7. Consternation: The Anthropological Moment in Prose Fiction (Cervantes, Flaubert, Kafka)

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Chapter Seven

Consternation: The Anthropological Moment in Prose Fiction (Cervantes, Flaubert, Kafka)

By the “anthropological moment” I mean the moment when one human being, to his or her consternation, perceives another as inhuman, while struggling to conclude that this strangeness is part of a design. The struggle aims to escape consternation—“a sudden, alarming amazement or dread that results in . . . paralyzing dismay.”¹ In the anthropological moment the object that alarms and amazes is another human being. The subject suffering consternation seeks relief, even by violent means. If the meaningful design is grasped, relief from interpersonal pain comes with the “negative pleasure” of the sublime.² With the waning of the true sublime—“a moribund aesthetic”—the anthropological moment gains sway.³

Thus described, the anthropological moment corresponds to an

¹. There is an oxymoron of senses of the word in its etymological history. The Random House Dictionary of the English Language (1967) gives the root sterna, which means “to make to shy or dodge.” “Consternation” thus suggests a concentration of contrary movements whose issue is immobilization and a trace of this agitation. The second edition of the Random House Dictionary (1987) registers a different etymological surmise, linking “consternation” to sternere, to “strew,” which also points, however, to the rigidity of stratum, “pavement.” Though “sense development [is] uncertain,” the opposed meanings of unsettling and hindering survive.


empirical moment in the practice of anthropology, which describes cultures remotest from the observer's own while struggling to produce a logic of this other humanity. The moment harbors the fundamental power of philosophical reflection; it breaks down the observer's idea of the human and makes a natural prejudgment a matter for wonder. According to Heidegger, this power should not be confused with what German authors call philosophical anthropology, which is supposed to make harmless the radical strangeness of human beings to one another and to themselves. It is too sociable a science. In his book on Kant, Heidegger terms philosophical anthropology "a reservoir of essential philosophical problems": that is, a place where these problems are stored in forms in which they have been settled for small stakes. The movement of Heidegger's thought—the so-called Kehre or turning from the existential project of *Being and Time* to the fundamental ontology of the later work, to a thinking of being as language—is based on "[an]other [mode] of thinking that abandons subjectivity," in which "every kind of [philosophical] anthropology and all subjectivity of man as subject . . . [are] left behind." I also point up a moment of "abandonment," when intersubjective dialogue in literature is left behind for a moment that contests the power of subjects to understand language, including literary language.

A genuine anthropology would be one in which hermeneutics and the impossibility of hermeneutics contend. The predicament of the consternated interpreter is schizophrenic. Derrida writes in a Heideggerian manner about Jean Laplanche's psychoanalytical study of Friedrich Hölderlin's poetry that the work affords "an exemplary access to the essence of schizophrenia in general: this essence of schizophrenia is not a psychological or anthropological fact available to the determined sciences called psychology or anthropology." Lacanian psychoanalysis, which aims to be an undetermined science, provokes between analyst and patient (as Stuart Schneiderman explains) this very schizophrenic consternation:

Whereas normal conversation attempts to gain some sense of mutual understanding leading to communication, [Lacanian] psychoanalysis tries precisely to break down communication and whatever understanding the analysand has already arrived at. ... Lacan, like most analysts, listened to something other than what was said; he listened as if the remarks that were about him were really addressed to someone else and as if the remarks of the analysand that were supposed to be about himself were really about another. ... By acting much of the time as if he were a creature from another planet, even another galaxy, Lacan gave the impression that he was hearing something other than what you were saying.  

Lacan meant to induce consternation, the heightened negative of the anthropological moment, as a “scrupulously maintained, ... fruitful, well-tuned discord.” If fruitful and well tuned, however, such discord must also include positive moments of apparently truthful interpretation—which is to say, moments of anthropological consternation that succeed in recovering a design.

It appears to be the privilege of literature—and specifically of prose fiction—to represent such moments of anthropological consternation in their fullest measure of negativity. Let us take the oblique path and consider some alternative genres: for instance, the written-up accounts of actual anthropological practice. Here the negative moment of consternation is the very condition of scientific anthropology, which tests itself on the radical otherness of the native respondent. But in the verbal records of such transactions, the rhetoric of consternation is necessarily suppressed in favor of agreement and accord—of science and information.  

8. Ibid., p. 119.  
9. More and more often, the awareness endemic to literature, of the merely factitious status of represented persons and the only doubtful ability of literature to communicate a moment of calculable otherness at the order of representation, has come to the fore in anthropologists’ accounts of other cultures. James Clifford, e.g., writes: “I think we are seeing signs that the privilege given to natural languages and, as it were, native cultures is dissolving. These objects and epistemological grounds are now appearing as constructs, achieved fictions, containing and domesticating heteroglossia” (“On Ethnographic Self-Fashioning,” in Reconstructing Individualism: Autonomy, Individuality, and the Self in Western Thought, ed. Thomas C. Heller, Morton Sonda, and David E. Wellbery [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986], p. 143).
Kafka’s Context

of dialogue is necessarily left out of the protocol that follows, for in the instance of consternation, seeing is important as what is not believing, and believing is not seeing.

The same aptitude for the presentation of dialogue is rarely realized in lyric poetry, although this is the project that Nathaniel Tarn has been calling for. Con­ sternation might seem the appropriate appanage of history writing, but here too the problematical of the visible are given short shrift. Natalie Z. Davis, a historian who advised the filmmakers of Le Retour de Martin Guerre, noted: “In the film, I was a historian who wanted to make the past come alive in the details of experience, the historian who so much wants to be in the past that she pretends she’s an anthropologist and is observing it” (my italics). In one respect, of course, films are very apt for problematical representation: they can evoke a real and a phantasmal visibility, and so they can suggest a consternating visibility in excess of the facts and, equally, a consternating failure of the visible to manifest the facts. Paul Valéry wrote of the way “artists are useful: they preserve the subtlety and instability of sensory impressions. A modern artist has to exhaust two-thirds of his time trying to see what is visible—and above all, trying not to see what is invisible. Philosophers often pay a high price for striving to do the opposite.” In films the artist’s task can become philosophical; films can dismiss the artist’s alleged loyalty to the visible.

But in one important way films fall short. They have by and large failed to develop a code of metanarrative signals—a commentary twilit­thing the narrative all along the way—being chiefly dependent for commentary on the limited field of the voice-over or the image of its impersonator. This is impoverishing, because the fullest presentation of the anthropological moment requires the vital dimension of the conflict to be illuminated—namely, the impensé, the ideological factor informing the “positions” that seem to constitute the anthropological dispute but which, in the absence of the impensé, do so only trivially. Such positions are construed by observers only insofar as

10. In conversation with the author.
they can be attributed to the self-awareness of the dialogists. It needs to be shown, however, how in the anthropological moment the *codic immersion* of interrogators, of which they themselves are ignorant, precipitates their consternation or what the anthropologist E. Michel Mendelson calls “the role of the discourse in our understanding of the problems it conveys to us.”\(^{13}\) This code can be indicated by narrators, if only by the hinting of rhetorical gestures, although this does not protect them, either, from blindness to the conditions of their own mastery of that code.

In consternation the code of public behavior that sustains the moral unity of persons shatters. Such a moment has been described by Tony Tanner as a constitutive feature of the novel. His book *Adultery and the Novel* links the early novel to its responsiveness to types of social transgression, of which adultery is said to be the most drastically usurpatory, producing in its wake unintelligible characters.\(^{14}\) In consternation the code shatters in a dialogical situation; here we can recall the aptitude of the novel for the expression of various dialogues: between character and character, narrator and character, narrator and narrator. Narrators can emphasize, over the heads of the dialogists, the wider code that explains their consternation—and implicates themselves. In Thomas Mann’s *Doctor Faustus*, for example, Zeitblom finds consternating a moment in his biography of Adrian Leverkühn which requires him to report a dialogue of Leverkühn’s, one that to Zeitblom’s dismay Leverkühn himself does not find consternating. Zeitblom escapes his distress by surrendering the narrative to Leverkühn: “The biographical moment has come,” writes Zeitblom. “And accordingly, I myself must cease to speak. . . . In this twenty-fifth chapter the reader hears Adrian’s voice direct.”

But is it only his? This is a dialogue which lies before us. Another, quite another, quite frightfully other, is the principal speaker, and the writer, in his stone-floored living-room, only writes down what he

\(^{13}\) Letter to the author, May 11, 1980.

\(^{14}\) Tony Tanner, *Adultery in the Novel* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979). The speech of Shakespeare’s Troilus comes to mind as an incomparably fierce instance: Troilus laments Cressida’s adultery as jeopardizing the “rule in unity itself” (*Troilus and Cressida* 5.2). If this example diminishes, of course, the novel-specific character of the moment of consternation, it heightens its connection with adultery.
Kafka’s Context

heard from that other. A dialogue? Is it really a dialogue? I should be mad to believe it. And therefore I cannot believe that in the depths of his soul Adrian himself considered to be actual that which he saw and heard—either while he heard and saw it or afterwards, when he put it on paper; notwithstanding the cynicisms with which his interlocutor sought to convince him of his objective presence. But if he was not there, that visitor—and I shudder at the admission which lies in the very words, seeming even conditionally and as possibility to entertain his actuality—then it is horrible to think that those cynicisms too, those jeerings and joggings came out of the afflicted one’s own soul.¹⁵

Zeitblom’s way of sublimating a devilish dialo gist is to deny that any such dialogue has taken place. The German word, meanwhile, for “jeerings and joggings” is Spiegelfechtereien: hence, “joustings with a mirror image.” In surmising that this meeting is a product of Adrian Leverkühn’s mirror phase, Zeitblom hints at the inauthenticity of his own dialogue with Leverkühn throughout. Their dialogue can now be seen as controlled by Zeitblom, as an anthropological dialogue with a devil designed always to be kept within bounds of the “humanistic.” The discourse of Zeitblom and Leverkühn itself belongs among the joustings of the mirror phase, and Zeitblom does not wish to know that Leverkühn comes out of the afflicted Zeitblom’s soul.

I am concerned, then, with literary moments of staged interpersonal consternation and recovery or covering up. Prose fiction is distinctive for the abundance of such moments. And now a crucial point: the same anthropological moment can be found to inform the reading that such fiction provokes. Here I do not mean to advance the interpersonal model of reading as a dialogue between author and reader, which is a highly contestable form of reading, so much as to stress the omnipresent moment of defamiliarization. Fiction as such defamiliarizes; it means to astonish and unsettle every step of the way. For it necessarily unsettles conventional patterns of signs, especially by transforming the conventional relation of the literal to the figurative in ways bound to induce consternation.

This chapter treats such transformations as they occur in major fiction, in the dialogues between characters that unsettle them. This

unsettling is communicated by a communication itself unsettling. The consternation of fictional characters amplifies its strangeness in the relation between text and reader, inflicting a kind of reading trauma defined by the issues under tension in the text. Such moments heighten the constitutive strangeness of fiction.

* * *

Before turning to examples from Cervantes, Flaubert, and Kafka, consider this model—built up chiefly from Hölderlin and Nietzsche—of what happens, or fails to happen, when there is consternation at the order of reading. The first point on this negative path: words that inspire understanding do not consternate. Understanding means the facility with which signs can be returned to a wide range of contexts and uses in which they have previously figured. Understanding proliferates doubles of the sign in question, which are or can be resituated. This is Nietzsche’s idea when he defines key words, powerful concepts, as “process[es] . . . semiotically concentrated.”

Understanding multiplies the sign, virtually remembering it in each moment of its semiotic history for me: every time I understand a word, I recapitulate a moment in what Lacan calls my “semantic evolution: this corresponds to the stock of words and acceptations of my own . . . vocabulary, as it does to my style of life and to my character.” My semantic evolution is involved in that of my group. Nietzsche writes of the communal abundance of meaning as “the ultimate result [of the development of this communicative function]: an excess of this strength and art of communication—as it were, a capacity that has gradually been accumulated and now waits for an heir who might squander it. (Those who are called artists are these heirs; so are orators, preachers, writers . . . ).” This is to catch the prolific hermeneutic or meaning-squandering function of literature.

This moment might, of course, itself induce a secondary consternation, the confusion of excessive significance, of too many doubles.

too much metaphor, which Nietzsche contrasts with the strength of the Dionysian type. The “art of communication commanded in the highest degree by the Dionysian type [is] marked by the ease of metamorphosis; it is impossible for him to overlook any sign of an affect.” 19 Such a Dionysian art might induce in the ordinary reader a cascade of affect-laden metaphorical displacements, an experience of meaning verging on consternation—but not principally negative: it suggests the category of “semantic saturation,” that abundance of information which formalists call “beauty.” 20 Its interpersonal analogue is the delirium—the lucky jousting in front of a mirror, Spiegelfechterei—of being-in-love, the bliss of perfect interpersonal recognition.

Nietzsche gives a semiotic account of being in love with the world as text.

The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all: one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor: everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors. (“Here all things come caressingly to your discourse and flatter you; for they want to ride on your back. On every metaphor you ride to every truth. . . . Here the words and word-shrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak”). 21

For Nietzsche the world is a text—occasionally a good text—requiring interpretation. But seen with “great health,” the world’s signs are more than signs: they are vehicles of the things they name, that “ride upon their backs.” The impulse of active interpretation is at low ebb. Things ride in on their own names. And these things too are metaphors; they and their meanings flow into the discourse of the

20. A certain modern form of this beauty is described by Anthony L. Johnson as arising through “the ‘profanation’ of the signified, achieved by increasing its plasticity in the interests of the signifier’s capacity for ‘self-display’ and inventiveness” (“Jakobsonian Theory and Literary Semiotics,” New Literary History 14 [Autumn 1982]: 1).
21. Basic Writings of Nietzsche, pp. 756–57; Portable Nietzsche, pp. 295–96. This rhetoric of fulfilled knighthood, of the journey to the Grail, also suggests Don Quixote’s wish-dream.
Consternation: The Anthropological Moment

inspired reader. In love, the world’s text approaches with the visibility of a loved body; and as around “the high body, beautiful, triumphant, refreshing, . . . everything becomes a mirror,” all discourse then mirrors, like an aroused lover, the thing, book, or body it is given to understand.22

In consternation, the book yellows, the body fades—the mirror shatters. The world’s signs become opaque: they do not produce mirrors for a doubling. They create no spectral doubles of themselves: they cannot produce metaphors.

Now if a sign can be imagined that cannot be carried over into any other context, it is absolutely literal: it is only the crack where a meaning is lacking, a place marker of the context that embeds its opacity and that can itself be seen as growingly reduced to opacity by this break in its texture.23 Hence the consternation of reading an entirely foreign word and, equally, of registering in a book a “human being” (scare quotes) as monstrous. In Kafka’s Metamorphosis, Gregor Samsa, the buglike victim, is called an ungeheueres Ungeziefer (“monstrous sort of vermin”). While he may be a monstrous human being, he is certainly the shadow of an outlandish pair of words, chiefly marked by their negative un-, un- sound and therefore having only etymological significance (they have no other clear-cut significance) as a creature unsuited to a household (infamiliaris) and unacceptable as a sacrifice (Middle High German, ungezivere).24 Here I have reached for an etymological dictionary for relief from the consternation of a pair of (almost) literal signs. If Gregor is a human being, then he lives out his career entirely as this etymological designation, as household trash to be swept out. Kafka’s theme is the effort by Gregor himself and his

22. Portable Nietzsche, p. 302. Evidently Nietzsche’s rhetorical vision does not fail to promise a new Kabbalah of sorts, though even this real appropriation of metaphor would have to be classed by him as a fiction.

23. Cf. the observation by Friedrich Kittler: “The sigh ‘oh [ach]’ is the sign of that unique entity [the soul], which, if it were to mouth any other signifier—as signifiers exist only in the plural, any signifier whatsoever—would have to return immediately to its own sigh; for then it would have ceased to be soul, it would have become words, language [Sprache] instead” (Aufschreibesysteme 1800 – 1900 [Munich: Fink, 1985], p. 11).

family to interpret other than by etymological approximation an unintelligible and continually changing body, to add to an obscure sign some other definite meaning. The mood of the story, as Kafka and Friedrich Beißner wrote, is horror, an exacerbated form of consternation before an irreducibly literal human being (M 187).

Yet the opaque sign can also arrest and fascinate. Schizophrenia, Laplanche suggests, is an arrest of the metaphorical function: all moments of experience fascinate and stun the schizophrenic equally. Hölderlin is an example. “Above all it is a matter of his hypersensibility,” writes Laplanche, “the sustained and ravaging echo that prolongs the smallest experience of the least liveliness into long periods of depression or excitement; like an ultrafine crystal or a string drawn too taut, it finds itself in a sort of unstable equilibrium that inclines it to resonate endlessly, even to sounds that have nothing in common with it except for remote harmonics.”

What Hölderlin cannot do is relay the sign to a definite context: not to do so is to be wholly exposed to the moment; it is to be helpless in the sense that Freud gives to Hilflosigkeit—a breaking down of the barriers that protect the subject, with the effect of preventing him or her from producing an exact or applied reaction. The consternating detail marks a weakness of ego defenses. Harold Searles observes: “Without the establishment of firm ego boundaries, a differentiation between metaphorical meanings and literal meanings cannot take place; [but] it would seem equally correct to say that metaphor, at least, could never develop if there had not once been a lack of such ego boundaries.”

What is at stake is the facility of repeated genesis of a doubled consciousness that will not prove deranging. In W. Stählin’s view (as discussed by Gerhard Kurz): “With metaphor we have a situation of the consciousness of doubled meaning. In intending an expression metaphorically, we intend a meaning that is supposed to arise out of the standard meaning without annihilating it. . . . We are conscious of the normal meaning and at the same time of its transform-

26. Ibid., p. 93.
Con sternation: The Anthropological Moment

mation into a new metaphorical meaning forced by the context or the situation." 28 With the lack of all ego boundaries, however, with the limitless expansion of the spaces between doubles of consciousness, meaning becomes interminably metaphorical and hence by the dialectic entirely literal. The sign that means everything in general means nothing in particular. Hölderlin gives his own troubled account of how things and signs could captivate him in their infinite and empty suggestiveness:

I am not entitled to complain about Nature—which heightened my sense of the shortcomings of things [das Mangelhafte], in order to make me all the more intensely and joyously aware of what is excellent. Once I have arrived at the point of mastering the knack of feeling and seeing in things that fall short less the indefinite pain that they often cause me than precisely their special, momentary, particular lack, and thus also of recognizing their beauty, their characteristic good—once I have achieved this, then my spirit will become calmer and my activity make a steadier progress. For when we experience a lack only infinitely, then we are naturally inclined, too, to want to repair this lack infinitely, and then our strength often gets entangled in an indefinite, fruitless, exhausting struggle, because it does not know definitely where the lack is and how precisely to repair and supplement this lack. 29

Hölderlin's exacerbated sense of lack, the failure of the energy of specification, is, for Lacan, the product of an unconscious that lacks a certain decisive regulatory function. “By means of the hole that [this absence] opens in the signified, [it] attracts the cascade of revisions of the signifier, whence proceeds the increasing disaster of the Imaginary.” 30

The moment in which the world grows increasingly literal is threatening and needs to be explained. Cervantes' Don Quixote, Flaubert's Sentimental Education, and Kafka's “The Judgment” describe different characters' responses to consternation. Don Quixote saves himself by enlarging his credulity, blaming magic, and sum-

Kafka’s Context

moning up religious patience: God will help His faithful knight. In *Sentimental Education*, Frédéric Moreau saves himself by constructing erogenous rhetorical fictions of selfhood; mastery of the Oedipus complex will save the consternated lover. In “The Judgment,” Georg Bendemann consents to his own literalization and death; his hope lies in immersion in a sort of Dionysian capitalist flux, an urban rage of sex and commerce. In each case the anthropological moment shatters the reading relation: interpersonal distress in fiction is amplified into a reading trauma. Thereafter it is every hermeneut for her- or himself. Literature rewrites anthropology by suggesting that interpersonality is founded on the violent suppression of a more native unintelligibility. Interpersonality is the reward for the lost knowledge of the universal failure of reading.

* * *

“I can see nothing, Sancho,” said Don Quixote, “but three village girls on three donkeys.”

*Miguel de Cervantes, Don Quixote*

Chapter 10 of Part II (II.10) of *Don Quixote*, in which Quixote first lays eyes on the pseudo-Dulcinea del Toboso, is told by two narrators. One narrator, conventionally called the Second Author, presents the “history” written by Cide Hamete Benengeli, who is a more obviously fictive narrator. The double frame increases the likelihood that the encounter has been thoroughly designed. The Second Author declares that he aims to present Don Quixote’s behavior at a maximum of unbelievableness (which is to say, as inviting a maximum of consternation for the reader) and yet as true.

When the author of this great history [Cide Hamete Benengeli] comes to recount the contents of this chapter, he says that he would have liked
to pass it over in silence, through fear of disbelief. For Don Quixote’s delusions here reach the greatest imaginable bounds and limits, and even exceed them, great as they are, by two bow-shots. But finally he wrote the deeds down, although with fear and misgivings, just as our knight performed them, without adding or subtracting one atom of truth from the history, or taking into account any accusations of lying that might be laid against him. And he was right, for truth, though it may run thin, never breaks, and always flows over the lie like oil over water.31

So the surface of the episode is true; we will find truth in its unction. We have only to distinguish its surface from its depth.

One such surface truth is plainly the truth of enchantment: enchanters, Don Quixote declares, have transformed Dulcinea “into a figure as low and ugly as that peasant girl’s” (p. 531). The alibi of enchantment is the means by which Don Quixote sublimes his consternation, but this solution is only provisional.

There is another striking truth in the rhetorical surface of the episode, a conspicuous confusion of signifiers about hackneys and she-asses: a sublime horseplay. Don Quixote’s consternation at Dulcinea’s appearance generates a parallel disturbance and play of the letter.

“Your Worship,” says Sancho Panza, “has nothing more to do than to spur Rocinante and go out into the open to see the lady Dulcinea del Toboso, who is coming to meet your worship with two of her damsels.” Sancho proceeds to describe the coming of the princess in a rhetoric he has learned from Don Quixote. His encomium returns to a famous set speech by Don Quixote; in Sancho’s words, “her maidens and she are one blaze of gold, all ropes of pearls, all diamonds, all rubies, all brocade of more than ten gold strands; their hair loose on their shoulders, like so many sunrays sporting in the wind and, what’s more [we are alerted to a supplement], they are riding on three piebald hackneys [or cackneys], the finest to be seen.” For hacaneas (“hackneys”), Sancho Panza has said cananeas (“nackneys” or “cackneys”). “Hackneys, you mean, Sancho,” replies Don Quixote.

“There is very little difference,” answers Sancho, “between nackneys [or cackneys] and hackneys. But let them come on whatever they may, they are the bravest ladies you could wish for” (p. 528).32

Sancho Panza speaks many such catachreses, of course, which Don Quixote as often tries to correct;33 but this one appears to have a special function. “Hackney” is a rich and aporetic word which—as the Oxford English Dictionary points out—“has engaged the most eminent etymologists” but whose “ulterior derivation is still unknown.” It stands for high and low; it is at once “an ambling horse or mare especially for ladies to ride on—often white,” and, from the fact that hackneys were hired out, “a prostitute.”34 It also came in Cervantes’ time to designate a pen-for-hire; and in Sancho’s citing the word from the world of Quixote’s chivalric books, it calls attention to Sancho himself as a plagiarist to the second power.

Given at least this semantic field, it is a matter of no mean difficulty to decide what is achieved when cananeas replaces hacaneas. For Sancho himself there is “very little difference”; he is a systematic leveler of discursive differences. The word cananeas is rendered by English translators, with an eye to Cervantes’ intent, as a degradation: it is not hard to hear it in “cackneys” or indeed in “nack-” (that

32. This passage, esp. as it involves the relation of the words cananea and hacanea, is a familiar topic for students of Don Quixote, as well as of Tirso de Molina’s El burlador de Sevilla. Bruce Wardropper discusses the relation of these words in the course of distinguishing between the two works in their use of cananea (“Who Was Catalinón’s Intercessor?” in Estudios literarios de Hispanistas Norteamericanos dedicados a Helmut Hatzfeld con motivo de su 80 aniversario, ed. Josep M. Sola-Solé, Alessandro Crisafulli, and Bruno Damiani [Barcelona: Hispam Colección, 1972], pp. 349–54). I am grateful to Alban Forcione for bringing this essay to my attention.

33. “The single most significant difference between Don Quijote and Sancho Panza: Don Quijote’s speech acts continually reflect his will to structure, to provide definitive endings and dependable meanings to events in the world. Sancho, in contrast, presents a will to unstructure definitions and meanings. For Sancho, definitions and meanings are exorbitant desires, not implacable realities” (Ramon Salivar, Figural Narrative: The Flowers of Fiction [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984], p. 40).

34. Leo Spitzer was the first to point out, apropos of the verbal play on cananea in El burlador de Sevilla, the connotation of puta in hacanea (“En lisant le Burlador de Sevilla,” Nouveau Monde 36 [1933]: 281). Wardropper (“Who Was Catalinón’s Intercessor?” p. 352) agrees that the “sexual implications of equitation are involved . . . even though English hackney did not acquire its meaning of ‘prostitute’ until long after (1679, OED) the word was appropriated by Spanish (1490, Corominas).”
is, “nag–”) or “knock-neys.” But Hackney is also a place name, and therefore in a number of coherent ways Sancho can have inserted into his word cananeas the place name Cana (in Galilee), the place of Christ’s first miracle, his turning water into wedding wine. The water (of the lie) miraculously vanishes under the oil of truth, the wine of presence.

This, then, is Sancho’s sublimated consciousness of the miracle he means to perform to provision a sort of wedding—of Don Quixote and Dulcinea del Toboso. Sancho Panza as a figura Christi could sound absurd, but hasn’t he after all learned from Don Quixote, two chapters earlier, that “chivalry is a religion” (p. 520)? And that sublimation is everywhere explicitly at stake is borne out by Sancho’s speech to the saddle-nosed country girl: “O Princess and world-famous lady of El Toboso! How is it that your magnanimous heart is not softened when you see the column and prop of knight errantry kneeling before your sublimated presence?” (p. 529). Sancho’s language is capable of wide religious reference: he knows populist religious rhetoric. I hold that the miracle of Cana is a self-reflexive mark of Sancho’s growing consciousness of his power to perform miracles with words.

Another intertextual line of descent, however, needs to be brought into play. The word cananeas literally means “Canaanite women”: it alludes in the plural to the woman of Canaan who besought Christ to drive out the devil from her daughter. Christ granted her prayer, and the woman of Canaan was blessed, as indeed her land had always been blessed. In this sense Sancho Panza salutes the peasant women as legendary survivals of the Promised Land, the land of milk and honey. Both these meanings work in the way that Cana works, but they
are special for arising from a signifier displaying itself as a citation, as I shall explain.

Older annotated editions of *Don Quixote* allege two main sources of Sancho’s catachresis. The first is Alfonso Lopez Pinciano’s *Filosofía poetica* (1596). In the course of cataloguing the principles of jokes, the author mentions “[sheer] ignorance,” as for example “to say cananea instead of hacanea.” According to the implications of this commentary, Cervantes means Sancho to speak as a fool; Sancho is presented as someone than whom every reader is smarter. Every reader will know what Sancho doesn’t know, namely that he is speaking in the very character of the fool. This is quite unconvincing.

Another commentary is more bemusing. It cites a passage from the play *Minerva Sacra* (1616), published a year after Cervantes’ death, in which a clownish figure reports:

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Ya ha sabido, señor padre,
Cómo entró su enqui/lo trencía
De la Princessa en la Corte,
Sobida en su Cananea.
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Following these implications, Sancho would presumably be speaking with the same intention as the zealous narrator in this play, who struggles to speak a chivalric idiom; Sancho, too, would mean to improve *hacanea* (already high and low) with his *cananea*. Does he succeed, then? If *cananea*, in the sense of a courtly language, is high—and high, too, for its biblical overtones; indeed, higher than “hackney”—it is also lower than “hackney” for simply being a crude neologism and, again, low (very low) for inverting the *hac* of *hacanea* to the diabolical syllable *ca*. According to this reading, Sancho has

39. “You have already known, señor padre, how her enqui/lo trencía [a fancy nonce word] the Princess entered the Court mounted upon her cananea” (Miguel de Cervantes, *El ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha*, ed. Francisco Rodriguez Marín, 7 vols. [Madrid: Tip. de la “Revista de archs., bibls., y museos,” 1928], 4:210–11. The author of *Minerva Sacra*, Miguel Toledano, born twenty-three years after Cervantes, prints a sonnet of Cervantes as part of the dedication of his work to one Doña Alfonsa Gonzalez de Salazar. By thus saluting a relative of the wife of Cervantes, Toledano affirms the filiation of his work from *Don Quixote*, which he interprets from the special perspective of the cousin.
imposed a low/high category on a high/low category; and thus there is regenerated in a small philological compass some of the consternation that Don Quixote feels on encountering the enchanted Dulcinea.

I make this point strongly because Cervantes does: just after the pseudo-Dulcinea struggled to get free, “Sancho moved off and let her pass, delighted at having got well out of his fix. And no sooner did the girl who played the part of Dulcinea find herself free, than she prodded her nackney [or cackney, cananea] with the point of a stick she carried, and set off at a trot across the field” (p. 530). Now, it is the reader’s turn to say: “Hacanea, you mean, Cervantes.” The reader is speaking like Don Quixote but—if he or she has already read this novel—will know that a version of Sancho’s answer is the best: not, perhaps, that “there is very little difference . . . between nackneys [or cackneys] and hackneys” but that the difference is impossible to specify. For, as Don Quixote says in II.32, in response to the related question of whether Dulcinea is or is not fantastic, “These are not matters whose verification can be carried out to the full” (p. 680).

I cite these words proleptically, because one might be inclined to solve the enigma of hacanea/cananea by an appeal to the third term, the referent. What, after all, is the creature whose name they are all busily distorting? Evidently, both Quixote and Sancho must be mad, since the animal in question is neither a hackney nor a cackney; it is a she-ass. Don Quixote himself seems perfectly lucid on this point when, speaking of the malevolence of the enchanters who have transformed Dulcinea into a figure “as low and ugly as that peasant girl’s,” he adds, for proof: “And they have deprived her too of something most proper to great ladies, which is the sweet smell they have from always moving among ambergris and flowers. For I must tell you, Sancho, that when I went to help my Dulcinea on to her hackney—as you say it was, though it seemed a she-ass to me—I got such a whiff of raw garlic as stank me out and poisoned me to the heart” (p. 531).

The reality of Dulcinea as a great lady is confirmed by her differ-

40. In Wardropper’s view (“Who Was Catalinón’s Intercessor?” p. 350), it is not necessary to second-guess the narrator here; the meaning is plain. In saying cananea, “the narrator sides not with Don Quijote’s point of view but with Sancho’s, asserting that the girl is not a princess but a peasant”: i.e., cananea means “not hacanea.” But since when do peasants ride cananeas? What, indeed, are cananeas?
Kafka’s Context

ence from the peasant girl, who is merely “playing a part” (p. 530). The precise measure of their difference, at this juncture, is proposed as the difference between a hackney and a she-ass; the identity of Dulcinea depends, therefore, on a secure identification of this animal as a she-ass. Once its identity has been established, the reader’s consternation can be confined to a local misunderstanding and easily resolved. Sancho Panza, it follows, got the name of the animal wrong, although his intent to improve it is apparent from his magniloquence. And Cervantes, the author, merely cited Sancho Panza in order to emphasize the joke of a naive mistake. The reader’s perplexity, which is a matter merely of names, not things, can then be dismissed.

But this name play can be contained only if the identity of the animal is actually established, and this depends in turn on the accuracy of Don Quixote’s perception and the account of what he has seen. It is therefore of some importance that on closer inspection Don Quixote’s claim turns out actually to be twice uncertain. Of course Sancho did not say the animal was a “hackney”; he said it was a “cackney,” nor did Don Quixote ever see the she-ass as anything more than a semblance.

Regarding the question of the reality of Dulcinea and hence of Dulcinea’s mount: In II.32, which speaks of the difficulty of verification, Quixote broods on the malign enchanters who have transformed Dulcinea “from beauty to ugliness, from angel to devil, from sweet smelling to pestiferous, from eloquent to rustic, from gentle to skittish, from light to darkness.” These enchanters are “born into the world,” he adds, “to obscure and obliterate the exploits of the good.” We cannot trust Quixote on this point either, however: as the duchess observes, basing herself on the text of Quixote’s adventures, “We gather . . . that your worship never saw the lady Dulcinea, and that this same lady does not exist on earth, but is a fantastic mistress, whom your worship engendered and bore in your mind, and painted with every grace and perfection you desired.”

Now Quixote replies with some finality: “There is much to say on that score. . . . God knows whether Dulcinea exists on earth or no, or whether she is fantastic or not fantastic. These are not matters whose verification can be carried out to the full” (p. 680). The strict identification of the she-ass as she-ass would contribute to this verification, but it has been impossible to make.
God knows the difference . . . and not even his representative on earth, the author. Indeed, this point would have to be a foregone conclusion, since Cervantes told it to us from the start. “When Sancho got up to mount Dapple, he saw three peasant girls coming in his direction, riding on three young asses or fillies—our author does not tell us which—though it is more credible that they were she-asses, as these are the ordinary mounts of village women; but as nothing much hangs on it, there is no reason to stop and clear up the point” (p. 527; my italics). But whether or not anything much hangs on it is not so foregone a conclusion.

In its thrust this point heightens the difference between our tale (as told by its author, Cide Hamete Benengeli) and the tale of its telling (the Second Author’s tale), which produces this comment on the insignificance of the missing detail. But just as the detached narrator-persona of Cervantes may declare that little hangs on Benengeli’s failure to identify the animal on which the pseudo-Dulcinea rides, it becomes the reader’s task to decide whether indeed anything much hangs on Cervantes’ dismissal of this matter. And having done the reading work, the reader will not now believe it is trivial but will prowl between the lines of what the author plainly says, provisionally holding that only the first part of his proposition—that the author is unreliable—is reliable. Cervantes, it appears, has only pretended to ask for obedience, so rewarding is the refusal to obey him on this point. The outcome has been to focus a question of the greatest significance for the novel: namely, that of the reality of Dulcinea and the ordeal of verification. To enter into this sublime horseplay is to discover that there cannot be a covering up of differences that does not elsewhere force the question of differences and of their verification.

In resisting Cervantes the narrator, the reader does so on the strength of Don Quixote’s surmise that authors—whether tellers or retellers—may indeed be enchanters, and so the reader’s sanity is at stake. “In Part Two” (as Robert Alter notes), “when Don Quixote’s ambition has precipitously caught up with him and he is pursued everywhere by the knowledge that he is already in a book, he begins to suspect that his chronicler may not be a sage after all but rather one of those willful sorcerers who are persecuting him.”41 Moreover,

Kafka’s Context

adds Don Quixote to Sancho, “if the author of that history of my exploits, which they say is now in print, chanced to be some enchant-er hostile to me, he has probably changed one thing into another, mingling a thousand lies with one truth” (p. 682).

The author Cervantes himself calls down this charge. Certainly he makes fiction very strange by complicating the narration exorbitantly, by producing within the book of the Second Author—the author’s double—a stranger doubling whereby the teller of a tale becomes the figure telling the telling of the tale.42 Cervantes actually appears to have Sancho Panza speak details of the novel Don Quixote in which he figures. Cervantes pretends that the scene of Don Quixote’s encounter with the pseudo-Dulcinea is copied out of the text of Cide Hamete Benengeli, who does not say for certain whether the girls were mounted on fillies or young asses. Cervantes ventures the opinion “it is more credible that they were she-asses,” a view with which Don Quixote finally agrees; he says at first, “I can see nothing but . . . three donkeys” but then concludes, “It seemed a she-ass to me.” But for Sancho, right from the start, the beast in question is a nackney (or a cackney), and it is as this creature that Cervantes finally sends it trotting off across the field, quite as if he is now reading Sancho (who has a strong view of the identity of the animal), rather than Cide Hamete Benengeli and Don Quixote (who are not sure). The effect of this multiplication of perspectives, this virtual infinity of selves that read the selves that write, is that each must yield its authority to another, whose task is always to pronounce on its legitimacy. Such a multiplication of lawyers and judges cannot fail to engender consternation. Cervantes himself appears as the chronicler, the evil demiurge. His double narrative design has served not to seat authority and contain ambiguity but to disperse them additionally, with Sancho—the unseater, the carnivalesque uncrowner of authority par excellence—as his chosen instrument. But Sancho uncrowns Cervantes as well.

“The story is told,” writes Geoffrey Waite, that Philip III peered out of the window in the Alcázar palace and, upon seeing below the then incredible sight of a man laughing, was heard to quip: ‘Either the

42. Don Quixote is the story of its own recounting; according to Lukács, this shapes the form of the novel as such (The Theory of the Novel, trans. Anna Bostock [Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977], p. 76).
man is mad, or he is reading *Don Quixote.*"43 Actually, it isn’t necessary to make this choice, for if the man is reading *Don Quixote* well, he will be as mad as Don Quixote. The work removes the distinction. *Don Quixote* exists to make the reader mad—which is to say, to keep the moment of consternation alive forever.

Not all readers of *Don Quixote,* of course, have been so inclined to see its intricacy as consternating. Leo Spitzer takes what he calls Cervantes’ “linguistic perspectivism” all the way in the opposite direction, to arrive finally at Cervantes’ “glorification of the artist.”44 For Spitzer, the *artifex* is in effect a reflection of a God beyond mere perspectivism. But this claim will seem dubious: a glorification of the artist as consternator is all we are entitled to conclude, an enchanter whose enchantments perplex.

Erich Auerbach, in *Mimesis,* acknowledges the character of *Don Quixote* as enchantment—sunlit and pleasant; its “multiple, perspectival, nonjudging, and even nonquestioning neutrality” is the mark of an “unproblematic gaiety.” Auerbach goes on to compare Cervantes’ approach with the

neutral attitude which Gustave Flaubert strove so hard to attain and to which it is not unrelated. . . . Yet it is very different from it: Flaubert wanted to transform reality through style; transform it so that it would appear as God sees it, so that the divine order—insofar as it concerns the fragment of reality treated in a particular work—would perforce be incarnated in the author’s tale. For Cervantes a good novel serves no other purpose than to afford refined recreation, *honesto entretenimiento.*45

No one would dream of denying the difference between Cervantes and Flaubert, but Cervantes’ gaiety is not so uncritical and unproblematic that he could himself avoid getting lost in it—enchanter but himself enchanted, enchainged.

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Kafka’s Context

Erich Auerbach’s view of Flaubert’s project—to “transform reality through style . . . so that the divine order . . . would perforce be incarnated in the author’s tale”—is a view with which Kafka might be said to have agreed when he gave the ending of Sentimental Education the scriptural validity of the fifth book of Moses (DII 196). Where are the signs of that divinity?

The final meeting in Sentimental Education between Frédéric and Madame Arnoux is unsettling through and through. In Don Quixote the disruption of the signifier hacanea occurs in speeches that frame the encounter between the lovers. In Sentimental Education the relation of word and meaning is disrupted throughout the lovers’ meeting, which is framed with silence. The peak scene of consternation between Madame Arnoux and Frédéric produces Frédéric’s silence and a sort of fatal reading silence following the last phrase “Et ce fut tout [And that was all]” (pp. 423, 416*). The emptiness at the close repeats the blanks which, as Proust noted, inform the three one-sentence paragraphs at the beginning of the episode:

Il voyagea.
Il connut la mélancholie des paquebots. . . .
Il revint. [p. 419]48

The blank at the close of the chapter is, however, a blank with a difference. If the first series marks Frédéric’s customary vacuousness and incoherence in pursuit of his desire, the second marks the disappearance of Madame Arnoux as a character in the novel and, more important, as the object of Frédéric’s desire. In the course of the episode Frédéric actually emerges as a more and more realized figure. The movement by which he is detailed—inked in as an acting, desiring being—is crossed by a successive deregionalization of Madame Arnoux. By a precise use of signs she is whited out and then obliterated,


48. “He travelled. He came to know the melancholy of the steamboat . . . He returned” (p. 411*).
as if it were a matter of expunging a fantasy. Observe the impersonalizing nomination at the close. She has left Frédéric’s room.

Frédéric ouvrit sa fenêtre, Madame Arnoux, sur le trottoir, fit signe d’avancer à un fiacre qui passait. Elle monta dedans. La voiture disparut.

Et ce fut tout. [p. 423; my italics]

_Ce._ What is this _ce_? Whose word is it? It is Frédéric’s despair, and the reader’s.

The scene has begun with the blanks of Frédéric’s fortieth year, interrupted by Madame Arnoux’s visit to his room. Thereupon they walk together through the streets of Paris, speaking in the language of romantic novels. When they return, Frédéric’s glimpse of Madame Arnoux’s white hair strikes him “like a blow full in the chest” (p. 414*). He discharges his consternation in a spasm of tender speech, then gets drunk on his compliments and believes what he says. The sight of the tip of her boot “troubles” him. He embraces her, but she pushes him off. He is again seized by wild desire and also revulsion and then rejects her by turning away—an act she takes for delicacy. They linger, she cuts off a lock of her white hair, and she leaves. “Et ce fut tout.”

In this agitated field I fix on two consternating moments: first, Frédéric’s sensation of a blow on the chest at the sight of Madame Arnoux’s white hair and his reaction, which is to speak in the rhetoric of romance; next, his desire and revulsion following the sight of her boot and the sense that she has come to offer herself. The feelings enacted in these moments, however, are so deeply involved in rhetoric that one can grasp Frédéric’s consternation only by understanding how his rhetoric functions to create, repress, and recreate desire.

Everything in this scene takes place in the unsettling mood produced by the confusion of the literal and metaphorical meanings of words. At the outset of their meeting, as Madame Arnoux describes her life in Brittany, she mentions her small house, where, she says, “I go and sit . . . on a bench I call: ‘le banc Frédéric’” (pp. 420, 413*). This innocent metonymy (in which the name “Frédéric” appears to
represent the total experience of Madame Arnoux as she sits dreaming of her lover) looms as a bizarre metaphor in which the vehicle (Frédéric as bench) figures too large. Earlier, in Chapter Three, I cited Lacan’s suggestive remark that “any conjunction of two signifiers would be equally sufficient to constitute a metaphor, except for the additional requirement of the greatest possible disparity of the images signified, needed for the production of the poetic spark, or in other words for there to be metaphoric creation.”

Here, I am afraid, the point seems wrong. In Flaubert, the collision of disparate signified images stifles the poetic spark. Tenor is supposed to “devour” vehicle, but the vehicle—or bench—proves undigestible.

On the other hand, if we have just now had a metonymy whose vehicle (the bench) turned deadly literal (in the sense of having a definite worldly reference), we soon after have, in a speech of Frédéric to Madame Arnoux, a literal word that turns infinitely metaphorical. It is the name “Marie,” which has one and only one referent. “For me,” says Frédéric, “your name contained all the delights of flesh and spirit, and I repeated it again and again, trying to kiss it with my lips. I imagined nothing beyond your name” (p. 414*).

When this entire episode is enlarged to include earlier events in the novel, however, the notion of definite reference vanishes, so that it becomes impossible to distinguish literal from metaphorical meanings. Frédéric and Madame Arnoux are described as strolling through Paris. Although the streets are noisy, they walk undisturbed, as if “they had been walking together in the country, on a bed of dead leaves” (p. 413*). These dead leaves refer the reader to Frédéric’s early revery when, returning from his first meeting with Madame Arnoux, he observed, “She looked like the women in romantic novels” (p. 22*).

In such a mood, noting the hills beside the river, he

52. “Et les délices de la chair et de l’âme étaient contenues pour moi dans votre nom que je me répétais, en tâchant de le baiser sur mes lèvres. Je n’imaginais rien au delà” (p. 422).
53. “Comme ceux qui marchent ensemble dans la campagne, sur un lit de feuilles mortes” (pp. 420-21).
54. “Elle ressemblait aux femmes des livres romantiqnes” (p. 9).
has thought “what bliss it would be to climb up there beside her with his arm around her waist, listening to her voice and basking in the radiance of her eyes, while her dress swept the yellow leaves along the ground” (p. 21*). 55

Years later, at their reunion, they come full novelistic circle. Because of this early fantasy of dry leaves, the simile at the close of the novel—“dead leaves”—loses all material reference and signals an at best very queer, only paper gain of true experience. The lovers’ last walk, like the first walk with Madame Arnoux, which Frédéric fantasized, is composed of the leaves from novels (this one included). “Dead leaves” are thus leaves twice dead: when they were alive, they were already dead. The lovers walk on a bed of dead metaphors. This fact about style is interesting thematically, of course, since together they will go on speaking in such clichés; but the phrase is especially interesting as the signifier of another signifier within the novel. It is an internal citation of a figure (“yellow leaves”) marked as itself returning to yet other novels. Hence, the figure at the close of this novel has a vast but only potential meaning, is itself neither literal nor metaphorical. This disconcerting fluidity of literal and metaphorical meaning signals a deeper, more pervasive uncertainty about the ceremony of reconciliation that Frédéric and Madame Arnoux enact.

Readers have traditionally been puzzled by the rhetoric that Frédéric and Madame Arnoux speak to each other, and this has led to contradictory accounts of the meaning of the scene. According to one reading, it amounts to a profanation, a degradation of their bond, because Frédéric flees his consternation by speaking specious Romantic language. According to another, the scene is a celebration of their bond, just because they do settle their consternation—even if bookishly—and are not destroyed by it. In instances of his dismay, let it be noted, Frédéric recovers “romantically.” At the sight of Marie’s white hair, he conceals his disappointment by speaking in the rhetoric of novels. Then, believing that she has come to offer herself and

55. The “thought” is in the style indirect libre (indirect free style): that is to say, it is not definitively attributed by the narrator to his character—Frédéric. It is stated as if it were a general proposition while actually showing Frédéric believing in the proposition as adequate to what he feels: “Quel bonheur de monter côté à côté, le bras autour de sa taille, pendant que sa robe balayerait les feuilles jaunies, en écoutant sa voix, sous le rayonnement de ses yeux!” (p. 7).
feeling desire, revulsion, and a sense of impending sacrilege, he acts out the behavior of a man (a certain kind of man) who has already made love: Frédéric “turned on his heel and started rolling a cigarette” (p. 415*).56 This phrase also evokes the rhetoric of Romantic novels: it alludes to Rodolphe in Madame Bovary, who, after he has made love to Emma Bovary in the forest, puts a cigar in his mouth, then turns away to fix the bridle of his horse with a penknife.57

The “trouble” between Frédéric and Madame Arnoux is produced throughout the scene by a rhetoric suggestive of cheap novels—and yet this language is not steadily inferior to Flaubert’s own lyric representation of intimate moments. It has the effect of producing an endless relaying, an echoing away of significance, as metaphors lose their way to an order of real things and finite meanings yet, as signs, fugitively evoke the contexts in which they have earlier appeared and which might never mean anything more than the words in a forgotten book, itself an echo.

But surely the scene is not all vanishing rhetoric; something is actually taking place, the acts of lovers who are experiencing real emotions. It is after all in an effort to master disturbing acts and feelings that they speak their phrases. And here the matter of Flaubert’s rhetoric of acts—especially his choice of tense—is significant. The scene continues: “When they returned, Madame Arnoux took off her hat. The lamp . . . lit up her white hair. It was like a blow full in the chest” (p. 414*). These events are conveyed in the past historic (rentrérent, ôta, éclaira, fut: p. 421), the tense of epic narration, the code of action; and it is to conceal his shock that Frédéric goes down on his knees and begins to murmur gorgeous platitudes in the imperfect, the tense of habitual behavior. As habituation calls attention to the consciousness registering this repetition—to an interposed consciousness—the imperfect tense produces the mood of inwardness. What triggers Frédéric’s consternation in this scene, then, is an alarming image of Madame Arnoux coming at him from the

56. “Il tourna sur ses talons et se mit à faire une cigarette” (p. 423).
world. In response, Frédéric performs a balancing act to right the scene for his desire: he dyes her white hair purple by imagining her gloriously otherwise, in the imperfect.

The reader can sustain Frédéric’s mood by reading the first sentence that follows his encomium as a reliable description of Madame Arnoux’s feelings. “She rapturously accepted this adoration of the woman she had ceased to be [Elle acceptait avec ravissement ces adorations pour la femme qu’elle n’était plus]” (pp. 422, 414*). The sentence appears to further the coherence of the novel as a history. It indicates the real communication between the two lovers. Frédéric is startled by Madame Arnoux’s abrupt action and, needing to dispel the shock, thinks better of her, whereupon his feelings pass back to her—a connection assured by the continuity of tense. The imperfect (of inwardness) through which Frédéric identifies his own feelings identifies those of Madame Arnoux. A text that in the imperfect bridges speaker and hearer appears to exemplify in principle the real continuity of inwardness and event—to enact the experience of persuasion.

This conclusion as to continuity, however, is overly optimistic. Only in a special and privative sense does the imperfect in the sentence about Madame Arnoux’s feelings show solidarity with the preceding sentence, as we shall see.

According to one authority, Pierre Cogny, the coherence sustained by the imperfect of acceptait is only grammatical and anticipatory, dictated by the obligatory imperfect of the hypothetical n’était plus.58 But the sentence is enigmatic in another way, being one of those sentences which, according to Roland Barthes, can be written but not read. The power of the passage depends on the effect of helpless immanence of the lovers within their world. But the feelings attributed to Madame Arnoux are not those that a living speaker could ever experience. Madame Arnoux cannot simultaneously experience rapture and the consciousness that she no longer exists as the being entitled to this rapture. Such a conjunction is possible only in a story that inserts directly into the consciousness of a rapturous feeling the undercutting presence-of-mind of another. Who then is finally feeling

rapture here; who is judging the ravishment as a delusion, and who is giving this account?\footnote{59}

If this sentence is not Madame Arnoux’s, it can have been spoken for her by the author—but then it is too sneeringly brutal in punishing her for crude delusion. The indictment fits Frédéric better! In light of what follows, I read this presence-of-mind as Frédéric’s. The accept\textit{t}ais in the imperfect merely extends into a new paragraph the field of the style indirect libre conveying Frédéric’s desires, not the least of which is the desire to be master. The thought that his rhetoric is overpowering her intoxicates him. And in the following sentence he indeed rises “drunkenly” to consciousness of his mastery; it appears that only Frédéric’s consciousness in the style indirect libre fabricates the continuity of the lovers’ minds.\footnote{60}

And so, therefore, everything in this scene that follows on this moment can have been composed in the style indirect libre as a record of events experienced by Frédéric. The distinction between what can be done and what can only be said is in this way erased. It becomes impossible to distinguish the time of public action conveyed by the imperfect from the temporality of Frédéric’s consciousness. Even more drastically, it becomes impossible to distinguish the sphere of epic objectivity articulated by the past historic from that of inner

\footnote{59. I do not expect every reader to agree that Madame Arnoux cannot at the same time feel rapture and perceive that Frederic’s adoration is intended for the woman she no longer is. It can be argued, as indeed Charles Bernheimer has done in a letter to me, March 21, 1986, that the sentence has eminent psychological plausibility. According to his reading, it is not necessary to assume in this sentence the presence of a second consciousness; rather, Madame Arnoux “knows on one level that her present appearance undercuts the romance of the past, and her ecstasy is produced precisely in a movement . . . away from the present moment. ‘Her ecstasy’ and ‘no longer being’ do not undercut each other, but the one explains the other. Ecstasy is denial of the body so as to recreate the pleasures in rhetoric.” As interesting as this objection is, I find it quite inconsistent with the knowledge we obtain through Frédéric that Madame Arnoux has come to offer herself. By what means does she suppose the gift will prove acceptable—by virtue of the charm she possesses as the woman she formerly was?

60. Thinking of Frédéric as narrator invites one to consider him as a persona of the author. In this case the interpenetration is interesting and vivid. We read that Frédéric, growing drunk on his compliments, begins to believe what he is saying. This sentence, which represents the peak point of Frédéric’s labor to escape his consternation, is an escape stage-managed by the author at the same time that it consternatingly indicts the author. The charge that Frédéric assumes mastery from credulousness induced by the toxin of rhetoric poisons the author, who is also drunk on words.
consciousness articulated by the imperfect. For instance, the touch of the lovers’ hands in the past historic brings about the first breakup of the imperfect; with the verb se serrèrent (“clasped”) the text passes into the past historic. It would be tempting to read the disruption of the tense of inwardness as the overcoming of repression, the emergence of an active sexuality, and the turn to the epic world. But this moment is followed (in the same sentence) by a return of the imperfect, as the point of Madame Arnoux’s boot is seen protruding from under her dress.

One could try to naturalize this perturbation as suggesting the conflict between Frédéric’s perception of real acts and his continued effort to will them into a form shaped by erotic desire. But this—the critic’s phantasm—is without surety. For there is no verb in any tense which could not stand for Frédéric’s imaginary desire, no epic world that is assuredly anything more than an expression of Frédéric’s imagination of the epic. At no point, it seems, has Frédéric definitively stopped writing the novel which, as we saw earlier in this novel, he had “started writing . . . [and in which] the hero was himself, the heroine Madame Arnoux” (p. 36*). Nothing in the novel escapes the potential status of Frédéric’s novelistic—and at moments dramatic—report of the world; thinking of Arnoux’s dying by an accidental gunshot wound, Frédéric sees a succession of pictures of domestic happiness, “brooding over this idea like a dramatist writing a play” (p. 314*). In earlier conversation with Madame Arnoux, Frédéric

61. Two eminent examples of this confusion frame this speech. The first precedes it: “He regretted nothing [Il ne regretta rien]” (pp. 414*, 421); the second concludes the chapter: “And that was all [Et ce fut tout]” (pp. 416*, 423). There are no earlier examples in the novel of sentences in the past historic obviously written in the style indirect libre. This helps confirm the claim that in this chapter Flaubert chooses to annihilate the distinction between the epic order of the past historic and the internalizing order of the imperfect, relaying the perspective of effaced distinction back onto the previous chapters.

62. “Il se mit à écrire un roman. . . . Le héros, c’était lui-même; l’héroïne, Mme Arnoux” (p. 24). The initial setting of this novel is, to be sure, Venice; its working title is “Sylvio, the Fisherman’s Son”; the heroine is Antonia; and the hero is presumably eponymous. Frédéric, we learn, stopped working on it, discouraged by “the echoes from other writers which he noticed in his novel [les réminiscences trop nombreuses dont il s’aperçut le découragèrent]” (pp. 36*, 25). Flaubert, of course, unlike Frédéric, never dropped Sentimental Education. He did not allow himself to be discouraged by the echoes in his novel . . . of Frédéric’s own. Indeed, he took heart and profit from them, composing his novel precisely from their interference.
Kafka's Context

déric “extolled the great lovers of literature” before “beginning to be
carried away by his own eloquence” (p. 201*). Whose consciousness
does the last sentence belong to? Is it a part of Frédéric's panegyric to
the great lovers of literature that they too were carried away by their
own eloquence, and is the point that Frédéric now in his own view
has become one of these lovers by virtue of his ability to be carried
away by his own eloquence? The last sentence is novelistic, but who
is thinking it? And because here as elsewhere Frédéric's consciousness
is wholly in the service of his desire, everything reported by him
responds to desire; everything could have the character of a phan-
tasm. “Et ce fut tout.” What then is this ce?

The ce refers to what has happened during the scene but also to
what has not happened; it refers, by implication, to the education of
Frédéric's desire as a matter of what has happened and what has failed
to happen throughout the novel. But the dissolution of markers dis-
tinguishing the order of event from fantasy jeopardizes the distinction
between Frédéric's merely phantasmal erotic life (linked with the
imperfect) and a more or less active sexuality (linked with the past
historic). The dissolution of all boundaries between inside and outside
orders, the confounding of real and imaginary voices and acts, results
in vague and dreamy inanition, taking on as it were the quality that
Frédéric's highest stimulation takes. In this scene desire and revul-
sion, like the fear of incest, crown with a kind of orgasm of inaction
the peak promise of sexual longing. With the gesture of lighting a
cigarette, Frédéric assumes the after-signs of a venting of desire
through the overwhelming consciousness of its actual impossibility.
His act culminates a misfiring of the culmination which in this novel
is said to be found only . . . in novels.

The celebration of blankness as the height of sexual excitement will
go on to trigger the happy memory of the close of the novel—the
memory of the bliss of impotence which overcame the young Fré-
déric at the bordello in Nogent. But even in noting this continuum,
the reader is uncertain of the extent to which the novel remembers
Frédéric's inaction at the brothel to be itself the product only of
Frédéric's imaginative desire for maintaining purity. His peak percep-
tion of the impossibility of orgasm was perhaps only a wish-dream.

But surely something happens by the close of this scene, indeed
happens brutally and thus serves to discriminate between action and
fantasy: it is Madame Arnoux’s gesture of cutting off with scissors a lock of her white hair. Following as it does Frédéric’s recognition of the incest taboo, it has led commentators to read this moment as a plain exhibit of the infliction of Oedipal traumas. Much the most tactful commentator in this vein, Charles Bernheimer, brings together psychoanalytic experience and rhetoric under the head of the fetishism of clichés. The rhetorical code of the lovers, he writes, is a popularized version of the literary ideal of Platonic love:

[This] allows Frédéric to reconstitute Madame Arnoux as a whole being, but one that is entirely abstract, an artificial creature of ready-made phrases. Here we are reminded of the etymology of the word “fetish” from the Latin factitus, made by art, which developed in Portuguese and Spanish into words designating precisely the work of imitation through signs. Frédéric does still refer to a more explicitly bodily fetish when, observing the point of Marie’s bottine protruding a little from under her dress, he declares, “the sight of your foot disturbs me.” . . . But by the very act of articulating his disturbance, Frédéric removes it from the silent dimension of subjective feeling and makes it part of a shared code of sublimating discourse. The code is a defense against the reality of perception: the shocking sight of Marie’s white hair, and behind that, of the mother’s castration.

By brutally cutting off a lock of white hair, Madame Arnoux destroys the possibility of joining herself and the fetish, which is the condition of Frédéric’s desire for her.

This reading is actually too optimistic. It subdivides the world of the novel into the “silent dimension of subjective feeling” and the “code of discourse”: that is, Romantic rhetoric. Romantic rhetoric, however, constitutes more than one pole of a binary opposition: it triangulates this polarity, in the sense that no verbal representation in the novel escapes such rhetoric, and this in the precise sense that no sentence in the novel is proof against espousal by Flaubert in the name of Frédéric; nothing is proof, that is, against the operation of the style indirect libre that makes every description a report of Frédéric’s consciousness of the described thing. No description of acts escapes contamination by the Romantic rhetoric of Frédéric’s “subjectivity,” and so even his “silent subjectivity” is a Romantic idea. There can be no

Kafka's Context

passing out of the order of subjective silence into the order of the Romantic code, since as a state of mind given within this novel, subjective silence is already involved in the Romantic code. That is to say, it is represented through a narrative itself indefinitely mingled with Frédéric's own Romantic consciousness.

This consciousness, vast and anonymous, is the one true subject of the novel, the dreary agitated dream of life, correlative of "et ce fut tout." This *ce*, this "that," takes up without distinction the lives of Frédéric and Madame Arnoux, the world of this book, the world. As the unconsummated union of prostration and flight, "that" is consternation.

Critics could believe that they had formulated an understanding of this scene in a language faithful to it. I have described how Frédéric's language, through the *style indirect libre*, functions not only to articulate the facts of desire but to create desire, even as it fades into silence. Frédéric completes his own language with silence—a mark, perhaps, of the awareness that his longing is only the rhetorical construction of desire, its facsimile. The critic's authoritative analysis will be true, itself least the product of rhetoric only, after it too has been silenced and banished into the past historic of someone else's narrative, when this essay figures as an event in someone else's story. And yet Flaubert reminds us that in all the tenses of narration, language can serve the rhetorical construction of desire, and we cannot say that even an imagined sobriety of the future will not itself be a product of another's rhetoric, of another's desire. This is a consternating state of affairs.

*   *   *

To survive after Flaubert, fiction could choose to display a violence of dramatic effects, woo a definiteness of acts, so as to escape a dreadful authorial freedom, a space of writing prone to the evasions of irony and the style of free indirect speech. In Kafka's story "The Judgment," free indirect speech continues as the main narrative device, but it also falls decisively away at the moment of violence, when an independent voice speaks from beyond the grave of the

64. "Tired out, full of contradictory desires, and no longer knowing what he wanted, he felt an infinite melancholy, a longing to die" (p. 209*).
Consternation: The Anthropological Moment

figure who has maintained this perspective. Everything, however, including this voice, is unsettled in a particularly violent mode of the way in which the lovers’ scene in Flaubert was unsettled: by a destabilization of metaphor.

In “The Judgment” Kafka radically metamorphoses metaphor. To read the story is to be caught in a whirligig of metaphor. The story consists of two parts and a brief coda or ejaculation, the orgasmic nature of which Kafka said he literally had in mind as he concluded the piece. The first part is about a son writing a letter on the subject of his engagement to a friend who lives in Russia; the second is a wild discourse between son and father, culminating in the father’s sentencing his son to death. The son obeys. The coda reads, “At this moment an unending stream of traffic [or act of sexual intercourse] was just going over the bridge [In diesem Augenblick ging über die Brücke ein geradezu unendlicher Verkehr]” (S 88; E 68). All parts of the story involve metaphor; most important is the way in which Georg Bendemann and his father read metaphor and actually suit their actions to metaphors and metaphorical relations.

“The Judgment” is one of the few stories that Kafka attempted to explain, as follows:

The friend is the link between father and son, he is their strongest common bond. Sitting alone at his window, Georg rummages voluptuously in this consciousness of what they have in common, believes he has his father within him and would be at peace with everything if it were not for a fleeting, sad thoughtfulness. In the course of the story the father . . . uses the common bond of the friend to set himself up as Georg’s antagonist. . . . Georg is left with nothing. [DI 278]

The analysis is stated in a sort of structuralist idiom and prompts the translation of this interpersonal relation into a figure, into metaphor. The friend is that body of predicates “shared” by father and son, by tenor and vehicle; he enables the metaphor, first of father as son, then of son as father. Importantly, the story ends with the splitting apart of the metaphor: the father draws into himself all those qualities which when possessed by Georg were analogues of qualities of the father. Georg is reduced to the literal being of an incomparable self, a surd; like Gregor Samsa in The Metamorphosis, he is now as
good as dead. The father, meanwhile, becomes at once himself and the figure of himself: he is his own metaphor, a thoroughly figurative being.

This tropic translation sounds farfetched but will perhaps sound less so if we read Kafka's second comment on the story. He writes to Felice Bauer:

The story is full of abstractions, though they are not admitted. The friend is hardly a real person, perhaps he is more that which the father and Georg have in common. The story is perhaps a journey around father and son, and the changing figure of the friend is perhaps the perspectival change of the relations between father and son. [LF 267]

The "changing figure of the friend" is an index of the increasingly aberrant transfer of qualities from the son to the father, the outcome of which is to reify (literalize) the son and transfigure (metaphorize) the father. The father pronounces sentence as a godlike figure of authority. The son, reduced to unconscious being, is "driven" out of the room by the sole force of the father's sentence. The son has been emptied of all the human traits that he and his father have shared; those traits have gone over to the father, who in this way redoubles his being, has for an instant a quite literally superhuman, autonomous power as a metaphor which—normally for Kafka dependent on the world of extrinsic reference, the materiality of the vehicle—here draws that world wholly into itself. The growing reification or literalization of the son and the growing transfiguration or meta-

65. The title of the story suggests that the precise meaning of the friend, the body of attributes binding father and son, is judgment. And indeed the story produces at key junctures three different conceptions of judgment. At the outset the son, who thinks that he has the friend (of his father) entirely within himself, produces judgments in the neutral, epistemological sense of *Urteil* as descriptive propositions. The preferred form of his mastery is cognitive. The character of the opening encounter between father and son is defined by the father as another mode of judgment: as a taking of mutual counsel, as reciprocal interpretation. Once the encounter shifts into its wild adversary key and the son's consternation at the growing strength of his father increases, judgment turns into a verdict, a death sentence. The friend, the change of perspective on the relation between father and son, means the increasing investment of judgment with interpersonal performative force. This change is, as I have suggested, enacted as a semiotic process, as the theoretical drama of the increasing pull of tenor (father) upon vehicle (son) until meaning has wholly ingested its own metaphorical sign, which then leads a straitened existence within the living figure. See Chapter Four, pp. 95-97.
phorization of the father, empowering him absolutely, occurs in definite stages of their rhetorical drama. To the father’s every figurative statement Georg responds with a crude literalizing, as if this could impose powerful constraints all in his favor on the necessarily figurative language of dialogue. Georg aims to deny his father the power to speak figuratively and to interpret his own speech through the figurative stock of language. The path to mastery of the “human figure”—the story says—is to interpret the world by assuming all the world’s perspectives. It is to put on the strength of understanding in the rapidity, coherence, and accuracy of metaphorical appropriation. This is the way to the fullest reproduction of the Real.

The dialogue between Georg and his father is almost entirely a matter of rhetoric aimed antagonistically to elicit a reading from the other. To the extent that reading fiction constitutively involves decisions as to literal and metaphorical meanings, their dialogue amounts to a fiction of reading. More than Don Quixote or Sentimental Education, Kafka’s story thematizes as well as inspires readerly consternation.

In “The Judgment” we are alerted to the struggle of wills by the son’s effort to literalize his father’s language, as if this were the way to reify, seize, and possess him. Theirs is the wild contest for the sole power to make metaphors. Says the father: “I’ve established a fine connection with your friend, and I have your customers here in my pocket.” Thinks Georg, literalizing, “He has pockets even in his

66. “The metaphorical meaning must be defined not as an aspect of the syntactical-semantic unit of the sentence but rather as the aspect of an utterance. Only with an utterance do we have a communicative situation in which it can be decided whether an expression is meant metaphorically or not” (Kurz, Metapher, p. 13). Here Kurz defines a fundamental principle of the interactional theory of metaphor. In this light we can see that Kafka dramatizes this model in the privative mode of a refusal to admit metaphorical meaning.

67. There is, contrary to the received view, a good deal of this Hegelianism in Kafka, though “The Judgment” may be only a noble parody of the process. This appropriative Kafka is bent on the potency of the philosopher of The Phenomenology of Mind who has drawn into himself all his worldly semblances. Cf. the posthumously published fragment, discussed in Chapter Five and again in Chapter Six, on the recognition of one’s “eternity.” It is important to remember, meanwhile, that this long aphorism proceeds to put itself into question. Nonetheless, Kafka’s aphorisms, in suspending terms, also proceed quite literally to “hang” their developed variations at a higher place on the whole helix of interpretative possibilities to which they give rise.
Kafka’s Context

shirt!” and that with this comment “he [Georg] could make him [the father] an impossible figure for all the world” (S 16). At this moment Georg’s literalizing project will be an open secret less to the English than to the German reader, who immediately picks up the unstressed metaphor: in German “the shirt without pockets” is a funeral shroud. Georg’s remark is cruelly witty in a double register: he literalizes the pocket of “in my pocket” and the shirt of “the shirt without pockets.”

To this the father responds: “How you amused me today, coming to ask me if you should tell your friend about your engagement... He knows everything a hundred times better than you do yourself.” “Ten thousand times!” says Georg, taking the numerical point literally, so as “to make fun of his father, but in his very mouth the words turned into deadly earnest” (S 87).

Just a little before this scene, the struggle turned on a word, which like the “cackney” or “nackney” of Sancho Panza, is importantly self-reflexive. In “The Judgment” this is the act of “covering [zudecken] with a blanket.” The father asks Georg twice: “Am I well covered up [bin ich gut zugedeckt]?” “Don’t worry,” says Georg, “you’re well covered up.” “No,” cries the father, “you wanted to cover me up, I know, my young sprig, but I’m far from being covered up yet” (S 84; E 63). And here he seems to mean “I’m not dead and buried yet.” The father is reading the word with elaborate figurative stress—which can and should include the secondary self-reflexive meanings of zudecken as “to cover” a subject (so thoroughly as to bury it), “to heap meanings of one sort or another on someone,” as “to cover with reproaches,” and finally, “to fit words to a meaning” with the negative implication of covering it up.68

The father exults to think that Georg

68. Grimm illustrates the word zudecken with the phrase “a thought, a meaning, a truth is covered up (or closed off) by words [ein Gedanke, ein Sinn, eine Wahrheit wird durch Worte zugedeckt]” and further cites a phrase from Goethe: “the various kinds of interpretation ... which are applied to the text, which are attributed, imputed or ‘stuck on’ to the text, with which it could be covered up (or closed off) [die verschiedenen Auslegungsarten ... die man auf den Text anwenden, die man dem Text unterschieben, mit denen man ihm zudecken konnte]” (Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm [Leipzig: Hirzil, 1954], 16:319). Gerhard Kurz has also noted the self-reflexive hermeneutic implications of the word zudecken as part of a discussion of overt and covert meanings in Kafka. “The texts themselves,” he writes, “contain turns of phrase which provoke an allegorical reading, for example, ‘That could obviously be meant only in a spiritual sense,’ in ‘The Great Wall of China’ [GW 156]; ‘The Hunger Artist’ is a ‘suffering martyr ... although in quite another sense’
imagines he has identified him, read him exhaustively. To do so in this story means to take the figure literally; and here where the word *zudecken* has, to speak with Gilbert Ryle, the higher-order function of denoting reflexively the intention of the speaker, to take the figure literally means to make someone acquiesce in a literal reading of himself. For whoever reads the metaphor literally, condemns it to the fatal solitude of a thing; and as whoever reads the metaphor literally, kills it, so also whoever as a metaphor is read literally, dies.

Georg makes the fatal mistake of attempting to read his father as a feeble, toothless old thing in soiled underwear. His “devilishness” is to refuse to the father a necessarily metaphorical existence, for the father cannot be defined as an assemblage (Heidegger’s *Gestell*) of literal characteristics—the features of his old body. Georg, the literalist, is appropriately disarmed when the father issues him a death sentence: where it would serve him to let his father’s language assume an only figurative resonance, he cannot; he is driven to his death by drowning, moist on his own petard. Interestingly, and inevitably, the father appears to die in the act of executing his son. He himself is executed by his fatal attraction to essence, to complete self-possession. Of course, as a father, he cannot exist without a son—just as, as an allegorical figure for metaphor, he cannot exist without a worldly vehicle. Kafka’s phrase for essence is “independent activity ruled by its own law” (DII 201); this, he says plainly, is the condition not of metaphor but rather of the other term on which it always depends—the world. For this father, the son is his world. In compelling his son to read the son’s own being literally, he reifies the other, annihilates the other save as an opaque sign; himself becomes pure figure, and—as in Kafka’s parable on figures—“wins . . . but alas only figuratively” (PP 11). In reality, he loses. No more than he, readers cannot take a literal meaning from the story, not even a literal meaning about metaphor, without condemning the story, and themselves, to death.

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*S 271*; there are ‘various possibilities of interpretation’ in ‘The Problem of Our Laws’ [S 437]; truths that are covered up [*zugedeckt*] and truths that are opened up [*aufgedeckt*], as the metaphorical play of ‘cover up’ [*zudecken*] and ‘open up’ [*aufdecken*] in ‘The Judgment’ suggests” (*Traum-Schrecken: Kafkas literarische Existenzanalyse* [Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980], p. 133).

Kafka’s Context

Kafka appears to have inscribed fully into the consternation of characters that traumatic destabilization of reading—especially as it involves the interference of the literal and figurative meanings of metaphor—which seemed in Cervantes or Flaubert a narrative intrusion.

* * *

We have looked, then, at ways in which consternation passes over from scenes of interpersonal collision in prose fiction into the order of reading. The troubled encounter of fictive characters is doubled, complicated—its energy amplified—in the reader’s consternation as reader. The anthropological moment in literature unrepresents reading. Anthropology might be said to be governed by conservative strategies for resisting the awareness that the other person is the Other of the Same, in the sense that it is the unconscious, the repressed Same of everyday discourse. In literary consternation naive readers are exposed. They are exposed to the fact of the merely contrived security of their ordinary understanding of linguistic figures.70 Through literature they are reacquainted with the social force that incarcerates tropes in the prison library in which resigned readers of the everyday live out their sentence.

70. What happens in the genesis of monstrosity is a recalibration of the metaphorical possibilities of the literal. The moment is anthropological in the sense that it forecasts the constitution of each and every other human type. Nothing human is alien to me in the precise sense that I contain in the suppressed field of meaning and vision within metaphor (this occlusion produced by social constraint) every other human possibility. The unconscious is the discourse of the Other, in the strict sense of the unrealized possibilities of metaphor.