination. One ought to lay out a few of its pages between sheets of glass, then change them from time to time. Then one would see what it is.—” (*Diaries* 205).

While Kermode's treatment of Musil is mollified by the fact he was writing in 1966, his decision to focus on Sartre rather than Musil is also symptomatic of a general neglect of *MoE* by the critical establishment, a neglect that lasted at least until the release of Musil's diaries in 1976. While both *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and Robert Musil are generally recognized as being major events in the history of literature (and not only 20th-century literature), they also share the strange distinction of being notoriously underappreciated: of being famous for not being read enough, not being famous enough.²¹ To some extent this is understandable: *MoE* is not an easy read and demands more labor hours than most people are willing to devote to a novel. Yet *MoE*'s dubious celebrity extends not only to the literary marketplace, where in fact it now enjoys sales comparable to other lengthy high modernist novels (thanks largely to Wilkins and Pike's monumental 1995 English translation, an achievement comparable to Kaufmann's Nietzsche or Schlegel's Shakespeare), but to academia as well, where even amongst scholars of modernism it is surprisingly rare to encounter someone who has read *MoE* "cover to cover." This has created an almost embarrassed anxiety around the novel, an anxiety that is nowhere more palpable than in Harold Bloom's Introduction to his *Critical Edition* on the book in which, while discussing *MoE*'s third volume, Bloom (2-3) clearly demonstrates that he has not read it. If even the keeper of the keys to *The Western Canon* cannot be trusted to make it all the way through *MoE*, what is a potential Musil scholar to do?

²¹ One need only point to the numerous "rediscoveries" that critics of various eras have proclaimed Musil to have undergone (or to be currently undergoing). Perhaps the first such proclamation was Helmut Boeninger's "The Rediscovery of Robert Musil" (1952); since that time, few authors have been rediscovered as often.

Apart from existentialist readings in the vein of Kermode, most of the critical attention directed at *MoE* in the twenty years after the war was devoted to questions of philology, and specifically to the question of how the novel would have ended. Of the two major camps (represented by Böhm & Rausch and Wilkins & Kaiser), the first believed that the outbreak of War would have brought total catastrophe while the second argued that some sort of transcendent escape into “the Other Condition” would have been possible within the sibling utopia. Both camps assumed (rather reasonably, based on Frisé’s original ordering of the novel) that the novel would have ended with the war, and thus that it had “failed” to reach its conclusion. Yet while the debate over how the novel would have ended has never truly been laid to rest, I not only agree with Luft that “the preoccupation of the Musil literature with decisions Musil was unable to make himself overestimates the tragedy of his inability to finish the novel” (Luft 213), but also feel that this preoccupation has actively worked to obscure the unique accomplishment that Musil was able to achieve in constructing an authentically essayistic mode of incompleteness (see Chapter 6.4).

The late 1950s and 60s saw an increasing interest in Musil’s prose style and use of allegory, satire and parable, as Musil was viewed as representative of a modernist interest in “artistic truth.” Musil also became a key bone of contention in the famous Lukács/Adorno disputes during this period, and the increasing interest in the aesthetic features of *MoE* was likewise followed by some sustained works of negative Marxist criticism such as Schelling’s *Identität und Wirklichkeit bei Robert Musil* (1968) and Laermann’s *Eigenschaftlosigkeit* (1970). Cultural criticism

dominated readings of the novel in the late 60s and early 70s, with an upswing in psychoanalytical readings from the end of the 70s to the early 90s.

It was only in the late 1980s that real attention began to be paid to Musil as a philosopher and ethical thinker, and indeed Tim Mehigan suggests that it was first in “ethical criticism” that “the failure to discover any final truth in Musil’s novel actually meant a sort of liberation, since it allowed Musil’s writing to be read as a series of experiments that modeled scenarios of moral order in the world” (Mehigan 131). In the early nineties, increasing attention also began to be paid to the book’s “postmodern” elements, including its resistance to teleology and to narrative closure on all fronts—traits no longer viewed solely from a tragic perspective—and the extent to which *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*’s worldview is informed by scientific-mathematic ideas of probability and information theory, ideas that the novel can be said to valorize and even aestheticize (albeit in an ambivalent, Musilian fashion).

As Tim Mehigan’s *The Critical Response to Robert Musil’s Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (2003) clearly illustrates, both the quantity and quality of Musil scholarship increased sharply from the late 1970s and then almost exponentially from the late 1980s onwards. This millennial leap forward in Musil studies can be linked (on the one hand) to two concrete events—Frisé’s release of the 1978 edition of the *Gesammelte Werke* and the 1992 CD-ROM edition of *MoE*—and (on the other hand) to two more general changes: 1) the gradual shift in academic emphasis “From Work to Text” (see Barthes’ essay of the same name), which allowed the unfinishable nature of *MoE* to be better appreciated and become critically useful outside the

rhetoric of failure traditionally applied to unfinished works, as “the dominant paradigms of Musil studies, which had drawn inspiration from the core idea of the hermeneutic impulse—an idea of the transcendent nature of the work of art and the transcendent nature that informed it—were increasingly displaced” (Mehigan 111); and 2) the emergence of poststructuralism (or the range of late 20th-century philosophical trends generally grouped together under this name) allowed Musil’s philosophical importance to be better recognized.

Even without the many shortcomings of the early editions and translations of *MoE*, it is easy to see how Musil’s mammoth novel might have posed challenges to critics working within a New Critical or *Werkimmanente* framework. How, for instance, would Wimsatt & Beardsley’s famous distinction between “intrinsic” and “extrinsic” criticism be maintained with regard to the *Aus dem Nachlaß* section of *MoE*? It seems clear that to even decide where to draw this line, it would be necessary to cross it several times. At the same time, it is also easy to understand why interest in *MoE* would have skyrocketed the way it did in the late 70s and early 80s, after a more Derridean notion of “text” had begun to supplement academic thinking.²²

As for the second factor, the increasing recognition of Musil’s importance as a thinker, Jacques Bouveresse’s *L’Homme Probable: Robert Musil, le hasard, le moyen, et l’escargot de l’histoire* (1993), published a year after the 1992 Geneva Conference commemorating the 50th anniversary of Musil’s death, marks an almost

²² The belated introduction of Bakhtin to the critical canon no doubt helped as well, as one can clearly see (for instance) in the title and content of Pierre Zima’s article “Robert Musils Sprachkritik, Ambivalenz, Polyphonie und Dekonstruktion” (1985).

foundational shift in thinking on Musil, and remains today one of the best books on him (and still in need of an English translator). Best known for his work on Wittgenstein and Schrödinger, Bouveresse was the first professional philosopher to write a book taking Musil seriously as a philosopher, as opposed to merely contextualizing Musil's work in relation to the philosophies of others. As one might expect, *L'Homme Probable* focuses largely on the concept of probability, a concept central to *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* and to Musil's thinking in general, but also one that (apart from Wittgenstein) received far more mathematical than philosophical treatment in Musil's day.²³ As Bouveresse demonstrates, Musil was not only familiar with classic thinkers on the subject from Leibniz to Poincaré but was also up to date on a good deal of the contemporary mathematical work on probability being produced at that time. Ironically, Musil's commitment to math and science seems to have contributed to his obscurity within philosophy's continental tradition, just as his commitment to literature ensured his consignment to the margins of its analytical tradition.

The increasing recognition of Musil's importance as a thinker is further exemplified in Mark Freed's *Robert Musil and the Nonmodern* (2011), one of the best books yet written on Musil. Freed's book places Musil in a philosophical dialogue on modernity with Habermas, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, before locating his position in more contemporary philosophy somewhere between Lyotard's "paganism," which assigns particular problems to their appropriate autonomous language games, and

²³ Henri Poincaré, of course, is the most important thinker here.

Latour's "nonmodernism," which attempts to track the interplay of purification and mediation as the essential ideological mechanism of modernity. Besides charting Musil's particular contributions to thinking modernity, Freed gives what is probably the best account to date of Musil's literary-philosophical strategy of "Essayismus":

In insisting simultaneously on the individual and non-subjective features of ethical experience, Musil is not only engaged in the cultural project of modernity: he is entangled in its enduring contradictions as well. The discursive strategy Musil develops to negotiate with these entanglements—Essayismus—breaks the pattern of subject-centered reason by abandoning the model of a finite subject elevated to false objectivity by reconfiguring both the subject and object poles of the interaction. Thus, while Musil maintains that the ethical phenomena arise in the individual, the individual he has in mind is not the Cartesian subject of subject-centered reason but a textual subject instituted through the discursive practice of Essayismus. [In a footnote, Freed explains that Friedrich Waller has argued that Mach already attacked the Cartesian 'I' by replacing it with sense experience.] Similarly, Essayismus reshapes the operations of subject-centered reason itself, dispensing with the quest for certainty and universality while preserving a kind of rigor central to the critical instincts of Modernity, thus answering the call for something like systematic thought.

Musil's Essayismus can be understood to operate in two distinct dimensions (although these are difficult to decouple from each other): as a mode of subjectivity (dramatized in Ulrich's, albeit problematic, attempt to live hypothetically) and as a discursive strategy for engaging the complexities of human experience. For Musil, both dimensions of Essayismus draw upon features of the essay, above all its ability to operate in a space between that which can be systematized and that which cannot. This distinction brings into play those sides of experience not strictly governable by logic but about which careful thinking is still required. Musil labels these domains, respectively, the *ratioïd* and the *nicht-ratioïd*. Conceptualizing the domain of ethics as *nicht-ratioïd* in light of the individuality of the phenomena that comprise it points to the necessity of an alternative discursive approach to that of the natural sciences, which deal adequately only with repeatedly observable phenomena obeying universal laws. (Freed 94-95)

The fact that Musil can be placed in productive dialogues about both the modern and the postmodern shows his usefulness as a thinker, as do the ways in which Musil

allows Freed to develop the term “NonModern,” a phrase Freed borrows from Latour, but which comes to bear a distinctly Musilian stamp by the end of Freed’s book.

The fact that Musil’s thinking on probability was much closer to Jacques Bouveresse in 1993 than it was to any of his contemporaries (again, save Wittgenstein), and that his thinking on modernity was in some ways closer to Lyotard or Latour than it was to Heidegger or Nietzsche, suggests some reasons why Musil might have found it advisable to practice “anticipatory plagiarism” in relation to his own masterpiece. Indeed, the publication of *L’Homme Probable*, as well as more recent works like Freed’s *Robert Musil and the Nonmodern* and Patricia McBride’s *The Void of Ethics* (2006), seem to provide compelling evidence for the success of Musil’s strategy—the eventual emergence of (at least some of) the conditions necessary for Musil’s utopian text to be brought into existence, the impossible *Möglichkeitroman* that he could only plagiarize in advance. And yet, as we shall see more clearly in Chapter Six, the triumphant realization of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* as a novel-project also represents an abandonment of the decadent ethos of literary modernism, since *MoE* requires a rejection of Modernism’s quest for the perfect text—here embodied in Mallarmé’s unrealized and unrealizable *Le Livre*—in favor of a quest for the best of all possible texts, here embodied in Musil’s unfinishable *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. In the nomenclature of this dissertation, this is a rejection of Totality in favor of Completion.

5.5 The Encyclopedic Mode(s) of Incompletion (Redux)

Admittedly, the distinction between completion and totalization can be difficult to get one's mind around. Luckily, one of the best ways to think this distinction is precisely through the concept of the Encyclopedia, and particularly through the contrasting ideals of the encyclopedia embodied by the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert, on the one hand, and by Hegel's own *Die Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* on the other.²⁴ In his entry "Encyclopédie," Diderot defines and etymologizes the word thusly: "Ce mot signifie *enchaînement de connoissances*; il est composé de la préposition greque *εν*, **en**, & de substantifs *κυκλος*, **cercle**, & *παιδεια*, **connaissance**" (5:635). En-circle-knowledge. In contrasting the *Encyclopédie* of Diderot and d'Alembert with the *Enzyklopädie* of Hegel, the most important thing to focus on is what is accomplished by the closing off of this circle. Whereas for Hegel the closing of the circle imposes self-identity through the establishment of "true infinity" (*wahrhaft Unendliche*), for Diderot the completion of the circle closes off a dialogic space and creates a literary time capsule for future generations. Thus, two of Diderot's most frequently stressed requirements

²⁴ The full title of the French *Encyclopédie* was *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers, par une société de gens de lettres, mis en ordre par M. Diderot de l'Académie des Sciences et Belles-Lettres de Prusse, et quant à la partie mathématique, par M. d'Alembert de l'Académie royale des Sciences de Paris, de celle de Prusse et de la Société royale de Londres*. Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* was published in three parts: *Wissenschaft der Logik* (1817); *Wissenschaft der Natur* (1827); *Wissenschaft des Geistes* (1830). The first self-titled "Encyclopedia" was the *Encyclopedia orbisque doctrinarum hoc est omnium atrium, scientiarum, ipsius philosophiae index ac divisio* of Johannes Aventinus (1517), though Ephraim Chamber's *Cyclopaedia, or Universal Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* (1728) was the work that did the most to inspire Diderot and d'Alembert's project.

for an *Encyclopédie* are that it not be “l’ouvrage d’un seul homme” and that it must be “commencée, continuée, & finie dans un certain intervalle de tems” (5:635, 636).²⁵ More a compromise with bad infinity than an overcoming of it, or in any case a tactical overcoming rather than a totalizing one.

One can map these two teleological strategies fairly easily onto what Bakhtin calls “The Two Stylistic Lines of Development in the European Novel” (“Discourse in the Novel” 366), though it is important to point out that one rarely sees either pole of the Encyclopedic ethos in its pure form. Indeed, Bakhtin actually links the merger of these two stylistic lines (an event he locates around “the beginning of the nineteenth century” [414]) to the novel’s ascension to the dominant form of art in Western culture. A powerful image for the merger of Bakhtin’s two lines of development—as well as for Modernity’s general shift in philosophical commitment from the unity of the True, the Good, and the Beautiful to the segregation of the epistemological, the ethical, and the aesthetic—can be found in the image of “the tree of knowledge” that d’Alembert uses to open the *Encyclopédie*.

We might first recall Eco’s reading of

the hypothetical nature of the tree: it does not reproduce the presumed structure of the world, but presents itself as the most economic solution with which to confront and resolve a particular problem of the re-unification of knowledge. In the second place, the encyclopedist knows that the tree organizes, yet impoverishes, its content, and he hopes to determine as precisely as he can the intermediate paths between the various nodes of the

²⁵ Moreover, Diderot’s question: “Et comment un seul homme, dans le court espace de sa vie, réussiroit-il à connoître & à développer le systeme universel de la nature & de l’art?” (5:635), might be read as an antagonistic inspiration for/pre-emptive strike at/stunned description of Hegel’s own project.

tree so that little by little it is transformed into a geographical chart or map.
(Eco 82)

For our purposes, the key question becomes: does the text seek to offer various “complete” versions of the tree under the aegis of the asymptotic process of mapping it, or does it seek to envelop and subordinate the tree to some higher logic or *Geist*? Does it seek to “finish” the tree, attempting to resolve the “re-unification of knowledge” all in one go, or does it simply seek to navigate the tree, confining itself to exploring particular problems within an ongoing, asymptotic enterprise? In literary terms, one might say that whereas the method of completion and mapping is in some sense exemplified on a large-scale by the asymptotic process of realism (see Chapter 3.1), the method of totalizing re-unification would have been exemplified in the world-redeeming *Gesamtkunstwerk* promised (though never delivered) by German Idealism.²⁶

Within my own historiography of the novel, the *Encyclopédie* and realism can even be said to follow parallel modes of incompleteness, both on national and international scales. Like the *Encyclopédie* itself, Realism was at once eminently cosmopolitan and intensely regional, even if “region” in these cases has more to do with one’s mother tongue than one’s geographic location. This explains the sort of intense yet familial rivalry observable in Diderot’s many jibes at “les Anglois,”

²⁶ Although one might also make a distinction between a novel that has a finalizing relationship to itself—a finalizing ending—and a novel that has a finalizing relationship with the world. In this sense, realism is certainly “finalizing” in the sense that it presumes to reproduce a “reality” that it already knows. Similar, the Hegelian dialectic both enriches becoming (by offering a useful conceptual tool for grasping it), and impoverishes it by dictating its procedure in advance.

whose patent inferiority to the French Diderot attributes not to any intrinsic qualities of the English themselves, but rather to the lack of an English equivalent to the *Academie Francaise*, a lack that Diderot claims must necessarily condemn the English language to philosophical imprecision and literary ineptitude (5: 638). While Diderot and d'Alembert's project was avowedly cosmopolitan (as one can observe simply from d'Alembert's many titles), the compilation of Encyclopedias soon came to be viewed in the context of both the national rivalry between France and Britain, and the more global rivalry between English and French.

As with the Encyclopedia, the primary international rivalry of Realism was Anglo-French. There were of course the opposing icons on each side of the channel, with Dickens and Eliot on one side vs. Balzac and Stendhal on the other. At the same time, there was also a more worldwide competition that would result in a general Anglophone dominance of "New World" literature and colonial realism, with Kipling and others filling out the present imperial perspective and American writers already pointing towards a more globalized and *laissez-faire* future. This in contrast to the fact that a great deal of "European" literature, particularly historical fiction, continued to be written in French. One might say that while Anglophone Realism conquered the colonial present and globalized future, French Realism colonized the common European past.

Just as France had provided the European model for the national organization of knowledge in the eighteenth century with its various state-funded Academies and learned societies, it would also provide the model for the conscious construction of a

national realist canon in the nineteenth, with famous and influential novelists ranging from Balzac, Zola and Stendhal to Dumas, Sand and de Kock producing individual works under the banner of a greater project, each novel an “entry” into the grand Encyclopedia of human experience produced by one generation and waiting to be canonized by the literary critics of the next. Supplemented by Goethe’s annunciation of a “Weltliteratur” whose value would increase through translation, circulation and exchange, Diderot’s promise of a “société de gens de lettres & d’artistes,” who would work to collect and organize the stories, characters, and psychological insights of individual writers as part of a legitimate body of knowledge, no doubt helped to spur and enable the realist novel’s Golden Age in the nineteenth century, on both sides of the channel and throughout the world.

Within the rise of the German novel there was an attempt to imitate and surpass both the English and French models, a new Renaissance in which English and French became Latin and Greek. German literature and German Idealist philosophy were of course each fueled in part by a desire to bring a German Nation into being. In Idealism, and particularly in the work of Schelling, these goals are in a sense combined in the notion of a Great Work to come—in a sense, Schelling could be accused of anticipatory plagiarism vis-à-vis Mallarmé’s *Livre* (see 6.2)—a notion essential to the formulation of the German romantic theory of literature, which is to say the modern theory of literature as such.²⁷ We can associate this drive towards a world-redeeming *Gesamtkunstwerk* with the Hegelian pole of the encyclopedic

²⁷ See *The Literary Absolute* for a book-length treatment of these claims.

ethos, which also underlies a good number of major novels, particularly epic-encyclopedic ones.

It thus might be useful to think the unfinishable novels discussed in this dissertation in terms of a conflict and/or dialogue between these two poles. The unfinishability of Proust's *La recherche*, for instance, might well be described in terms of a struggle between these two poles: whereas the novel's original artist-coming-to-full-potency narrative—which remains intact but is somewhat diluted by the addition of the middle volumes—could be said to exemplify the drive towards totalization, the novel's expansive open-middledness could equally be said to exploit the powers of completion.²⁸ For an unfinishable novel written in the Golden Age, one can usually ask if its relation to Totality is tragic (pursuit of the impossible unto death), antagonistic (defiance of death unto death), or a mixture of both. Do we insist on the Absolute, in whatever form it takes, and pursue it unto death? Or is the Absolute itself an opponent, something to be kept at bay and even actively undermined?²⁹

The example of *Bouvard et Pécuchet* seems particularly relevant here, not only because it is one of the great unfinishable novels and a marvelous exemplar of

²⁸ As Richard Terdiman put it in conversation: "It's as if you got on a bus to Monterey, but soon realized that the bus was not going to Monterey, and that the driver was on LSD, but when the bus eventually stops in Las Vegas your ticket still says Monterey."

²⁹ In terms of the modernist unfinishable novels that I have discussed, one could say that the tragic relationship to Totality is exemplified by Pessoa, whereas the antagonistic relationship to Totality is exemplified by Hašek. In general, however, it is better to attempt to think of unfinishable novels as battlegrounds between these two drives (as we saw in our readings of Kafka in Chapter Four), than it is to seek to unequivocally classify them as exemplifying one drive or the other.

the encyclopedic mode, but also because there is no other single novel (save *War and Peace*) that seems to me to have had more of an influence on *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*. *Bouvard et Pécuchet* is rather like an Introduction to the “Eine Art Enleitung” that begins *MoE*, and the backstory of “Ulrich’s three attempts to become a great man” does not need to be told in too much detail because Flaubert has already told it. One might say that *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* begins where *Bouvard et Pécuchet* leave off; or, in a more mathematical formulation, one might say *MoE* assumes *B&P*—though not as part of a single proof or theorem, but as The Uncertainty Principle assumes Relativity. With a few major plot variations, Volume II of *MoE*—with its commitment to seclusion and becoming-in-tandem—could even be said to pick up where *Bouvard et Pécuchet* breaks off. Moreover, Volume II could be said to demonstrate the impossibility of fully and totally exploring the relationship of even a single pair of human beings... or at least a pair of human beings in love.

Like *Bouvard’s* two-dimensional Panopticon, which functions as an essential element of the novel’s satire but “adds” little to the realms of psychological knowledge or insight, the first volume of *MoE* pays lip service to the quest for universal mediation through the characters of Ulrich (the Austrian without qualities) and Arnheim (the Prussian with all qualities). Though the “seriousness” with which Musil undertakes this quest is debatable, the first volume can easily be read as a tragic attempt at universal mediation at the dawn of the information age. Musil, himself professionally trained as a mathematician, engineer, gestalt psychologist, and philosopher, frequently draws upon erudite and “extra-literary” discourses. Yet while

characters in *MoE* representative of specialized discourses (e.g. Ulrich's father and the Law, Arnheim and "Big Business," Fischel and investment banking) certainly make use of the specialized terminology of their fields, a sense is always preserved that there are areas within each specialized discourse that must by definition remain obscure to the non-specialist.

Thus, in contrast to *Moby-Dick*, where Ishmael's unfolding of his narrative is intertwined with his encyclopedic insider's account of the business of whaling, the content of Ulrich's specialized discourse (mathematics) is never progressively "filled in" for the reader. When the movement of the novel demands an explanation of exactly what "type" of mathematician Ulrich had been, for instance, it is the narrator and not Ulrich who provides it: "He was one of those mathematicians called logicians, for whom nothing was ever 'correct' and who were working out new theoretical principles. But he was not entirely satisfied with the logic of the logicians either. Had he continued his work, he would have gone right back to Aristotle; he had his own views of all that" (*MoE* 939).³⁰ Had Ulrich been made to explain his own work in this fashion, his necessarily "dumbed-down" representation of it would have required a kind of trivialization of the specialized discourse he represents. The narrator, by contrast, is able to sagely explain the basics of this "type" of mathematician to the reader, as one non-specialist to another, while still alluding to a

³⁰ "Er gehörte zu jenen, Logistiker gennanten, Mathematikern, die überhaupt nichts richtig fanden und eine neue Fundamentallehre aufbauten. Aber er hielt auch die Logik der Logistiker nicht für ganz richtig. Hätte er weitergearbeitet, er würde ochmals auf Aristoteles zurückgegriffen haben; er hatte darüber seine eigenen Ansichten" (865).

space “outside” the novel where the specific specialized jargon of this discourse is preserved, a realm that one cannot venture into without doing one’s own research. Thus Musil, while taking the contradictory and untotalizable nature of human knowledge for granted, continues to show fondness and respect for science as well as an ironic-ambivalent, tragi-comic commitment to the Realist project of universal linguistic mediation. Importantly, modern man’s rush to specialization (aligned with masculinity in *MoE*) is not seen as entirely bad by Musil, who was far less concerned with castigating the allegedly soul-crushing influences of science and technology than he was with dissecting the ideological consequences of holding up “the realm of the soul” as an alternative or solution to what Heidegger was then identifying as modern man’s increasing lack of “authenticity” (*Eigentlichkeit*).

Like Flaubert’s parodic use of the *Bildungsroman* in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, the structure of *MoE* both utilizes and deconstructs the panoptic mode of *War and Peace*. *MoE*’s characters are composed not of single, complementary, or even conventionally paradoxical Bakhtinian “images of language,” i.e. images identifiable with particular social stations or personality types, but rather of freakish discursive “hybrids” reminiscent of Bruno Latour’s *We Have Never Been Modern* (1991). Beginning with its title, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* disrupts and dismantles Realism’s standard equations of literary character construction. The fact that the novel is set in Austro-Hungary makes *MoE* particularly suited to pushing the literary envelope of psychological complexity, since any denizen of the Austro-Hungarian Empire could already be assumed to possess “at least nine characters: a professional, a national, a

civic, a class, a geographic, a sexual, a conscious, an unconscious, and possibly even a private character to boot. He unites them in himself, but they dissolve him, so that he is really nothing more than a small basin hollowed out by these many streamlets” (*MoE* 30).³¹ Importantly, it is not merely that there are nine different boxes that each person must fill out on the application form of life, but also that each combination of these nine characters produces its own singularity in combination (thus reflecting Musil’s great interest in Gestalt psychology). As Tim Mehigan puts it while pointing to the shortcomings of psychoanalytic approaches to *MoE*: “Musil’s psychology scales up to ever increasing levels of mental and emotional complexity. Musil’s subjects, accordingly, are never reducible to a single or basic psychopathology, just as their outlook is never reducible to a single or dominant motivation” (Mehigan 79). Every developed character in *MoE* is a mess/mesh/mash of seemingly incompatible qualities, discourses, ideologies, and character-forming social conditions.

This unfinalizable psychological complexity unworks the realist project of a universal historical-psychological encyclopedia of the human condition, pursuing and prolonging this project even as its means of pursuit can be seen to render the project itself inoperative. With people split into such subtle combinations of qualities, their overall formation (*Gestalt*) becomes increasingly unpredictable and unfinalizable. The critique of realism is taken up here not only from an aesthetic standpoint, as in

³¹ “mindestens neun Charaktere, einen Berufs-, einen National-, einen Staats-, einen Klassen-, einen geographischen, einen Geschlechts-, einen bewußten, einen unbewußten und vielleicht auch noch einen privaten Charakter; er vereinigt sie in sich, aber sie lösen ihn auf, und er ist eigentlich nichts als seine kleine, von diesen vielen Rinnsalen ausgewaschene Mulde” (34).

Flaubert, but from epistemological and ethical standpoints as well. And whereas a moralizing approach might prompt one to choose between two distinct alternatives—drawing a clear and immutable line between modernism and postmodernism, for example, or even between totality and completion as such—Musil stresses that properly ethical thinking should not require us to make stark “Either/Or” decisions, but should instead lead us to search for the best ways in which the necessary drives towards completion and totality might learn to share the stage... not to eliminate totality, but to subordinate it to completion. This will be the task of the postmodern novel.

PART III. THE POSTMODERN NOVEL

The shift towards more “open” and “open-ended” fictions in the twentieth century (particularly its latter half) is a well-documented and widely acknowledged occurrence. The primary concern of this section is less this trend itself than how this well-known shift in literary sensibility—the (in)famous “postmodern turn” in literature—fits into the historiography I have constructed thus far. In this historiography, of course, unfinalizability and bad infinity are by no means phenomena unique to the twentieth century... rather, they are forces inherent to prose itself, forces whose power increased exponentially in the age of the press, and that prose fiction and the novel have always had to come to terms with in some way or another.

To put it in broad strokes: the “crisis of realism” and corollary crisis of endings that accompanied the metaphysical market crash of *fin-de-siècle* Europe provoked a need for new strategies of closure, as the threat that bad infinity had always posed to prose fiction began to take on even larger and more frightening proportions. As Benjamin and Lukács illustrate so well, the linear realist novel points its readers towards “a divinatory realization of the meaning of life” by directing them back towards the middle of the novel, a middle that is—like the center of a circle—in some sense created by the closure of the novel itself (the end of the line). Once the story is finished, the reader can look back upon the narrative chain of causes and effects and determine in retrospect which events in the novel were the most significant. The end of the novel thus establishes a “present” from which the entirety

of the novel can be viewed as past. Even today, this finalizing technique—which, as Lukács points out, is both thematized and exemplified in the ending of Flaubert's *L'Education Sentimentale*—remains probably the most popular strategy for achieving narrative closure in the novel. Nonetheless, the latter half of the twentieth century witnessed a striking increase in the use of alternative methods for bringing novels to an end, often with the help of the postmodern turn itself.

What, then, are these new strategies for closure that modernism and postmodernism produced? For modernism, as we have seen, there was in fact a glut of unfinishable novels, of novels in which closure was so problematic that it could only be attained posthumously. As we have seen, this Golden Age was made possible not only by the ambitious projects of writers of this era but also by the *Nachlaß* industry that had sprung-up in the latter nineteenth century; with the cult of author worship still near its height, the prospect of being posthumously “discovered” and published had never been better.

Such projects demand a rare level of commitment, however. For the professional writer, the most problematic aspect of writing an unfinishable novel is generally financial. For those postwar writers struggling to earn a living while still engaging in critiques of traditional closure, methods had to be found for avoiding unfinishability without sacrificing unfinalizability. As unfinalizability becomes an increasingly respectable goal for the serious novelist, so unfinishability in fact becomes increasingly rare. The question becomes: how to oppose closure while still making a living as a professional novelist?

Importantly, the new strategies for closure that modernism and postmodernism developed have been used not only to oppose, disrupt, and unwork traditional closure, but also as a means of returning to it. We saw in “The Modernist Novel” how a need for transcendence—the desire “to raise the world into the pure, the true, the immutable”—led in some cases to a recognition of the impossibility of such a project, leading to a number of unfinishable projects that pursued Totality in a tragic vein and could only be completed by the deaths of their authors. The postmodern novel, by contrast, is more content to draw its own arbitrary boundaries within the arbitrary space of fiction. This in turn led to a remarkable abundance of unfinalizable novels in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Although both these movements can also be viewed as twisting paths towards a reclamation of classical novelistic closure—partly through a new willingness to embrace the arbitrariness of the sense of an ending that the closing of a literary world creates—in the meantime we have a century of unprecedented investment in unfinalizability by the novel genre.

The two chapters in this final section will seek to explore this phenomenon in different but mutually reinforcing ways. Chapter Six (“Unworking Totality”) continues my exploration of Musil’s *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, this time in the context of the post/modern transition. The final chapter (“Beyond Completion”) offers a survey of postwar strategies of novelistic closure, described as a shift from unfinishability to unfinalizability. It also offers a comparative reading of two novels whose chronotopes exemplify both closure and unfinalizability: Pynchon’s *Gravity’s*

Rainbow and Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. The chapter and the dissertation are then concluded with some closing reflections on the meaning of their shared title.

CHAPTER SIX: UNWORKING TOTALITY

“Scientific aesthetics searches for the universal building block from which the edifice of aesthetics might be erected. But, for us, art is that which we come across under that name. Something that is simply there and has no need of laws whatsoever, a complicated social product.”

“[A] life without systematizing but, nonetheless, with order. Self-creative order. Generative order. An organization that is not determined from a to z, but from proceeding from n to n + 1”

—Robert Musil, *Diaries* (245, 318)

“Musil once remarked that he wanted to end the second book in the middle of a sentence with a comma, so that the novel would not appear finished and absolute, but this is a stressful vision for a critic.”

—David Luft, *Robert Musil and the Crisis of European Culture* (213)

Amongst the many writers who could be said to blur, straddle and/or deconstruct the border between modernism and postmodernism, there are few who do so as deftly as Robert Musil. More modernist than Borges, more postmodern than Heidegger, more nonmodern than Nietzsche, it is no mere joke to say that Musil can give migraines to those invested in such distinctions. At the same time, given the depth and sophistication of Musil’s engagement with all three of these ideologies, one might also say that there is no novel better suited for exploring them than *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*.¹

¹ In this chapter I will be using the word “ideology” in its Musilian sense (“the intellectual framework one gives to one’s emotions”) as a way of pointing to the essential affective element of Essayismus: to take a thing “from various congruent sides” means taking a thing from several intellectual-emotional perspectives, rather than trying to achieve an “objective” standpoint that would effectively bracket affect. This is key, since modernism, postmodernism and nonmodernism all imply not only intellectual positions but complex affective evaluations as well.

6.1 What is Meant By Postmodernism?

Great ideas in human history, like Progress, tend to valence both ways from their inception. In the field of literature, what takes place is less a movement from one side of the scale to the other than an increasing purification and self-assertion of first one side, then the other.² As with realism and idealism, the opposition between modernism and postmodernism resides less in the epistemological underpinnings of either movement, which are largely the same, than in the different valences (cognitive, moral, and above all aesthetic) that each attaches to the same process.³ Like Enlightenment and Romanticism, or Baroque and Neoclassical, Modernism and Postmodernism do not so much represent successive stages in the history of ideas as opposing evaluations of the same idea. At the same time, however, each of these three binaries also undeniably points to a historically specific shift in literary *praxis*. In the case of postmodernism, this shift can be characterized as a widespread recommitment to the theories and practices of Menippean satire in the wake of a postwar abandonment of modernism's quest for a world-redeeming *Gesamtkunstwerk* (although even World War II should not be seen as marking a strict temporal divide).

² This view is supported by the career trajectory of Flaubert (1821-80), a pioneer of modernism who nonetheless eventually arrived at far more "postmodern" positions than high modernist gurus like Stefan George (1868-1933) or T.S. Eliot (1888-1965) ever would. Indeed, as many critics have pointed out, Flaubert can be said to have written not only the first modernist novel in *Madame Bovary* (1856) but also the first postmodern novel in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*. This no doubt suggests one reason why it took so long for a serious scholarly reconstruction of the *Sottisier* to be produced.

³ Cf. Jochen Schulte-Sasse's "Modernity and Modernism, Postmodernity and Postmodernism: Framing the Issue" (1987), which emphasizes the extent to which both high modernism and the postmodern avante-garde are invested in the autonomy of the aesthetic realm.

Yet the modernism/postmodernism binary does not actually point to the emergence of a new idea, so much as to the failure of a new idea **to** emerge. Whether considered as ideologies, as avant-garde artistic movements, or both, modernism and postmodernism are equally symptoms of the metaphysical market crash of *fin-de-siècle* Europe, a point on which even Lyotard and Latour can be seen to agree.⁴ More specifically, as Musil would no doubt have pointed out, both are symptoms of the failure of Euro-American civilization to develop a new idea in the wake of Progress. As the traditional metanarratives of humanism dash themselves ever more vigorously against the rocks of physical reality, modernism and postmodernism each seeks to salvage what it can of humanist ideology whilst hunkering down amidst what each perceives to be the wreckage of Western civilization. History is still seen as nearing its end, but this end is now defined negatively—whether in terms of the inevitable triumph of political movement X (communism, liberalism, fascism), or the threat of nuclear holocaust, or humanity’s blinkered march towards worldwide ecological catastrophe.⁵

⁴ Latour actually cites Lyotard to support the idea of postmodernism that he polemicizes against in *We Have Never Been Modern*: “Postmodernism is a symptom, not a fresh solution. It lives under the modern Constitution, but it no longer believes in the guarantees the Constitution offers. It senses that something has gone awry in the modern critique, but it is not able to do anything but prolong that critique, though without believing in its foundations (Lyotard, 1979)” (Latour 46).

⁵ This trend towards pessimism *vis-à-vis* the future is often traced to Oswald Spengler’s *The Decline of the West* (*Der Untergang des Abendlandes*, 1918/1922), which had a major influence on the modernist movement as both inspiration and foil.

As artistic-philosophical movements, both modernism and postmodernism can be characterized as forms of tragic humanism.⁶ For modernism, “der Ende Liberalismus” and the corollary crisis of realism (discussed in Chapter 5) led to a doubling down on the autonomy of the aesthetic realm and the widespread embrace of a Wildean notion of “Art” as “our spirited protest, our gallant attempt to teach Nature its proper place” (“Decay of Lying” 970). Even as mankind’s central importance in the grand scheme of things was exposed as a fiction, mankind’s ability and desire to create such fictions was self-consciously valorized and sanctified as the new authentic wellspring of human dignity. This is the tragic-artistic position of the twenty-five year old Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872): “It is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*” (52). Intellectually, Nietzsche argues, life can only be condemned—a position he never abandoned. Yet the meaning of this aesthetic axiom shifted dramatically over the course of Nietzsche’s career: in 1872, he suggests that only great works of art and the artists who produce them are capable of redeeming human existence. By the time Nietzsche returns to *The Birth of Tragedy* in 1886 for his “Attempt at a Self-Criticism,” however, the meaning of this phrase in the context of his philosophy has shifted radically, with “*aesthetic phenomenon*” no longer suggesting “work of art” in particular so much as the realm of “aesthesis” (sense experience) in general. For the

⁶ The connections between tragedy and humanism are thoroughly developed in Alain Robbe-Grillet’s “Nature, Humanism, Tragedy” (1958), as well as Jean-Paul Sartre’s *Existentialism Is A Humanism* (1946) and Karl Jaspers’ *Tragedy Is Not Enough* (1969). Cf. also Stanley Cavell’s *The Claims of Reason* for a historical treatment of the relationship between tragedy and philosophy.

later Nietzsche, it is only from the perspective of life that life can be considered worthwhile.

This is a quintessential postmodern sentiment, as is Carrie Fisher's maxim: "If my life wasn't funny then it would just be true, and that is unacceptable." While modernism clings desperately to the distinction between high and low art—a distinction Musil remained invested in throughout his career, as evidenced by the disparaging remarks about cinemagoers that litter his diaries—postmodernism celebrates hybridity, the blurring of borders, and the collapse of boundaries. Seeing little possibility for human dignity, let alone nobility, postmodernism draws much of its tragic force from a new alliance with the Absurd, as human absurdity in the face of a senseless universe is seen to reflect a larger image of the struggle of Life against Death. Allied with the Absurd, the very feebleness of Life's forces takes on tragic proportions, most famously perhaps in Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1954)—widely held up as **the** axial text in the transition from modernism to postmodernism—but equally in his *Endgame* (1957) and *Happy Days* (1962), and (less dramatically) in his novels as well.⁷

But describing postmodernism as a literary-philosophical movement can lead to dangerous oversimplifications. When thinking postmodern literature, it is often crucial to distinguish between the ideology described above (a recommitment to tragic humanism under the auspices of absurdity) and the various avant-garde literary

⁷ Another great twentieth century thinker of the Absurd was of course Albert Camus, most of whose work (plays, novels, and essays) is devoted to developing various aspects of this idea.

trends and techniques that began to flourish after WWII (metafiction filling reams). At times these two can be seen to overlap completely (Kurt Vonnegut, Thomas Pynchon), while in other cases a writer might be said to use postmodern techniques but remain essentially modernist in outlook, or to be postmodern in outlook while remaining committed to the modernist project (Vladimir Nabokov might be accused of either form of hybridity). With Musil, however, the situation becomes even more complicated since, as Mark Freed points out, one must account for his “NonModern” aspects as well.

For Bruno Latour, nonmodernism refers to “a retrospective attitude, which deploys instead of unveiling, adds instead of subtracts,” and seeks above all to “reestablis[h] symmetry between the two branches of government, that of things—called science and technology—and that of human beings” (Latour 47, 138).⁸ Musil anticipates Latour’s nonmodern ideology in many ways: like Latour, Musil is fascinated by the ability of the sciences (and the inability of the social sciences) to continue to function after many of their fundamental assumptions (*das-Ding-in-sich*,

⁸ Latour theorizes a “modern Constitution” that posits a clear separation of Nature and Society while paradoxically allowing for the proliferation of Nature-Society hybrids on an unprecedented scale. Although Latour rejects the possibility of any pure Nature/Society distinction (hence the title: *We Have Never Been Modern*), he also takes pains to stress that “The [premodern] nonseparability of natures and societies had the disadvantage of making experimentation on a large scale impossible, since every transformation had to be in harmony with a social transformation, term for term, and vice versa. Now we seek to keep the moderns’ major innovation: the separability of a nature that no one has constructed—transcendence—and the freedom of manoeuvre of a society that is of our own making—immanence. Nevertheless, we do not seek to inherit the clandestineness of the inverse mechanism that makes it possible to construct nature—immanence—and to stabilize society durably—transcendence” (140).

“proof”) have been renounced, as well as the ideological consequences this has had for Latour’s second branch of government: “that of human beings.” Yet whereas Latour desires “symmetry” between his two branches, Musil’s desire for “self-creative” and “generative order” is expressed through his never quite symmetrical ratioed/non-ratioed distinction, which provides a powerful tool for thinking the relationship between universal laws and particular facts even as it denies any pure existence to the former. *MoE*’s ambivalent commitment to realism, observable in both the psychological complexity of its characters and the facticity of its fictional world, also testifies to Musil’s nonmodern insight that “facts are created in laboratories,” in this case the laboratory of fiction. Above all, however, there is Musil’s dual commitment to both “Precision and Soul” (*Genauigkeit und Seele*), a duality that maps easily onto Latour’s “two branches of government,” but one that both modernism and postmodernism are often committed to segregating.

In order to fully appreciate the precocity of Musil’s nonmodernism we must place *MoE* in the context of the post/modern transition, partly because this transition marked (amongst other things) a re-valorization of completion over totality that helped finish off the Golden Age of Unfinishable Novels. In this sense, the axial text of the post/modern divide is less Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* than Borges’ story-collection *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (*The Garden of Forking Paths*, 1941), beginning with its Prologue in which Borges sagely opines: “The composition of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance. To go on for five hundred pages developing an idea whose perfect oral exposition is possible in a few

minutes! A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a résumé, a commentary” (Borges 15).⁹ Ironically, by abandoning realism, valorizing uncertainty, and embracing absurdity, postmodernism proved far more practical than its prefixless predecessor (at least in the context of completion). Nowhere is this better illustrated than in the tragic-heroic tale of Stéphane Mallarmé’s unrealized *Gesamtkunstwerk: Le Livre*.

6.2 Unworking Totality¹⁰

In Paul de Man’s unpublished Ph.D. dissertation—“Mallarmé, Yeats and the Post-Romantic Predicament” (1960)—he attempts to track Mallarmé’s changing thought through contextualized readings of three texts (*Herodiade*, *Igitur*, and *Un Coup de dés*), the first two of which are unfinished.¹¹ All three readings revolve

⁹ “Desvarío laborioso y empobrecedor el de componer vastos libros; el de explayar en quinientas páginas una idea cuya perfecta exposición oral cabe en pocos minutos. Mejor procedimiento es simular que esos libros ya existen y ofrecer un resumen, un comentario” (3-4; italics in original). It is difficult not to read a reference to *MoE* into this statement, particularly since Musil was still alive and writing in 1941. It is likely that Borges had some knowledge of Musil’s project, and in any case it is always dangerous to assume there was anything Borges did not read.

¹⁰ “Unwork” is a literal translation of the French *desoeuvrer* (“to render inoperative”), a word used by Jean-Luc Nancy in his *La Communauté desoeuvrée* (*The Inoperative Community*, 1986) that also has a long trans-linguistic theologico-philosophic history dating back to Luther (*Aufhebung*) and St. Paul (*katargein*).

¹¹ De Man actually highlights the relative lack of *vollendet* works in Mallarmé’s oeuvre as a compelling reason to study him, since “Fragmentary and difficult as it is, Mallarmé’s work, considered as a gradual development towards an ideal Poem that never came into being, provides us with the clearest possible image of a poetic consciousness in growth” (1). At the same time, de Man also seems compelled at one point to pre-emptively defend himself against charges of aesthetic vandalism: “The musical overture to *Hérodiade*, however, was never finished and, as in the case of *Igitur*, one has to cope with the difficult circumstance that the most revealing texts

around a larger speculative reading of Mallarmé's unrealized magnum opus *Le Livre*, which was to have represented the *Aufhebung* of all books and on which Mallarmé spent the last 26 years of his life. *Le Livre*, de Man argues, was an attempt to do for Poetry what Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* had done for Philosophy, and the eventual result was one of literary modernism's most spectacular Benjaminian allegories (i.e., a ruin). De Man accounts for this disaster in terms of the respective linguistic dilemmas confronting the Hegelian philosopher and the Hegelian poet:

The poetic development of a poet like Mallarmé is not essentially different from that of Hegel, except for the fact that it encounters the problem of language in a different way. [...] In Hegel's philosophy, language first appears as one among other entities susceptible of achieving a mediation between opposites. Later [...] it becomes the last link in a long chain of mediations leading up to the absolute Spirit. It reaches this final stage, however, in the form of a *science* of reflective language, or logic. This logic is detached from its previous history, from the successive approximations and errors that have led to its ultimate perfection. Up to the final moment, language *follows* the experience in which it does not participate [...]; finally, when it becomes manifest that it is the only preserver of past facts and events, it naturally becomes the supreme mediator. The transfer of mediation into the sphere of language appears as the ultimate goal of philosophical development. It is the starting-point, however, of a poetic consciousness. (de Man 83)

Whereas Hegel's *Enzyklopädie* reaches its goal by creating a totalizing philosophical language, for Mallarmé's *Livre* to even begin it must first create "a poetic language" capable of "discover[ing] 'hasard' under all appearances of certainty, and thus to

exist only as developed sketches. It would therefore be unwise to 'evaluate' the overture to *Hérodiade* as one evaluates a finished poem such as *L'après-midi d'un faune* or *Un coup de dés*. Posterity does not commit the indiscretion of revealing notes which a poet had deliberately hidden, in order to indicate their inadequacy, but with the hope of shedding light on the work as a whole. The unfinished texts are those that aimed highest, which accounts for their major importance as well as for their fragmentary condition" (14). Ironically, de Man's dissertation can itself be considered unfinished, since de Man never wrote the third section on Stefan George promised in his Introduction.

transcend it by asserting its universal presence” (88). Yet Mallarmé’s failure to realize his *Livre*, de Man argues, makes it possible to read his *Nachlaß* (particularly *Herodiade* and *Igitur*, which were intended for *Le Livre* before being abandoned) and *Un Coup de dés* (1897) as rewriting the first and second books of Hegel’s *Phenomenology*, respectively, since the saga of personal development charted in Mallarmé’s unfinished fragments already contains *in nuce* the world-historical trajectory for poetry (or lack thereof) that Mallarmé casts in *Un Coup de dés*: “The failure of universal consciousness is equivalent to the death of the Spirit, a cosmic event for which a language has to be found. The act of throwing the dice, the symbolic action of the ‘coup de dés’ [...], represents the creation of this language, knowing that it can only state its failure” (90).¹² In the nomenclature of this dissertation, we can speak of Mallarmé’s project in terms of an immoralist’s dilemma: the quest for artistic perfection leads the artist to recognize the impossibility of such a quest. For most writers such a recognition leads to compromise, a settling for completion at the expense of Totality. For a handful of high modernists, however, this immoralist’s dilemma actually made possible the achievement of what Benjamin describes as “the purity and beauty of a failure,” the purity and beauty evoked by a

¹² See also de Man’s reading of *Un Coup de dés* itself: “The Book, symbolized as a rock on page VIII would, unlike the abyss of the ocean, have constituted a foundation on which the Spirit could have erected its dwelling-place. Instead, it is merely a ‘*faux manoir / tout de suite / évaporé en brumes.*’ There only appears the ironic, taunting image of the ballerina

une statue mignonne ténébreuse debout
en sa torsion de sirène

Like the dancer symbolizing the impossible union between drama and poetry (see p. 106 of this ms.), the ‘*statue mignonne ténébreuse*’ announces the ultimate defeat of poetic fiction” (123).

certain tragic heroism inherent in “the decision of a consciousness to keep asserting itself after *the absurdity of all thought* has been revealed” (de Man 90, my italics). For the postmoderns, of course, this absurdity would itself become grounds for affirmation.

This valorization of totality over completion underlies the obsession with *Nachlaß* that accompanied and followed literary modernism. For Mallarmé, as for Pessoa and Kafka, death became the totalizing event in which failure and success could be synthesized, and *Nachlaß* became the totalizing genre in which the story of the author’s failure could at last be successfully told. This was the perverse benefit that living in the Golden Age of Unfinishable novels afforded Musil: the insurance of a *Nachlaß* industry capable of “discovering” one after one’s death. As the decadent genre *par excellence*, *Nachlaß* redeems literary failure through death by completing the unfinished works that finish an author’s *oeuvre*, thus yoking totality and completion together in the service of a grand delimitation. For the most uncompromising of modernists, it would seem, immoralist decadence transforms attempts to achieve totality into attempts to unwork it, to keep it at bay. At times these drives even appear to be inextricably linked, above all perhaps in the *chef d’oeuvres* of Mallarmé and James Joyce.¹³ Yet whereas for Mallarmé the abyss

¹³ *Le Livre* aside, modern literature’s closest thing to a *Gesamtkunstwerk* is Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* (1939), a singular text that literally creates its own language and seems to embody “*wahrhaft Unendliche*,” but that could equally be read as a carnivalization of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Full of pastiche and hybridity, *Finnegan’s Wake* also has a circular structure characteristic of the postmodern turn to completion, and could be said to exemplify the movement from unfinishability to

remained abysmal, such horror in the face of “hasard” (chance) was entirely foreign to Musil, whose postmodern sensibility is best revealed in his affirmation of “Möglichkeit” (possibility), an affirmation *MoE* was intended to help guide its readers towards as well.

Since Musil never acknowledged any essential “*absurdity of all thought*”—an idea that runs counter to both precision and soul—his own “failure” lacks the tragic purity and beauty of those like Mallarmé who wholeheartedly devoted themselves to redeeming this absurdity. Yet Musil was also highly cognizant of the link between death and aesthetic totality, represented in *MoE* by the specter of suicide that hangs over Ulrich (and later Agathe) throughout the novel.¹⁴ In a larger context, *MoE* also alludes to the death drives embodied in the totalitarian projects of National Socialism and Communism, each of which sought to achieve totalizing self-identity on a massive scale (Musil was roundly booed for describing Bolshevism as totalitarian at the 1935 anti-fascist Congress for the Defense of Culture in Paris). For Musil, however, the question was never whether Totality should be negated or affirmed (“such a crass Either/Or,” as Arnheim might say), but rather what place might be

unfinalizability that will be the subject of Chapter Seven. In any case, it is not unfair to say that James Joyce was the only writer ever to finish an unfinishable novel.

¹⁴ The novel begins with Ulrich “taking a year off to find himself,” in our American parlance, with the understanding that if he has not found himself at the end of this year he will commit suicide. McBride gives a superb reading of the role that the specter of suicide plays in the novel, arguing that suicide represents Ulrich’s “only alternative to embracing the fundamental split of existence” by “writing a book about his failed literary utopia” (150). Ulrich rejects the idea of writing a book on the grounds that “he wanted to live without splitting himself into a real and a shadow self” (*er wollte leben, ohne sich in einem wirklichen und einen schattenhaften Teil zu spalten*) (*MoE* 722; 662).

found for totalizing experience within the exponentially increasing complexity of modern life. To this end, all three volumes of *MoE* are preoccupied with what Musil calls “the Other Condition” (*der andere Zustand*), a *principium individuationis* shattering experience similar to Nietzsche’s theory of the Dionysian and Bakhtin’s theory of carnival laughter, but also to Derek Attridge’s theory of “the literary event”: a reshuffling of evaluative and epistemological horizons that literary reading can occasionally provoke, in some cases leading to a transformation of the reader’s entire worldview.¹⁵ Whereas Nietzsche and Bakhtin focus on historically specific instances (by their very nature unrecoverable) of totalizing communal aesthetic experience, Musil and Attridge focus on the possibilities opened up by the experience of literature, which Musil describes as a transfer of creativity: “Creative writing is not an activity but a condition. [...] Reading is transmission of this condition” (*Diaries* 250). While vehemently opposing the lack of intellectual rigor that characterized contemporary discussions of “Art,” “*Geist*,” and “the soul” (as exemplified in his scathing review of Rathenau’s *Mechanik des Geistes*), Musil was equally dedicated to taking seriously the biological existence of the Other Condition as a factual part of human experience.¹⁶

Whereas ratioed totality in *MoE* takes the form of a drive to self-identity (e.g. Ulrich’s attempt to live as a literary character, the Parallel Campaign’s search for an

¹⁵ Cf. Attridge’s *The Singularity of Literature* (2004).

¹⁶ Musil depicts Ulrich’s experiences of the Other Condition at multiple points in *MoE*: during a walk home from Walter’s house, during Ulrich’s memory of “the major’s wife,” and above all in Ulrich and Agathe’s strange consummation in chapter 45 of *Ins tausendjähriges Reich*.

“Austrian” idea, *MoE*’s shadowy allusions to the rise of Fascism), the non-ratioed totality of the Other Condition takes the form of a complete dissolution of self-identity, much like Schopenhauer’s “*pure will-less subject of knowledge*” who functions as both theater and agent for “the aesthetical mode of contemplation,” which Schopenhauer associates above all with music (Schopenhauer 208):

When some external cause or inward disposition lifts us suddenly out of the endless stream of willing, delivers knowledge from the slavery of the will, the attention is no longer directed to the motives of willing, but comprehends things free from the relation to the will, and thus observes them without personal interest, without subjectivity [...] for we are for the moment set free from the miserable striving of the will; we keep the Sabbath of the penal servitude of willing; the wheel of Ixion stands still. (209-10)¹⁷

Leaving the space of literature, one notes that it was music that played the largest role in shaping modern conceptions of “the work” (*l’opera, l’oeuvre*), and of aesthetic totality as such, that helped inspire modernism’s quests for the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. The nineteenth century’s most prominent *Gesamtkunstwerk*, of course, is *Der Ring des Nibelungen* (1853-1876), Richard Wagner’s answer to the tragic tetralogies of Ancient Athens. Even Wagner, however, could not blaze the trail to Totality alone, as the realization of his project required the cooperation of hundreds of singers, musicians, stagehands, etc., not to mention the construction of the Bayreuth

¹⁷ Schopenhauer’s idiosyncratic rendering of Kantian aesthetics laid the foundations for Nietzsche’s Apollonian/Dionysian distinction in *The Birth of Tragedy*: “Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous *terror* which seizes man when he is suddenly dumbfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena because the principal of sufficient reason, in some one of its manifestations, seems to suffer an exception. If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells up from the innermost depths of man, indeed of nature, at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysian*, which is brought home to us most intimately by the analogy of intoxication” (36).

Festspielhaus—all of which was only made possible by the full backing of King Ludwig II of Bavaria, whom Wagner convinced to fund the massive undertaking.

Like Wagner, Mallarmé believed that an authentic *Gesamtkunstwerk* would have to synthesize music, lyric poetry, and drama in a way that could only be achieved in the singular event of a live performance. Unlike mechanically reproducible novels or films, live performances cannot be repeated identically, since even on video they lack the possibility of failure that dangles like the sword of Damocles over every staged enactment. This is one of theater's thrills: the knowledge that the performers are walking a tightrope and disaster is always impending, a knowledge that has the potential to bind performers and audience in a communal experience of totality right up until the applause that completes and/or breaks the spell. Mallarmé, according to de Man, located the "essence of drama [...] in the fact that it necessarily implies a public performance and thus tends, by definition, towards universality, towards a communion of minds confronted with a shared spectacle" (de Man 99). This sense of losing oneself in a communion of viewers is no doubt familiar to most of us, whether we look for it at the theater, at sporting events, at significant public ceremonies like weddings, or (like Schopenhauer) at the concert hall and the opera house.¹⁸ In such events the experience of aesthetic totality remains tied to the singularity of a particular performance, and takes its place as the sort of occasional plunge into the Other Condition that Musil considered to be not just part of a healthy human existence, but also (far more controversially) to be the very condition of

¹⁸ Nietzsche might point out that most of these events also involve intoxication.

possibility for any critique of one's own instrumental reason, and thus in fact the root of all ethical behavior.

Conceding that the will to totality does indeed play an important role in music and drama (as well as in the human condition as such), one can still note that even opera has produced monuments to completion as well as totality. The best illustration of this is Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffman* (1881), an unfinished opera based on an unfinished literary work that is largely dedicated to exploring the connection between intoxication and creativity.¹⁹ The opera dramatizes a drunken Hoffman recounting the stories of his three loves, and the attempts of his Muse to lead him back to writing. Since it deals with an artist attempting to produce his great work, the unfinishedness of *Hoffman* can thus be seen to reinforce its themes as well as to open up a wider range of performative possibilities.²⁰ Importantly, in spite of its *unvollendet* state, the opera works: when well mounted it is fantastic to behold. Unlike Mallarmé, whose failure to achieve Totality **or** completion in his *Livre* means that it exists nowhere, save perhaps in the imaginations of some extremely erudite French scholars, producers of *Les Contes d'Hoffman* must revel in the possibilities

¹⁹ E.T.A. Hoffman (1788-1822) died of syphilis and alcoholism at age 46 while at work on what would become known as his *Letzte Erzählungen*. Offenbach (1819-80) suffered from severe gout (also drink related), and was aware when he began composing *Hoffman* in 1877 that he probably would not live to finish it.

²⁰ For instance, a potential Director of *Les Contes d'Hoffman* is actually forced to decide the order in which the second and third acts should be performed, as well as whether or not to cast separate singers in the role(s) of Hoffman's three loves and four enemies.

opened up by the very compromises required to complete the work. And this is as it should be, for the primary merits of the text lie beyond completion in the first place.²¹

The success of *Hoffman* is important because it reinforces an essential link between the experience of aesthetic totality and the singularity of the event that provokes it. Like Latour's nonmodern "explanatory model," which seeks "to integrate the work of purification as a particular instance of mediation" (78), Musil's nonmodern literary project seeks to integrate "the Other Condition" as a real experience of "the abolition of reality"—a peculiar but particular instance of human being. Moreover, since Musil locates the primary instance of the Other Condition in the process of falling in love rather than in the disinterested contemplation of art or nature, the stakes of his project extend far beyond the proper social function of art. Musil points out that love itself is already "disinterested" in the Kantian sense, which points not to a lack of interest but rather to a lack of practical, utilitarian interest. Because knowledge of one's beloved increases one's obligation to him or her far more than it increases one's power over him or her, love disrupts the power=knowledge equation dear to Western Philosophy since at least the time of Socrates. For Musil, however, this disruption is in fact the foundation of all ethical

²¹ Also of interest in this context is *The Enchanted Island*, a "Baroque pastiche" that mixes Baroque chamber pieces by Handel, Vivaldi and Rameau (among others) into a plot combining *The Tempest* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The project was inspired by the current surplus of contraltos in the opera world and the practical dilemma of finding employment for them, prompting producers to look to a period when castrati were not yet out of fashion. The still-expanding *Enchanted Island* also displays a Baroque mindset towards its own text, constantly re-ornamenting itself to fit the conditions of a given performance. In these cases, of course, we are not dealing with "unfinishable novels" but rather with the sort of texts that Eco (in *The Open Work*) describes as "*works in movement*" (see Chapter Seven).

behavior, despite the fact this obligation to one other person can itself lead to a neglect of public duties (as Ulrich eventually recognizes in relation to Agathe: “‘No!’ Ulrich thought. ‘Wanting to live for another person is no more than egoism going bankrupt and then opening a new shop next door, with a partner!’”) (951).²²

This, in fact, is the dilemma that drives *Ins tausendjähriges Reich*: whether Ulrich and Agathe can and/or should escape from reality into a lover’s utopia that would constitute something akin to a permanent experience of the Other Condition. This central dilemma of Volume II recalls Aristophanes’ speech on love in Plato’s *Symposium* (385-80 BC) where, after curing his hiccups by shoving a feather up his nostril, the old comedian claims that all individuals were once two people but that Zeus long ago split everyone in half with the result that “when a person meets the half that is his own, whatever his [sexual] orientation [...], then something wonderful happens: the two are struck from their senses by love, by a sense of belonging to one another, and by desire, and they don’t want to be separated from one another, not even for a moment” (Plato 475). Importantly, “mere sex” for Aristophanes is not the goal of love so much as a sort of consolation prize, a poor substitute for the totalizing reunion that Zeus’s surgical intervention has made impossible. Moreover, since “‘Love’ is the name of our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete” (476), Aristophanes’ story implies that it is in fact our irreparable incompleteness as individuals that makes love possible at all. For both Musil and Aristophanes, the

²² “«Nein!» dachte Ulrich. «Für einen anderen leben wollen, ist nichts als das Fallissement des Egoismus, der nebenan ein neues Geschäft mit einem Sozios eröffnet!»” (876).

proper goal of love is not the temporary wholeness afforded by sexual union but rather the process of becoming-in-tandem that “coming together” can, in the best of cases, serve as overture to, the sort of dialogic development granted only to those “who finish out their lives together and still cannot say what it is they want from each other” (475).

In *MoE*, of course, matters are complicated still further by the threat of incest, which hints at more disastrous consequences than simple heartbreak or hedonism. *MoE* raises the question: what should one do when one’s missing half turns out to be one’s sibling? For all the wrinkles it adds, however, the fact of incest does not fundamentally alter the Aristophanic dilemma at the heart of *Ins tausendjahriges Reich*, and if anything only enhances its Aristophanic overtones. On the one hand, one cannot even begin to become oneself until one finds one’s Other; on the other hand, one cannot continue to become oneself unless one preserves one’s Other **as** Other, as an unassimilable singularity who completes Me by remaining You, just beyond my own ontological horizon (except perhaps for occasional *Vereinigungen*).

6.3 The *Buch* Breaks... Reading *MoE*’s Changing Relationship to Its Own End

Like all published books, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* is complete. Yet *MoE*’s “completion” is more a de facto textual attribute than a quality that it possesses as a literary work. Indeed, *MoE*’s relation to its completion parallels Ulrich’s relation to his qualities: Ulrich acknowledges that he has qualities, but he does not see them as essentially his or as essential to him: he does not “own” them,

either in the sense of legal possession or in the sense of taking public responsibility for them.²³ As with Bouvard and Pécuchet, it is only the introduction of Agathe (who, in stark contrast to Ulrich, is inclined to do things as well as to think about them) that opens up new possibilities for both the novel and its protagonist. For Ulrich, the discovery of his Other allows him to begin to chart the boundaries of his own character(lessness), and to begin becoming in tandem with Agathe. One could make a similar claim, I believe, for Volume I (*Seinesgleichen Geschichte*) as a whole, which is both bolstered and undermined by its relative finishedness just as Volume II (*Instausendsjahriges Reich*) is both undermined and bolstered by its relative fragmentariness. Ulrich's clear eschatology in *Seinesgleichen Geschichte*—become a writer or commit suicide—is unworked by the arrival of Agathe, and Volume I's clear narrative trajectory—it ends six months into Ulrich's year off, and thus presumably six months away from the War we are told the Parallel Campaign will bring about—is unworked by the obsessive exploration of a single relationship to which the fragmentary Volume II is primarily devoted, leading finally to an unraveling of “the Galley Chapters” (39-58) into fragmentary alternate versions in Volume III (*Aus dem Nachlaß*), chapters of uncertain status that not only continue forward to Chapter 63 but also rewrite earlier chapters all the way back to Chapter 47.²⁴

²³ “Eigenschaften“ could literally be translated as “own-nesses” or “own-hoods.” For a fascinating comparison of Musil's *Eigenschaften* with Heidegger's *Eigentlichkeit*, see Mark Freed's *Robert Musil and the NonModern* (69-81).

²⁴ For a similar but differently focused reading of the effect of the second and third volumes on the novel as a whole, see Bunia's *Faltungen* (256-70), which illustrates at length how the third volume works to undo even the fragmentary closure constitutive of the form of the fragment as such.

In *Seinesgleichen Geschichte*, Ulrich's lack of qualities results in Hamlet-like inaction, as in Chapter 116 (arguably the climax of Volume I) when he is unable to commit to his own "preposterous" (*unsinnigen*) proposal to the Parallel Campaign's inner council (Leinsdorf, Diotima, Arnheim, Tuzzi, and Stumm):

there is only one real task for the Parallel Campaign: to make a start at taking stock of our general cultural situation. We must act more or less as if we expected the day of Judgment to dawn in 1918, when the old spiritual books will be closed and a higher accounting set up. I suggest that you found, in His Majesty's name, a World Secretariat for Precision and Soul. Without that, all our other tasks cannot be solved, or else they are illusory tasks. (651)²⁵

One could read "illusory tasks" (*Scheinaufgaben*) here as a reference to totalizing projects like Mallarmé's *Livre*: instead of seeking to "transcend *hasard*," Ulrich claims, we must establish new values capable of helping us orient ourselves amidst the baffling complexity of the modern world. Without this, totalizing projects must remain mere "Scheinaufgaben," doomed to produce (at best) tragic allegories of their own failure.

To the surprise of all, Count Leinsdorf (by now somewhat desperate for a course of action) supports Ulrich's proposal:

'I take his point quite well,' he said. 'People used to grow naturally into the conditions of their lives as they found them, and it was a sound way of coming into their own; but nowadays, with everything being shaken up as it is, everything uprooted from its natural soil, we will have to replace the traditional handicrafts system, even in the raising of souls, as it were, by the intelligence of the factory.' It was one of those remarkable statements his

²⁵ "es gibt nur eine einzige Aufgabe für die Parallelaktion: den Anfang einer geistigen Generalinventur zu bilden! Wir müssen ungefähr das tun, was notwendig wäre, wenn ins Jahr 1918 der Jüngste Tag fiel, der alte Geist abgeschlossen werden und ein höherer beginnen sollte. Gründen Sie in Namen Seiner Majestät ein Erdensekretariat der Genauigkeit und Seele; alle anderen Aufgaben sind vorher unlösbar oder nur Scheinaufgaben!" (597).

Grace occasionally voiced, to his own and everyone else's surprise, all the more so as he had merely been staring at Ulrich with a dumbfounded expression the whole time before he began to speak" (652)²⁶

What is more, the Count's initial enthusiasm is immediately galvanized by the objections of Arnheim: "Oh, would you say so?" Count Leinsdorf said curtly, full of fighting spirit" (652).²⁷ At this moment, the Austro-Hungarian Empire's doors of power are more-or-less wide open to Ulrich, who here has a chance to secure the full backing of "Capital and Culture" (*Besitz und Bildung*) for his "World Secretariat for Precision and Soul." In the end, however, Ulrich squanders Leinsdorf's sympathy towards him and antipathy towards Arnheim by being unable to answer Arnheim's crushing question: "Are you really of the opinion that it is possible to live in accordance to some analogy? If so, what would you do if his Grace were to give you a free hand? Do tell me, I beg you!" (653).²⁸

Yet it is doubtful that Ulrich's failure here "to put the Prussian in his place" (*den «Preußen» abblitzen zu lassen*) (654; 600) would stem from any essential inability to articulate his project—throughout the novel, Ulrich demonstrates a

²⁶ "«Ich versteh den Herrn Doktor schon ganz gut» meinte er. «Früher sind die Menschen in die Verhältnisse, die sie vorgefunden haben, hineingewachsen, und das war eine verlässliche Art, in der sie zu sich gekommen sind; aber heute, bei der Durcheinanderschüttelung, wo alles von Grund und Boden gelöst wird, müßte man schon sozusagen auch bei der Erzeugung der Seele die Überlieferung des Handwerks durch die Intelligenz der Fabrik ersetzen.» Es war dies eine jener bemerkenswerten Antworten, die dem hohen Herrn zu-weilen überraschend unterliefen; denn er hatte während der ganzen Zeit, ehe er das sagte, Ulrich nur mit einem fassungslosen Ausdruck angestarrt" (597).

²⁷ "«Aber warum nicht gar!» meinte Graf Leinsdorf kurz und kampflustig" (598).

²⁸ "Sind Sie wirklich der Meinung, daß man bloß nach <Gesetzen der Analogie> leben könne? Was würden Sie also tun, wenn Ihnen nun Seine Erlaucht völlig freie Hand ließe?! Sagen Sie es doch, ich bitte Sie eindringlich darum!" (598).

remarkable ability to argue “unsinnigen” positions with coherence and flair. Instead, precisely at this his “moment of truth” (*Entscheidung*) (654; 600) Ulrich realizes that he is essentially divided between two “trees of life” (*Bäume des Lebens*), trees he idiosyncratically associates with “violence and love” (*Gewalt und Liebe*) (645; 591). Just as importantly, Ulrich also realizes here that he is unwilling to fully commit himself to the first tree, even if this means abandoning his passionate ambition “to influence reality” (*auf die Wirklichkeit einwirken*) (646; 592). Towards the end of this chapter we shall analyze Ulrich’s choice of love over violence at this moment in the novel in greater detail. For now, the important thing to note is that Ulrich’s rejection of his chance for secular power and subsequent turn towards love is not yet a renunciation of totality in the name of completion, since Ulrich’s second quest (his attempt at a sibling-lovers utopia with Agathe) will equally represent a failed assay at totality.²⁹

Kermode is thus not wrong when he claims that Musil “fails, but the point is he had to try,” though I believe this is still more true of Ulrich than Musil. Yet the

²⁹ Cf. McBride: “The novel’s first volume ends with Ulrich’s realization that his attempts at seizing the intuited ethical horizon failed because they were rooted in only one side of experience, the aggressive, dynamic realm of “violence” that makes up ordinary life. The novel’s second book unfolds as an inquiry into the juxtaposed, elusive realm of “love,” the domain to which meaning seems to have fled in modernity. In the loving relation to his sister Agathe, Ulrich sees the possibility of reconciling the two trees of life by plunging ordinary experience into the Other Condition. Yet the siblings attempt at permanently anchoring their lives in the Other Condition gives rise to an impossibility, which is analogous to that produced by Ulrich’s failed literary utopia—namely, the demand that ordinary experience be erased. The collapse of the siblings’ adventure appears inevitable and exemplifies the unsustainability of any call to live a thoroughly moral life in the modern period” (150).

real issue is **why** Musil had to try, for Musil’s “have to” in *MoE* is not the tragic “have to” of the decadent modernist (Mallarmé, Pessoa, Brod), but rather the methodological “have to” of the essayistic nonmodernist. In a fragment from the *Nachlaß* (not included in the English translation), Musil speaks of three *Utopies*—for him this word is equivalent to “literary experiment”—that the novel explores: “A major theme for the whole is thus: staging a confrontation between the man of possibility and reality. This produces 3 Utopias: The Utopia of Inductive Understanding, the Utopia of the other (non-ratioed, motivated etc) life in love [...] The Utopia of the pure Other Condition” (my translation).³⁰ While “The Utopia of the pure Other Condition” and “the Utopia of life in love” seem to be aligned with *MoE*’s first and second Volumes, respectively, the third utopia (“The Utopia of Inductive Understanding”) remains something of a mystery, though Patrizia McBride has offered some compelling speculations on its possible characteristics:

While it does not dismiss the reality of ethical experience, this inductive attitude recognizes that the ethical cannot provide a unitary, intelligible horizon of meaning for ordinary life. It calls for relinquishing the dream of a thoroughly moral, reconciled life, which could transcend the messiness and ambivalence of modern experience. Instead it pleads for accepting as irreversible a modern condition defined by the dividedness of individual consciousness and the decenteredness of modern societies. What is more, it calls for acknowledging and seizing the emancipatory potential inherent in the modern condition thus defined. In the final analysis, Musil’s ethos is carried by the realization that in modernity the question of the ‘good life’—that is, of the coordinates for organizing and steering collective existence—cannot be

³⁰ “Ein Hauptthema fürs Ganze ist also: Auseinandersetzung des Möglichkeitsmenschen mit der Wirklichkeit. Sie ergibt 3 Utopien: Die Utopie der induktiven Gesinnung. Die Utopie des anderen (nicht ratioïden, motivierten usw) Lebens in Liebe [...] Die Utopie des reinen aZ [andere Zustand]” (1881-82). Note that I am reversing the numerical order of the utopias given here and will refer to “Die Utopie der induktive Gesinnung” as *MoE*’s third utopia.

addressed from a purely *ethical* standpoint, but that it must be mingled with a host of *practical, pragmatic* considerations. What guides the inductive ethos is not the purity of a recognizable moral imperative but the hybrid reality of conflicting claims and perspectives of different spheres of the modern world. (McBride 168)

In McBride's reading, staging the failures of Ulrich's first two utopias is vital to Musil's espousal of his inductive ethos in the novel. Yet while McBride, in my opinion quite rightly, emphasizes the potential of literature as an aesthetic space in which sticky ethical situations can be explored with Kantian disinterestedness, it is worth pointing out that Musil himself elsewhere describes the Utopia of Inductive Understanding as "der ärgste" (worst, most annoying, most troubling) Utopia of all, at least from a "literarisch [...] Standpunkt" (1885). This seems to be similar to the standpoint I read as provoking Kafka's abandonment of *Das Schloß* in Chapter Four: the impossibility of simultaneously representing "The True Way" and "raising the world into the pure, the true, the immutable." For Musil's *Möglichkeitsmenschen*, however, "the immutable" (*Unveränderliche*) is not a goal to be reached so much as an end to be kept at bay. Musil thus attempts to overcome this literary dilemma in *MoE* by dramatizing the failure of Ulrich's first two, more aesthetically attractive, utopias.

Freed follows McBride in reading Volumes I and II as experimentally productive failures, and presumes that the Utopia of Inductive Understanding would have been expounded in an unrealized third volume whose form, content, and discursive strategies we can only imagine (Freed 131-33). Without denying the general validity of this reading, this division of the novel also seems to me at times to

be a little neat: the Platonic love story of Diotima and Arnheim is a major part of *Seinesgleichen Geschichte*, after all, just as the Parallel Campaign continues to play an important role in *Ins tausendjähriges Reich*.³¹ What is more, the passage that Freed reads as signaling Ulrich's realization of the impracticality of life in the Other Condition (*MoE* 950) occurs only about halfway into *Ins tausendjähriges Reich*.

For these reasons, I feel it is important to stress the impossibility of fully “resolving” or even “moving on” from these issues within the narrative structure of the novel. While the failures of Ulrich's attempts at totalization are indeed necessary to the novel's overall affirmation of “induktive Gesinnung,” this third utopia still must not be understood as an unrealized synthesis of the first two—both of which already aimed at synthesis, with disastrous results—but rather as an exploration of Utopia's remaining possibilities once the drive towards *Aufhebung* has been renounced. Nor do the successive negations of Ulrich's first two utopias leave a third utopia alone on the stage: once the third step of the dialectic has been jettisoned, what remains is an endless dialogue between Ulrich's two trees of life, trees that have now been more precisely and soulfully defined through Ulrich's failure to synthesize them. Like Baruch de Spinoza's *Ethics* (1677), which do not pass on a totalizing system for understanding the world but rather attempt to intuit the reader into a complete system for dealing with the world, *MoE* is intended above all as a guide for coping with reality. Ulrich's recognition of the inevitable dangers of actually succeeding in either of his first two quests thus marks the condition of possibility for a third, more prosaic

³¹ The poet Feuermahl, for instance, whom we are told in the *Nachlaß* will push the Parallel Campaign towards war, is not introduced until Volume II.

quest, in which “reality” and “the Other Condition” must negotiate the best way of sharing the stage. Deprived of a Benjaminian *Finis* that would draw a definitive border around its fictional world, fiction and reality are left to coexist in the novel like Ulrich and Agathe—“Undivided and Not United” (*Ungetrennten und Nichtvereinten*).

For this reason, we must not confuse Ulrich’s quests with those of *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* itself, which can be said to succeed precisely where Ulrich fails. For Musil’s unfinishable novel is his “World Secretariat for Precision and Soul.” With the triumph of anticipatory plagiarism described in my last chapter, what proves impracticable for Ulrich in the “reality” of the novel has proven far more practicable for Musil in the realm of fiction. This is particularly important because Musil believed that precisely this impracticality—the methodological cruelty and inevitable violence that accompanies real life experimentation, the potential for Nietzsche’s call for a Revaluation of All Values to be answered by Hitler’s Final Solution—is what opens up literature’s most important social function and provides the *Dichter* with a non-illusory task (*Aufgabe*) worthy of abandoning *Gesamtkunstwerks* for.

Thus, although it seems clear that Musil did intend to write a third volume in which his “Utopia of Inductive Understanding” would have been specifically discussed, possibly against the backdrop of the War, I nonetheless believe that the Utopia of Inductive Understanding already exists as the entire novel, and more specifically in its continual dialogic mediation between “Precision and Soul”: between the denotative precision afforded by Realism as a literary laboratory for the staging of thought experiments, and the aesthetic power of prose narrative to excite

non-ratioed experiences of love, occasionally climaxing in the *principium individuationis* shattering experience of the Other Condition that Musil believed to be the soul of ethical sensibility. This “ärgste” Utopia cannot be navigated by prescriptions, since it exists precisely in one’s continual negotiations between the desire to lead a good life (the goal of any true philosopher), the ever-shifting demands of reality (the necessity of instrumental reason), and our all-too-human need for occasional flights into “der andere Zustand.”

Late in Musil’s life, his notes begin to show planning for what would happen after the war broke out (Ulrich was to re-enter military service, leading to a conflict and perhaps even a dramatic break with Agathe), whereas it is previously taken for granted (at least from the point when “Anders” became “Ulrich”) that the novel would end with the outbreak of war. This raises the question of exactly when, where, and how *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* became unfinishable: was it unfinishable from its inception? Or did it become unfinishable through the process of composition? One might suggest that the outbreak of War in 1939 not only rendered any precautionary, “anti-war” agenda irrelevant, but also considerably raised the stakes for Musil’s Utopia of Inductive Sensibility by providing it with a far more powerful backdrop for a potential third volume. At the same time, like the Good Soldier Svejk’s “failure” to reach the front, Musil’s inability to finish *MoE*’s second volume (or even to form a concrete plan for realizing its third) need not be seen as entirely negative. For one thing, Musil’s refusal to finish his novel actually made its posthumous third volume possible, in some sense achieving the Essayistic mode of

incompletion that Musil was unable to realize during his lifetime. On the one hand, there is Musil's abandonment of his original plan for an "open architecture" for his novel... a compromise in the interests of completion. On the other hand, there is Musil's conflict with his editors leading to his withdrawal of the twenty "Galley chapters" (meant to continue *Ins tausendjahriges Reich* but not to finish it) from the press in 1938, thereby preserving the unfinishedness of his work and with it the radical unfinalizability of his novel.

In the end, however, questions of if or when the novel became unfinishable are far less important than accounting for *MoE* as it exists today. Here, perhaps the most important question is: how do different organizations of the *Nachlaß* effect the structure, meaning, and overarching orientation of the novel as a whole? Questions of translation become particularly important here as well, since one of the decisions that any translator of *MoE* must make is just how much of the *Nachlaß* to include. The English edition, for instance, is arguably more entertaining than the German insofar as the latter includes several passages with only minor variations, while the former generally limits itself to a single one. While this can be frustrating for scholars, it does help to make the text more accessible and "finishable" for non-professional readers (and of course the German edition remains waiting in the wings).

Yet in addition to the usual interpretive and editorial quandaries posed by unfinished works, the text of *MoE* seems to confront us with a far more nonmodern dilemma than any raised by Mallarmé's or even Kafka's *Nachlaß*, i.e. the question of which (if any) of the fictional events described in Volume III should be regarded as

“facts” in the world of the novel? Since Musil made a point of explicitly eschewing the purity of a Mallarmean or even Kafkaesque failure—he did publish the first two volumes, after all—one might put a more positive spin on the issue and ask: once one abandons the rhetoric of failure, what new opportunities emerge? In other words: what now?

6.4 The Essayistic Mode of Incompletion

In the title story of Borges’ *El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* (1941), set in 1916 Buenos Aires, a German spy of Chinese ancestry encounters an English scholar who has edited an unfinishable novel written by his ancestor Ts’ui Pên. This novel, also entitled *The Garden of Forking Paths* and proclaimed by both its author and its editor to be at once “un libro y un laberinto,” was discovered upon Ts’ui Pên’s death as a bunch of “manuscritos caóticos” which Ts’ui Pên’s family “wished to consign... to the fire; but the executor of the estate—a Taoist or Buddhist monk—insisted on their publication” (Borges 96).³² The narrator explains to the Englishman that his family has long reviled this monk, since his “publication was senseless. The book is an indeterminate heap of contradictory drafts. I examined it once: in the third chapter the hero dies, in the fourth he is alive” (ibid).³³ The English scholar, however,

³² “quiso adjudicarlos al fuego; pero su albacea—un monje taoísta o budista—insistió en la publicación” (89)

³³ “publicación fue insensate. El libro es un acervo indeciso de borradores contradictorios. Lo he examinado alguna vez: en el tercer capítulo muere el héroe, en el cuatro está vivo” (ibid).

proceeds to tell the story of how he discovered the secret to Ts'ui Pên's mysterious ultimate work, after many years of thought and exegesis:

These conjectures gave me amusement, but none seemed to have the remotest application to the contradictory chapters of Ts'ui Pên. At this point, I was sent from Oxford the manuscript you have just seen. Naturally, my attention was caught by the sentence, 'I leave to various future times, but not to all, my garden of forking paths.' I had no sooner read this, than I understood. *The Garden of Forking Paths* was the chaotic novel itself. The phrase 'to various futures times, but not to all' suggested the image of bifurcating in time, not in space. Rereading the whole work confirmed this theory. In all fiction, when a man is faced with alternatives he chooses one at the expense of the others. In the almost unfathomable Ts'ui Pên, he chooses—simultaneously—all of them. He thus *creates* various futures, various times that start others that will in their turn branch out and bifurcate in other times. (Borges 97-98)³⁴

The strange eponymous novel at the heart of Borges' classic postmodern tale provides a possible example of the essayistic mode of incompleteness that Musil was unable to realize, a narrative technique in which similar but factually different events are allowed to coexist. Yet even forgetting Musil's abandoned plan for a full scale Borgesian novel, the labyrinthine text of *MoE* as it exists today still parallels Ts'ui Pen's text in many ways. The most obvious parallels, of course, are in *Aus dem Nachlaß*, where a number of contradictory events do indeed occur such as the proto-

³⁴ "Esas conjeturas me distrajerón; pero ninguna parecía corresponder, siquiera de un modo remoto, a los contradictorios capítulos de Ts'ui Pên. En esa perplejidad, me remitieron de Oxford el manuscrito que usted ha examinado. Me detuve, como es natural, en la frase: *Dejo a los varios porvenires (no a todos) mi jardín de senderos que se bifurcan*. Casi en el acto comprendí; *el jardín de senderos que se bifurcan* era la novela caótica; la frase *varios porvenires (no a todos)* me sugirió la imagen de la bifurcación en el tiempo, no en el espacio. La relectura general de la obra confirmó esa teoría. En todas las ficciones, cada vez que un hombre se enfrenta con diversas alternativas, opta por una y elimina las otras; el de la casi inextricable Ts'ui Pên, opta—simultáneamente—por todas. *Crea* así, diversos porvenires, diversos tiempos, que también proliferan y se bifurcan" (91).

fascist youth Hans Sepp committing suicide twice, first by throwing himself in front of a train (1611-15; 1673-76) and then by shooting himself (1388; 1682).³⁵

Far more relevant to the overall structure of the novel, however, are the sexual relationships that Ulrich engages in in Volume III. Not only do Ulrich and Agathe give full vent to their erotic urges during an “Italian Voyage”—in the 1933 edition of *Ins tausendjähriges Reich* they maintain an asymptotic relationship to sex, although they do consummate relatively early into the Galley chapters in an uncharacteristically euphemistic passage in Chapter 45 (“Beginn einer Reihe wundersamer Erlebnisse”)—but Ulrich also takes a sexually packed Italian journey with Clarisse, the wife of his childhood friend Walter whose request that Ulrich impregnate her is rejected in *Seinesgleichen Geschichte*’s penultimate chapter. Interestingly, these Ulrich-Clarisse passages from the *Nachlaß* were written in the late 1920s (i.e., before the publication of Volume I) and thus represent one of the paths not taken that the action of partial publication, the *vollenden*-ing of *Seinesgleichen Geschichte*, had forced upon the novel. Moreover, the fact that Musil carried these passages into exile with him suggests that he may have regarded them as more than discarded material; since Musil left a good deal of draft material in his Vienna apartment (later destroyed), I believe we can treat the passages he did take with him

³⁵ As the page numbers cited above show, this ordering actually constitutes a reversal of the German edition, where the report of Hans shooting himself takes place almost three hundred pages before the direct and more in-depth account of Hans’ suicide by train. This ordering can be said to effect the meaning of the text, since Hans specifically decides against shooting himself before throwing himself in front of the train. Placing the train suicide first, as it is in the English edition, therefore carries more of a suggestion that these are parallel incidents, as opposed to presenting the shooting as an earlier draft of the later, “definitive” suicide by train.

as loose ends, meant to be re-attached to the whole but not to be concluded or “wrapped up.”

Of course, we shall never know exactly what the “open architecture” of Musil’s envisioned *Möglichkeitroman* (“novel of possibility”) would have looked like, just as we shall never actually be able to read the unfinishable novel described in Borges’ story. After Musil was forced to publish *Seinesgleichen Geschichte* in 1931, it became somewhat inevitable that *MoE*, like “todas las ficciones,” would thenceforth be required to “opta por una [alternativa] y elimina las otras”... at least until the publication of *Aus dem Nachlaß*. At the same time, Musil seems to have maintained a desire to realize his *Möglichkeitroman* in the unfinished third volume, and the fear that he would be unable to do so seems to have been a motivating factor in his decision to withdraw twenty chapters from the galleys in 1938. Withdrawing these chapters, however, gave the novel’s essayistic third volume a body to which later, successively expanding editions of the *Nachlaß* could be attached, and the alternate versions that exist for some of the Galley Chapters now make it almost impossible to conceive of them as not having an open architecture.

Even the numerous self-referential fragments in Volume III are hardly typical *Nachlaß* documents, particularly since they can be seen to follow in the tradition of *MoE*’s closest generic predecessor, Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* (1867). Like *War and Peace*, in which Leo Tolstoy the essayist takes over after the narrator ends the novel, there are clearly at least two voices in *Aus dem Nachlaß*: the voice of the narrator and the voice of “Robert Musil,” although admittedly these voices are sometimes difficult

to distinguish. As Bunia points out (270), the third volume also casts suspicion on the continuity-cohesion of the narrator by raising questions like: is the narrator who speaks of “Anders” in Volume III the “same” narrator who speaks of Ulrich in the first two volumes? The novel’s third volume thus serves to undermine not only the unity of its narrative voice but also the linearity of its own timeline... going beyond the labyrinthine embedded narratives and epic digressions of texts like *The 1001 Nights* or *Tristram Shandy*—both of which still conform to the single unbroken linear timeline of their storytelling protagonists, however convoluted such lines may end up becoming (cf. Sterne 425-426)—and anticipating the more radical non-linearity that would appear in later novels like David Foster Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996).

Although Musil did undeniably fail to develop the full tale of Ulrich and Agathe’s failed escape from the world into a sibling-lovers utopia, the aborted storylines in the *Nachlaß* of *MoE* do far more than “shed light on the work as a whole” by allowing us to better understand its failure, as de Man (91) says of Mallarmé’s unfinished fragments. Rather, the alternate drafts and alternative storylines in Volume III are precisely what complete *MoE*, and provide the condition of possibility for its third Utopia, enabling a healthy dialogic play between Volumes I and II and a more sustained plunge into what McBride, in a beautiful and haunting phrase, has dubbed “the void of ethics.”

The publications of the labyrinthine *Aus dem Nachlaß* as *MoE*’s third and final volume in 1957, 1978, and 1992 can thus each be read as partial, fragmentary realizations of Musil’s unrealizable *Möglichkeitroman*, which was never itself meant

to be “merely” an aesthetic innovation but was always intimately linked to Musil’s larger literary-philosophical strategy of Essayismus. As it exists today, and provided that the reader take at least some of the events in the *Nachlaß* as “facts,” the third volume of *MoE* can already be shown to offer innumerable illustrations of Ulrich’s “Principle of Insufficient Cause,” which states that, at least on the level of human action: 1) nothing particular that happens has to happen; 2) something else in any case could have happened; and 3) nothing happens for a good (enough) reason.³⁶ Ulrich’s Principle refashions the concept of inevitability itself, banishing it from the personal realm of causal determinism to the sociological realm of statistical determinism. At the same time, events that arrive in more than one way (like Hans Sepp’s suicide) suggest a narratological inevitability that is in some ways made more powerful by the mutability of detail that Volume III allows. This reflects Musil’s view of reality, which found in the idea of “possibility” (*Möglichkeit*) a useful tool for liberating the mind from both the Cyclopean ideal of historical necessity and the preordained path of becoming prescribed by dialectical thought.

Musil’s *Möglichkeitroman* has two goals. First, it is meant to provide cosmology and ontology for the type of human being that Musil wished to summon into existence: *Möglichkeitmenschen*, people of possibility. Considered as a utopic literary project, this first goal reflects the political side of Musil’s project: to use his novel for the creation of a new type of human being who in future times would be better equipped to face reality. In this sense Musil’s *Möglichkeitmensch* takes his

³⁶ For more on Ulrich’s principle of insufficient cause, see Bouveresse’s *L’Homme probable* (97-127).

place alongside Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, Plato's Philosopher King, and Spinoza's adequate knower. Yet this (admittedly unpractical) goal reflects only half the function of Musil's *Möglichkeitroman*. The other goal takes the "utopic" nature of Musil's literary project from another perspective, in which the world of Musil's novel functions like those of Thomas More's *Utopia*, Plato's *Republic & Laws*, and Michel de Montaigne's *moi*.³⁷ Musil, less prescriptive than Plato and More but also more ambitious than Montaigne, uses the utopic space of literature to construct an "open labyrinth" in which whole series of ethical situations can be imagined, played out, and expanded into larger series of parallel consequences. In the German *Aus dem Nachlaß*, this ethical experimentation is reinforced by the fact that Musil in his drafts denotes characters by initials rather than names ("U."=Ulrich, "D."=Diotima, "Ah"=Arnheim, etc.), a trope more suggestive of elements in an algebraic equation than of fully "finalized" literary characters. Here again, the question of what is a "fact" in the world of the novel becomes important, since in this case it determines whether Musil's use of initials can actually be read as a literary trope, or whether it constitutes simply a by-product of the novel's "unfinishedness."

³⁷ Montaigne's *moi* being, like the fictional worlds described above, an object of knowledge that is simultaneously observed and created in the *Essais*, as well as (in a more specifically Musilian vein) an object of intellectual inquiry that is speculated on from a number of different perspectives. For Musil's relation to Montaigne, see (amongst others) Freed: "Unlike Montaigne, Musil had to face the proximal end of the philosophical discourse of Modernity that begins only with Descartes' attempts to close the openings Montaigne made available by Essayism" (Freed 111).

As for the realm of the ethical in Musil, Jacques Bouveresse (though at this point in his book he still uses the term “morality”) provides an excellent account of it in *Robert Musil: L’Homme probable, la moyenne, et l’escargot de l’histoire*:

Musil thinks that the difference that exists between the domain of science and that of morality is that whereas the former is the realm of laws without exceptions, the latter should be considered as the realm of exceptions without laws... In the language of chemistry, one could say that the singular element has a greater valence which determines its possibilities of combination with others, but signifies nothing outside of the diverse combinations in which it appears and, in that of Gestalt psychology, that a thing has multiple aspects whose function can change radically in relation to the ensemble in which it is integrated.³⁸

Interestingly, Bouveresse here is still able to describe Musil’s “unscientific” realm of morality in scientific terms, reflecting his own reading of Musil and Ulrich as “scientists of ethics.” In the nomenclature of this dissertation, one might add that the novel functions as a sort of immoralist’s laboratory, in which Musil stages and Ulrich experiences an unworking of the first principles on which their experiment is based. As in Plato’s *Republic*, where the search for true justice leads to a re-thinking of justice itself—from *diké* to *dikaisoyne*—Ulrich’s youthful search for “the right way to live” leads him from the ratioed realm of the moral (the tree of violence) to the non-ratioed realm of the ethical (the tree of love). Yet whereas in Plato’s case this re-thinking is done deductively from universal principles, principles that must

³⁸ “Musil pense qu’à la différence de ce qui se passe dans le domaine de la science, qui est celui des lois sans exceptions, celui de la morale devrait plutôt être considéré comme le domaine des exceptions sans lois. [...] Dans le langage de chimie, on pourrait dire que l’élément singulier a au plus une valence qui détermine ses possibilités de combinaison avec d’autres, mais ne signifie rien en dehors des combinaisons diverses dans lesquelles il apparaît et, dans celui de la psychologie de la forme, qu’une chose a de multiples aspects qui peuvent changer radicalement en fonction de l’ensemble auquel elle est intégrée” (88-89). My translation.

necessarily become somewhat debased through the very process of representation, for Musil any pure search for “the good life” can only take place in the utopia of literature, in part because in order to attempt to chart all of the ethical possibilities of a given situation, to fully explore “the realm of exceptions without laws,” it would be necessary to make multiple choices, to choose one without eliminating the others, to refuse to betray Walter in one chapter and to “take an Italian Journey” with Clarisse in another.

6.5 Essaying the Possibilities of Thought: Ethics, Aesthetics, the Novel, Sex

The novel is a genre without qualities. This means that **as** a genre, the novel is continually in the process of unworking itself for new generations of consumers.³⁹ This nature of having no essential characteristics other than a material, physical existence is embedded in the history of the term novel itself, which originally meant something akin to “cheap little book” in Italian (*novus* + *vellum* + feminine diminutive = *novella*). Following Maurice Blanchot, one might extend this status of being without qualities to “the space of literature” in general, the lack of qualities inherent in Blanchot’s paradoxical yet uncharacteristically **un**ambiguous definition: “literature, by its very activity, denies the substance of what it represents. That is its law and its truth” (*Work of Fire* 310). This idea of literature as something already other, always beginning anew, continually contesting its own boundaries and power

³⁹ In “Ein Genre ohne Eigenschaften: Musil, Montaigne, Sterne und die essayistische Tradition” (1992), Geoffrey Howes points out that the essay is also a genre without qualities. Howes’ point and my own, fortunately, are far from mutually exclusive.

with the effect that it broadens its boundaries and power, could easily be applied to the novel as well. At the same time, the physicality of the novel, as well as the fact that it really is a genre (in contrast to “literature,” broadly conceived) means that its own particular lack of qualities must be thought differently from the lack of qualities inherent to Blanchot’s “space of literature.”

In *Only A Promise of Happiness: The Place of Beauty in a World of Art* (2007), Alexander Nehamas points to two traditions of the beautiful in Western philosophy. The first, exemplified by Plato, roots the experience of beauty in one human being’s erotic love for another; the second, originating with Kant but exemplified (for Nehamas) by Schopenhauer, identifies beauty with the experience of disinterested pleasure occasioned by the contemplation of works of art or nature. While recognizing the need for moments of Schopenhauerian release (see Diotima’s critique of Ulrich in Chapter 115), and embracing to some extent the role of art as a space for the development of regulating moral ideas that can be reinforced through aesthetic pleasure, Musil believed that literature’s greatest potential lay in its ability to transform readers’ horizon through an experience of the Other Condition similar to what Attridge calls “the literary event.” In everyday existence, the most powerful experience of the Other Condition is tied to the process of falling in love, a process that can lead one to bliss, destruction, or both.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ For an illustration of the dangers of beauty see Zadie Smith’s novel *On Beauty* (2005), an apparent critique of Elaine Scarry’s treatise *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999).

Musil, in his novel and in his essays, could be said to pull off a seemingly impossible reconciliation of Plato and Schopenhauer, since his conception of love as rooted in the Other Condition acknowledges the primacy of physical attraction that Plato sees as the first step towards the beautiful (love of the beautiful boy leads the philosopher to love of the ideal Form of beauty itself), while also following Kant and Schopenhauer in linking aesthetic pleasure to a cessation of self-interest in which “we are for the moment set free from the miserable striving of the will” (Schopenhauer 210). At the same time, Musil rejects the devaluation of sexual attraction that is central both to Plato (for whom it is merely a first step) and to Schopenhauer (for whom erotic desire is perhaps the Will’s most insidious incarnation). This repudiation of the intellectual value of human sexuality, via the positing of a clear separation between a properly philosophical realm of ideas and a “merely physical” realm of the body, is of course an old theme in Western philosophy, nearly as old as misogyny in general. The enduring popularity of this separation points to an enduring phallocentrism rooted in the Western philosophical tradition. Yet in sharp contrast to thinkers who set sexuality and morality in opposition to one another or exclude sexuality from the realm of properly philosophical subjects, Musil’s theory of the Other Condition actually seems to set up erotic attraction as one of the conditions of possibility for ethical behavior.⁴¹

⁴¹ Here one might note an interesting parallel with Montaigne who, in spite of his generally low opinion of sexual intercourse, points in his *Apologie de Raymond Sebond* to the selfless devotion of certain animals towards their mates as evidence of animals possessing human virtues. One could read into this argument the (likely

Moreover, as a novelist dedicated to staging and exploring complicated ethical situations, Musil possesses the craftsman's knowledge that "sexual relations"—in both the broadest and narrowest senses of the phrase—offer one of the most fertile grounds for (re)thinking the realm of the ethical. As an aspect of human experience sexuality would seem to exist in a sort of limbo between "the realm of laws without exceptions" and that of "exceptions without laws"—one might perhaps place it in "the realm of laws with many, many, many exceptions." This has no doubt contributed to the fact that sexuality has long served as a hobgoblin for moralists seeking to schematize all human behavior into clear-cut, pre-packaged instances of right and wrong. Yet it can also (and for more-or-less the same reasons) serve as a conceptual testing-ground for ethicists seeking to show that in most cases the ethical value of an action will depend more on its context than on the action "*in-sich*." Like transgression in general, sexual transgression can in a given instance be ethical, unethical, or both—thus marking it out as a perfect philosophical *terra incognita* for Musil as both a novelist and an immoralist scientist of ethics.

Largely for this reason, I think it is especially important to take seriously the sexual relationships that Ulrich engages in in Volume III, not merely as discarded drafts but as real moments (*in diesem Augenblick*) and "facts" in the fictional world of the text. Perhaps most shocking of all in this respect is Ulrich's violent one-night stand with his cousin Diotima, normally a Platonic ideal of fashionable propriety. In an attempt at *induktive Gesinnung*, we will focus on this passage as representative of (unintentional) suggestion that sexual love can lead to moral virtue not only in the Platonic fashion but on the level of physical *praxis* as well.

numerous other unfinished chapter-fragments. As it begins, an inebriated, broken-hearted and sexually frustrated Diotima has stumbled into Ulrich's study from a costume party, dressed as a Napoleonic Colonel:

It was clear that the suprahuman and suggestive love play with Arnheim, rising physically to no more than a kiss but mentally to a boundless, floating duet of souls (a love play that has lasted many weeks, during which Diotima's quarrel with her husband has kept it pure), had so stirred up Diotima's natural fire that, to put it crudely, *someone ought to be kicking it out from under the kettle to prevent some kind of accident of exploding nerves*. This was what Diotima, consciously or not, wanted from Ulrich. She had sat down on the sofa; her sword lay across her knees, the sulfurous mist of gentle rapture over her eyes, as she said:—*Listen, Ulrich: you're the only person before whom I'm not ashamed. Because you're so bad. Because you're so much worse than I am.* (1440; my italics)⁴²

Ulrich's study here seems to function for Diotima rather like fiction in general functions for Musil: a place to explore messy, transgressive alternatives to the clear-cut moral imperatives imposed by the given social condition. Diotima, perhaps more than any other character in the novel, has been a victim of these imperatives, as her distaste for her sexual duties with her husband (which are made only more distasteful to her by the fact that she does take some pleasure in them) lead her to invest herself entirely in a vague and contentless "realm of the soul." Unhappy in her loveless

⁴² "Es was klar, das übernatürliche andeutende Liebesspiel mit Ah, körperlich höchstens bis zu einem Kuß ansteigend, gedanklich dagegen grenzenlos u. ein schwebendes Duett der Seelen, hatte in seiner wochenlangen, u. zuletzt durch das Zerwürfnis D's. mit ihrem Gatten reinen Dauer, das natürliche Feuer in D. so geschürt, *daß man, respektlos gesagt, es gleichsam mit einer Ruck unter dem Kessel wegreißen sollte, um irgendein Unglück zerberstender Nerven zu verhüten*. Das war es, was D., bewußt oder nicht, von U. verlangte. Sie hatte sich auf ein Sofa gesetzt, ihr Schwert lag über ihren Knien u. über ihren Augen der schweflige Nebel der leichten Entrücktheit, als sie zu U. sagte: — *Hören Sie, U; Sie sind der einzige Mensch, vor dem ich mich nicht schäme. Weil Sie so schlecht sind. Weil Sie so viel schlechter als ich sind - -*" (1619).

marriage, she turns instead towards a sexless love with Arnheim, with the unhappy results described above.

All this serves to make this episode doubly interesting from an ethical point of view: Diotima is clearly in need of sexual release, if only “*to prevent some kind of accident of exploding nerves,*” as her body seems to recognize and her mind has long steadfastly denied. Sex with Ulrich is of course morally transgressive, not only as adultery and (relatively minor) incest, but also as a betrayal of the “purity” of her love for Arnheim. As the narrator points out, however, it is precisely this Platonic “purity” that is the cause of Diotima’s present woes. Ulrich, who has long recognized that Diotima is looking for love in all the wrong places (i.e. everywhere but sex) is thus confronted with a peculiar ethical dilemma: the only way that he can help his cousin and give her what she needs is to do something that according to prevailing mores would be morally reprehensible. And indeed, this is precisely why Diotima has sought him out: “*Because you’re so bad. Because you’re so much worse than I am.*” To “do his duty” as Diotima’s “bad” friend, Ulrich must be actively immoral.

This scene with Diotima stands in stark contrast to an earlier scene in which Ulrich refrains from seducing Gerda, the teenage daughter of Ulrich’s friend Leo Fischel. The clear-cut moral imperative not to seduce Gerda (as evidenced in part by the fact that there are no alternate drafts in which such a seduction takes place), serves to reinforce the greater ethical ambiguity in the scene with Diotima, an ethical ambiguity that is still further enhanced by the disturbing nature of Ulrich’s own attraction to Diotima:

Ulrich was in despair. The circumstances reminded him of the scene with Gerda that had taken place here weeks ago, like this one the result of a preceding overstimulation. But Diotima was no girl overstimulated by forbidden embraces. Her lips were large and open, her body damp and breathing like turned-up garden soil, and under the veil of desire her eyes were like two gates that opened into a darkened corridor. *But Ulrich was not thinking of Gerda at all; he saw Agathe before him, and wanted to scream with jealousy at the sight of this feminine inability to resist any longer, although he felt his own resistance fading from second to second.* (1440; my italics)⁴³

In Ulrich's mind, the contrast with Gerda quickly metamorphoses into a contrast with Agathe, invoking the more blatant specter of incest that overshadows *Ins tausendjahriges Reich*. Yet the ethical dilemma invoked here by the thought of Agathe has less to do with incest than with the sexual double-standard: "*he saw Agathe before him, and wanted to scream with jealousy at the sight of this feminine inability to resist any longer, although he felt his own resistance fading from second to second.*" Ulrich's jealousy over this "feminine inability to resist" is immediately contrasted to his own growing sexual arousal and masculine inability to resist, and the violent thoughts that accompany Ulrich's own arousal highlight even further the phallogocentric double standard long applied to "masculine" vs. "feminine" desire (the honor inherent in penetrating, the dishonor inherent in being penetrated).

⁴³ "U. war verzweifelt. Die Umstände erinnerten ihn an einen Auftritt mit Ge, der sich vor Wochen hier abgespielt hatte, Ergebnis vorangegangener Überreizung wie dieser. Aber D. war kein Mädchen, das von verbotenen Umarmungen überreizt worden ist. Ihre Lippen waren groß u. offen, ihr Körper feucht u atmend wie aufgeworfene Gartenerde, u ihre Augen unter dem Schleier des Verlangens wie zwei in einen dunkeln Gang geöffnete Tore. *Aber U. dachte gar nicht an Ge; er sah Ag. Vor sich u. er hätte schreien mögen vor Eifersucht, im Anblick dieses weiblichen Unvermögens, länger Widerstand zu leisten, obgleich er seinen eigenen Widerstand von Sekunde zu Sekunde schwinden fühlte*" (1619-20).

Ulrich is clearly resistant to sex with his cousin, no doubt in part because he knows this is something a sober Diotima would never do. Nevertheless,

His expectation was already a mirror in which he saw the breaking of these eyes, their growing dull, as only death and love can achieve, the parting in a faint of lips between which the last breath steals away, and he could hardly still expect to feel this person sitting here before him collapsing completely and looking at him as he turned away in decay, like a Capuchin monk descending into the catacombs. Apparently his thoughts were already heading in a direction in which he hoped to find salvation, for with all his strength he was fighting his own collapse. He had clenched his fists and was drilling his eyes, from Diotima's viewpoint, into her face in a horrible way. At this moment she felt nothing but fear and approval of him. Then a distorted thought occurred to Ulrich, or he read it from the distortion of the face into which he was looking. Softly and emphatically he replied:—You have no idea how bad I am. I can't love you; I'd have to be able to beat you to love you! (1440-41)⁴⁴

To “find salvation” and discourage his cousin, Ulrich gives voice to the “distorted thought” (*verzerrter Gedanke*) that is coupled with his own growing arousal: his desire “to beat” her. Yet even before his thoughts turn to violence in this passage, Ulrich also fantasizes about bringing Diotima to climax, the *petite mort* she is soon to experience. This presumption of sexual competence on Ulrich's part seems to be

⁴⁴ “Schon spiegelte ihm seine Erwartung das Brechen dieser Augen vor, ihr Glanzloswerden, wie es nur der Tod u. die Liebe hervorrufen, das ohnmächtige Aufbrechen der Lippen, zwischen denen sich der letzte Atem fortschleicht, u. er konnte es kaum noch erwarten, diesen Menschen, den er da vor sich hatte, ganz zusammenbrechen zu fühlen u. ihm zuzusehen, während er sich ihm Moder wand, wie ein Kapuziner, der in die Schädelgruft hinabsteigt. Wahrscheinlich gingen da seine Gedanken schin in einer Richtung, in der er Rettung erhoffte, den er wehrte sich mit allen Kräften gegen seinen eigenen Zusammenbruch. Er hatte die Fäuste geballt und bohrte seine Augen, von D. aus gesehen, fürchterlich in ihr Gesicht. In diesem Augenblick empfand sie nicht als Angst u. Anerkennung für ihn. Da fiel U. ein verzerrter Gedanke ein oder er las ihn uas der Verzerrung des Gesichtes, in das er blickte. Leise u. bedeutsam erwiderte er: - Sie wissen gar nicht, wie schlecht ich bin. Ich kann Sie nicht lieben; ich müßte Sie schlagen dürfen, um Sie lieben zu können---!” (1620).

shared by both of them, as Diotima's choice of Ulrich seems to be founded not only on his status as a "bad" man who is willing and able to flout societal mores, but as an ethical lover whose own sexual satisfaction is tied to his desire and ability to bring his partner to climax, something that neither Diotima's husband nor her Platonic lover seem to have much interest in.

Ulrich's need "to beat" Diotima speaks less to his standard sexual proclivities (as evidenced elsewhere) than to his intellectual frustration with Diotima and what she represents: her espousal of some vaguely feminine "realm of the soul" as antidote to the cultural crisis European society is undergoing. This overlap of the sexual and the intellectual can be read in two opposing (but not mutually exclusive) ways: on the one hand, their impending bout of rough sex (and Diotima's desire for it) mocks and undermines the "high mindedness" for which Diotima and her Viennese salon are famed. On the other hand, the beauty of Diotima, and Ulrich's inability to circumvent his own arousal points to the irresistible attraction that such high ideals can continue to hold, even for one who is intellectually opposed to them. Moreover, the desire to transgress such ideals serves further to blur the boundaries between sexuality and intellect, since without such high ideals to transgress the potential forms of human sexual pleasure would no doubt be drastically circumscribed.

Diotima gazed stupidly into his eyes. Ulrich hoped to wound her pride, her vanity, her reason; but perhaps it was only his natural feelings of animosity against her which had mounted up in him and to which he was giving expression. He went on:—For months I haven't been able to think of anything but beating you until you howl like a little child! And he suddenly seized her by the shoulders, near the neck. The imbecility of sacrifice in her face grew. Beginnings of wanting to say something still twitched in this face, to save the situation through some kind of detached comment. Beginnings of standing up

twitched in her thighs, but reversed themselves before reaching their goal. Ulrich had seized her saber and half drawn it from its scabbard.—For God’s sake! he felt.—If nothing intervenes I’ll hit her over the head with it until she gives no more signs of her damned life! He did not notice that in the meantime a decisive change had been taking place in the Napoleonic colonel. Diotima sighed heavily as if the entire woman she had been since her twelfth year was escaping from her bosom, and then she leaned over to the side so as to let Ulrich’s desire pour itself over her in whatever way he liked. (1441)⁴⁵

Ulrich’s thoughts here recall the case of Moosbrugger, the notorious sex-murderer whose crimes and legal proceedings are a major subplot of the novel. Like Ulrich in the passage above, Moosbrugger’s misogyny merges with his attraction and incites him to brutal violence against women. Yet whereas for Moosbrugger violence and homicide are a means of resisting “feminine temptations,” for Ulrich and Diotima the thought of murder here seems to function as a form of foreplay. As with the comparison to Gerda, superficially similar situations are revealed to have monumentally different ethical implications.

If her face had not been there, Ulrich would at this moment have laughed out loud. But this face was indescribable the way insanity is, and yet just as infectious. He threw away the saber and gave her, twice, a rough smack.

⁴⁵ “D. blickte ihm blöde in die Augen. U. hoffte ihren Stolz zu verletzen, ihre Eitelkeit, ihre Vernunft; vielleicht waren e saber auch nur die natürlichen, in ihm aufgehäuften Gefühle des Grolls gegen sie, die er aussprach. Er fuhr fort: - Ich denke seit Monaten an nichts anderes, als Sie zu schlagen, bis Sie brüllenwie ein kleines Kind! – In diesem Augenblick hatte er sie aber schon bei den Schultern gepackt, nahe beim Hals. Die Opferblödeheit in ihrem Gesicht nahm zu. Noch zuchten Ansätze darin, etwas zu sagen, die Lage durch eine überlegene Bemerkung zu retten. In ihren Schenkeln zuckten Ansätze, aufzustehen, u. kehrten vor dem Ziel um. U. hatte ihren Pallasch ergriffen u halb aus der Scheide gezogen – Um Gotteswillen! – fühlte er – ich werde, wenn nicht etwas dazwischen tritt, sie damit über den Kopf schlagen, bis sie kein Zeichen ihres verfluchten Lebens mehr von sich gibt! – Er bemerkte nicht, daß in dem Napoleonischen Obersten indessen eine entscheidende Veränderung vor sich ging. D. seufzte schwer auf, als entflöhe die ganze Frau, die sie nach ihrem zwölften Lebensjahr gewesen sei, aus ihrer Brust, u. dann neigte sie sich zur Seite, um U.’s Lust sich über die ihre ergießen zu lassen, wie er mochte” (1620).

Diotima had expected it to be different, but the physical concussion nevertheless had its effect. Something started going the way clocks sometimes start when they are roughly treated, and in the ordinary course that events took from that point on something unusual was also mingled, a scream and rattle of emotions. (1441-42)⁴⁶

The figure and function of Diotima's face jumps out in this passage: from an abstract intellectual perspective, Ulrich is prepared to recognize this situation as absurd. But the "infectious" power of her face speaks both to the inescapability of sexual attraction, and to the contradictory ethical obligations imposed by someone whom Ulrich, on some level, does have genuine affection for. Moral and ethical imperatives can thus be said to stand in stark opposition in this scene, as the same "clockwork" that leads Moosbrugger to murder leads Ulrich and Diotima to successful completion:

Childish words and gestures from long ago mingled with it, and the few hours until morning were filled with a kind of dark, childish, and blissful dream state that freed Diotima from her character and brought her back to the time when one does not yet think about anything and everything is good. When day shone through the panes she was lying on her knees, her clothes were scattered on the floor, her hair had fallen over her face, and her cheeks were full of saliva. She could not recall how she had come to be in this position, and her awakening reason was horrified at her fading ecstasy. There was no sign of Ulrich. (1441-42)⁴⁷

⁴⁶“Wäre ihr Gesicht nicht gewesen, U. hatte in diesem Augenblick aufgelacht. Aber dieses Gesicht war unbeschreiblich wie der Wahnsinn u. ebenso ansteckend. Er warf den Säbel fort u. gab ihr zweimal einen derben Klaps. D. hatte es anders erwartet, aber die physische Erschütterung wirkte trotzdem. Es kam etwas in Gang, wie manchmal Uhren zu gehen beginnen, wenn man sie roh behandelt, u. auch in dem gewöhnlichen Ablauf, den die Begebnisse von da an nahmen, blieb ein Ungewöhnliches gemengt, ein Schrei u. Röcheln des Gefühls.” (1620-21).

⁴⁷“Weit zurückliegende Kinderworte u. –Gebärden mengten sich hinein u. die ablaufenden wenigen Stunden bis zum Morgen waren wie erfüllt von einem dunklen, kindischen u. seligen Traumzustand, der D. von ihrem Charakter befreite u. sie in die Zeit zurückführte, wo man noch nichts überlegt u. alles gut ist. Als der Tag durch die Scheiben schien, lag sie auf den Knien. Ihre Uniform was über den Boden verstreut die Haare waren ihr über das Gesicht gefallen u. die Wangen voll Speichel. Sie konnte sich nicht erinnern, wie sie in diese Stellung gekommen war, u. ihre

Diotima gets the release she yearned for, and even experiences a brief return to her “realm of the soul” in which “one does not yet think about anything and everything is good.” When the sun rises, she finds herself lying naked on the floor with the results of the previous night’s encounter readily apparent. Ulrich being nowhere to be found points to another ethical peculiarity inherent in this situation: whereas getting dressed and out the door before one’s partner awakes is normally something of a *faux pas*, in this case Ulrich’s presence would no doubt serve to greatly enhance the embarrassment and discomfiture that Diotima feels upon awakening. An action that would normally be considered unethical thus again reveals itself to be ethical under certain circumstances, illicit sex having its own etiquette.

In relation to the earlier discussion of love, beauty, and the Other Condition, it might be pointed out that neither partner is in love with the other, and thus that this is loveless sex. Indeed, the sexual encounter is provoked by the fact that neither Ulrich nor Diotima is able to have sex with the person with whom they are actually in love. Nonetheless, it is still an encounter inspired by love, in which two friends get what they need from each other: Diotima recovers her realm of the soul and prevents “some accident of exploding nerves,” and Ulrich finds an outlet for his contempt for the Parallel Campaign and his jealousy over Agathe. Unable to get what they want, both characters are nonetheless able to find what they need in the realm of sexual

erwachende Vernunft entsetzte sich über ihre entweichende Entrücktheit. Von U. war aber nichts zu sehen” (1620-21).

transgression, showing how moral turpitude can in some cases serve an ethical function.

The question now must be asked: what is at stake in treating this passage as fact? When does it take place in the novel? The reference to Agathe clearly places the passage after Volume I, and the reference to Diotima's feud with her husband suggests that it takes place before their reconciliation and her later turn towards a "scientific" espousal of healthy, marital sex. When Ulrich encounters Diotima later, is there a tacit agreement to ignore this earlier encounter? Has Diotima suppressed or blacked out the event? Is it possible that Diotima's sexual fulfillment with Ulrich, after her unhappiness with Arnheim, informs her turn towards sexuality? On the one hand, the pleasure she experienced may have led her to reconsider the importance of sex, to think of her sexual relations with her husband in terms of a happy functionalism rather than a sordid duty. On the other hand, the shame she experiences vis-à-vis her sexual transgression may have informed her commitment to *married* sex, to a *ratioed* normalization of sex. With these possibilities already in mind, we may also ask: how would the implications of Diotima's later turn towards ratioed sex be different if her sexual encounter with Ulrich were not a "fact" in the world of the novel? Notice that allowing for the possibility that this event "really took place" means that we can begin to read the novel in ways "se bifurcan."

One may also perhaps note the greater negativity of Ulrich in this passage than in the published volumes of the book. This is typical of much of the *Nachlaß*, in which "Ulrich appears crueler, more morally indolent, as his successive failures are

recorded. (Musil should not be identified with Ulrich; as is made quite clear here, in his role as narrator Musil is usually critical of Ulrich)” (Pike xiii). This illustrates how the process of choosing “the best of all possible texts” for publication, as Musil was forced to do in order to publish his first two volumes, almost inevitably leads to a more sympathetic hero. At the same time, however, this more sympathetic portrayal of Ulrich in the *vollendet* volumes could also be said to mask some of the more subtle philosophical critiques Musil appears to be making in the novel, not least his Nietzschean exploration of the connections between curiosity, experimentation, and cruelty.

6.6 Writing Fiction In the Margins of Philosophy

According to Jacques Derrida, the question “Where are the margins of philosophy?” is one that Western philosophy has thus far been incapable of answering, since philosophy’s commitment to its own self-placement atop the hierarchy of disciplines means that it is methodologically committed to subordinating and/or incorporating any discourse or field of knowledge that it perceives as being outside itself (“philosophy of”). In his essay collection *Marges – de la philosophie* (1972), Derrida argues that this commitment has historically rendered philosophy immune to any rigorous questioning of its own methodological assumptions, and proposes “en marge” as both a guiding concept for the deconstructive reading of specific texts, and a potential discursive space in which it might be possible “to displace philosophy’s alignment of its own types. To write otherwise. To delimit the

space of a closure no longer analogous to what philosophy can represent for itself under this name, according to a straight or circular line enclosing a homogenous space” (xxiv). Each of the essays in his collection, Derrida claims:

Ask the question of the margin. Gnawing away at the border which would make this question into a particular case, they are to blur the line which separates a text from its controlled margin. They interrogate philosophy beyond its meaning, treating it not only as a discourse but as a determined text inscribed in a general text, enclosed in the representation of its own margin. Which compels us not only to reckon with the entire logic of the margin, but also to take on an entirely other reckoning: which is doubtless to recall that beyond the philosophical text there is not a blank, virgin, empty margin, but another text, a weave of differences of forces without any present center of reference (everything—“history,” “politics,” “economics,” “sexuality,” etc.—said not to be written in books[...]); and also to recall that the *written* text of philosophy (this time in books) overflows and cracks its meaning. [...]

Overflows and cracks: that is, on the one hand compels us to count in its margin more and less than one believes is said or read, an unfolding due to the structure of the mark (which is the same word as *marche*, as limit, and as *margin*); and on the other hand, luxates the very body of statements in the pretensions to universal rigidity or regulated polysemia. A lock opened to a double understanding no longer forming a single system. (xxiii-xxv)

The questioning of the margin, as Derrida describes it here, seems to resemble the condition of possibility for Musil’s Utopia of Inductive Understanding, which could arguably be described as “a double understanding [i.e., ratioed and non-ratioed] no longer forming a single system.” Like the novel genre in general and *MoE* in particular, Derridean deconstruction marks an unfinishable project whose commitment to questioning borders always already prevents it from definitively delimiting its own. Yet in each case this unfinishability bears a positive aspect: like Musil, Derrida was dedicated not only to exploring the ethical void undermining the Western episteme, but also to valorizing this void—“*the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play*”—or (at the very least) to exposing it

as a symptom of human being's desire for full presence, rather than the result of the historically specific demise of some great moral certainty.

Elsewhere in "Tympanum," the volume's introductory essay, Derrida describes the two primary strategies of subordination and incorporation that shape the Western philosophical tradition:

in its mastery and its discourse on mastery (for mastery is a signification that we still owe to it), philosophical power always seems to combine *two types*.

On the one hand, a *hierarchy*: the particular sciences and regional ontologies are subordinated to general ontology, and then to fundamental ontology. [...]

On the other hand, an *envelopment*: the whole is implied, in the speculative mode of reflection and expression, in each part. [...]

These two kinds of appropriating mastery, hierarchy and development, communicate with each other according to complicities we shall define. If one of the two types is more powerful here (Aristotle, Descartes, Kant, Husserl, Heidegger) or there (Spinoza, Leibniz, Hegel), they both follow the movement of the same wheel, whether it is a question, finally, of Heidegger's hermeneutical circle or of Hegel's ontotheological circle. (xix-xx)

Derrida's martial rhetoric here (mastery/power/hierarchy/envelopment) points to an essential link between philosophical reason and violence, a link Musil devotes much of *MoE* to exploring. Soon after Musil's death, this link would be more fully articulated in the theory of "instrumental reason" expounded by Adorno and Horkheimer in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Like these Frankfurt school thinkers, Musil regarded the violence of "instrumentalization" as inherent to the operation of *Aufklärung* itself, rather than a "subversive foreign element" (to use Count Leinsdorf's idiom) that has infiltrated and perverted reason's properly altruistic being. For Musil, however, the violence inherent to rationality is not an essential

objection to it, but rather a cruel fact of human existence (the desire to impose order) that must be acknowledged.

This recognition of the link between reason and violence, between imposing intellectual order on ideas through force of logic (or state ideological apparatuses) and imposing physical order on people through force of arms, is the philosophical position that most clearly aligns Musil with Derrida's "marginal" goals. In Musil's case, *MoE* also explores the inadvertent emotional violence that a marginal, essayistic existence can lead to. This, in fact, is precisely the nature of the thought that occurs to Ulrich during "his moment of truth" before the Parallel Council:

Again he had the impression, without being able to account for it, that his moment of truth was at hand. *Suddenly Gerda Fischel came to mind; there was a dangerous possibility of her coming to see him, to continue their last conversation. He realized that even as he had only been toying with her, they had already reached the limit of what words could do, and there was only one last step: he would have to fall in with the girl's unexpressed longings, ungird his intellectual loins, and breach her "inner ramparts."* This was crazy, he would never have gone this far with Gerda had he not felt safe with her on this point. He was feeling a strangely sober, irritated exaltation, when he caught sight of Arnheim's angry face and heard himself being accused of having no respect for reality, followed by the words 'Forgive me for saying so, but such a crass Either/Or as yours is really too juvenile,' but he had lost the slightest inclination to answer any of it. He glanced at his watch and, with a smile of appeasement, said it had grown much too late for going on with the subject. (654; my italics)⁴⁸

⁴⁸Und wieder hatte er den nicht recht begründeten Eindruck, ein Entscheidung sei nahe. *Er dachte in diesem Augenblick an Gerda Fischel und erkannte die Gefahr, daß sie zu ihm kommen und das letzte Gespräch fortsetzen werde. Es wurde ihm plötzlich klar, daß sie, wenn er auch nur damit gespielt hatte, schon bis an die äußerste Grenze der Worte gekommen seien, und von da weiter gab es nur noch einen Schritt: auf die schwebenden Wünsche des Mädchens liebevoll einzugehen, sich geistig zu entgürten, die «zweite Umwallung» zu übersteigen.* Aber das war verrückt, und er war überzeugt, daß es ihm immer unmöglich sein werde, mit Gerda so weit zu gehen, und daß er sich überhaupt nur deshalb mit ihr eingeladen habe, weil er bei ihr sicher war. Er befand sich in einem eigentümlichen Zustand nüchterner, gereizter Gehobenheit,

Ulrich's thought of Gerda Fischel "in this moment" (*in diesem Augenblick*) at first strikes the reader as a non sequitur, but read more closely this thought can itself be seen to mark Ulrich's "decision" (*Entscheidung*) or "moment of truth." Importantly, this would mean that perhaps the most important choice Ulrich makes in the novel does not result from a conscious calculation but rather from a spontaneous thought erupting from seemingly out of the blue; "his moment of truth was at hand" (*Entscheidung sei nahe*) is immediately followed by "He suddenly thought" (*Er dachte in diesem Augenblick*), yet this immediacy points not to the causal progression of logical decision making (characteristic of the tree of violence), but rather to an eruption of the tree of love, an eruption that takes the form of Ulrich acknowledging the dangerous complications of his relationship to another person (Gerda Fischel) and the ethical responsibilities that might arise from it. The period after "nahe" could thus be said to mark the end of Ulrich's first quest, and "Er dachte" to initiate the introduction into his second.

Close reading can also highlight specters of violence: the sexual double-entendres in "ungird his intellectual loins, and breach her 'inner ramparts'" (*sich geistig zu entgürten, die «zweite Umwallung» zu übersteigen*) point to the classical link between penetration and pedagogy—Ulrich had been tutoring Gerda when the flirtation began—and "zweite Umwallung" mixes sexual, pedagogical, and rhetorical

sah darin Arnheims erregtes Gesicht, faßte auf, wie ihm dieser noch vorwarf, daß er keine «Wirklichkeitgesinnung» habe und daß – «verzeihen Sie, solche krasse Entweder-Oder allzu jugendlich» – seien, hatte aber völlig das Bedürfnis, darauf zu antworten, verloren. Er sah nach seiner Uhr, lächelte beschwichtigend und bemerkte, daß es sehr spät geworden sei und zu spät, um zu erwidern" (599-600).

connotations with its military denotation. Particularly in the context of 1913, one can also read military as well as sexual overtones into “*He realized that even as he had only been toying with her, they had already reached the limit of what words could do, and there was only one last step.*” Just as a tutor’s playful flirtation can lead to a choice between seduction and rejection, both potentially hurtful to the pupil, so any “successful” attempt by an “Erdensekretariat” to change the moral status quo would inevitably necessitate the violent suppression of forces committed to preserving it. Presented with an opportunity “to influence reality” (*auf Wirklichkeit einwirken*) by putting the resources of the Hapsburg Monarchy behind an attempt to apply “die Intelligenz der Fabrik” to “der Erzeugung der Seele,” it becomes suddenly clear (*plotzlich klar*) to Ulrich that an essayistic approach to life can still leave one morally compromised; and if this is true even in relation to a single, “harmless” person, how much more true for the “Erdensekretariat” Ulrich proposes to form? Whatever form it might have taken, the goal of Ulrich’s *Erdensekretariat* would clearly have been to finish Nietzsche’s genuinely unfinished work, *The Revaluation of All Values*: a task whose real world implementation would undoubtedly require violence on a massive scale.⁴⁹

In a novel (i.e., *en marge*) such a task becomes more practical. But are the margins of the novelist the same margins that Derrida was writing/attempting to write in? Are the margins in which Musil operates analogous to the margins inhabited by

⁴⁹ *Der Antichrist* (1888), the second to last book Nietzsche wrote, was meant to be the first volume in a four volume *Revaluation of All Values*, though Nehamas suggests the four books Nietzsche wrote in 1888 were his *Revaluation: Der Antichrist, Gotzendammerung, Der Fall Wagner, and Ecce Homo*.

other philosophically minded novelists, from Plato (whom Nietzsche dubs the first novelist), to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (whom Bakhtin points to as an exemplar of the novel's "First Stylistic Line") to Margaret Atwood (who like Musil has a strong scientific background, and refers to *The Handmaid's Tale* and her current "MaddAdam Trilogy" as "speculative fiction")? Ironically, there are times when fiction seems far better equipped to deal with facts than empirical observation does, a fact Albert Einstein was well aware of when he composed his "*Annus Mirabilis*" essays in 1905 (the year before Musil published *Young Törless*). Like Musil, Einstein was an intense admirer but ultimate critic of Ernst Mach. In coming to their conclusions, his 1905 papers do not rely on empirical observation where this would be patently impossible, but instead make use of "Thought-experiments" (*Gedankenexperiments*) to play out possible scenarios that could never be created under strict laboratory conditions. In particular, Einstein's paper "Zur Elektrodynamik bewegter Körper"—in which he first develops the theory of special relativity—relies largely on what could be called "speculative fiction" in reaching its conclusions.

Considered as a philosopher, Musil's primary concern was the relation of the emotions to the intellect, including what today falls under the heading of affect studies. This is also where the influence of Ernst Mach can be seen most clearly in Musil's work, since Musil wanted to make a functionalist analysis of human emotions analogous to Mach's functionalist analysis of human sensations. Such issues were especially pertinent to Musil because he viewed the geopolitical crises of his lifetime

as being largely the result of societal failures to be passionate and dispassionate about the right things (above all the War). In the scene above, for instance, Arnheim, the practical man of action whose “Wirklichkeitsinn” (“sense of reality”) is more-or-less unmatched in the novel, is only able to continue **in** his role as man of action because he successfully ignores his emotional responsibilities to those around him.⁵⁰ During this confrontation, Diotima is also struck by a (to her) seemingly random thought about an ongoing court case in which a wife has been sentenced to death for encouraging her lover to murder her impotent husband. Similarly, we learn that her husband Tuzzi, in order to stifle his own jealousy, has convinced himself that Arnheim is an agent of the Czar and thus that Arnheim’s interest in the Parallel Campaign stems from Russian geopolitical interests rather than his love for Tuzzi’s wife. Ironically, by concocting a story that allows him to preserve the time that “suspecting his wife” would have demanded from his professional duties, Tuzzi in fact fails in his duty as a professional diplomat by being taken in by such a shoddily clad rumor, thereby missing Arnheim’s real geopolitical aims (the Galician oil fields).

Yet the most fertile and productive use that Musil makes of his novel’s place in the margins is in his development of a special brand of irony, a word that in *MoE* speaks simultaneously to a signature style, an all-pervasive trope, and a philosophy of

⁵⁰ The most blatant example of this is Soliman, the black adolescent whom Arnheim had originally adopted as a ward but subsequently turned into a servant, and whose resentment of this fact Arnheim does not seem to have the slightest awareness of.

life.⁵¹ Musil's is a dynamic, polyphonic irony—it does not lead the reader to Truth via the negation of error, like Plato's Socratic irony, but instead shuttles one back and forth between the realms of ratioed and non-ratioed thought, between the distancing laughter that allows us to objectify people and reflect on terrible things, and the compassionate laughter that binds us to our fellow beings and discourages us from doing terrible things to them. Musil uses humor to explore the relationship between emotions and intellect, as his polyphonic, metamorphic irony works in some places to defamiliarize ideas, people, and situations we might have an immediate emotional reaction to, and in other places collapses emotional distance and draws us into connections with others by illustrating the essential similarity of all our positions in this our *Comedie Humaine*.

One place in which Musil's use of irony can be seen to shuttle the reader between ratioed and nicht-ratioed realms is the death of Ulrich's father, the event that sparks the transition from Volume I to Volume II. Throughout the first volume, Ulrich's father is one of the few characters treated in a more or less entirely satiric fashion, devoid of the empathetic touches given even to characters like Tuzzi and Stumm who are generally (but not always) objects of mockery. At first, the announcement of the father's death is carried out in the same satiric tone as earlier references to him, as Ulrich receives a telegram during his pivotal meeting with Clarice (before she asks him to impregnate her):

⁵¹ The literature on Musil's use of irony is extensive. One good place to start is the collection *Robert Musil: Essayismus und Ironie* (1992).

Ulrich ripped open the telegram and read it while only half-listening to Clarisse's words. He turned suddenly pale and read the startling message over again, unable to take it in. [...]his telegram, obviously drafted in advance with meticulous care by his father himself, informed him punctiliously, and in a funereal tone that did not quite succeed in repressing all reproach, of his own death. There had been little enough affection between them; in fact, the thought of his father had almost always been rather disturbing to Ulrich, and yet, as he now read the quaintly sinister text over again, he was thinking: "Now I am all alone in the world." [...] He felt, with some amazement, that he was floating free, as though some mooring rope had snapped, or that his state of alienation from a world to which his father had been the last link had now become complete and final [*verbunden*].

"My father's dead," he said to Clarisse, holding up the telegram with a touch of unintended solemnity.

"Oh!" Clarisse said. "Congratulations!" And after a slight, thoughtful pause she added: "I suppose you're going to be very rich now?" and looked around with interest.

"I don't believe he was more than moderately well off," Ulrich replied distantly. "I've been living here quite beyond his means." (714)⁵²

In this initial announcement the father himself has no voice, and words like "meticulous" and "punctiliously" reinforce the parodic portrait (prim and stuffy mandarin of legal minutiae) that has been drawn of him thus far. Like the telegram

⁵² "Ulrich riß die Despesche auf und las sie, während er nur mit halbem Ohr hörte, was Clarisse sagte; er wurd überraschend bleich und las ungläubig noch einmal den sonderbaren Wortlaut[...] Meldete ihm das Telegramm in einer ausführlichen, aus halb unterdrückten Vorwürfen und voller Todesfeierlichkeit wunderlich gemischten Weise, die sein Vater offenbar leben seines Erzeugers. Sie hatten wenig Neigung füreinander besessen, ja es war Ulrich der Gedanke an seinen Vater beinahe immer unangenehm gewesen, trotzdem dachte er, während er den schnurrigunheimlichen Text ein zweites Mal las: «Ich bin nun ganz allein auf der Welt» [...] Fühlte er sich verwundert aufsteigen, als wäre ein Ankertau zerrissen, oder fühlte einen sich nun ganz herstellenden Zustand der Landesfremdheit in einer Welt, der er durch seinen Vater noch verbunden gewesen war.

«Mein Vater ist gestorben!» sagte er zu Clarisse und hob mit einiger unwillkürlicher Feierlichkeit die Hand mit der Depesche.

«Ach!» antwortete Clarisse. «Ich gratuliere!» Und nach einer kleinen, besinnlichen Pause fügte sie hinzu: «Da wirst du jetzt wohl sehr reich?» Sie sah sich neugierig um.

«Ich glaube nicht, daß er mehr als wohlhabend war» erwiderte Ulrich ablehnend. «Ich lebte hier über seine Verhältnisse» (655).

itself, however, this paragraph does “not quite succeed in repressing all reproach” toward the callousness of Ulrich and Clarisse, despite the mutual lack of feeling we know to have characterized this father-son relationship. Yet since this reproach takes the ironic form of a lack of emotional content in this paragraph, it also calls attention (through Clarisse’s closing reference to money) to the fact that one of the most emotional events in most people’s lives (the loss of one’s parents) is generally accompanied by a host of practical and financial considerations that sometimes stand in sharp contrast to the emotional turmoil one is supposed to be undergoing at such times. Clarisse, as she often does, states aloud the sort of thought that polite society teaches us to keep to ourselves, and yet our emotional response to her callousness points not only to the exceptionality of her character but also to the un-exceptionality of this situation, the sordid necessity that often forces us to mix filial grief with more mundane financial considerations.

And yet this “sense of floating free” that the death of his father bestows upon Ulrich does not in fact mark a severing of Ulrich’s emotional attachment to the world; indeed, since the death of his father will lead directly to his reunion with his sister, it actually serves to catalyze Ulrich’s turn towards the tree of love, not least by providing a breaking-off point that allows the first volume to become clearly “verbunden.”⁵³ Ulrich’s now-finalized “state of alienation from the world to which

⁵³ The title of the last chapter of Volume I is in fact “Die Umkehrung,” translated as “The Turning Point,” though the German has strong connotations of “turning back” as well, perhaps hinting at Ulrich’s impending attempt to re-create the sort of loving familial relationship that his father has made impossible (Ulrich and Agathe

his father had been the last link” marks his alienation from the circles of power to which his father’s name had given him access, but not from the familial circle of love from which his father himself had previously alienated him.

Ironically, this move towards the tree of love in *Ins tausendjahriges Reich* becomes apparent in part through the somewhat more sympathetic treatment given the father at the beginning of Volume II. For one, the beginning of the second volume actually gives us direct access to the father’s posthumous telegram:

In his pocket he carried his father’s eccentric telegram, which he knew by heart: “This is to inform you that I am deceased” was the old gentleman’s message for him—or was it to him? as indicated by the signature at the end: “Your father.” His excellency the Privy Councillor never went in for levity at serious moments. The weird information of the message was consequently infernally logical, since he was himself notifying his son when, in expectation of his end, he wrote or dictated word for word the message that was to be dispatched the instant he had drawn his last breath; the facts could really not be more correctly stated, and yet this act by which the present tried to dominate a future it could not live to see emitted from the grave an uncanny whiff of an angrily decayed will! (730)⁵⁴

have barely seen one another since their mother’s death, when he was ten and she was six, and their knowledge of one another comes mainly from their father’s telegrams).

⁵⁴ “Er trug das sonderbare Telegramm seines Vaters in der Tasche und kannte es auswendig: «Setze dich von meinem erfolgten Ableben in Kenntnis» hatte der alte Herr ihm mitteilen lassen – oder sollte man sagen mitgeteilt? – und darin drückte sich das schon aus, denn darunter stand die Unterschrift «dein Vater». Se. Exzellenz, der Wirkliche Geheime Rat, scherzte nie in ernsten Augenblicken: der verschrobene Aufbau der Nachricht war darum auch verteufelt logisch, denn er war es selbst, der seinen Sohn benachrichtigte, wenn er in Erwartung seines Endes den Wortlaut niederschrieb oder jemand in die Feder sagte und die Geltung der so entstehenden Urkunde für den Augenblick nach seinem letzten Atemzug bestimmte; ja man konnte den Tatbestand vielleicht gar nicht richtiger ausdrücken, und doch flatterte von diesem Vorgang, worin die Gegenwart eine Zukunft zu beherrschen versuchte, die sie nicht mehr zu erleben vermochte, ein unheimlicher Leichenhauch zornig verwesten Willens zurück!” (672).

Though these ruminations still take place in a rather mocking vein, the “frustrated will” that Ulrich reads into his father’s final telegram already begins to humanize somewhat the previously inhuman bureaucrat. The characterization of the telegram as “eccentric” (*sonderbare*), for one thing, prompts the reader to begin to think of the dead man as a peculiar individual rather than a faceless caricature of soulless scholasticism. Moreover, in this paragraph we see Ulrich begin to identify with his father in ways he did not in the first volume, since Ulrich’s ironic appraisal of the telegram highlights not only their differences (*Se. Exzellenz ... scherzte nie in ernsten Augenblicken*) but also their similarities (*verteufelt logisch*), and indeed the thought of his father’s “angrily decayed will” leads Ulrich to even more sympathetic reflections in the next paragraph.

For the reader, however, the full ironic swerve towards a more non-ratioed realm of empathy occurs at the funeral, where we finally begin to see the father through the eyes of someone other than his children—i.e., his longtime friend and archrival Professor Schwung (752-761). In this case, the mockery is not really softened—the recondite academic dispute in which the two had been engaged remains an object of ridicule—but now this ironic portrayal of the triviality of academic disputation is connected to a more universal human feeling: the desire, at the end, to reconcile with old friends, and to realize the important role they have played in our lives, here despite the fact that

the accumulated experience of countless grating episodes in the past [...] had coagulated into a contemptuous opinion each held of the other, an opinion as unaffected by the flux of emotion as any unbiased truth would be. Professor Schwung felt this just as his antagonist, now dead, had felt it. [...] But this had

nothing to do with Professor Schwung's need to take leave of his dead friend. Good Lord, they had known each other back at the start of their academic careers, before either of them were married! Do you remember that evening in the Burggarten, how we drank to the setting sun and argued about Hegel? However many sunsets there have been since then, that's the one I always remember. And do you remember our first professional disagreement, which almost made enemies of us way back then? Those were the days! (759)⁵⁵

While the account of the academic dispute between Schwung and Ulrich's father remains at an ironic distance due to its inscrutable pedantry and the comic vehemence of its two antagonists, the paragraph's sudden shift to the informal second person (*du*) also works to pull the reader into the personal relationship between these two old men, a friendship that, in its universality, makes these friends seem like *Menschen* as well as caricatures. In this paragraph, we realize that Schwung understood (and perhaps even loved) this dead man far better than his own children. Thus, while the content of the scene—the spilling over of this legal debate into the funeral itself—carries on the comic treatment of the father's academic rivalry, at a certain point this ironic treatment of the father actually begins to arouse our sympathy, as the very pettiness of this dispute (and the vast emotional resources these men have invested in it over the years) begins to become touching as well as laughable. Separately,

⁵⁵ “der gesammelte Inhalt zahlloser vergangener unliebsamer Vorgänge in die Form eines geringschätzigen Urteils über einander geballt, das so unabhängig vom Kommen und Gehen der Gefühle war wie eine vorurteilslose Wahrheit. Professor Schwung empfand das genau ebenso, wie es sein jetzt toter Angreifer empfunden hatte [...] Gaz etwas anderes war es natürlich, daß Professor Schwung das Bedürfnis hatte, von seinem toten Freund Abschied zu nehmen. Mein Gott, man kannte sich schon, seit man Dozent und noch unverheiratet war! Erinnerst du dich, wie wir im Burggarten der Abendsonne zutranken und über Hegel disputierten? Wieviel Sonnen mögen seither untergegangen sein, aber ich erinnere mich besonders an diese! Und erinnerst du dich an unseren ersten wissenschaftlichen Streit, der uns beinahe schon damals zu Feinden gemacht hätte> Wie schön war das!” (698-699).

Ulrich's father and Professor Schwung remain almost pure caricatures, yet in their relationship to one another they become sympathetic as well. Most of us have a few shared sunsets that we remember fondly, and the particulars of what was discussed at such times—whether it be the existence of God, the meaning of Hegel, or the superiority of Coke over Pepsi—matters little in the end.

The association of characters with more general ideas/discourses is a commonplace trope (not only) in fiction. Yet in Musil, each character can be seen to blur and confuse not only several qualities and discourses, but also to blur wisdom and stupidity in disturbing ways, taking the Quixote/Panza relationship of the first modern novel to the level of the Panopticon.⁵⁶ This forces the reader to remain constantly on his or her toes when considering whether or not a given idea in *MoE* should be affirmed: when one reads the proto-fascist guru "Meingast" railing against democracy, for instance, one must weigh the good sense of much of what he has to say with one's historical knowledge of what such ideas led to. In a different vein, one might also be struck when Tuzzi, who is not merely himself a general object of mockery but is generally representative of the type of saber-rattling diplomacy that helped bring about the War, comes out with a shocking suggestion—that the Austro-Hungarian Empire should leave the Triple Alliance and join the Triple Entente—whose real life implementation would no doubt have significantly altered the course of European history (808-09; 878-79). Tuzzi's idea does not so much make WWI

⁵⁶ McBride gives a more sophisticated development to this point in her reading of "Clarisse's ring."

seem “avoidable,” as question the cultural situation that made ideas like this one impossible to implement.

At the same time, however, because the novel never reaches the War, and because the Parallel Campaign does not cause the War but only remains perpetually about to do so, one could say that *MoE* is able to avoid giving the War the look of historical necessity (despite the fact that the narrator does directly foreshadow it in a few places). Although such a reading would probably go against Musil’s intentions, taking the text as it stands one could say that even as the specter of the Great War (together with the 1933 elections, the *Anschluss*, WWII, and the implementation of Hitler’s “Final Solution”) lend urgency to *MoE*’s ethical speculations and weight to its satire, the story’s “failure” to arrive at the “inevitable” outbreak of war could simultaneously be said to exorcise the specter of inevitability from the novel. A miraculous irruption of new conditions of possibility remains possible for *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, and even while acknowledging that all roads in the novel lead to war one could argue that in the book as it exists today there remains a possibility, however remote, that a new path might emerge, and that the War might not happen.

Such a reading further aligns *MoE* with the Benjaminian ethos that Derrida labels “the messianic without messianism,” an attitude that calls for embracing one’s task without any certainty of ever reaching one’s goal, or even of necessarily being able to recognize that goal if and when it were to arrive. This certainly would seem a fair characterization of the attitude that Musil adopted towards his own novel, and (more arguably) towards life in general. Both Musil and Derrida strive to keep certain

goals—above all, “The End of History”— at bay... in hope perhaps that if the inevitable is unworked long enough it might possibly not arrive, or at least would no longer be inevitable the next time around.

Like many of the children of the Golden Age of Unfinishable novels, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*'s continuing importance lies largely in what it has kept open, in the remarkable *Möglichkeitsinn* it has retained and that continues to grow after seventy years. By leaving his readers with an unfinished work, Musil draws us *a priori* into the realm of the ethical, forcing us (as unfinished works are wont to do) to reflect on editorial decisions and the ethics of canonization. Beyond completion, beyond the history of the *vollendet oeuvre*, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* continues to call future readers, unraveling itself by candlelight as it preserves an open space for literary events and a future literary republic of *Möglichkeitsmenschen*. Like Penelope, the great unworker of the ancient world, Musil in *MoE* achieves his goal through the non-completion of his masterpiece, rejecting its prescribed future as a novel (beginning-middle-end) in order to preserve the possibility of another future, in order to preserve the future as a series of possibilities, an undetermined space... the space of literature and of a literature of the *à venir*.

.....

Question: Who **is** the hero in the history of the novel?

Answer: We are still waiting for her.

CHAPTER SEVEN: BEYOND COMPLETION

A poem of the mind
In the act of finding what will suffice
—Wallace Stevens, “Of Modern Poetry”

Mallarmé’s immense enterprise was utopian: it was embroidered with ever more disconcerting aspirations and ingenuities, and it is not surprising that it was never brought to completion. We do not know whether, had the work been completed, the whole project would have had any real value. It might well have turned out to be a dubious mystical and esoteric incarnation of a decadent sensitivity that had reached the extreme point of its creative parabola. I am inclined to the second view, but it is certainly interesting to find at the very threshold of the modern period such a vigorous program for a *work in movement*, and this is a sign that certain intellectual currents circulate imperceptibly until they are adopted and justified as cultural data which have to be organically integrated into the panorama of the whole period.

—Umberto Eco, *The Open Work* (13)

VLADIMIR: Well? Shall we go?

ESTRAGON: Yes, let’s go.

They do not move.

Curtain

—Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (61)

The shift towards what has been called “openness” in twentieth century literature (and twentieth century creative artistry in general) is well documented and there is no need to exhaustively recount it here. The focus of this chapter is not this shift itself but rather how it is reflected in the endings of novels in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet to give some context, we will begin by briefly recapitulating Eco’s canonical account of this process in *The Open Work* (1962), a text written at the very time the “creative parabola” of this period was taking shape—but well before it had reached its “extreme point”—by a critic who would go on to

become a leading novelist of his generation, and whose novels will play a prominent role in this chapter.

Eco begins *L'Opera aperta* with examples of recent musical works that are truly “open” insofar as they invite active collaboration with and rearrangement by a performer. This artistic trend, he suggests, reflects contemporary insights in theoretical aesthetics, which now recognizes “openness” as something essential to the artwork in general:

A work of art, therefore, is a complete and *closed* form in its uniqueness as a balanced organic whole, while at the same time constituting an *open* product on account of its susceptibility to countless different interpretations which do not impinge on its unadulterable specificity. Hence every reception of a work of art is at once an *interpretation* and a *performance* of it, because in every reception the work takes on a fresh perspective for itself. (3)

Eco claims, however, that the musical works he considers go beyond this general openness inherent to the work of art insofar as in these cases “the very fact of our uncertainty is itself a positive feature[...], rather than submit to the ‘openness’ as an inescapable element of artistic interpretation, [the artist] subsumes it into a positive aspect of his production, recasting the work so as to expose it to the maximum possible ‘opening’” (4, 5). Such a development “invites us to consider *why* the contemporary artist feels the need to work in this kind of direction, to try to work out what historical evolution of aesthetic sensibility led up to it and which factors in modern culture reinforce it” (4).¹

¹ Here I am admittedly muddling Eco’s argument somewhat, since he makes a more specific distinction between the musical works he cites (Stockhausen’s *Klavierstück XI*, Berio’s *Sequence for Solo Flute*, Pousseur’s *Scambi*, and Boulez’s *Third Sonata for Piano*) and literary works whose “openness” is limited to the acts of

Eco acknowledges that earlier theories of interpretation (Plato, the Church) were aware of the essential ambiguities of signs, but points to the medieval Church's four-tiered model of allegorical reading as a way of closing and exhausting texts rather than opening them to further interpretation. Although Eco points to the Baroque as an early awakening of this modern aesthetic sensibility, he claims it was only in late nineteenth century Symbolist poetry (particularly the work of Verlaine and Mallarmé) that the open work truly came into its own, as the creation of an inexhaustible symbol became an explicit poetic goal:

The important thing [in Symbolist poetry] is to prevent a single sense from imposing itself at the very outset of the receptive process. Blank space surrounding a word, typographical adjustments, and spatial composition in the page setting of the poetic text—all contribute to make a halo of indefiniteness and to make the text pregnant with infinite suggestive possibilities.

This search for *suggestiveness* is a deliberate move to 'open' the work to the free response of the addressee. An artistic work that suggests is also one that can be performed with the full emotional and imaginative resources of the interpreter. (8-9)

Eco claims this symbolic tendency has become more and more entrenched in literature in general, and cites in particular the work of Kafka as well as recent critical studies on metaphor and ambiguity. Eco's quintessential open work of literature is of course Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, though he points out that even Brechtian Epic

interpretation performed by the reader. The first, more radical versions of the open work Eco terms "works in movement," but it is convenient for our purposes to ignore this distinction since, following Eco's logic, a stage play would always be more "open" than a novel would (or at least more of a "work in movement"), insofar as the text is not (only) complete in itself but is (also) "a roadmap to a theatrical event," to borrow a phrase from Tom Stoppard. Richard Zenith's admission of his own inability to realize Pessoa's *Book of Disquiet* as "an edition of loose sheets" points to the difficulties that the novel genre poses to the ideal of a "work in movement," even when such an ideal would seem well in keeping with the artistic agenda of the novel itself.

Theater can be considered “open” insofar as it does not seek to resolve its debate but rather to force a decision upon its audience.

Eco links these artistic trends to more general changes in twentieth century thought: relativity, the uncertainty principle, phenomenology, psychology, non-Euclidean geometry, etc. In any era, art reflects contemporary views of reality: just as Baroque art reflects the Copernican revolution, so twentieth century literature reflects the far-reaching epistemological changes of that long and eventful century:

Multi-value logics are now gaining currency, and these are quite capable of incorporating *indeterminacy* as a valid stepping-stone in the cognitive process. In this general intellectual atmosphere, the poetics of the open work is particularly relevant: it posits the work of art stripped of necessary and foreseeable conclusions, works in which the performer’s freedom functions as part of the *discontinuity* which contemporary physics recognizes, not as an element of disorientation, but as an essential stage in all scientific verification procedures and also as the verifiable pattern of events in the subatomic world. (15)

In such a world, art must search for methods of closure that reflect, make sense of, endow with meaning—or, at the very least, get around—the essential ambiguities with which the modern world presents us. In terms of the history of the novel, this led to a revolution of sorts in common strategies for achieving narrative closure, a valorization of completion over totality that is reflected in the endings of postwar novels. Yet what is particularly striking about this period is not so much the “newness” of such strategies as the fact that even traditional novels had to embrace “avant-garde” methods for a time, if only as a way of reclaiming traditional closure.

While agreeing substantially with the account Eco offers in *The Open Work*, I must also state that I am wary of the term “open,” which becomes particularly

problematic in the context of the novel. A novel that cannot be closed is—with the rare hypertextual exception—not a novel at all.² For this reason, and in keeping with the general Bakhtinian slant of my dissertation as a whole, I will be using the Bakhtinian term “unfinalizable” rather than “open.”

7.1 From the Unfinishable to the Unfinalizable

Rather than seeking to “overcome” their modes of incompleteness via the imposition of a totalizing Benjaminian *Finis*, unfinalizable novels seek to incorporate their modes of incompleteness, often achieving a paradoxical sense of closure through the creation of an image of uncertain continuation into the future. Two key elements that frequently shape the endings of unfinalizable novels are thus uncertainty and future-orientedness. Certainly, neither of these elements is unique to postmodern fiction, and most of the closural tropes I will be noting predate the postmodern novel as such. As is usually the case with revolutions, artistic or otherwise, this was less a matter of something entirely new and previously unthinkable bursting into existence than of a number of previously marginalized discourses coming to control the center. While unfinalizability is older than the novel genre itself, for the postmodern novel

² See Bunia’s discussion in *Faltungen* (284-295) of “*Das Medium Buch*” in relation to narrative closure, and the problems this poses for any coherent definition of an “open-ended novel,” since in fact it is only the physical framing power of the book as medium that makes novelistic closure possible at all: “ohne Rahmen gäbe es keinen Schluß, keine terminale Klausel, keine letzten Ereignisse und kein Dénouement” (295).

unfinalizability is not the exception but the norm.³ Indeed, a general recognition of the difficulty of providing any sort of totalizing conclusion is often thematized in postmodern novels through endings that explicitly question the very possibility of closure, as in the ending to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981):

One empty jar... how to end? Happily[...]? In melancholy[...]? Or with magic children... [...]

Or with questions[...]?

Or dreams: because last night the ghost of Reverend Mother appeared to me, staring down through the hole in a perforated cloud, waiting for my death so that she could weep a monsoon for forty days... and I, floating outside my body, looked down on the foreshortened image of myself, and saw a gray-haired dwarf who once, in a mirror, looked relieved.

No, that won't do, I shall have to write the future as I have written the past, to set it down with the absolute certainty of a prophet. But the future cannot be preserved in a jar. One jar must remain empty... (531-32)

In this passage, the explicit question of “how to end?” is followed by a number of speculations, culminating in the dream image of the disembodied narrator looking down upon a “foreshortened image of myself,” in some sense making literal a metaphor of classical novelistic closure through the trope of magical realism. The narrator, however, decides that “that won't do,” since it would require preserving the future in a jar as he has preserved the past: “But the future cannot be preserved in a jar. One jar must remain empty...” Strangely, however, this commitment to the uncertainty of the future, this preservation of the future as an empty space—rather

³ In part this would seem to reflect the historical situation of the postmodern novel, as the once-dominant genre saw itself increasingly displaced by film and television as the primary objects of cultural mass consumption. Yet even as the novel genre fell in popularity, it became increasingly self-segregated in terms of content, as writers of complex fictions could continue to count on a dwindling but committed readership that prided itself on its superiority to (or at least aloofness from) the crowd-pleasing pleasures of “popular culture.”

than one more jar of preserves—itsself works to provide a form of closure... the sort of uncertain and future-oriented closure proper to an unfinalizable postmodern novel.

By “uncertainty,” I refer not merely to “ambiguity”—an inability to choose between a set of possible alternatives, though ambiguity is of course one form of uncertainty—but to a wide range of strategies for depicting, embracing, and even aestheticizing our epistemological poverty through the construction of fictional worlds. For example, a novel that ends by calling attention to its own construction—either directly or through the creation of an apocalypse that consumes the novel’s fictional world—would always be aligned with uncertainty to some extent insofar as it calls attention to its own constructedness, and with it the all-pervasiveness of fiction. In contrast to the nineteenth century, in novels of the twentieth century the certainty of a fictional world (imposed by the arbitrary boundaries of *L’Espace Litteraire*) often serves to indict the uncertainty of reality: the themes that were so precociously explicit in the ending of *Don Quixote* (see Chapter 2.8) have now become explicit once more.

“Future orientedness” refers to the postwar trend of ending novels with images of movement (quite often literal, physical movement) into the future, rather than with a backwards glance towards the middle of the novel that serves to finalize its narrative as “past” through the totalizing power of a Benjaminian *Finis* (what I am calling “classical closure”). Admittedly, classical closure can itself be achieved through such images (witness *The Great Gatsby*), and it would be wrong to say that “open-ended” imagery as such poses a problem for classical closure ... indeed, as we

shall see, novelists often resort to such imagery as a means of reclaiming classical closure. Yet this wariness to objectify the past, to “put it in a jar,” is symptomatic of a now fundamental suspicion of both the future—which must be kept open, lest it end in a mushroom cloud—and the past, of which there are too many facts and no reliable sources.

This emphasis on uncertainty and future-orientedness in the endings of postmodern novels can be thought in terms of four major strategies (not mutually exclusive, and often interconnected) for achieving closure, strategies that became increasingly prominent after the second world war and helped produce the large number of unfinalizable novels written during the last half-century. These strategies include:

- 1) A general shift in closing imagery towards uncertain futures, new beginnings, and physical movement. While such imagery is often used as a means of attaining classical closure (cf. Graham Greene’s *The Comedians* [1965] or William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice* [1978]) or of advancing a particular future-oriented political ideology (cf. James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* [1952] or Peter Weiss’s *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* [*The Aesthetics of Resistance*, 1975-81]), it also includes more specifically unfinalizable variants. Of these, the most significant include: closing images of Pantagruelist flight, in which a hero is sent running into an uncertain future after somehow avoiding a seemingly inescapable doom (cf. Joseph Heller’s *Catch-22* [1961] or John O’Toole’s

Confederacy of Dunces [1980]) or in which a love presses onward indefinitely despite all obstacles (cf. Gabriel Marquez's *El amor en los tiempos del cólera* [*Love in the Time of Cholera*, 1985]); closing images of *aporia*, in which the novel ends with the protagonist frozen in a moment of suspense or indecision (cf. Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* [1966] or Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* [2003]); and properly "Symbolist" closing images, that offer neither a clear line of flight nor a clear *aporia* but rather a symbol of an ongoing situation with its roots far in the past (cf. Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon* [1977]; J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* [1986], or Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* [2005]).⁴

- 2) An explosion of metafictional speculations, which in the context of endings leads to the strange discovery that reflecting on the problematic nature or even the impossibility of narrative closure can itself serve as a means to attaining such closure (cf. Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* [1955], John Barth's *The Floating Opera* [1956], or Roberto Bolaño's *Los Detectives Salvajes* [*The Savage Detectives*, 1998]), as can the trope of speculating on possible endings without choosing one (as we saw in our

⁴ Here and elsewhere, the lines between these different types of closure are often quite thin; this is not a problem, however, since as I have stressed many times in this dissertation we are not dealing with pure or essentializing typologies but with strategic ones. Put another way: the tree constructed by all my types and examples is not a Porphyric tree but a genealogical one, which strives not for "essence" or exactitude but only for greater specificity. By analogy, while a genealogical tree can never be used to "predict" a person's character in advance with painstaking exactitude, it does provide an abundant field of data for tracing and reflecting on the specific characteristics and qualities of a given family member.

Rushdie quotation). Such a strategy exemplifies the valorization of completion over totality discussed in Chapter Six. Even if a fully satisfactory “sense of an ending” cannot be achieved without a betrayal of truth and authenticity, nevertheless a simple recognition of this fact can often serve a similar function by providing a closure of sorts. Closure here is no longer a totalizing end in itself (the miraculous *Finis*), but rather a means to an end (completion). This privileging of completion can also be said to reflect twentieth century insights into information theory and entropy, as one sees how a finite form can work not only to close off a fictional world by setting in stone its facts and ambiguities, but also to open it up by completing a bounded but highly complex system that can, from within its boundaries, generate ever more information via its interactions with readers and their interactions with the world.⁵

- 3) An increasing experimentation with the possibilities of fragmentary closure. Whereas Musil had to forsake his plan of ending his volume in the middle of a sentence with a comma, David Foster Wallace was able to end his first novel *The Broom of the System* (1987) in a similar fashion without causing much stir. Wallace’s *Infinite Jest* (1996) is even more fragmentary, particularly since its lengthy footnote section makes the location of the novel’s “ending” a matter of some debate (though both “endings” are still highly fragmentary themselves). This expanded

⁵ See Bunia’s treatment (building on the work of Niklas Luhmann) of the relationship between “Realität” and “Welten” in *Faltungen* (76-88).

investment in the closing power of the fragment manifests itself not only in novels that cut-themselves off at seemingly “random” points, but also in novels that end with “attached documents” that situate, question, and/or undermine the status of the text itself. Thus the text provides its own context, as all novels do, but here more explicitly as a means of achieving completion while undermining totality. Two of the best examples of this—novels that in some sense accomplish by strategic completion what *MoE* could only accomplish as an unfinishable novel—are Nabokov’s *Pale Fire* (1962) and Barth’s *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966).

- 4) An increasing number of books that end with their own creation or destruction, which often amount to more-or-less the same thing since both serve to close-off the fictional world of the novel. Magical realism has been a great facilitator of this trend, since it offers more creative possibilities for apocalypse, autopoiesis, and circularity, all three of which are exemplified in the ending of Marquez’s *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967). While this can in some sense be seen as a more finalizing ending, it is in keeping with the trend of unfinalizability insofar as it opposes its own artificial “reality” to the official one, and thus does not so much “capture” a “cross-section of the epoch” as it creates its own reality in opposition to the epoch, an alternative history to supplement the official one.

Again, these strategies often overlap and should not be seen as mutually exclusive. In Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale* (1985), for instance, the "narrative proper" ends with the main character facing an uncertain future:

The van waits in the driveway, its double doors stand open. The two of them, one on either side now, take me by the elbows to help me in. Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing: I have given myself over into the hands of strangers, because it can't be helped.

And so I step up, into the darkness within. Or else into the light. (295)

This closing image of future-oriented uncertainty, however, is then supplemented by a long section advertised as containing "Historical Notes," or more specifically "*a partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies, held as part of the International Historical Association Convention*" (299). Besides offering some satiric jabs at the types of academic symposia in which the novel itself would soon become a topic of conversation, this attached document transforms the preceding first person narrative from a self-generating document that constitutes the entirety of the novel's fictional world, into one historical document within a much larger fictional world, the borders of which here become more distinct—as "objective" context is provided for the primary narrative—even as they expand beyond the horizons envisaged by the narrator, pointing to an immense and unfinalizable fictional world that we (like the historians at the Symposium) have only an extremely limited access to... "*a partial transcript.*"

As I have already said, these strategies are not always employed in the service of unfinalizability, nor are they original to postmodernism. Yet what makes the period of the postmodern turn particularly significant to my study is the fact that at perhaps

no other time has unfinalizability been so widely embraced across the literary world, both for its own sake and as a route back to the finalizable. Menippean Satire, that most ancient, resilient, and unfinalizable of prose genres, with its practical commitment to literary miscegenation and its Pantagruelist opposition to totality, became for a time the guiding spirit of postmodern fiction as such.⁶ The resurgence of more classically psychological and “realistic” novels, particularly by many of the leading novelists of the current generation (Zadie Smith, Jonathon Franzen, etc.), has by now bookended postmodernism to some extent, and while there are still a great number of unfinalizable novels produced they no longer seem to represent the dominant trend.⁷ More vital to my own genealogy, however, are the novels that whole-heartedly embrace this turn to uncertainty and future-orientedness, and the possibilities it opens up for the unfinalizable novelist. The essential “bad infinity” of the novel genre, long an embarrassing secret kept locked in the attic with Rochester’s wife, was with the postmodern turn colonized and exploited once more.

⁶ See Theodore Kharpertian’s *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon*, for a Menippean treatment of Pynchon’s novels that also contextualizes his work in terms of postmodern American fiction in general. Although I agree with most of Kharpertian’s individual analyses of Pynchon’s work, he also posits an essential conceptual division between “the Menippean” and “the Encyclopedic” that I do not find to be epistemologically tenable, particularly if one is attempting to think the concept of prose as such (see Chapter 1).

⁷ At the same time, literary techniques that would once have been regarded as “avant-garde,” such as shifting without comment between multiple Point of View characters for each chapter, have become standardized to the point where they can now be found even in adolescent and “pop” fiction, from Piers Anthony to George R.R. Martin.

7.2 History in the Information Age (The Paranoid Mode of Incompletion)

The postmodern novel's investment in unfinalizability becomes particularly apparent in the uses it makes of history. The surfeit of competing facts and narratives that confront the historically minded modern human prompts him or her to choose facts and "complete" narratives out of this surfeit, but in many cases it is with the knowledge that none of these narratives can ever be finalizing, in part because in today's world there is simply too much information to ever be synthesized into a single, tidy version of events. This fact is humorously noted by Flaubert in *Bouvard et Pécuchet*: "Ancient history is obscure because there are too few documents. In modern history there are too many" (106).⁸ Such an attitude towards the past, an attitude that profoundly affects the historicity of the present for those who hold it, is compounded with an increasing awareness of what could be termed the Socratic wisdom of the paranoid historian: the knowledge that the most reliable certainty one can have about history—past, present, or future—is that the official version of events is always false (or, at the very least, misleading). Yet this bedrock wisdom only leads to greater confusion, as the certain falsity of the One unleashes an irreconcilable horde of the Possible, countless possibilities that in historical fiction give birth to an unfinalizable labyrinth of alternate versions, supplementing the already-rich labyrinth of historical lacunae ("known unknowns," like the resting place of Jimmy Hoffa) in which historical novelists have long and happily dwelt. On the one hand: a filling-in of the "known unknowns" of the official history, whether by "solving" prominent

⁸ "L'Histoire ancienne est obscure par le défaut de documents. Ils abondent dans la moderne" (189).

mysteries in the historical record, or by offering an official account from the perspective of one normally excluded from it. On the other hand: the composition of paranoid counter-histories that offer themselves in opposition to the official history.

Before going further, I must define the sense in which I am using the term “paranoid”—a word with primarily negative connotations, to be sure—and also mark a distinction between clinical paranoia and the more philosophical paranoia that often inspires the paranoid historian and/or novelist. In both cases, one might define paranoia as the tendency to use the information at one’s disposal to construct grandiose historical narratives around one’s own existence, narratives in which not only individuals but places, events, and ideas are understood in terms of a personal symbology that endows them with added significance and moral value (positive or negative). For most clinical paranoiacs, this narrative symbology tends to exhaust itself in the construction of plots directed against the individual (“everyone is out to get me”); for what Thomas Pynchon calls “creative paranoia,” however, the imagining of plots must be counterbalanced by the imagining of counter-plots, new potential spaces of resistance: “Of course a well-developed They-system is necessary—but it’s only half the story. For every They there ought to be a We. In our case there is. Creative Paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-System” (*GR* 650). The distinction between a clinical paranoid and a philosophical paranoid, however, stems not from the presence or absence of a “We-System” but simply from the paranoiac’s ability to view his or her own narratives with a touch of skepticism. Whereas the clinical paranoid knows that everyone is out

to get him or her, feels it as a certainty, the philosophical paranoid self-consciously constructs theories with the knowledge that s/he is engaged in an imaginative act, and that s/he might well be wrong.

Historical fiction is as old as fiction itself, indeed as old as history itself, since (as we saw in Part I) the history vs. fiction distinction is a peculiarly modern one and is largely constitutive of the latter. Moreover, historical novels have long utilized the paranoid mode of incompleteness not only as a template for the filling-in of historical lacunae, but also as a means of offering perspectives suppressed by the official history, of re-visioning the official history through the eyes of the marginalized as in Tolstoy's famous depiction of the Battle of Borodino in *War and Peace*. Yet since so much historical fiction is written under the aegis of nationalism, even novelists who appear to critique the official version of events often do so in ways that (subtly or un-) build-on and thereby validate the official national history which, without necessarily being monolithic, needs to be finalized where it counts (despite the value of war itself being questioned, Borodino is still presented as the key battle of the Patriotic War, etc.). Both poles of the epic-encyclopedic mode of incompleteness traditionally reinforce this process: the *Bildungsroman* uses the growth of an individual to figure the growth of a nation (see Bakhtin's readings of *Pantagruel*), and the Panopticon allows readers insight into the lives of citizens from the perspective of the state.

Paranoid history, by contrast, explicitly situates itself in opposition to the official history, not in the hope of establishing some new "master narrative" but rather in the hope of exposing the fraudulence of master narratives in general. The aim is to

unfinalize history, to open it up to play and plurality even as one uses it to attempt to make sense of one's world, and/or to make nonsense of one's oppressors. Thus the paranoid mode does not despise making use of magic, monsters, or mysticism in finding alternate versions of events, or even of placing such fantastic interventions alongside more theoretically plausible counter-accounts, since in both cases the aim is to call the official account (facts, methodology) into question, as in this paranoid digression from *Gravity's Rainbow*:

She asks this seriously, as if there's a real conversion factor between information and lives. Well, strange to say, there is. Written down in the Manual, on file at the War Department. Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. The murdering and the violence are self-policing, and can be entrusted to non-professionals. The mass nature of wartime death is useful in many ways. It serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War. It provides raw material to be recorded into History, so that children may be taught History as sequences of violence, battle after battle, and be more prepared for the adult world. Best of all, mass death's a stimulus to just ordinary folks, little fellows, to try'n'grab a piece of that Pie while they're still here to gobble it up. The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled "black" by the professionals, spring up everywhere. (107)

In this passage, the facts of the official account of the war are not really called into question, but the spin given to these facts is doubly interrogated: on the one hand, why **is** history traditionally taught as a series of battles? On the other hand, the fact of "organic markets" in wartime and their labeling as "black" supports the validity not only of reading the war through a more market-oriented historiography, but also of distrusting "the professionals" precisely when it comes to this sort of historiography. The lingering question is not so much "what is the conversion rate between information and lives?" as it is "who makes these decisions?" In any case, in keeping

with the tradition of paranoid history, this passage clearly suggests that official histories function as “diversion[s] from the real movements of the War,” even while seeking to speculate on better ways of thinking these “real movements.”

The oeuvres of Thomas Pynchon and Umberto Eco, two novelists who make brilliant and abundant use of the primary commodity of the Information Age, are each particularly emblematic of the paranoid mode of incompleteness despite what would seem to be their decidedly different opinions on paranoia in general. For Pynchon, “Paranoia” constitutes something akin to a master term in his work, a banner beneath which he and his readers can seek to construct a plurality of We-systems. For Pynchon, paranoia signifies not merely an approach to history (and/or an adverse drug reaction) but also something akin to a philosophy of life. All of Pynchon’s novels, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect this philosophy of creative paranoia: in *V.* (1963), there is perhaps a clearer separation between the two protagonists Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, one a “schlemihl” or “human yo-yo” against whom inanimate objects conspire, and the other a paranoid historian, investigating his father’s demise and the possible involvement of the mysterious woman “V,” the one continually cast as the victim of conspiracies and the other continually cast as their creator and/or unraveler. In the end, however, the event that Stencil is seeking to explain through chains of cause and effect is seemingly revealed to be a freak occurrence, while Profane’s image of himself (as beset by an international conspiracy of the inanimate) seems to function as simulacrum. In *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the entire narrative of the novel can be said to chart the protagonist’s initiation into

paranoia, as Mrs. Oedipa Maas leaves behind her sheltered suburban existence in “Kinneret-Amongst-the-Pines” to delve further and further into the labyrinthine implications of the Last Will of Pierce Inverarity. Both *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *Against the Day* (2006) offer sweeping historical accounts of well-documented periods, using and abusing the historical record to offer paranoid interpretations of documented events in ways that explore the influence that the past and future can have on the present (e.g. the tracing of the Mason/Dixon line is allegorically linked to the global removal and re-positing of barriers enabled by the World Wide Web, and the 1908 “Tunguska Event” is interpreted as a sort of temporal shockwave sent back by the unprecedented destruction of the first World War). Meanwhile, Pynchon’s smaller novels *Vineland* (1984), *Inherent Vice* (2009), and *Bleeding Edge* (2013) have explored some of the more popular conspiracy theories overshadowing more recent American history.

Eco, by contrast, while arguably holding many epistemologically similar positions to Pynchon concerning history in general, seems decidedly wary of the whole-hearted, enthusiastic embrace of paranoia that Pynchon espouses. Although Eco’s properly “historical novels”—*Il nome della rosa* (1980), *L’isola del giorno prima* (1994), *Baudolino* (2000)—utilize the paranoid mode of incompleteness as a way of making discarded forms of cognition accessible (the lost library, the oddity of the date line, the medieval bestiary), his most interesting novels for our purposes are probably those set in the present: *Il Pendolo di Foucault* (1988) and *La Misteriosa Fiamma della Regina Loana* (2004). In both these novels a paranoid approach to the

past turns against and consumes the narrator. In the latter, a stroke victim seeking to reconstruct his past is led inexorably (and against the advise of those close to him) back to the self-immolating knowledge that brought on his stroke in the first place. In the former, a fascinating historical plot is concocted and unleashed into the world only to become a Frankenstein's monster, brought to life (to the ruin of its creators) by the power of the simulacrum. Eco's most recent novel, *Il cimitero di Praga* (2010), would seem to offer something of a hybrid of the two poles of the paranoid mode of incompleteness: on the one hand, the novel centers around a protagonist who is linked to and/or made responsible for a number of nineteenth-century conspiracies; on the other hand, since these conspiracies were real and the forged documents around which the novel revolves were clearly created by somebody, the narrator's very existence works in a sense to fill in a number of historical lacunae, as Eco himself notes: "The only fictitious character in this story is the protagonist, Simone Simonini[...]. But on reflection, even Simone Simonini, although in effect a collage, a character to whom events have been attributed that were actually done by others, did in some sense exist. Indeed, to be frank, he is still among us" (439).⁹ In the context of Eco's fictional oeuvre as a whole, then, *Prague Cemetery* does not so much function as a denunciation or even re-thinking of Eco's previous treatment of the dubious value of paranoid outlooks in general, as it is an admission that conspiracies have undeniably played a major role in world history. At the same time,

⁹ "Il solo personaggio inventato di questa storia è il protagonista, Simone Simonini[...]. Ma, ripensandoci bene, anche Simone Simonini, benché effetto di un collage, per cui gli sono state attribuite cose fatte in realtà da persone diverse, è in qualche modo esistito. Anzi, a dirla tutta, egli è ancora tra noi" (515).

however, the novel reiterates the dangers of paranoia illustrated in Eco's earlier novels, since the imaginary plots that the protagonist forms take on real world shapes that come back to haunt him (though in his case this haunting sometimes works to his benefit, as for instance when he is able to buy off the Russian Okrana by giving them his masterpiece, *The Protocols of Zion*). In any case, the sinister paranoid simulacrum that drives *Il pendolo di Foucault's* self-immolating paranoid mode of incompleteness seems to be at work in *Il cimitero di Praga* as well.

7.3 The Parabola and the Pendulum

To illustrate what is meant by "incorporating" a mode of incompleteness, by embodying its unfinalizability, we turn to the central chronotopes of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Foucault's Pendulum*, in each case conveniently figured in the novel's title. The figures of the Parabola and the Pendulum in these novels provide examples of unfinalizing chronotopes, chronotopes that valorize uncertainty and multiplicity like the grotesque body in Bakhtin's Rabelais. The chronotope (literally: "time-space") is of course one of Bakhtin's most important critical terms, extensively developed in "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel." Bakhtin uses the term to describe literary images that fuse space and time, "the road" being perhaps the most paradigmatic example. Narrative arcs of novels—and their corresponding modes of incompleteness—are generally informed and determined by one or more overarching chronotopes (as in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*), and this is true of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Foucault's Pendulum* as well.

The title of *Gravity's Rainbow* refers primarily to the parabolic arc of the V2 rocket, with the obvious allegorical connotation of the inevitable conclusion that awaits both each individual human life and human civilization as a whole. From one perspective, the parabola certainly seems a pessimistic guiding image, a more mathematically sophisticated variation on antiquity's Thread of Fate or early modernity's Wheel of Fortune: what begins must end, what goes up must come down. Like these earlier presiding metaphors of the human condition, the gravitational parabola also serves to "open up" a narrative space inside itself by completing its course, though Pynchon also emphasizes the potential of the curved line to allow for derivative lines of flight that intersect it at any given point, continuing in both directions into infinity. It is thus a fatalistic image that can also be tampered with to produce lines of Pantagruelist flight, even if these are only flights into fantasy or momentary comfort, as at the novel's end:

And it is just here, just at this dark and silent frame, that the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last immeasurable gap above the roof of this old theatre, the last delta-t.

There is time, if you need the comfort, to touch the person next to you, or to reach between your own cold legs... or, if song must find you, here's one They never taught anyone to sing, a hymn by William Slothrop, centuries forgotten and out of print, sung to a simple and pleasant air of the period. Follow the bouncing ball:

There is a Hand to turn the time,
Though thy Glass today be run,
Till the Light that hath brought the Towers low
Find the last poor Pret'rite one...
Till the Riders sleep by ev'ry road,
All through our cripl'd Zone,
With a face on ev'ry mountainside,
And a Soul in ev'ry stone...

Now everybody— (*GR* 775-776)

This closing image, the silent rocket about to fall, combines a tragic fatalism with a sense of Pantagrulist resistance and Preterite solidarity.¹⁰ At the same time, in terms of both the completion/closure of the novel itself and the parabolic path of the rocket's flight that chronotopically informs the novel's mode of incompleteness, it is important to remember that it is only the constant g (the negative acceleration due to gravity) that makes closure and completion possible at all. Without a negative constant, the parabola (in its most basic form, x^2) becomes unfinishable itself, aiming forever upward into the infinite on both the positive and negative sides of the x -axis. The negative constant g is thus the price and possibility of completion.

Yet the titular chronotope of *Gravity's Rainbow* is not only parabolic... it is also circular, or at least functions as such within the book's narrative structure. The end of the novel—the imminent fall of the rocket—can famously be said to precede its famous opening sentence—“A screaming comes across the sky”—since the supersonic speed of the V2 means the sound of the rocket will be heard only after it has reached its destination, by survivors and bystanders. “Beyond the Zero,” the title of the novel's first section, thus could refer to both the time before the novel's opening sentence—and perhaps the range of conditioned responses that each individual reader brings to the novel—and also to that most maddening infinity that

¹⁰ “Preterite,” a term from Calvinist theology that refers to the vast majority of humankind who have been condemned in advance by an omnipotent/omniscient God to an eternity of fiery suffering, is another master term of sorts in Pynchon's fiction. Thus, in regard to “the light that has brought the Towers low” referenced in the song, it may be useful to recall that Pynchon titled his longest novel *Against the Day*.

exists between Zero and One, to the unfinalizable space that has been opened up between the completed novel's front and back covers. The unfinalizability of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in the end, has less to do with the size of the novel—there are longer novels that are far more finalized—than it does with the narrative complexity that the novel's size allows, the intersections between narrative strands that make the sum of the novel's plots too large to enumerate.¹¹ Like the hourglass figured in the novel's closing song, the unfinalizable narrative contained within the novel's parabola can continue indefinitely so long as there is a reader to engage it, to discover hitherto unnoticed connections. Indeed, the larger and more integrated the plot (or “They-system”) becomes, the less oversight it has over its own details and the easier it becomes to pass through it unnoticed, as Slothrop eventually discovers:

“This is some kind of a plot, right?” Slothrop sucking saliva from velvet pile.

“*Everything* is some kind of a plot, man,” Bodine laughing.

“And yes but, the arrows are pointing all different ways,” Solange illustrating with a dance of hands, red-pointed fingerectors. Which is Slothrop's first news, out loud, that the Zone can sustain many other plots besides those polarized on himself... that these are the els and busses of an enormous transit system here in the Raketenstadt, more tangled even than Boston's—and that by riding each branch the proper distance, knowing when to transfer, keeping some state of minimal grace though it might often look like he's headed the wrong way, this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom. (614)

It hardly seems a stretch to suggest that the “plot” discussed above could be read as synonymous with the “plot” of the novel itself without generating any insurmountable

¹¹ See Richter's reading of the novel in *Fable's End*, where he claims that the novel is more-or-less impervious to narrative closure and totalization.

interpretive difficulties.¹² Yet even as the “enormous transit system” created by the novel’s intersecting narrative threads seems to unwork totality in favor of unfinalizability, the intentional unfinalizability of the novel is in fact made possible only by the framing borders of the completed text, in terms of both A) the practical task of completion that makes professional authorship financially viable (the production of fungible volumes), and B) the eponymous parabola that serves as the novel’s overarching chronotope, and whose completion of its apocalyptic course endows the novel not only with a structural framework in which its complexities can be added and multiplied, but also with an undeniable measure of organic unity.

The two meanings of “Beyond the Zero” also neatly express the vast intellectual and ideological gulf that separates the Pavlovian Dr. Pointsman from the young statistician Roger Mexico in the novel. For the former, the phrase refers to Pavlov’s mysterious discussion of the possibility of “extinction beyond the zero,” when a conditioned response has been so thoroughly extinguished that it actually continues to exist in a “paradoxical phase” in which minor stimuli cause greater response than major stimuli. Pointsman believes this is the key to understanding the link between Slothrop’s map of sexual conquests and the map of V2 rocket strikes... extinction beyond the zero has in this case reversed cause and effect, as the response (Slothrop’s erection) has now come to anticipate the stimulus (the Rocket). For Mexico, however, “Beyond the Zero” seems to refer more to that most maddening of

¹² As a recent reviewer of *Bleeding Edge* wittily remarks: “reading Pynchon for plot is like reading Austen for sex”... it is always there, influencing and guiding the action, but never right out in the open as such.

infinities that exists between zero and one, an open space that Pointsman seems unwilling and unable to think. This is also the space of probability: like a human life, the end and the beginning are to some extent set in stone, but between these two things there is room for the play of chance on a grand scale. The Poisson diagram, which Mexico takes as Gospel and Pointsman continually struggles to get his head around, is another figure for this: the mathematical equation in the end determines a finalized set of numbers, but in the present the details of these numbers remain unfinalized. This can be taken negatively or positively, as Pointsman somberly reflects:

Each firebloom, followed by blast then by sound of arrival, is a mockery (how can it not be deliberate?) of the reversible process: with each one the Lord further legitimizes his State, and we who cannot find him, even to see, come to think of death no more often, really, than before... and, with no warning when they will come, and no way to bring them down, pretend to carry on as in Blitzless times. When it does happen, we are content to call it “chance.” Or we have been persuaded. There do exist levels where chance is hardly recognized at all. But to the likes of employees such as Roger Mexico it is music, not without its majesty, this power series $Ne^{-m} (1 + m + m^2/2! + m^3/3! + \dots + m^{n-1}/(n-1)!)$, terms numbered according to rocketfalls per square, the Poisson dispensation ruling not only these annihilations no man can run from, but also cavalry accidents, blood counts, radioactive decay, number of wars per year... (142)

We may know what the final statistics will be, but chance continues to govern the who, what, when, where, why and how of these predetermined statistics. The resiliency of “chance” in this context reinforces the possibility of Pantagruelist flight, for the individual at least if not the species: we are all doomed in the long run, but it may be possible now and then to escape or postpone the specific dooms reserved for us as individuals, as what appears deterministic on a species-wide scale continues to

leave room for chance on a personal, human scale. Similarly, the shape of both parabola and lines of flight are determined in advance... but the specific point of the parabola from which one might choose to derive a line of flight can remain unpredictable.

All this, of course, assumes a rather solipsistic worldview, in which each individual is (or at least has the potential to be) the center of their own little universe (“Shall I project a world?”). While Pynchon’s novels certainly express an awareness of the potential dangers of such solipsism, these dangers assume a far more prominent place in the narrative structure of Eco’s *Il pendolo di Foucault*, particularly via the figure of the Pendulum that chronotopically informs the novel and its mode of incompleteness. The figure of the Pendulum seems to comment on the paranoid project of “projecting a world” in at least two ways: first, the narrator (Casaubon) associates the Pendulum with the “fixed point” from which it hangs, while understanding at the same time that this fixed point is not an objective reality but can only be created through the emotional-intellectual investments of human beings. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the novel demonstrates how even a world that one self-consciously projects as fictional can come to take on a reality of its own... in this case to the clear detriment of its projectors.

Casaubon’s somewhat mystical understanding of the Pendulum is presented for the reader in the novel’s opening paragraph:

That was when I saw the Pendulum.
The sphere, hanging from a long wire set into the ceiling of the choir,
swayed back and forth with isochronal majesty.

I knew—but anyone could have sensed it in the magic of that serene breathing—that the period was governed by the square root of the length of the wire and by π , that number which, however irrational to sublunar minds, *through a higher rationality binds the circumference and diameter of all possible circles*. The time it took the sphere to swing from end to end was determined by an arcane conspiracy between the most timeless of measures: the singularity of the point of suspension, the duality of the plane's dimensions, the triadic beginning of π , the secret quadratic nature of the root, and *the unnumbered perfection of the circle itself*.

I also knew that a magnetic device centered in the floor beneath issued its command to a cylinder hidden in the heart of the sphere, thus assuring continual motion. This device, far from interfering with the law of the Pendulum, in fact permitted its manifestation, for in a vacuum any object hanging from a weightless and unstretchable wire free of air resistance and friction will oscillate for eternity. (3; my italics)¹³

On the one hand, the Pendulum points to the conspiratorial cabal of ratios and irrational numbers that govern the geometric universe.¹⁴ On the other hand, the purity of the Pendulum is only made possible by a trick: the Pendulum swings **as if** it were

¹³ Fu allora que vidi il Pendolo.

La sfera, mobile all'estremità di un lungo filo fissato alla volta del coro, descriveva le sue ampie oscillazioni con isocrona maestà.

Io sapevo – ma chiunque avrebbe dovuto avvertire nell'incanto di quel placido respiro – che il periodo era regolato dal rapporto tra la radice quadrata della lunghezza del filo e quel numero π che, irrazionale alle mente sublunari, *per divina ragione lega necessariamente la circonferenza al diametro di tutti I cerchi possibili* – così che il tempo di quel vagare di una sfera dall'uno all'altro polo era effetto di una arcana conspirazione tra la più intemporali misure, l'unità del punto di sospensione, la dualità di una astratta dimensione, la natura ternaria di π , il tetragono segreto della radice, *la perfezione del cerchio*.

Ancora sapevo che sulla verticale del punto di sospensione, alla base, un dispositivo magnetico, comunicando il suo richiamo a un cilindro nascosto nel cuore della sfera, garantiva la costanza del moto, artificio disposto a contrastare le resistenze della materia, ma che non si opponeva alla legge del Pendolo, anzi le permetteva di manifestarsi, perché nel vuoto qualsiasi punto materiale pesante, sospeso all'estremità di un filo inestensibile e senza peso, che non subisse la resistenza dell'aria, e non facesse attrito col suo punto d'appoggio, avrebbe oscillato in modo regolare per l'eternità. (9)

¹⁴ For a more earthy and materialist debunking of mystical numerology, see the speech of Casaubon's partner Lia (*FP* 360-65; 380-86).

in a vacuum or hanging from an immobile fixed point in the heavens, but it proves far easier to subtly correct for the movement of the Pendulum than it would be to actually create a vacuum or discover a fixed point. In the end, however, although (or even because) no actual vacuum has been created, the theoretical fixed point from which the Pendulum theoretically dangles becomes a functional reality, a reality attested to by the successful oscillation of the Pendulum itself. Thus,

this deviation from the Law, which the Law took into account, this violation of the rule did not make the marvel any less marvelous. I knew the earth was rotating, and I with it, and Saint-Martin-des-Champs and all Paris with me, and that together we were rotating beneath the Pendulum, whose own plane never changed direction, because up there, among the infinite extrapolation of its wire beyond the choir ceiling, up toward the most distant galaxies, lay the One Fixed Point in the Universe, eternally unmoving.

So it was not so much the earth to which I addressed my gaze but the heavens, where the mystery of absolute immobility was celebrated. The Pendulum told me that, as everything moved—earth, solar system, nebulae and black holes, all the children of the great cosmic expansion—one single point stood still: a pivot, bolt, or hook around which the universe could move. And I was now taking part in that supreme experience. I, too, moved with the all, but I could see the One, the Rock, the Guarantee, the luminous mist that is not body, that has no shape, weight, quantity, or quality, that does not see or hear, that cannot be sensed, that is in no place, in no time, and is not soul, intelligence, imagination, opinion, number, order, or measure. Neither darkness nor light, neither error nor truth. (4-5)¹⁵

¹⁵ “questa deviazione dalla Legge, che peraltro la Legge prevedeva, non era questa violazione di una misura aurea che rendeva meno mirabile il prodigio. Io sapevo che la terra stava ruotando, e io con essa, e Saint-Martin-des-Champs e tutta Parigi con me, e insieme ruotavamo sotto il Pendolo che in realtà no cambiava mai la direzione del proprio piano, perché lassù, da dove essa pendeva, e lungo l’infinito prolungamento ideale del filo, in alto verso le più lontane galassie, stava, immobile per l’eternità, il Punto Fermo.

La terra ruotava, ma il luogo ove il filo era ancorato era l’unico punto fisso dell’universo.

Dunque non era tanto alla terra che si rivolgeva il mio sguardo, ma lassù, dove si celebrava il mistero dell’immobilità assoluta. Il Pendolo mi stava dicendo che, tutto muovendo, il globo, il sistema solare, le nebulose, i buchi neri e i figli tutti della grande emanazione cosmica, dai primi eoni alla materia più vischiosa, un solo punto

This search for/obsession with the fixed point (*il Punto Fermo*) in the novel is clearly tied to a quest for hidden certainties, to the quests for esoteric knowledge that determine the lives of several characters in the book. At first, a line is drawn between the skeptical or “incredulous” protagonists and the “diabolicals” who flock to their publishing house to contribute to their history of the Occult as well as to Project Hermes, a publishing enterprise aimed at emptying the bank accounts of hermetically minded self-financing authors. Whereas these “diabolicals” believe whole-heartedly in the facts on which their own paranoid fantasies are based, and temper their reasoning with some extremely dubious methodological assumptions—e.g. “when originals no longer exist, the last copy is the original” (*quando gli originali non ci sono più, l’ultima copia è l’originale*) (131; 143)—the protagonists at first employ such reasoning only in mockery, and take a light-hearted approach to the information and ideas they study, and even to “the Plan” they cynically construct. For Belbo and Casaubon this is primarily an aloof if pleasant mockery, although for the more serious-minded Cabalist Diotallevi there is also a much holier commitment to textual rearrangement that motivates him. For Casaubon, the line between skeptic and practicing paranoid seems to be crossed when he begins “to let myself be lulled by

rimaneva, perno, chiavarda, aggancio ideale, lasciando che l’universo muovesse intorno a sé. E io partecipavo ora di quell’esperienza suprema, io che pure mi muovevo con tutto e col tutto, ma potevo vedere Quello, il Non Movente, la Rocca, la Garanzia, la caligine luminosissima che non è corpo, non ha figura forma peso quantità o qualità, e non vede, non sente, né cade sotto la sensibilità, non è in un luogo, in un tempo o uno spazio, non è anima, intelligenza, immaginazione, opione, numero, ordine, misura, sostanza, eternità, no è né tenebra né luce, non è errore e non è verità” (11).

feelings of resemblance: the notion that everything might be mysteriously related to everything else” (164).¹⁶ Yet while Casaubon acknowledges the seductive power that ideas he formerly mocked can have, for his friend Diotallevi it is this spirit of mockery itself that leads to their downfall:

To manipulate the letters of the Book takes great piety, and we didn't have it. But every book is interwoven with the name of God. And we anagrammatized all the books of history, and we did it without praying. [...] He who concerns himself with the Torah keeps the world in motion, and he keeps in motion his own body as he reads, studies, rewrites, because there's no part of the body that doesn't have an equivalent in the world. [...] If you alter the Book, you alter the world; if you alter the world, you alter your body. This is what we didn't understand. (565-66)¹⁷

Diotallevi believes this explains the cancer he has developed, and in terms of the novel's self-destructive paranoid mode of incompleteness—in which an imagined plot becomes real and consumes the imaginer—this link is articulated clearly and eloquently:

For months, like devout rabbis, we uttered different combinations of the letters of the Book. GCC, CGC, GCG, CGG. What our lips said, our cells learned. What did my cells do? They invented a new Plan, and now they are proceeding on their own, creating a history, a unique, private history. My cells have learned that you can blaspheme by anagrammatizing the Book, and all the books in the world. And they learned to do this now with my body. They invert, transpose, alternate, transform themselves into cells unheard of, new cells without meaning, or with meaning contrary to the right meaning. There

¹⁶ “a lasciarmi cullare dal sentimento della somiglianza: tutto poteva avere misteriose analogie con tutto” (178).

¹⁷ “Per manipolare le lettere del Libro ci vuole molta pietà, e noi non l'abbiamo avuta. Ogni libro è intessuto del nome di Dio, e noi abbiamo anagrammato tutti i libri della storia, senza pregare. [...] Colui che si occupa della Torah mantiene il mondo in movimento e mantiene in movimento il suo corpo mentre legge, o riscrive, perché non c'è parte del corpo che non abbia un equivalente nel mondo[...]. Se tu alteri il Libro, alteri il mondo, se alteri il mondo alteri il corpo. Questo non abbiamo capito” (599).

must be a right meaning and a wrong meaning; otherwise you die. My cells joke, without faith, blindly. (566)¹⁸

For Diotallevi, their guilt lies in the fact that they have recombined the Torah precisely not as “devout rabbis,” nor even as devout scholars, but simply as a “joke, without faith, blindly.” There thus seem to be two negative forms of overinterpretation that haunt the novel, both of which are contrasted to the more pious recombinatory efforts lauded by Diotallevi. In this positive pious model, the search is what is valorized, the endless reshuffling of the text of the world—and, moreover, it is precisely in its unfinishability that this quest is valorized, as Diotallevi makes clear in denouncing the cabalistic utility of Belbo’s new computer: “By rearranging the letters of the book over the centuries, we may someday arrive again at the original Torah. But the important thing is not the finding, it is the seeking, it is the devotion with which one spins the wheel of prayer and scripture, discovering the truth little by little. If this machine gave you the truth immediately, you would not recognize it, because your heart would not be purified by the long quest” (33).¹⁹ One might

¹⁸ “E che sono le cellule? Per mesi come rabbini devoti abbiamo pronunciato con le nostre labbra una diversa combinazione delle lettere del Libro. GCC, CGC, GCG, CGG. Quello che le nostre labbra dicevano, le nostre cellule imparavano. Che cosa hanno fatto le mie cellule. Hanno inventato un Piano diverso, e ora vanno per conto proprio. Le mie cellule stanno inventando una storia che non è quella di tutti. Le mie cellule hanno ormai imparato che si può bestemmiare anagrammando il Libro e tutti i libri del mundo. E così hanno imparato a fare col mio corpo. Invertono, transpongono, alternano, permutano, creano cellule mai viste e senza senso, o che sensi contrari al senso giusto. Ci dev’essere un senso giusto, e dei sensi sbalgiati, altrimenti si muore. Ma loro giocano, senza fede, alla cieca” (599-600).

¹⁹ “E permutando nel corso dei secoli le lettere del libro si potrebbe arrivare a ritrovare la Torah originaria. Ma non è il risultato quello che conta. È il processo, la fedeltà con cui farai girare all’infinito il mulino della preghiera e della scrittura, scoprendo la verità a poco a poco. Se questa macchina ti desse subito la verità non la

compare the situation to reading a novel: if reaching the end of a novel (“finding out what happens”) were truly the point, then it would be enough to skip to the end and save oneself many hours of reading. But without these many hours of reading, without the mode(s) of incompleteness that have been overcome en route to the end, the ending would lack coherence and emotional impact. To receive the revelation of the ending, the reader’s heart must be purified by the process of reading, the lectorial journey that endows the novel’s sense of an ending with significance.

Against this paradigm *Il pendolo di Foucault* seems to offer up two distinct models of “bad” reading. On the one hand there are the diabolicals, so fixated on the secret and its discovery that they pay little or no attention to the process by which it is discovered: this is a hermeneutic model in which the ends always justify the means, rather like the four-tiered model of medieval allegorical reading Eco discusses in *L’Opera aperta*. One knows beforehand what one will find, and it is only a matter of making the facts fit one’s conclusion. This approach not only leads to dubious interpretive practices, but also actively blinds the diabolicals to what Casaubon and Belbo finally consider to be the ultimate secret... the secret that there is no secret. On the other hand, there are the faithless, impious acts of textual recombination performed by the inventors of the plan, their cynical solutions to the mysteries and lacunae of history, here explained as the workings of a single master plan that they know to be false. The first approach has faith but lacks incredulity; the second has incredulity but lacks faith.

ricosceresti, perché il tuo cuore non sarebbe stato purificato da una lunga interrogazione” (41).

The dangers of the first path are jovially illustrated by the mocking portraits of the diabolicals that litter the novel. The dangers of the second path, however, are illustrated by the novel's self-immolating paranoid mode of incompleteness. The Plan that the protagonists create assumes a life of its own: for instance, they invent the name of an imaginary hermetic society—"the Tres," or "Templi Resurgentes Equites Synarchici"—a society that near the end of the novel has not only constituted itself but actually interrogates and executes Jacopo Belbo, and which, at the novel's end, is about to discover and put to the question the narrator Casaubon as well. The becoming-real of the Plan points to the potential dangers of finalizing history: like the fixed point above the Pendulum, which swings **as if** in a vacuum, the Plan attains a functional reality through the belief of the diabolicals (and, soon, the fearful reflections of Belbo and Casaubon). Once the past has been finalized as "the Plan," it comes to take on a sinister life of its own, making the rest of the world that much more complex and unfinalizable.

Again, there is a link between completion and levels of complexity in the novel: it is only after they have "finished" the plan that Belbo, in a moment of hubris, chooses to share it with Aglié (a particularly influential diabolical), eventually resulting in his own death and (after the novel's end) the death of Casaubon as well. Once the plan is complete, it is able to interact with the world and add wrinkles to itself, even as it jealously guards the secret of its own fictionality. After the death of the narrator, the Plan will doubtless develop further permutations as the diabolicals continue to search for its nonexistent secret. The completion of the Plan succeeds in

finalizing a version of history, but the power of the simulacrum unfinalizes the Plan itself, which attains increasing levels of complexity after taking on a real existence and outliving its creators.

The presiding chronotope of the Pendulum contributes to the novel's unfinalizability on the level of textual organization as well. When Belbo is hung from the Pendulum, Casaubon reads his corpse as tracing out the ten points of the Sefiroh, and the novel itself is organized into ten sections that correspond to the Sefiroh, pointing to the subtle influence of Diotallevi upon the narrator. But the far greater dialogic relationship at the heart of the novel's structure is of course the one between Casaubon and Belbo, as Casaubon's narrative is heavily interspersed with the contents of Belbo's computer, in which Casaubon discovers "diary fragments, confessions, outlines for works of fiction made with the bitter obstinacy of a man who knows that his efforts are doomed to failure" (43).²⁰ Casaubon is thus not only the narrator but the editor of the text as well, indeed a sort of second-order editor—Belbo actually was a professional editor—since the 120 chapters of the novel are organized in conjunction with 120 quotes that Belbo has already assembled. Thus, although the novel certainly attains an organic unity of sorts through the symbolically pregnant period of its chronotope, its unity is such that there can be no single explanation for its construction. As a heterogeneous composite text that functions as a complex unity, it is simultaneously finished and unfinalizable. The dangers of insisting on a fixed point, a hidden secret meaning that would explain all, can be counterbalanced by a

²⁰ "brani di diario, confessioni, abbozzi di prove narrative registrate col puntiglio amaro di chi le sa già votate all'insuccesso" (51).

pious skepticism, a commitment to the process of reading and interpretation, and the cautionary examples of Diotallevi, Belbo, and Casaubon.

In each of these novels, a semi-concrete message can be read into the symbol of its chronotope, which embraces and reinforces its paranoid mode of incompleteness. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, the paranoid mode of incompleteness proceeds on three levels: 1) the construction of a counter-history of the Second World War, depicted here not in terms of the triumph of the Allied nation states but in terms of the birth of a new world order, the age of the Multinational; 2) the specific plot directed against the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop, which by the end of the novel consumes him; and 3) the MAD plot of a postmodern world that is continually threatened by nuclear holocaust, a perpetual crisis launched before the war was even over and falling upon the heads of the reader in the present day. The parabola of the rocket connects these levels, since 1) the postwar arms race was fueled by captured Nazi scientists on both sides of the iron curtain, making the Rocket itself a sort of figure for the multinational ("Raketenstadt"); 2) the plot around Slothrop (at one point known as "Raketenmensch") springs from the strange reversal of cause and effect vis-à-vis rocket strikes and Slothrop's sexual exploits; and 3) the obvious parabolic path of the dreaded ICBM attack. Since the mysterious Rocket 00000, around which the plot of the novel revolves, is eventually discovered to contain a young boy, formerly the sado-masochistic plaything of Captain Blicero, we might also take the irreversible arch of the parabola as counting down the end of Western innocence, of faith in the Progress metanarrative of the Enlightenment. Yet because it is completed, because

the novel embodies its chronotope in these ways, these different parabolic levels of the novel can coexist... informing, complicating and undermining one another, preserving the unfinalizability of the novel within the open space of the completed Parabola, “Beyond the Zero” but also before the One, remaining always on that liminal unfinalizable threshold in which “everything is connected, but not yet blindingly one”... at least so long as “a Hand to turn the Time” remains. The positive nature of the novel’s unfinalizability consists in its remaining in this liminal space, between the disheartening anti-paranoiac meaninglessness of “nothing is connected” and the individual and/or species death implicit in becoming “blindingly one,” as in the blinding oneness of the explosion that precedes and follows the novel.

This liminal space of the unfinalizable novel, swinging forever between meaninglessness and certainty while never conclusively attaching itself to either one, is also highlighted by the chronotopic influence of the Pendulum in *Il pendolo di Foucault*. The paranoid mode of incompleteness in the novel proceeds at first according to the construction of the Plan—equal parts historical research and paranoid exegesis—and later according to the self-destructive logic of the paranoid simulacrum. At the same time, the search for the “blindingly one” is mocked on two levels: by the futility of the diabolicals in their search for a revelatory secret, and by the misery and impotence afforded by the secret that Belbo and Casaubon each discover at the point of death: the secret that there is no secret. This secret brings no advantages, little wisdom, and only fleeting joy at best, as Casaubon, waiting for death, reflects at the novel’s end:

I have understood. And the certainty that there is nothing to understand should be my peace, my triumph. But I am here, and They are looking for me, thinking I possess the revelation they sorely desire. It isn't enough to have understood, if others refuse and continue to interrogate. [...] In a little while, They'll be here. I would have liked to write down everything I thought today. But if They were to read it, They would only derive another dark theory and spend another eternity trying to decipher the secret message hidden behind my words. It's impossible, They would say; he can't only have been making fun of us. No. Perhaps, without realizing it, Being was sending us a message through its oblivion.

It makes no difference whether I write or not. They will look for other meanings, even in my silence. That's how They are. Blind to revelation. Malkhut is Malkhut, and that's that.

But try telling Them. They of little faith.

So I might as well stay here, wait, and look at the hill.

It's so beautiful. (641)²¹

The reader of the novel is placed in a somewhat paradoxical position by this closing passage, in which the narrator of the text seemingly decides against composing the text we have just read, declaring that it "makes no difference whether I write or not."

To avoid the position of the diabolicals, who have been made immune to revelation

²¹ Ho capito. La certezza che non vi era nulla da capire, questo dovrebbe essere la mia pace e il mio trionfo. Ma io sono chi, che tutto ho capito, ed Essi mi Cercano, pensando che posseda la rivelazione che sordidamente desiderano. Non basta aver capito, se gli altri si rifiutano e continuano a interrogare. [...] Tra poco arriveranno. Vorrei aver scritto tutto ciò che ho pensato da questo pomeriggio a ora. Ma se Essi lo leggessero, ne trarrebbero un'altra cupa teoria e passerebbero l'eternità a cercare di decifrare il messaggio segreto che si cela dietro la mia storia. È impossibile, direbbero, che costui ci abbia raccontato solo che si stava prendendo gioco di noi. No, magari lui non lo sapeva, ma l'Essere ci lanciava un messaggio attraverso il suo oblio.

Che io abbia scritto o no, non fa differenza. Cercherebbero sempre un altro senso, anche nel mio silenzio. Sono fatti così. Sono ciechi alla rivelazione. Malkut è Malkut e basta.

Ma vaglielo a dire. Non hanno fede.

E allora tanto vale star qui, attendere, a guardare la collina.

È così bella. (679-680).

by the very vehemence of their search for it, the reader must accept that the novel s/he has just read contains no secret message: for the reader who has just finished the novel, it is like Casaubon's description of a particularly transcendent moment of Belbo's youth (which he had long associated with figure of the pendulum): "it was what it was. It did not stand for anything else. At that moment there was no longer any deferment, and the score was settled" (633).²² Like the hill on which Casaubon gazes in the novel's final line, the reader is asked to view the novel not as a container filled with hidden secrets but as a beautiful object that offers only the revelation of itself (*Malkut è Malkut e basta*).

But of course this is only half the story. Casaubon reflects on the futility of putting his thoughts on paper because he knows that, after the death of its author, the text will come to take on a life of its own. The complexity of the novel means that its potential meanings blossom far beyond the simple pessimistic Socratic wisdom proclaimed by Casaubon... though just how far remains in a sense the choice and responsibility of the reader. But through its finished form, the correspondence of shape, Sefiroh, and numerology, it completes its period, encircled by a completed plot that culminates in the death of its narrator, while hanging from the imaginary fixed point that is made functional through the imaginative power and lectorial competence of the reader, who—in collaboration with the text—projects a world.

In both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Il pendolo di Foucault*, the abundant use of real historical data allows for complex interactions between the "real world" and the

²² "era ciò che era e che non stava per niente altro, il momento in cui non c'è più rinvio, e i conti sono pari" (671).

fictional worlds of the novels, whose borders become somewhat porous due to the historical facts from which they are built (in contrast, for instance, to the self-conscious fictionality and self-containedness of “Macondo” in Marquez’s *Cien años de soledad*). Yet even this porousness of their borders, another key element of their unfinalizability, is made possible only by the drawing of these borders, by the completion of these novels (their “making fungible”) that simultaneously makes possible their chronotopic embodiments of their paranoid modes of incompleteness. The Parabola of the Rocket’s Progress is an inexhaustible symbol in which multiple meanings are meant to coexist, while the Pendulum is explicitly figured as something that is given meaning only through the investment of the interpreter, yet in each case the novel’s unfinalizable embodiment of its symbol is made possible only by the recognizable completion of the inexhaustible chronotopic image. United in its circularity, unfinalizable in its complexity and porousness, each novel “is what it is”: at once finished and unfinalizable.

7.4 Postscript: Beyond Completion

When I began this project, I imagined the title “Beyond Completion” would function as a clever double entendre: on the one hand, the phrase can be used to describe the unfinishable novels that are central to my work, novels that, for one reason or another, proved beyond the powers of their authors to complete (or, in some cases, beyond the powers of their authors to destroy). In this sense, the phrase can be seen as alluding to the particular biographical backstories that stand behind each and

every unfinished work. Perhaps more importantly, the phrase “Beyond Completion” also points to the period between death and publication in which unfinished works and unfinishable novels are co-authored into fungible texts and made available for public consumption, insofar as unfinished works are only truly “completed” through the literal deaths of their authors.

At the same time, of course, the phrase “Beyond Completion” also points to a methodological imperative that this project was meant to espouse... a semi-polemical, neo-Bakhtinian assault on the privileged position that neoclassical notions of wholeness and unity continue to hold in many of the most influential accounts of the novel and its history, particularly those that privilege the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as constituting not only the pinnacle of the genre’s popularity and influence, but also as exemplifying its essential nature. Although my goal has never been to invalidate such narratives, I have attempted to supplement them by adding one more historiographical account to the pile, hopefully reinforcing in the process the Bakhtinian perspective that conceives of the novel—that most quintessentially prosaic and unfinalizable of genres—as the genre whose essential nature is not to have an essential nature. The novel, like prose itself, can never be satisfactorily defined once and for all because it is continually in the process of defining itself. That is its law, its process, its truth, and to recognize this is not to reach an interpretive dead-end but rather to open up a larger and more fluid field of possibilities for thinking both prose in general and the novel in particular.

Yet I must also admit that the phrase Beyond Completion has come to take on an added significance for me as, over the course of the writing process, I have come to gain a deeper appreciation of the merits of completion as well. This springs in part from an increasing investment in the “finished” vs. “complete” distinction I have developed to describe the difference between the totalizing goal of literary *Vollendetheit* and the somewhat magical de-facto unity that any published work of literature inevitably attains. Moreover, the strange de-facto completion that unfinished works achieve—as with novels that “fail” to achieve any recognizable sense of an ending yet nonetheless somehow function as novels—has been increasingly tied in my thought to the somewhat magical organizing power of prose itself, which (for those initiated into its literacy) alchemically transmutes marks on paper into words on a page. In this sense, one might say that to move beyond completion is also to learn to play within it.

It thus might be said that the phrase Beyond Completion functions rather like the phrase “Beyond the Zero” in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: on the one hand, it points outside the finished text, to the before and after of the novel... in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, of course, this before and after are combined in the blinding oneness of an explosion, but in most of the properly “unfinished” novels I have looked at this before and after speak primarily to a posthumous space of literary collaboration, the space in which the unfinishable novel is completed as an unfinished work. On the other hand, however, one can also think of “Beyond the Zero” as designating the unfinalizable space that the completed novel opens up, the complex field of possibilities that spring

up between the Zero of the front cover and the One of the back cover, whether or not the text achieves organic unity via its narrative or is consciously “finished” by its author. As in *Foucault’s Pendulum*, there is a certain sad wisdom in acknowledging that there is no ultimate secret—that closure takes place of its own accord, in any case—but this sad wisdom can also be accompanied by ephemeral bursts of ecstasy, as one learns to feel the pious joy inherent in the process of endless interpretation, and to appreciate the beauty of everything that precedes the end: “È così bella.”

One embraces completion in order to move beyond it.

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Given the importance of unfinished works to my project, I have marked texts that were published posthumously and/or left unfinished at their author's death with an asterisk. For works written after the invention of the printing press, original publication dates are given separately for the original language version and the translation, or together if the book was not read in the original language. For secondary texts, the date of publication is the copyright date unless otherwise noted.

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