



## **Into the Abyss: A Study of the *mise en abyme***

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## Declarations

I, Marcus Snow, hereby take oath that this write-up of approximately 84 000 words in length, including all footnotes, introductions, conclusions (but excluding appendices and bibliography) have all been written by me, that this is a deed of work carried out by me in reckoning with London Metropolitan University's guidelines of good academic conduct and that this written work has not been put forward in any earlier, former bid for another higher degree at another awarding school of learning or other learning body. The recordings in this thesis are my own copyright as are all images which are either my own or are in the public domain.

I was acknowledged as research student in December 2009 and as a Vice Chancellor Scholar for the degree of MPhil in May 2010, and subsequently as a candidate for PhD research, under the oversight of Dr Megan Stern, Dr Martin Murray, Professor Wendy Wheeler and Mr Jim Grant. The advanced study, of which this written work is set forth, was followed through at London Metropolitan University between 2009 and 2015. Under the financial backing of the Vice Chancellor Doctorate Programme, I have done well and seen through the in-school teaching requirements and come to belong, as member, to the Associated Fellowship with The Higher Education Academy in UK. (2012)

Date \_\_\_\_\_ June 2016

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***Mise en abyme***: a French expression originally used in heraldry to describe a small shield within a larger shield bearing the same device. In English the smaller shield is said to be 'set in escutcheon'; the expression is used only in heraldry. Equivalent formal devices have long been used in both literature and the visual arts...The expression *mise-en-abyme* was given a new currency by the French novelist André Gide (1869-1951) who defined it as the representation within a work of art of that work's structure...*mise-en-abyme* is frequently associated with the *nouveau roman*, and a similar self-reflexivity is typical of much postmodernist fiction... (Macey, 2001: 256)

**Mise en abyme:** (French ‘put in the abyss’) A term for a self-reflexive repetition in a text. ...The term also suggests infinite regression, such as the design which used to appear on the Quaker Oats packet, on which there was a picture of a man holding a Quaker Oats packet, and so on. The term has been taken up in deconstructive criticism for the occasional glimpses of the ‘solving emptiness’ that underlies the endless free-play of meanings in words, the revelations of an abyss of nothingness which is constantly covered and uncovered by the signs themselves. (Gray, 1992: 181)

**Mise en abyme:** Term from heraldry, meaning the reduced reproduction of an image within itself. It was popularised by Gide to refer to a similar phenomenon in literature. (France, 1995: 532)

**Mise-en-abyme/ mise en abîme:** A concept taken from art theory, referring to the inset-frame structure. A frame and its inset can be called a mise-en-abyme structure if the framed element shows points of similarity to the frame. In narrative, one can speak of mise-en-abyme if an embedded story shares plot elements, structural features or themes with the main story and this makes it possible to correlate plot and subplot. (Fludernik, 2009: 156)

There is no term in English for what French critics call a *mise en abîme*—a casting into the abyss—but the effect itself is familiar enough: an illusion of infinite regress can be created by a writer or painter by incorporating within his own work a work that duplicates in miniature the larger structure, setting up an apparently unending series. (Neil Hertz, 1979 in Patricia Lawlor, 1985)

A “*mise en abyme*”: a series of apparently endlessly overlapping, enclosed networks of conceptual or structural spaces which form a kind of labyrinth leading to a shifting, ever-unattainable nucleus or centre. (Cardwell, 1989: 271)

**Mise en abyme.** From the French meaning, literally, to throw into the abyss. The term is adapted from heraldry, and in its adapted form generally involves the recurring internal duplication of images of an artistic whole, such that an infinite series of images disappearing into invisibility is produced—similar to what one witnesses if one looks at one’s reflection between two facing mirrors. (Hawthorne, 1998: 138)

In the field of literary criticism, André Gide borrowed from heraldry the term *mise en abyme* to define the property of certain paintings in which a convex mirror reflects the scene in the picture, or the fictions in which a text-within-the-text echoes the main narrative. An equivalent phenomenon has been of late found by mathematicians to characterise the structure of edges and surfaces in objects of the natural world, nowadays studied in terms of fractals. (Bloom, 2007; 228)

...images-within-images, where the work includes its own representation, is called *mise en abyme*. The heraldic term *en abyme* was originally introduced by André Gide to denote self-reference in literature and in the visual arts... (Bokody, 2015: 14)

**Mise en abyme,** French for ‘put into the abyss’, is the miniature replication of the whole within some portion of it, a device that therefore reveals the constructedness [sic] of mediation (visual or textual). Clichéd uses of it include the picture of someone holding a picture depicting the same scene *ad infinitum*. (Chaney, 2011: 39, n1)

## Abstract

As no single English study of the *mise en abyme* with its examples in our late-modern world has been undertaken, this thesis concerns the *mise en abyme* in English literature. In approximately the last third of the twentieth century, the concept has increasingly been associated with ‘postmodernism’ and the essential groundlessness of all claims to general or universal truth. In this thesis, I argue that the *mise en abyme* has become such a broad staple of character and narrative study that its meaning is diffuse in the extreme. First celebrated in the 1980s and 1990s, by several literary thinkers as a figure capturing the spirit of postmodernism, the eventual symptomatic dissipation of the *mise en abyme* in literary studies resulted from critical suggestions that the *mise en abyme* was after all, perhaps, bogus. It subsequently became associated with aesthetic phenomena far beyond its initial characterisation by André Gide in 1893. I argue that it has now become a trope of things wider than Gide’s initial allusion and has become a metaphor for abyssal—and abysmal—things. This thesis seeks to consider the history of the *mise en abyme* and to offer a contemporary account of what it might mean: it does this by uncovering the latent rhetorical figures which preceded the name ‘*mise en abyme*’. Formal readings of the play within the play in *Hamlet* and the gothic story read in *The Fall of the House of Usher* are both starting points to relink Gide’s idea to its, more common, metaphorical applications. Thus, metaphors of the abyss, the dark, the occulted, the uncanny and, most precisely, the ‘sinister’ are examined in this dissertation. The thesis first evaluates the theoretical inheritance of Gide’s work and then, in the second part, applies, through close reading, the meaning of Gide’s idea to recent, and representative literary examples. The thrust of the argument is that the reason many definitions, and applications, of the *mise en abyme* are such a source of problems, is because the *mise en abyme*, as an English literary phenomenon supporting the broad thesis of postmodern Gothic aesthetics, is concerned with representing abyssal metaphors. A clear delimitation of the *mise en abyme* is difficult whenever connotations of the abyss, the dark, the occult and the sinister are overlooked. So, this dissertation gives a circumspect view of what is designated as *mise en abyme*, and argues that, in late-modernity, its meaning is closest to the rhetorical figures named *ekphrasis*, *metalepsis*, and *epanalepsis*. This study concludes that, realistically, there is probably no such thing as the *mise en abyme* and instead, there are only rhetorical figures and metaphors of the sinister and of the abyss.

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The abyss compels us to destruction—it is a reminder of death—and yet it also draws one toward it, attracting one to peer down into the darkness. (Edwards, 2016: 4)



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## Introduction

This study is about the *mise en abyme*. *Mise en abyme* is a French term and it means: 'put into the abyss.' The *mise en abyme* gives artwork a multi-dimensional feel. It is an enduring idea. But what is the meaning of the *mise en abyme*? Since many of its definitions remain at best, vague and general, or at worst, puzzling and inconsistent, what is the best way to understand what the *mise en abyme* means? The following thesis examines the application of the term '*mise en abyme*' in English culture. This thesis considers the sense and wonder: the 'aesthetics' and the 'metaphysics' of this elusive concept called the '*mise en abyme*'.

The '*mise en abyme*', which might better be termed Gide's original idea of the abyss, (after his diary use of the term '*en abyme*') is also elaborated briefly elsewhere in his own diary. For our purposes, the most important works clarifying his original idea are: *Journal* (1893), *An Attempt at Love* (1893), and *The Counterfeiters* (1925). Also amongst the most important sources of Gide's idea are two essays by Claude Magny 'The Meaning of *The Counterfeiters*' and 'The *mise en abyme* or cipher of transcendence' (1950). Other secondary material on Gide's work is voluminous, though much of it is inflected with its own theoretical approaches. The most useful works of this kind, include Lucien Dällenbach's *The Mirror in the Text* (1989), Brian McHale's *Postmodern Fiction* (1987) and Mieke Bal's essay 'The *mise en abyme* and iconicity' (1978). With all the work, and sections of books, traceable to Gide's original idea, however, no objective study of his English literary examples has yet been produced.



## 1. Problem

The opening quotes on pages 2-3 show how definitions of the *mise en abyme* vary a great deal. How is it that critics offer such diverse meanings for the *mise en abyme*? Commentators often cite ‘abysses’. (Lawlor, 1985; Hawthorne, 1998) Two aberrant associations follow as: ‘emptiness’ and ‘infinite regress’. (Gray, 1992: 181) Another meaning includes ‘frame similarity’. (Fludernik, 2009: 156) The *mise en abyme*, today, also refers to ‘any part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs’. (Ryan, 2008: 312) As Nelles notes, the device is far ‘easier to illustrate than to define’. (ibid) Nelles recognises that such a ‘device’ is now extremely common and he adds that, despite the considerable amount of research carried out, the ‘agreed shorthand’ of ‘the *mise en abyme*’ still eludes precise definition. It is a perennial problem and resists specific formulation because the terms ‘part’ and ‘resemble’ are very general and inclusive; most *mise en abyme* theory presumes that something more specific is involved, but theorists have not been able to agree precisely what this “something” is. (McHale, 1987: 124) The greatest puzzle is, besides, the way ‘mirrors’ and ‘reflection’ are metaphors for the *mise en abyme* idea. (Hawthorne, 1998)



Figure 1



Still, the most attractive metaphor for the *mise en abyme* is that of a cascading mirror sequence. (Figure 1) Following the definitions, there is an intriguing notion that, somehow, recurrent visual images have a textual equivalent. This imagined ‘*ad infinitum*’ regression has generally come to be thought about as the *mise en abyme*. (Chaney, 2011) But how do part-to-whole resemblances relate to abysses, and how do infinitely regressive mirrors come into all these literary associations? Again, what does the *mise en abyme* really mean?

In order to disentangle some of its associations, it is important to see how the *mise en abyme* idea developed historically. The *mise en abyme* carries a composite meaning and it relies, mainly, on the work of three thinkers: 1) André Gide, 2) Claude Magny and 3) Lucien Dällenbach.

Firstly, the French writer André Gide, in 1893, inaugurates an idea, one largely to do with how characteristic parts correspond to the whole work in which these parts are found. Gide recognises an effect in the arts, which he takes to mean, a link between various components and the way in which these unify the whole work, but remain disparate. The thrust of his idea is about parts and wholes. It is ‘to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work’ (1893: 30) He draws ‘a comparison with the device of heraldry that consists in setting in the escutcheon a smaller one *en abyme* at the heart-point’. (ibid: 31) Gide upholds this effect in his novels.

Secondly, the French critic Claude Magny, in 1950, examines Gide’s description. She asserts that Gide had an ambition to ‘write a super-novel’ because, Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*, contains a novelist writing a novel called ‘The Counterfeiters’. (1950: 269) Magny recognises a semantic link between, this (1) small-scale composition ‘The Counterfeiters’, and (2) Gide’s novel, *The Counterfeiters*. From her link, she declares that the implied, part-to-whole, “possible worlds” between the whole novel (2) and its small-scale reduction (1), altogether, elicit an ‘infinite set’ of ‘interpretations’. She concludes, from her assertions that critics ‘feel the totality of their interpretations are not inexhaustible’ and therefore, their links are a mathematically conceivable

‘process’ similar to “reflection” (in the optical sense of the word) [which] Gide was thought to apply to *The Counterfeiters*.’ (ibid) The many, imagined interpretations are, indeed, endless. For Magny, her view of ‘reflection’ is then drawn with a comparison to mirroring. She subsequently attributes mirrors to Gide’s idea, intuiting how smaller “infinite parallel mirrors introduce ‘inner space’ to the center of the same work”. (ibid: 270) She thus proposes cascading mirror metaphors and conceives a sense of ‘metaphysical vertigo’ in such ‘reflections’ where, ‘in short there is the illusion of mystery and depth’. (ibid: 270-1) Magny therefore appropriates this perceived depth as an endless abyss of mirror reflections. From Gide’s entry, Magny calls her mirror idea, ‘the *mise en abyme*’.

Thirdly, the critic Lucien Dällenbach, in 1977, examines Magny’s description. His research is based on the French New Novel developments of the late 1970s. (Appendix B) Dällenbach accepts Magny’s term, the *mise en abyme*, and entertains her mirror comparisons. Dällenbach also renders Gide’s idea as ‘the inaccessible heart of the text’, and marshalling Magny, Dällenbach argues that Gide really meant a ‘work within a work’ (ibid: 8) or that the idea is ‘an interlinked arrangement of elements, a relational network, or, if one prefers, a *structure*’. (ibid: 96) After Magny and Dällenbach, Gide’s idea became progressively more complicated.

In summary, Magny took Gide’s fairly straightforward idea of relations of similarity and correspondence between parts and wholes in a work of art, and reconceived ‘comparison’ and ‘transposition’ as modes of *mirroring* and *reflection*. Thus, Magny follows up her assertion that these latter relations are both reflexive and infinitely repeatable, comparing the effect to that of double mirrors whose reflections ‘converge’. In this way, her reading moves, from prosaic part-to-whole similarity, to infinity—and it is in this way that Magny is able to take up the dormant metaphor of the ‘abyss’ from Gide’s use of the heraldic term, and bring his idea back to life as the abyss of infinite repetition through mirror metaphors. Dällenbach compounds Magny’s speculations and proposes that Gide’s idea, of part-to-whole similarity, is like some mirror metaphor for a literary text.

So the problem of giving a precise definition of the *mise en abyme* persists. Multiple meanings still thwart any single definition of the *mise en abyme*, bespeaking indefinability from this side of its tortuous development. And even though it was poorly-defined, the term *mise en abyme* was used as a slur in the 1980s-90s in attacks on literary theory and its practitioners. (Scruton, 1983: 16; Norris, 1993: 198) The *mise en abyme* became something associated with ideas far beyond what Gide could have imagined. It became a term *believed* to indicate endless deferral of meaning—even though no clear examples were ever put forward which could tenably support the formal possibility of any such regressive conception. Criticism had become sophisticated but compromised especially since the *mise en abyme* carried various meanings that relied on little more than fortifying theories. Today, an internet search for the ‘*mise en abyme*’ returns marvellous definitions and untenable associations. The commonest of these infelicities are still with ‘relations of mirroring’. (Elsaesser, 2014: 21) The critical literature on the *mise en abyme* associates the “clumsy term” (Klimek, 2011: 256) with a bewildering array of concepts, allegories, analogies, phenomena and, it is true, even as the inventor of the term wrote, a ‘cipher’ and a ‘docile’ musical instrument: ‘an Aeolian harp’. (Magny, 1950: 268) Like gazing into an abyss full of incredible surprises, leading handbooks claim Gide created, or ‘coined’ the term *mise en abyme* (Cuddon, 2004: 513) or that the *mise en abyme* has something, in English, to do with ‘infinite regress’. (Baldick, 2008: 211-2) The term may have lost its cachet with academic controversies but it is still used widely: it circulates as currency in the intellectual marketplace of the humanities and arts.

## **2. Solution**

This treatise proposes that the ‘*mise en abyme*’ might be a misconceived name for other things. My argument tries to restore Gide’s idea to classical roots that pre-date its modern outgrowths. Wherever the term ‘*mise en abyme*’ is attributed to a text, it often calls for an accurate meaning. Common-sense reading raises the likelihood that the ‘*mise en abyme*’ is a stand-in term: it is a term which means other things. Very often, it refers to forgotten rhetorical effects, effects which are quite

easily identified and explained. Sometimes, the term is attributed to texts with extreme, abysmal, themes. In such cases, the *mise en abyme* resonates with a profound mood which is symptomatic of modern times. Therefore, in uncovering a delimited meaning and stronger context for the *mise en abyme*, this thesis examines 1) the probable roots for Gide's idea and 2) the cultural themes on which his modern idea is predicated.

Firstly, three common precursors to Gide's idea emerged during this study. This thesis examines three types of figurative term that are closely associated with what is broadly called the *mise en abyme*. These three principles are:

- *Ekphrasis*: the verbal expression of something visual;
- *Metalepsis*: the carrying over of meaning from one part of a work to another;
- *Epanalepsis*: the repetition of two, or more, parts in a sequence.

These tropes show some precursors to Gide's part-whole idea. General, three-fold models of the *mise en abyme* are, however, not new: Gide's idea is elaborated as single, double or multiple variations and is replicated in at least five studies. (Dällenbach, 1977; Bal, 1978; McHale, 1987; Wolf, 2010; Kukkonen, 2011) The descriptive content of the term *mise en abyme*, with these vague typologies, grew capriciously. But my model returns Gide's idea to its solid ground. My model invites an open-mind to older figures, tropes that never went away, tropes that were only buried under an edifice of sophisticated theory for over sixty years.

Secondly then, apart from a needed English, rhetorical solution, we see many overlooked concerns in *mise en abyme* research. One alluring gap includes the relationship of Gide's idea with abysses, nothingness and even, oddly enough, with music.

### **3. Gaps**

There is much opportunity to advance the *mise en abyme* idea by looking at visual illustrations. It seems easy to indicate infinite abysses in pictures, implying limitlessness, because it is difficult to verbalise the definition of this idea. (Figure 1) Yet, its ubiquity in literary theory suggests this

infinite sense is as commonplace in the verbal arts as it is in visual culture. A helpful passage in Dällenbach's work touches on these issues. The marginal place, in his book's appendix, outlines visual illustrations for his *mise en abyme*. In his final remarks, he raises dark, moody and hidden associations of 'the abyss'. His notes expose areas beyond the scope of enquiry. Two concerns include 1) connotations of the abyss and 2) the *mise en abyme* in the dimension of music:

The paradigms that we used as the metaphors for the locus of a metaphysical narrative are directed sometimes at a central point at the inaccessible heart of the text, and sometimes at a fabulous scene representing the 'beyond'. But although, following etymology, the primary connotations of the 'abyss' ('abyss') are necessarily the bottomless, the very deep, the vertiginous and the buried, it does not follow that the bowels of the earth, the underworld, caves and pits are the places in which the primordial is sited. In the same ambiguous way that the adjective 'altus' in Latin means both the high and the deep, the 'abyssal' can also choose as the seat of its supremacy the Heaven of Ideas or divine transcendence. We may add that, in its wish to be the quintessential expression of textual order, the originating reality almost always has to coincide with a piece of writing whose authenticity is unquestionable (a manuscript, a parchment or an original letter) or with an integrative expression (voice, song, music) that not only institutes the text, but is also essentially melodic. (Dällenbach, 1977: 181)

Firstly, the 'expression' that undergirds any part holding a high level of representative similarity to its frame, is perhaps 'a framed element shows points of similarity to the frame [itself]' as authorities define the *mise en abyme*. (Fludernik, 2009: 156) And besides Magny's influence, 'connotations' of the *mise en abyme* are, for Dällenbach, of 'deep', 'buried' and 'abyssal' impressions where he cites Friedrich Nietzsche's 'behind each of his caves there does and must lie another deeper cave—a stronger, more comprehensive world beyond the surface, an abyss behind every ground, beneath every foundation'. (ibid: 183 *cf* Nietzsche, 1886 § 289)

Secondly, Dällenbach's influence from Magny, of mirrors in mirrors, is undeniable: "a '*mise en abyme*' is any aspect enclosed within a work which shows a similarity with the work that contains it" (ibid: 8). Such occult 'connotations' remain part of the unexamined legacy behind the *mise en abyme*. Dällenbach's final remark on the *mise en abyme* is interesting about plummeting towards a mirror-like infinity. So, these two points in his conclusions require examination. His concerns besides reference 'the melodic' and involve metaphors of 'the abyss'. Understandably, the above portions are very difficult and unlikely to clear up the vague definitions of the *mise en abyme*

as ‘any part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs’. (Nelles, 2010: 312) However, my examination will turn to these two allusions in order to investigate whether these scholarship themes do indeed 1) delimit my meaning of the *mise en abyme* as something rhetorically part-whole and 2) strengthen the context for Gide’s idea as a metaphor for the abyss.

#### 4. Justifications

Two areas beyond the scope of Lucien Dällenbach’s study are 1) metaphors of the abyss and 2) textual treatments of music. Other scholarship confirms these two gaps. Besides Dällenbach, the study of narrative, or narratology, highlights topics for further investigation regarding the *mise en abyme*. (Appendix C) At least one of these topics—music—validate Dällenbach’s remarks.

Firstly, Dällenbach’s ‘essentially melodic’ is an indirect concern, a reference-of-a-reference, or meta-reference. (Appendix C) Since music, by the limits of its medium, cannot actually occur in a novel or story (though it *can* in a play, when performed), textual music can only be referred to indirectly. Often, when we read of cases called the *mise en abyme*, we will notice these second-order types of references to music and song. For example, the musically referenced poem in *The Fall of the House of Usher* or the lyrical performance of the play in *Hamlet*, are presumably performed to accompanying music. Music, as mentioned by Dällenbach, is a good example of the use of meta-reference. Music, in a text, is an exchange between two artistic media (music and literature). The problem of the literary *mise en abyme* and its potential participation in non-verbal media, such as music, has been promoted by Werner Wolf. (1999, 2002, 2010) Through a study of narrative, media and frames, Wolf has painstakingly addressed critical scholarship ‘where classical narratology has left lacunae’. (2010: 78) Of the many gaps that would merit attention, concerning the link between contemporary literature and music, Wolf points out an opportunity to explore ‘the connections between ... common forms of self-reference ... and *mise en abyme*’. (2007: 316) Wolf’s musical concerns also support the aims of narrative study which are ‘to broaden the scope of [its] methodology’ including what is called, the *mise en abyme*. (Meister, 2009: 343) This research

gap of sounds and the *'mise en abyme'* is also rehearsed by others in its structural associations: as a special case of narrative levels. In this regard, Didier Coste and John Pier highlight the 'broad area of inquiry for additional study [as] the interaction of narrative levels with speaker-hearer relations'. ([2013], 2007: 306) They both propose a linguistic study to the sounds of speech aligned with the *'mise en abyme phenomenon'*.

Secondly, Dällenbach alluded to but never fully investigated, the 'abyss' metaphor that Friederich Nietzsche sometimes used. This research gap is less a formal concern and more thematic and historical. Again, Dällenbach's allusion is arcane but it does require mention. Since the *mise en abyme*—as Dällenbach says—is a reflexive 'work within a work' we come to a concern of his *mise en abyme* in relation to the abyssal word (*abyme*) in its name. For reflexivity and the *mise en abyme* see Appendix C. Pictures capturing infinite abysses, are undeniably common in contemporary visual (non-verbal) media, like graphic tales, art which rehearses contemporary anxieties about boundlessness and nothingness. (Chaney, 2011: 22) Consequently, Dällenbach's second (metaphysical) allusion of 'the abyss' metaphor is apt because the term, *mise en abyme*, is widely defined as a sense of radical baselessness. Dällenbach's popularisation of the abyssal image raises feelings to do with the supposed sense of falling into absence by virtue of implied repetition, like looking down a long, endless tunnel and 'disappearing into invisibility'. (Hawthorne, 1998) The effect, it is claimed, seems one of 'revelations of nothingness'. (Gray, 1992) Dällenbach's *mise en abyme* confirms, following the basic meaning, 'to put into the *abyss*'. Indeed, in this thesis, I will show that the examples in English do formally evoke the idea of gazing 'into the abyss' but not in the way we might imagine.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Now although this abstruse idea (of infinite abysses) is readily mentioned, (Chaney, 2011; Gray, 1992; Hawthorne, 1998) there remains a continued silence on the metaphysical foundations of its aesthetic purpose in contemporary English literature. The abyssal issue, although hackneyed enough to mention, remains disappointingly sidestepped. Philosophically, Dällenbach foresaw its ubiquity when he proposed: 'To appreciate through a structural transformation the metaphysical change that has come about in and through recent literature—this is in fact the ultimate goal of this study, which aims rigorously to take account of our transition to modernity'. (ibid, 1977: 3) And Dällenbach is rigorous indeed in showing how the French novel changed and how his work is a part of the French New novel and its preoccupations with depicting, or distorting, reality. There is understandably very little elaboration, or close reading of any home-grown English examples. Gide's journal does cite two English examples in literature (*Hamlet* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*). Dällenbach glosses these, without close readings.



To date, an extended close-reading study of contemporary examples of the *mise en abyme* in English does not exist. Nor is the link, following Magny and Dällenbach, between metaphysical meanings of the abyss and the *mise en abyme* explicitly confirmed. The aesthetic of an abyss, groundlessness, is a concept I argue, does exist in some of the literature affiliated to the concerns surrounding the term *mise en abyme*. Perhaps this idea is indeed as evident in close readings as the definitions assert. The insight by Birgit Neumann and Ansgar Nünning is therefore relevant here: they point out that ‘there are hardly any studies concerning functions that may be fulfilled by certain forms of self-reflexive narration in different historical epochs and literary genres’. (2007: 210) An example of this function, in self-reflexive narrative, is then of ‘the abyss’ metaphor which Dällenbach first marshalled in his ‘transition to modernity’ study. (1989, [1977]: 3) The ‘historical epoch’ of late-modernity, today, holds many ‘reflexive genres’ such as tales variously celebrated as meta-fictions. My thesis will, therefore, debate Gide’s original idea in relation to this Anglo-American development because some of its literature captures metaphors of the abyss.

In summary, Dällenbach identifies two main gaps in his study. Other scholars confirm these gaps: 1) the *mise en abyme* and the aesthetics of music and 2) the *en abyme* notion connoting abyssal impressions and the metaphysics of nothing-ness. The dimension of music will be addressed in this thesis. The view of the *mise en abyme*, to do with abyssal metaphors, is formidably obscure and will not be examined in this dissertation. Although tentative, this thesis does come some way closer to touching on this contemporary concern within the arts—a concern dubbed aesthetic nihilism, or a sublime sense of radical absence in artistic representation (Slocombe, 2006, 2013). I will leave this interesting line of enquiry open as I have come to learn, in doing this project, that any study about the belief in nothing, or ‘nihilism’, is a thesis in its own right. Being mindful of this concern, I will not engage with the ideas about nihilism, but I will try to keep this concern in my purview throughout this study. The closest my enquiry comes to metaphors of the abyss is by means of exploring the rise of dark artistic tastes, commonly called The Gothic, since this movement suspends much disbelief about occult matters, absent manifestations, and

negative impressions. Not that the Gothic is a nihilistic field of study but because it covers a versatile range of the arts and can help us understand perhaps better what abyssal metaphors mean. My research will not be able to strengthen this cultural overlap between the ‘abyss metaphor’, and nihilism. (Appendix C) Yet, I sense that in the future, the *mise en abyme* as a literary association of nihilism will be better covered. I hope that work is carried out by scholars who can address the topic of nihilism and the ‘*mise en abyme*’ sufficiently and convincingly in a full-length study.

## **5. Interest**

This thesis is formalist in its method and aims to uncover a meaningful model for the *mise en abyme*. (Appendix C) Additionally, my idiosyncratic interests, during this project, were often in aspects which orthodox criticism avoids. Looking at Gide’s idea, for me, discerned alternative explanations which general commentary continues to sidestep. Any open-minded reading of Gide’s words whisper an uncanny and hidden threshold dimension of experience: one which Gide’s idea does limn. The supernatural scope of Gide’s idea is still ‘to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work’ (1893: 30) These lines, notwithstanding the utmost chaos put forward by conventional studies, evoke a magical link between universes: 1) the objective, natural world of the events and 2) the subjective, non-natural world of the characters. Besides, a carrying over, like in musical voicing from one position to another, the subversive link of a working ‘transposed’ also engenders an ideal world, a world dynamically evolving towards a newer state in which the single, subjective state in self-imposed exile, gradually separates from any unity with the objective universe and thus finds ‘transposed’, on its experiential ‘scale’, the will of the natural, objective work which is bent by the will of this character. This transcendental view of Gide’s idea verifies my suspicions of its affiliation to, and amenability to, the area of dark romance, commonly called, The Gothic. The following thesis is a contribution to this area of enquiry situated in the aesthetic literature of the occult. An interest in the scholarship concerning the uncanny, with my background involvement in Western esoteric traditions, presented me with an opportunity to

question some of applications of this important principle in gothic aesthetics and metaphysics. I call my own nuanced development of the uncanny, ‘the sinister’. The sinister is, much like the uncanny, an axiological stance between familiar subjects and strange objects. But unlike the uncanny, the sinister is a hidden, dark and, perhaps dangerous, perhaps, *pantheistic* understanding of human super-nature, a view beyond orthodoxies. The sinister critical approach imagines inverted absolute values: it is a radically adversarial starting point because it provokes sublime possibilities by which all subjective-objective laws are tested to their reasonable limits (occult antinomianism). Thus, darkness *can* be enlightening and the sacred and profane *can* be recognised as inseparably united, where the dictum validates: ‘nothing is profane because all is sacred’. At its simplest, my system for close reading the *mise en abyme* uses three tools, fashioned as follows:

1. **The link** sets a relationship between character and narrative. It is the manner or methods, taken by the character, to cause or thwart changes in the authorial narrative by means of communication, relaying information at odds with the events from the narrator or by means of taking a comradely or adversarial stance for/against the fated flow of narrative events. It seems that the characters’ actions, within and without, their subjective worlds are non-natural actions because the character seems to exercise self-conscious independence from the fated events dictated by either the objective narrator and/or author.
2. **The Subjective** part of the story is the character’s world ruled by the fictional living entities within the whole story. Each character is a particular manifestation of the narrative, in the sense that they relay or thwart information about the flow of events from the objective level of the narrative.
3. **The Objective** whole is the story taken together (including the character component) that can be reasoned about and formally quantified. It is the naturally ordered, regular and predictable work of the author, made manifest by the presence of a narrator, or several narrators.

## 5. Summary

In conclusion, the working definition of the *mise en abyme* is of ‘any [smaller] part of a work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs’. (Nelles, 2010: 312) Interest in the *mise en abyme* has spanned many decades from its coinage in 1950 until quite recently. In 2010 this meaning of the *mise en abyme* was inverted to give an even newer perspective. (Wolf, 2010: 59)

Yet, from 1950 to the present, most writers have simply been exploring different possible dimensions, variations and permutations of the part-whole relationship within a work of literature initially posited by Gide as ‘proportions’. In each case of its development, writers have sought to help us better understand the mereological (part-whole) nature of Gide’s idea—its form and described structure, its significance more broadly, its abstractness and the metaphorical questions to which it gives rise. In summary, what part of the work resembles the other part of the work? What does this resembling look like? Is the *mise en abyme* like reflecting mirrors, or superimposed shields? Or is it like Russian Nesting Dolls? Indeed, what does a *mise en abyme*, as a ‘work within a work’, actually mean? (Dällenbach, 1977: 8)

This thesis contains notated references to music. For readers who do not read music, I have prepared an accompanying CD (affixed to the cover). Its tracks are numbered, corresponding to the various places these musical examples are found in the thesis.

This thesis is a contribution towards the body of work about the *mise en abyme*. Through variously analysed examples, the outcome of this study offers a rhetorical typology of the *mise en abyme* and also comes somewhat closer to a more precise, delimited formulation. This written study provides an account of how rhetorical tropes are really the de facto terms designated as the ‘*mise en abyme*’. This work evaluates the recent, inflected meanings of the *mise en abyme* and additionally shows the extent to which the term has grown and is applied more broadly. The typology also provides an immutable tool for delimiting the established typologies of the *mise en abyme* device and thereby, this thesis develops a delimited understanding of the device. I hope that this work will be interesting to anyone seeking an updated and enlarged account of what is designated as the *mise en abyme*.



## Gide's Original Idea

This chapter is about the *mise en abyme* and its French origins. Most critics cite André Gide's 1893 diary entry as the first identification of the *mise en abyme*. This attribution is partly correct. Even though the idea is much older than 1893, having classical tropes that obey its general meaning, Gide's insight is still timeless. The actual term '*mise en abyme*' was coined much later by Claude Magny (1950). It is Gide therefore who inaugurated the idea and Magny who popularised it.

In the introduction of this thesis, the working definition for the *mise en abyme*, was 'any part of a

work that resembles the larger work in which it occurs'. (Nelles, 2010: 312) Taken to an extreme, we find many small forms resembling the large form with which



any of the small forms are significantly associated. Like Russian *matryoshka* dolls (Figure 1.1.) which can stack indefinitely receding container sizes within themselves, the *mise en abyme* has today, become associated with the way small parts resemble the larger whole in which these small parts occur. But as it will emerge, the large critical literature (about the *mise en abyme*) is inconclusive as it shades into association and analogy. Although the conception of the *mise en abyme* as a device containing small resembling parts *ad infinitum* has been asserted, there is little evidence that Gide had anything like this in mind. The many critical inconsistencies about Gide's

idea are mainly due to the widespread disagreement about a suitable candidate—or set of candidates—to define what the *mise en abyme* means.

So, what follows, provides a reading of André Gide's work to do with the *mise en abyme*. The subsequent chapter gives an account of French thinkers who inflected Gide's idea. I will argue that their definitions of the *mise en abyme* have overlooked older, established descriptions for effects their commentary characterises with the term '*mise en abyme*'. Thus, effects which are more adequately and accurately described using rhetorical tropes are designated as '*mise en abyme*' in much French commentary and also in many English contexts which draw on French studies.

It is proper therefore to start by quoting the diary of André Gide. This might seem well trodden ground, but all modern study of the *mise en abyme* starts with Gide, and many subsequent errors have coalesced around these words which create his original idea. The history of the *mise en abyme* can be read as a history of belief in an idea, it is a history of unverifiable and unfalsifiable arcana: abysses, mirrors, infinities and perhaps even, abysmal concerns that this one quote has engendered. His words remain the centre of a vast converging scholarship, a perilously inscrutable centre to the work crafted around it. Sometime in August 1893 Gide records, in his journal, his ideas about literature. In a tantalising fragment, Gide declares his motive for writing his novella, *An Attempt at Love*. His book was published in the same year as he wrote his diary entry in which he speaks of his plans to achieve a particular narrative effect: one where a narrating character reports events in much the same manner as the author reports these events. His story is about a couple, Luc and Rachel, who once dreamt about living together in a beautiful park. Their tale is full of opaque dreamscapes in which they strive to find this park. Eventually, the dream is tangibly realised. As they both physically enter their imagined park they are, however, both disappointed. Gide's effect is one where he 'wanted to suggest', as he says, the way his characters mimic his feelings. Gide wrote of this doubling in his diary as follows:

I wanted to suggest, in *An Attempt at Love*, the influence of the book upon the one who is writing it, and during that very writing... Luc and Rachel [the protagonists in *The Attempt at Love*] also want to realise their desire, but while, by writing mine down, I realised it in an ideal way, they, dreaming of the park that they saw only from the outside, want to go in materially; when they do they experience no joy. In a work of art I rather like to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work. Nothing throws a clearer light upon it or more surely establishes the proportions to the whole. Thus, in certain paintings of Memling or Quentin Metzys a small convex and dark mirror reflects the interior of the room in which the scene of the painting is taking place. Likewise in Velásquez's painting of the *Meniñas* (but somewhat differently). Finally, in literature, in the play scene in *Hamlet*, and elsewhere in many other plays [...] In *The Fall of the House of Usher* the story that is read to Roderick, etc. None of these examples is altogether exact. What would be much more so, and would explain much better what I strove for in [*The Attempt at Love* and my *Notebooks of André Walter*], is a comparison with the device of heraldry that consists in setting in the escutcheon a smaller one 'en abyme' at the heart-point. (ibid: 30-1)

The writer, Gide, is perturbed by an emotional ideal in *An Attempt at Love*. His novella cites Calderon's epithet that 'desire is like a shining flame, and what is touched by it is nothing anymore but ash—light dust, scattered around at the first wind blowing'. (1893, [1922]: i) This apparently unattainable longing for love, unattainable perhaps because Gide presents love so elusively, is however, a longing suggestively fulfilled. The narrator, who addresses the tale of Luc and Rachel to an unnamed mistress, adopts a literary device in which characters are the vicarious agents of the author's faintly gestured aims. Quite simply, the writer fulfils his longings through representing these through the characters. The characters subvert the experience conveyed by the narrator, Gide.

The inseparable Luc and Rachel carry out the displaced longings of the author, Gide, whose desires are recorded, in an epistle, by the unnamed mistress who reads about Luc and Rachel's love life. Rather unusual for its time, the form of this composition disrupts any complicity between the two couples because each couple feels differently. For example, the narrator addresses directly its fictive unnamed mistress and says that theirs is a lost and 'sad love affair'. (ibid: 33) Luc's and Rachel's sexual alliance is however one of 'splendour' and fulfilled 'lusting' (ibid: 22) As Gide proposed in his *Journal* above, Luc and Rachel's Edenic return past the 'shadow of the wall' (ibid: 44) and into the park, charges the feeling of the characters. The vacant longings of the writer and his

mistress consequently become those of the characters, Luc and Rachel. The story *finally* illustrates how traits of a character are attributable to the traits of the narrator, in this case the author Gide, who creates the narrative of Luc and Rachel. Such is the reason why the conclusion reveals the success of this experimental act of writing. The characters become bored of each other, perhaps in the same way as the writer of the story had, theretofore, become tired of his literary mistress:

So Luc and Rachel left each other; only one day, only one instant of Summer, both their fates had melted together—but only tangentially—and now already they were looking somewhere else. On the sand, seated near the waves, Luc was watching the sea, and Rachel the countryside. From time to time they intended to catch again their undying love, but it was just pleasure without any surprise; that was an exhausted thing and Luc was happy at the idea of leaving. Rachel couldn't hold him back anymore. (ibid: 53)

As their ardour wanes, Luc's and Rachel's desire to return to what they had, in contrast, grows stronger. In the end, once they finally are in the physical park, they find it abandoned, disappointing and empty. Upon 'having awoken', 'they experienced no joy'. Indeed, the bankruptcy of their awakening is one where nothingness is the only competent candidate to signify what they feel: 'nothing could paint the splendour of the alleys'. (ibid: 54) Therefore, Gide's composition has two tiers where we find 1) characters articulating the events of a story in the same way as 2) the narrator-author that articulates the way these character-narrators articulate the story. But beyond this parallel narrative, Gide evokes the delicacy of the effect. In his diary, Gide uses a passive, 'transposed', where the authorial narrative voice is registered *by*, the level of, character. For his novella, this change in voice starts with the vulnerable desire of the authorial expression but the attempted elimination of desire by the character voice. Whereas the tale begins with Calderon's tragic warning about fulfilled desire turning to an analogous 'light ash', Luc and Rachel end their subsumed literary foray by returning the narration back to Gide's voice. In the end, Gide addresses his mistress as similarly perishable as the love between Luc and Rachel, arousing fulfilment of lust by the 'winds of my spirit—which will scatter this ash' and, incidentally, end all his desire. (ibid:



63) The effect Gide therefore achieves is one of two narrative layers: one prominent layer superimposed, like shield surfaces, onto a ‘second’ narrative articulated at the level of character.

In the key part of the *Journal* entry, therefore, from which many definitions of the *mise en abyme* are derived; following on from *An Attempt at Love*, Gide writes:

In a work of art I rather like to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work. Nothing throws a clearer light upon it or more surely establishes the proportions to the whole. (Gide, 1978 [1893]: 30)

What we see is how Gide’s central idea consists of three parts: 1) a transposed subject 2) character scale and 3) the causal relationship between 1) and 2). For simplicity, transposing means a change of register, a change in manner of one position for another one. The term is highly relevant to music. After a piece of music (Figure

1.2) is transposed into a different key, for example, there remains a likeness in form between the music before and after it is transposed. But there is a definite difference between the relative position



of tones, or pitches, of the original piece and its alteration. Nevertheless, the new music still corresponds proportionally to what it was before it was transposed, especially since a tonal scale is the reference guide for the transposition. (Track 1 on accompanying CD)

But unlike music, for Gide’s entry above, what is changed is the subject of a literary work. Gide had much to say about what he meant by ‘subject’, much of which concerned literary character. Gide’s ‘scale of the characters’, however, is easier to think about. This category is to do with the life-like entities in a story and the way in which these entities seem to contain the traits of the story in which they figure. Some happy characters might, for instance, enunciate the pleasant events of a story. Theirs is a scaled refraction, a world in miniature, broken away from the illusion of the whole work as they report, very effectively, their character’s share in the whole of the work.

Therefore, there is the literary subject, and on the other hand, the characters. And the connection established between the character and the subject of a work of art, is what Gide meant when he articulated his fondness for a technique, he noticed, in literature. The idea is, however, more complex than this reduction so I shall examine the above three concerns in more detail.

### **1. The Transposed Subject**

The first point about Gide's idea is its potential terminological difficulty. He seems to be suggesting that there are these three inter-related parts forming his idea. The 'very subject' of the work is the basis of his idea and is especially unclear since Gide did describe what he meant by 'subject' but in some rather roundabout, mystifying ways. However, Gide does say that for his idea, the subject of a work is associated with:

... the very model of the psychological novel. An angry man tells a story; there is the subject of a book. A man telling a story is not enough; it must be an angry man and there must be a constant connexion between his anger and the story he tells. (Gide, 1978: 31)

The character, consequently, 'tells' a story in keeping with this character's traits. Though still unclear, this is 'the subject'. The character's motive is perhaps hypothetically similar to the way that a narrator tells a story which relates his own feelings. Gide's novel, *The Counterfeiters* ([1925], 1931) is more helpful for thinking about what he meant by 'subject'. As discussed later in this chapter, critics have come to agree that this novel "established the device" which Gide first sketched in his diary. (Cuddon, 1998: 513) The novel is held to be an 'especially conspicuous' case of Gide's *Journal* description. (Smyth, 1991: 57) Furthermore, *The Counterfeiters* is asserted to have 'popularised' the device designated as the *mise en abyme* (France, 1995: 532). The novel is about a writer called Edouard, who is composing a novel in a notebook. It transpires that the novel, *The Counterfeiters*, is in large part the collected records of this notebook. 'My notebook contains, as it were, a running criticism of my novel—or rather of the novel in general' as Edouard declares (ibid: 170). The character Edouard, what is more, is like a 'spokesman' for the ideas of Gide who

depicts this novelist character: Edouard expresses the essence of Gide's ideas. When Edouard is pressed about his aims in styling his novel, he tells us that:

In order to arrive at this effect—do you follow me?—I invent the character of a novelist, whom I make my central figure; and the subject of the book, if you must have one, is just that very struggle between what reality offers him and what he himself desires to make of it. (ibid: 168-9)

Edouard's confession, immediately afterwards, that 'the subject' is a strained connection 'between the facts presented by reality and the ideal reality' (ibid: 169) echoes Gide's idea where a 'subject' is the encompassing link between a factually angry man and the possibility for that the angry man to tell an angry story. The 'individual's development' must take into account 'the pressure of the surroundings' as the novel prescribes. (ibid: 244) The environment is always present. There is, thus, an ambivalence, but 'constant connection', between (inner, *psyche*-centric) ideals and (external, *allego*-centric) realities; it is 'the desire to reconcile them', as Edouard wishes, which is perhaps what Gide meant by the subject 'transposed'. (ibid: 169) If the dissonance can be resolved, then transposition has occurred. Indeed, even later, based on his earlier conversation, Edouard comes to a conclusion about what a subject means, and correlatively, what a subject might mean for Gide:

I am beginning to catch sight of what I might call the 'deep-lying subject' of my book. It is—it will be—no doubt, the rivalry between the real world and the representation of it which we make to ourselves. The manner in which the world of the appearances imposes itself upon us, and the manner in which we try to impose on the outside world our own interpretation—this is the drama of our lives. (ibid: 183)

The 'subject' mentioned in Gide's *Journal* therefore shows a similarity to Edouard's journal. So, primary to the subject 'transposed alive' as the novel speaks of it, there is an association of character and the connection between it and the substrate of the work. (ibid: 71) For Gide, then, the subject is some component of reality—it is a sum of experiences carried over, registered, by characters who can speak about these realities from their fictive level in the novel. But this magical

link is so broad it could apply to nearly *any* novel. Indeed, but it is the subtle nature of *what* the reality is, and *how* neatly this elusive (and often sinister) reality is conveyed by the characters. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter 6, behind the being of the character is the elusive doing of the subject.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Character Scale

It is tempting to take a liberal translation that Gide meant 'level' rather than scale. But the continuous, causal, gradations Gide proposes make 'scale' an apt word. The scientist-physician character, Vincent, bears Gide's idea of scale quite well. Vincent delivers a profound, but unwelcome lecture on marine zoology. In it, he discourses about the challenges of human types by drawing on metaphors of deep sea creatures. He reveals his innermost character through his disquisition on the abyssal levels of the sea. Vincent is articulating, though at a distance, the themes of *The Counterfeiters*. It seems that the subject of the work, a dark, antinomian theme, is articulated in the content of his lecture and, by declension, his lecture shows how his own character is interchangeably linked to the themes of *The Counterfeiters*. In order to see the transposition of *The Counterfeiters* to the scale of Vincent's character, the final remarks in the novel serve to recapitulate what Gide insinuates all along, namely that:

The devil and God are one and the same; they work together. We try to believe that everything bad on earth comes from the devil, but it's because, if we didn't, we should never find strength to forgive God. He plays with us like a cat, tormenting a mouse. (ibid: 344-5)

Good and evil, in occult philosophy, are 'two sides of the same coin', allegedly separate and opposed, but really, two faces of a greater whole: a oneness. What Vincent describes, similarly goes against the grain, against what is expected because he is 'transfigured' by his surroundings. (ibid:

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<sup>1</sup> Leading critic, Germaine Brée (1963), still offers a succinct overview of the purpose of Gide's unusual composition. Undeniably coloured by preoccupations of The French New Novel and its enterprises, Brée does capture André Gide's experimental aims to achieve something theretofore quite marginal in literary forms: 'The *Journal of the Counterfeiters* is neither a guide to Gide's novel nor an explanation of it. At most, it can raise certain questions in the reader's mind concerning Gide's intentions, the merits of the techniques he used, and the scope of the book itself. On the whole, it stresses those characteristics of fiction which Gide wanted to do away with: descriptions in the realistic manner, a plot around which to drape his story, motivational analysis explaining the characters' behaviour, the kind of narration so smoothly organised that it carries the reader along on a kind of conveyer belt, and the traditional sort of conclusion'. (1963: in Littlejohn, 1970: 112)

137) Recognising the analogy between light and dark, Vincent captures the subversive traits of the novel as a meditation on ‘mystical despair’ and its original alternatives, respectively. (ibid: 345)

Vincent’s lecture carries with it, the sense of his character and his worldview:

You know, no doubt, that the light of day does not reach very far down into the sea. Its depths are dark...huge gulfs, which for a long time were thought to be uninhabited; then people began dragging them, and quantities of strange animals were brought up from these infernal regions—animals which were blind, it was thought. What use would the sense of sight be in the dark? Evidently they had no eyes; Nevertheless, on examination it was found to people’s amazement that some of them *had* eyes; that they almost all had eyes, and sometimes antennae of extraordinary sensibility into the bargain. Still people doubted and wondered: why eyes with no means of seeing? Eyes that are sensitive—but sensitive to what? ...And at last it was discovered that each of these animals which people at first insisted were creatures of darkness, gives forth and projects before and around it its *own* light. Each of them shines, illuminates, irradiates. When they were brought up from the depths at night and turned out on to the ship’s deck, the darkness blazed. Moving, many-coloured fires, glowing, vibrating, changing—revolving beacon-lamps—sparkling of stars and jewels—a spectacle, say those who saw it, of unparalleled splendour...[These] fish, like us, my dear boy, perish in calm waters. (ibid: 137-8)

Vincent’s lecture about what the novel calls ‘private lights’ echoes the underworld operations of the fraudsters (ibid: 191). Yet, the ‘unscrupulous elders’ who are the counterfeiters, do not taint the novel with the expected moral injunctions of good and evil, dark and light, characters. (ibid: 298) Instead, it is the imminently ‘intriguing’ novelistic currents which leave a strange and ‘sinister’ mark on the characters. (Brée, ibid: 118) The metaphor of the deep-sea fishes *in* a dark sea, or characters *under* the antinomian spell of the novel, is a causal, spatial, link. The counterfeiting themes of the events determine the character enormity in as much a way as the characters cryptically reveal these perceived themes. If there is no evident presence of a link, then there is no transposition. Other contrivances between character and subject could include cynical, idealistic characters, like Strouvillou, who connive with the counterfeiters to create, by dubious incidents, fake, artificial coins. Clearly, not everything about the character can be made to forge a link with the literary subject: there are sometimes, as is evidenced by Vincent, an inverse contrivance

between his character and the 'subject of the work'. And so, some connections might, just, be too forced.

It is nonetheless, the causal link, whatever its orientation, between the character who articulates the subject of the work or how this enormous sea of themes are imposed on and reported, by the character that we come closer to understanding Gide's diary entry. Characters register the broader subject of the work and so create a connection. The relationship between character and subject is therefore foundational to understanding Gide's idea. However the reader might interpret the idea, the relationship between these two parts cannot be denied.

### **3. Character and Subject**

The third part of Gide's idea takes into account the interaction between character and subject. Of note, the subject is 'transposed' to the 'scale' of the characters, as Gide says. Transposing is a dynamic process and is perhaps more precisely thought about as a development process: a growth from the original register into something newer and evolved. Because the switching of registers (namely character and subject) reconfigures whatever the original register is, studying what Gide meant by transposition affords a richer understanding about what he also meant by subject and character. Yet, by defying conventions in literary composition, Gide includes a counterfeiter's logbook in the novel which provides further commentary for Edouard's journal which, in turn, makes up the novel *The Counterfeiters*. Introduced, as hoped, 'for the greater irritation of the reader', the travel logbook duplicates Edouard's journal. Thus, much like the aim of his novel, Gide seems to have followed through with his confounding quip about duplications:

If you were crafty, after such a journey, you would publish not only your logbook, but also the logbook of this logbook, and your companion would publish the journal of the journal of my husband's logbook... (Dällenbach, 1989: 200 ff 19)

Now because there is commentary about commentary, we have a narrative form that seems bewilderingly complex but is, rather quite simply, a composition that carries a finite number of

incidents related by characters. Gide seems to suggest that there is a firm resolution between the character and 'subject of the work'. Much like Henry James, who famously asserted that the subject, as an event or incident, was determined by the character; Gide thus drew on features in a mutual alliance that had long been established for literary composition:

There are bad novels and good novels, as there are bad pictures and good pictures; but that is the only distinction in which I see any meaning, and I can as little imagine speaking of a novel of character as I can imagine speaking of a picture of character. When one says picture, one says of character, when one says novel, one says of incident, and the terms may be *transposed*. What is character but the determination of incident? What is incident but the illustration of character? (James, [1884], 1986: 174) *my italics*

James, much like Gide, recognised a keen alliance between the visual and the verbal. The determination is not necessarily some definite causal outcome, but rather, a character determines the subject by exhibiting certain traits that are analogous to the subject of the work. And these traits often require justification. Therefore, the way that transposition might work, in literature, is the way that a character determines, revealing in speech (as Vincent does, for example) the subject matter in a work of fiction. 'To find transposed, on the scale of the character, the very subject of the work', as Gide says, is thus to focus upon the purposive alliance between character and subject. Transposing, in one sense, is to have a story about characters. These characters do the story justice by their well-reported legitimization of the events; or, contrariwise, transposing is the probability of the events, as these incidents inform the greater subject and are narrated by the relevant characters.

For Gide then, his idea contains 1) a subject 2) a character and 3) a dynamic between 1) and 2). This third part of his idea has much to do with how the character embodies the traits of the work. Besides, the character determines the subject of the work by articulating the broader themes of the work, which for Gide's example includes 'an angry man who tells an angry story'. But sometimes, the characters do not realistically convey the traits of the work around them, in some faithful mirrored likeness for instance, rather the character only serves to obscure or invert the traits of the work. An example includes the immaculate character, Vincent, who is portrayed opposite to the

dark world around him. Consequently, Gide's characters can only ever convey their traits in virtue of what is known at any one point about the subject of the work. Furthermore, the subject determines the character by legitimating particular traits at the expense of others, and the subject is part of the dynamic relation with character. The relation is a process and enables a broader understanding of the character and the subject of a work.

Although the above is an examination on the main thrust of Gide's idea which was to become the *mise en abyme*, these parts must be taken into account whenever the idea is investigated in literature and rhetoric. At the heart of the representational dichotomy of events versus characters, either visual, or verbal, one finds Gide's apposite comparison, expressed as an imagined phenomenon in heraldry. For a detailed exploration of Gide's idea regarding Heraldry and how it relates to *ekphrasis* see Appendix C.





## The French '*mise en abyme*'

In the previous chapter, I outlined the contours of Gide's idea from its French origins. Understandably, there are many French studies of Gide's work. Gide's idea was only designated as the *mise en abyme* in 1950, and then this term was taken up by a group of French writers who were inspired by the 'New Novel' movement (Appendix B). These French theorists also leaned on the models of structuralism (see Appendix B). Among the first critics to revive Gide's idea, one finds Edmonde Vinel, also known as Claude-Edmonde Magny (1950) who coined the term '*mise en abyme*'. Other critics include Bruce Morrisette (1971) and Jean Ricardou (1973). By far the most important name in the French *mise en abyme* critical corpus is Lucien Dällenbach (1977).

### 1. Claude-Edmonde Magny

Before Magny, Gide's idea had remained dormant for nearly sixty years. It was Magny who offered the earliest account of Gide's diary entry: she also endorsed Gide's insight, calling his idea 'the *mise en abyme*'. Therefore, the chapter 'The *Mise En Abyme* or the Cipher of Transcendence' in *The French Novel Since 1918* (1950) contains the first published use of the term '*mise en abyme*'. The title of the essay is intriguing but the content of the study is difficult, woefully erratic and moves illogically from one position to another. So great is the disorder of the essay that a leading critic dismissed it as a 'hotch-potch'. (Dällenbach, 1989: 24) However, despite the shortcomings of Magny's work, she must be credited with coining an influential and wide-ranging term. Magny gave Gide's original idea a certain occult mystique. And although she offers no single definition of the principle alluded to by Gide, she does liken Gide's idea to a 'cipher'. (1950: 269) This word has a double meaning: 1) a hidden code or 2) the number zero.

## Cipher as Code

For Magny, Gide's idea is a cryptic name, a secret code which remains arcane, possessing a protean value. In short, it is a 'cipher': a 'structure "in abyss"'. (ibid: 270) A key dichotomy, which Magny adapts for her cipher idea, is that of 'open' and 'closed' texts and their readings. An open text permits many interpretations along its narrative trajectory. It presupposes an average reader. The closed text, however, as Magny notes, requires a 'conscientious reader'. (ibid: 267) Such a text prompts a model reader to make up their own mind on the finite outcomes of coded events in the closed narrative. But, for Magny, a closed text tends to mean one where the author employs a special code, a cipher, in their composition and the text remains closed to readers who cannot decipher the code. In her brief discussion of Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, Magny asserts that the distinction, between such types of text, is difficult to draw because Gide's novel elicits both codes of interpretation:

...when Gide said he wanted to write a book, he did not ignore the sense of its flat design, an ambiguity which gives a worldly sense, of both immanent and transcendent meaning, which flows to the terminal event, in the novel, and converges the fate of all the characters that are of separate metaphysical significance to the work and situated on another level of it... Gide just pretends to ignore, and seems to leave intact, the freedom of his characters; but this simple artifice, is also a legitimate special effect. (ibid: 266)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Gide's idea contains the separate concerns of character and narrative subject. Magny recognises this, above. Magny's opaque style still comes some way closer to capturing the literary relationship, in Gide's concept, between 1) character and 2) the subject of the 'work'. She calls this association 'a special effect'. Gide's idea was that its effect was a transposition between these two elements in a text. Magny likens Gide's work to 'metaphysical' levels, or transposed physical, 'immanent' positions. She sees physical and metaphysical dimensions of Gide's work as separate but both united in the end of the book. The terminal event, in *The Counterfeiters*, is for Magny when suicides begin to raise crises in the lives of various

characters that disentangle the narrative web from the narrator. The novel's central message is: 'it's only after our death that we shall really be able to hear'. Perhaps, it is to hear the 'continuous common chord' which Edouard hoped to find in his writing. The aesthetic is as much a way of evoking musical analogy in texts as it is composing fictional form: it is like changing tonal keys, literary registers—and recognising this alternation between elements—as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6. Therefore, Magny ends her brief discussion, on *The Counterfeiters*, with an interesting speculation that 'Gide probably wanted to make his novel a kind of docile Aeolian harp to allow his spirit to blow through the work, something analogous to such a structure as a reticule-handbag'. (ibid: 268) This is where her chapter 'The Meaning of *The Counterfeiters*' ends. But before such alternative metaphors, Magny declares that Gide's idea—and his 'ambition to write a super-novel' is ultimately amorphous, and reading it cannot:

...determine the total "sum" towards which events converge and which constitute the novel. And so we leave with an irreparably confused reading, more and mostly so with such a 'super-novel' where one could say that the reading is both "open" and "closed", giving to these spatial terms a metaphorical sense...(ibid: 267)

*The Counterfeiters* is besides like 'a kaleidoscope' for Magny and such a chaotic depiction 'forbids the reader to formulate abstract interpretations'. (ibid: 268) Therefore, Magny holds that *The Counterfeiters* is 'a tautology'<sup>1</sup> which thus also, in a sense, makes Gide's idea a mathematical one:

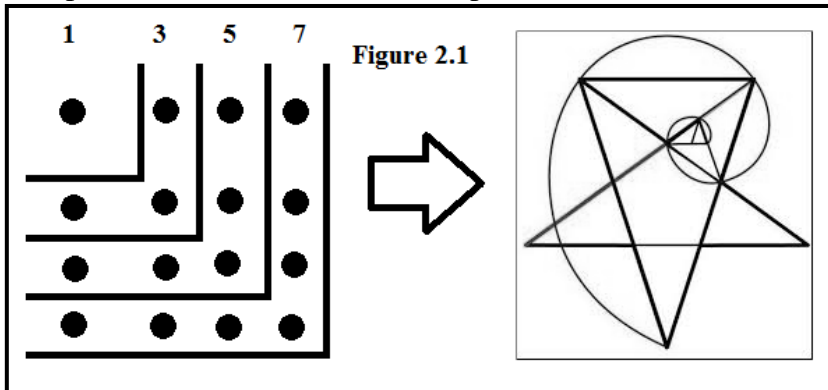
The "open novel" could be defined by the fact that all its possible meanings form an infinite set. [Some works are] "closed" because, although they probably do not have just one sense, we feel that the totality of their interpretations is not inexhaustible. However, there exists a simple mathematical way to detect if you are dealing with a finite or infinite set: the Bolzano-Weierstrass theorem. An infinite set can be recognized in this manner, it can be put in correspondence term-to-term with a representative part of itself, that is to say, reduplicating its parts

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<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to understand what Magny means when she says Gide's novel *The Counterfeiters* is like a 'novelistic tautology'. Earlier, she derives what Gide's motives for writing the novel were, and by virtue of what Edouard says about failure, she conflates Gide's intentions with those of the character Edouard to perhaps call the novel's form a 'paradox'. Evaluating the alleged intentions thus lead Magny to what she calls an 'impasse of the novel'. Magny says 'It [interpretation] elicits a profound paradox comparable to what were, in ancient times, the antinomies of The Megarian School, or those more modern ones from set theory. *The Counterfeiters*' contradictory essence is not "successful". If we understand the meaning of a book's "success" by its perfect adequacy between the indifference of the author and his written and printed work, which is an objective correlate (a single precise meaning in which the word 'success' may have applied to a literary work [because] it must be admitted that *The Counterfeiters* is missing essential information, as its criticism confirms. But the intention of the author that this was precisely adequate did not take place: he [Edouard] has managed to do what he wanted, that is to say: failed'. (ibid: 265-6)

from its whole sequence. Thus the set of integers can be applied to all even numbers, or the perfect squares that are contained within it: just write any number in front of its double, or square, and it covers all possible terms, in both series. However, such process of withdrawal from the sequence or “reflection” (in the optical sense of the word) of 1893 is what Gide thought to apply to the novel, and he actually employed it in *The Counterfeiters*. (ibid: 269)

Magny’s reading of Gide’s idea is that it has a mathematical counterpart, one where a part is transposed to a whole so that the part is a scaled variable of the whole. Magny alludes to the



Bolzano-Weierstauss theorem because she conceives of a narrative sequence in much the same way as a converging number sequence, a series that

can be refracted into a portion of this series (Figure 2.1). So, along the sequence of *The Counterfeiters* narrative, Magny asserts how ‘Gide actually employed’ this mathematical principle in his ‘super-novel’ composition. Though she cites no examples, Magny is perhaps compounding the ambiguity, she declares, exists in the novel by virtue of its closed and open meanings.

### Cipher as Number Zero

Magny’s other ‘cipher’ analogy raises its etymological meaning: from Arabic, of nought or zero. Magny, to recap, reaches her tentative position by means of several assertions. Her work begins with a puzzle that Gide’s ‘special effect’ involves *two* elements that ‘converge’ upon each other: 1) character and 2) events. For Magny, ‘characters are of a separate metaphysical significance to the work [itself]’ (ibid: 266). Yet, ‘the fate of the characters’, like the ambiguous outcome in Gide’s work, ‘flow towards the terminal event, in the novel’. Gide’s wording, of a ‘subject transposed’, for Magny, means ‘flow’. Gide’s ‘proportions’ between part and whole, for Magny, become ‘reflections’. And so is Magny able to construe Gide’s fairly prosaic idea to fit her own interpretations. She recruits a parlance of ‘terminal event’ and ‘flow’ beside ‘mirror reflection’.

Taken together, Magny's argument is characterised by three concerns: 1) mathematics, 2) mirrors and 3) abysses.

Firstly, Magny imports Gide's idea into the discourse of mathematics. She alludes to a reflexive sequence theorem: the Bolzano-Weierstauss hypothesis. In doing so, Magny affords herself an insight, whereby the 'sum of all events', the net value of the events perhaps, 'converge' on the narrative outcome. Like the terminal summation of numerical values in a number line, the happenings in a story add up at the end of the tale. The denouement is resolved or not, open or closed but terminal nevertheless. Therefore, the mathematical theorem about infinite sequences and finite, terminal ends, place Magny's literary observations alongside allusions to recursive sequences.

Secondly, from such comparisons, Magny compounds more comparisons. Next, she raises the metaphorical depiction of 'infinite parallel mirrors'. Because there remains an ambiguity of inexhaustible possibilities, in any infinite sequence, Magny disavows final outcomes for reading Gide's narrative. In theory, two mirrors, exactly parallel, reflect each other's surfaces to an infinite end point or inscrutable blind-spot (Figure 1, introduction). However, no-one can ever actually *see* infinite reflections. Perhaps, therefore, Magny's point about infinite sequences are appropriate as the conceived result for her *mise en abyme*. Magny's implication of annihilated reflections are compared to nothingness, or as a cipher, the sense that her *mise en abyme* can mean zero.

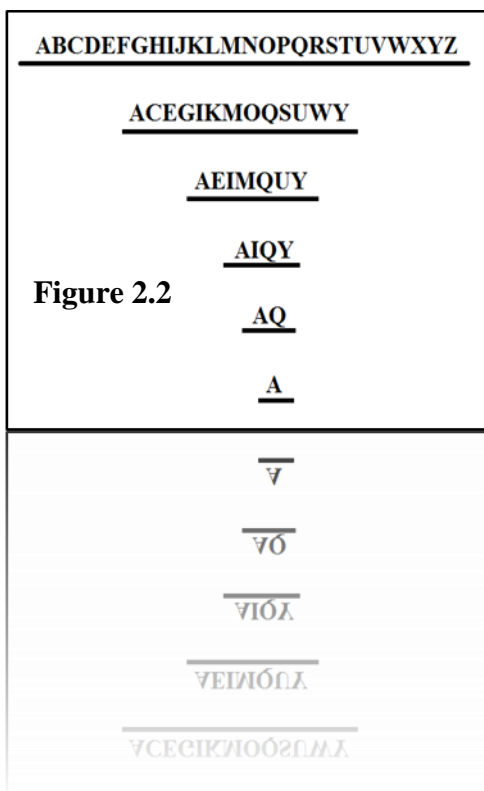
Thirdly, from comparisons about mirrors, Magny moves on yet further. From impressions of nothingness, as an outcome of infinitely reflecting mirrors, Magny theorises absence in terms of human experience. In this sense, Magny makes some connection between Jean Paul Sartre's philosophy about a human will and its confrontation of nothingness or 'the abyss'. Magny relates this last 'illusion' of 'metaphysical vertigo' back to the outcomes of infinite reflections, of mirroring, and around the existential conception of radical absence or the void.

Consequently, Magny extends Gide's idea in line with her three discernible themes: mathematics, mirrors and abysses. The chief direction of her argument denotes Gide's idea in terms

of hidden meanings, or the *mise en abyme* as a ‘cipher code’. The alternating implications of her argument include connotations of nothingness, or the transcendental meaning of a cipher, as the mathematical value of nought. To keep our bearings, an outline of her double cipher argument runs as follows:

1. There are finite and infinite possibilities in reading open and closed texts
  2. Gide’s novel elicits both codes of reading
  3. But *both* readings, reasoned together, can be paradoxical
  4. Therefore, Gide’s idea in the novel is elusive and is like a cryptic cipher
- 
1. The Bolzano-Weierstauss theorem codifies both finite *and* infinite sets in limited space
  2. Like parallel mirrors, both sets can be captured by visual representation
  3. Mirror reflections open up an imagined space of the ‘abyss’
  4. Therefore, Gide’s term, *en abyme*, is a cipher connoting baselessness, zero

The following section will highlight Magny’s themes: mathematics, mirrors and abysses. What follows will also outline the trajectory of these concerns and how they relate to her explicit and implicit meanings of ciphers more generally.



Firstly, Magny’s chapter draws on mathematics. At bottom, she asserts that Gide’s idea elicits a direct equivalence with the Bolzano-Weierstrauss theorem. This postulation was put forward to support other function calculations in mathematics. Magny asserts that reading Gide’s idea can be expressed in ‘spatial terms’ (ibid: 267). Because of Magny’s claim, she moves onto this number-hypothesis about value series and convergence in finite spaces. She implies any linear sequence, like the ‘flow’ of narrative events and ‘character fate’ can, of themselves, hold a refracted instance of other preceding instances. Any portion of a sequence can

thus, potentially, hold all others. Furthermore, any sequence can have a converging double-sequence of nested sets. (Figure 2.2) The proviso is that the formula of this double coding is finite, if and only if, the formula is finite, bounded and limited. Magny appeals to this formulation, of semantic infinite nesting, to perhaps capture her concern with mathematical recursion as she theorises Gide's part-whole idea. (see Appendix C on Recursion). Now, a simple series where any target is obtainable *before* the point of infinity can be defined recursively or non-recursively. By recursion, here, Magny may be imagining the multiple nodes in linguistic structures which can be re-written, imaginably, one upon the other. Yet, Magny clearly asserts that there are infinite possibilities in Gide's texts, where like a ratio, in mathematics, this ratio is infinite. Magny's 'cipher' in this sense, might therefore mean some shorthand term for aesthetic value *approaching* the void, or zero absolute, rather than an infinite value itself.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly, Magny mentions mirrors to illustrate Gide's idea. After her allusions to the mathematics of self-referential and infinitely regressing pictures like the Quaker Oats box, Magny cites Aldous Huxley's novel *Point Counter Point*. With each point in its story approaching a new vagueness, Huxley's character proposes his experimental novel form, in which a repeated tale-in-a-tale 'becomes a little smaller, a little vaguer and less rich in precise details'. (ibid: 272) This example is discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis. Huxley called this idea 'the musicalisation of fiction' where the literary element of character was like an *ostinato* voice from a fugue. Similarly, Magny evokes the abstract idea but speaks of narratives as if composed 'in terms of algebraic symbols' which Huxley first proposed, albeit that such algebra is shorthand for musical symbolism. (ibid: 271) But

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<sup>1</sup> Recursion is, generally, any instance which calls back a previous instance of itself (see Appendix C). As in calculus, Magny seems to be inferring ordinary sequences that run on to any term but can be formulated because they are read as limited and are thus perfectly calculable, or understandable. She is moreover saying, *mutatis mutandis*, how, limits in such recursive workings are limited because they are calculable to begin with. Any sequence defined recursively, or a sequence defined in terms of a formula, can be an interesting function of infinite possibility (and consequent meaninglessness) or be limited and boring to obtain results. Magny's reference is quite specious: if the Bolzano-Weierstrass theorem is applied to any recursive sequences, operations she is clearly raising by 'parallel mirror' comparisons, then the B-W theorem is not an appropriate clarification to what she makes of Gide's idea (as akin to cascading mirrors). For example, take  $a$ =term 1 and  $r$ =common ratio to be defined as  $t_n = r t_{n-1}$  (recursive) or  $t_n = ar^{n-1}$  (non-recursive). Similarly, the sum of the series is given by  $S_n = S_{n-1} + ar^{n-1}$  (recursive) or even  $S_n = \frac{a(1-r^{n+1})}{(1-r)}$  (non-recursive). Thus, the algorithm (gradual operations for a calculation) can use both recursive and non-recursive functions to get to the same target provided this target is not infinity ( $\infty$ ). The danger is that Magny does not see that the calculation will be negligibly infinitesimal in any arithmetic or geometric sequences where the common ratio is infinite as it is in mirror geometrics. Because, much like dividing by zero, the operation of dividing by infinity can be, potentially, meaningless. Perhaps, therefore, the recession of value, through a ratio, as in differential calculus, tends to zero, and is what Magny's 'cipher' signifies, in its numerical sense.

Magny overlooks Huxley's notation. Magny's ideas about such effects prompt her to find a suitable metaphor in keeping with her mathematical preoccupations. For her, the special effect is one of 'parallel mirrors' intimating an infinite representation. Thinkers since Magny have been inspired by the regressive visuals of two mirror images bouncing off one another until the cascade ends in a mysterious point of convergence. (Figure 1 in my introduction). It is in this way that Magny's reads Gide's idea to set an example for recurrent narrative events. In Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, like Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, Magny maintains there exists 'an ambiguity...ending at a terminal event' (ibid: 266) And so, by the theorem Magny imposes onto the outcome of a narrative, her cipher, or what she calls Gide's 'special effect', becomes tantamount to nothing: it is like zero.

Infinite or finite interpretations of reading are introduced, by Magny, as something of 'reflection in the optical sense of the word':

Without going too far with a mathematical comparison, it is easy to see intuitively how infinite parallel mirrors can introduce 'inner space' to the center of the same work (that is, like effects that decorators use to expand the parts of cramped interiors), and how the attraction to metaphysical vertigo can seem as this world of reflections suddenly opens at our feet, in short there is the illusion of mystery and depth which necessarily produce these stories whose structure is thus '*en abyme*'. (ibid: 270-1)

The 'mystery and depth' is perhaps to do with the way parallel reflections—reflecting equally onto each other—eventually annihilate any image cast upon each other's surfaces. Like parallel interpretations, perhaps, one reading invariably focuses more on narrative, the other more on character. But rejecting the idea that the narrative is infinitely impenetrable does not mean going to the other extreme to think that the character component is more transparent. Magny implies however that both components reflect equally (if they are to evoke an infinite mirror sequence). In a mirror cascade, a terminal blind-spot, *aporia*, is a visual representation of the 'abyss' which is where Magny's cipher means an empty value, zero, or naught. A value for the void—or an empty value—is indeed a paradox: it is a presence of absence. Magny recognises a sublime response to contemplating an impression of nothingness: at the blind-spot, in parallel mirror sequences, gazing



into the terminal end-point makes the rational mind fail, and ‘a sense of vertigo’ results. For Magny, if an effect between character and its ‘universal affirmation’ by the narrator is discerned, it is undefinable, it cannot be formulated. Magny holds that Gide’s ideas are entangled with those of Edouard and so it is difficult to separate them. The ideas constitute a paradox. But this potentially meaningless point is as paradoxically meaningful as any possibility when there is a legitimating ‘general philosophy’ to explain it all, and so she says:

This [narrative-naratee entanglement] is not a fallacy, formulated from a clumsy (or overly-skilled) use of language, but rather a paradox or a scandal, inherent in the structure of the human being. One cannot formulate its truth, which is perhaps the metaphysical essence of the novel, in abstract terms without producing a vicious circle which reveals the essence of transcendence—without seeing, beneath our feet, the gaping ‘abyss’ (‘abyme’) that the intellect cannot contemplate without a sense of vertigo. (ibid: 277)

Thirdly, Magny’s conception of vertiginous paradox, lead toward allusions of the occult notion of the ‘gaping abyss’. This sublime experience includes some place gestured beyond: it is a transcendental, unknowable, unfathomable depth of compulsion and impression. Magny’s conception of the abyss frames the philosophy of Jean Paul Sartre.<sup>1</sup> Magny’s defence is that this paradoxical place is predicated on the universal idea of the abyss: where instances encase each other to an inscrutable point beyond perception. Her argument holds a subtle insistence on the monist, underlying structure of her ‘cipher of transcendence’. Her mystical insights are greatest, but most difficult when she speaks in terms of a ‘series of worlds nested in the other’ like the Leibnizian doctrine of monads where each monad reflected the world from its own position. (ibid: 273-4) The

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<sup>1</sup> Magny evokes the existentialist Sartre who famously declares in *Being and Nothingness* that ‘vertigo announces itself through fear’ perhaps, where the un-individuated person misidentifies the ‘transcendent possibilities’ of the subjective self with the real objective Self. As Sartre says; ‘What is the meaning of anguish in the various examples which I have just given? Let us take up again the example of vertigo. Vertigo announces itself through fear; I am on a narrow path - without a guard-rail - which goes along a precipice. The precipice presents itself to me as *to be avoided*; it represents a danger of death...’ (Sartre, ibid: 56) Magny also believes that the outcome of *The Counterfeiters* when its series of suicides disorient the flow of its narrative. She seems thus to be evoking Sartre’s conjecture about suicide and the meaning of going into the abyss: ‘...If nothing compels me to save my life, *nothing* prevents me from throwing myself into the abyss. The decisive conduct will emanate from a self which I am not yet. ... Vertigo appears as the apprehension of this dependence. I approach the abyss, and it is myself that I am looking for in its depths. At this moment, I am playing with my possibilities. My eyes, surveying the abyss from top to bottom, imitate my possible fall and realize it symbolically; at the same time suicide, from the fact that it becomes a *possibility* possible for *me*, now provides possible motives for adopting it (suicide would make my anguish cease). Fortunately these motives in their turn, from the sole fact that they are motives for a possible action, present themselves as ineffective, as non-determining; they can no more *produce* [i.e., cause] the suicide than my horror of the fall can *determine me* to avoid it. It is this counter-anguish which generally puts an end to anguish by transmuting it into indecision. Indecision, in its turn, calls for decision. I abruptly get away from the edge of the precipice and resume my way’. (ibid) French existentialism is a modern philosophy about individual existence. The leap into the unknown is the foundation of this belief. The subjective consciousness of the individual legitimates the personal life experienced or lived out. Thus is existence its root and chief concern. Humans have no essential nature: in Sartrean existentialism, they are only human by their existence. More generally, existentialism can be an individual understanding of the world. This idea might be a mood or an emotionally toned sense of absurdity. The choices an individual makes, in the absence of reason, create a crisis of existing. The crisis involves being authentic to the individual sense of selfhood of not.

consequences of such a doctrine imply that the world is a bewildering hall of innumerable mirrors reflecting each other *ad infinitum*. Magny's essay rehearses some teachings from the thinker Gottlieb Leibniz as 'a general philosophy'—she does so in order to justify her position that Gide's idea is like infinite parallel mirror sequences.<sup>1</sup>

So, Magny first secures a position that Gide's texts raise infinite possible interpretations. From infinity, Magny makes an unsubstantiated allusion to number sequences which prompt her to illustrate her speculations with mirrors. Regressive conceptions of mirror sequences end in blind-spots which are like the occult idea of 'the abyss'. It is in this way that Magny is able to take up the dormant connotation of '*en abyme*' from the original diary entry of André Gide.

However, Magny's conceptions remain specious. Magny raises this theorem in relation to infinite possibilities, as the candidate to decode Gide's idea. Yet, the theorem contradicts her later comparison with reflective mirror sequences. The postulate is only meaningful support for finite, limited operations. Drawing a comparison to infinitely cascading mirror geometrics is, therefore, illuminating but infelicitous. The requirement for finite calculable inputs (creating finite outputs) for this function-based theorem, Magny misleadingly compares to a mirror image capturing infinity. And so, Magny's comparison between finite sequences and mirrored infinity retrospectively validates the paradox she initially raises between open and closed texts, finite and infinite interpretations.

As a result, Magny's comparison to mirror cascades is odd given that the image is infinite whilst the theorem requires imposed limits (even to its infinite series). Magny's discussion jumps from the theorem to an untenable comparison with mirrors which is perhaps why she never wished to go 'too far with the mathematical comparison' and instead abandoned it for intuiting 'parallel mirror' metaphors. (ibid: 270) Mixed in, therefore, with Magny's mathematical references, is Aldous

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<sup>1</sup> Though Magny clearly raises Leibniz in relation to his mathematics (ibid: 273), she is also, perhaps, thinking about the philosopher's *Monadology* in which individual minds, as substances, relate like mirroring metaphors of the objective universe. As Leibniz says 'all created things to each and of each to all, means that each simple substance has relations which express all the others, and, consequently, that it is a perpetual living mirror of the universe' (ibid: § 56). If Magny is evoking this specific idea, then her *mise en abyme* is a metaphysical part-to-whole mereology.

Huxley's visual illustration of the self-referencing effect on the box of Quaker Oats—an image which, for Magny, is like that of parallel mirror cascades:

...the structure of the 'mise en abyme is like the image on the packet of Quaker Oats precisely because it expresses this structure of a reality where one cannot say sentences like: one cannot philosophise without entering a reality where one cannot say sentences like: one cannot philosophise without entering a reality where one cannot say sentences like: [one cannot philosophise without entering a reality where one cannot say sentences like] etc... (1950: 276)

This self-repetition seems like a paradox but it is simply a re-iterative statement. Such an operation opens up a metaphysical space in the imagination of the reader where infinity is the endpoint. Yet, no exemplified passages from literature, of infinite regress, are ever put forward by Magny. The idea is only intimated by offering a few book titles, like *Ulysses* and *Point Counter Point*, where the principle is alleged to occur. Indeed, in *Point Counter Point*, Huxley's character, Philip, only speculates what this idea would look like: the novel certainly does not contain any novels-in-novels *ad infinitum*. Nevertheless, one helpful passage of analysis is in Magny's reading of *The Counterfeiters* insofar as it relates directly to what Gide's diary entry says about character and narrative:

Edouard [in *The Counterfeiters*] recounts some events, offers aphorisms and thereby does not allow us to take for granted, when we are won over by his arguments, that once his views fully accept us (and we forget that it is only a point of view), his journal account stops and we are plunged into a voice from the direct narrative. How then to resume after such a rudely awakened shock, because, if we are not aware [that the passage is that of] a newspaper writer (or, as in Huxley, in the diary of a writer who himself figures in the paper of another writer who is himself, etc.), we do not have to re-enter the reality that still has the inner being of a novel, it is safe to say in terms of the imagination, it would be naïve for us to believe all that is pretended by the characters and that all has to be accepted by what they say. So the device, which removes from the book some kind of truth, is at the same time one that gives it meaning. (ibid: 274-5)

To be 'plunged into a voice' not from character, but rightfully attributed to the narrator, is a disorienting experience for the reader. The word Magny uses here is 'rappelled', meaning to be cast from one reality to another. It is disconcerting to find out that the character voice is rather the voice of the narrator. This effect confirms Magny's view about 'vertigo' as a result of realising rapid

reflections between character and narrative elements. For this abrupt ‘special effect’, Magny intimates the strong place of character in Gide’s novel. The agency of character is recognised as more prominent than the importance of the narrating subject. But there is nonetheless, alternation between narrator and naratee. Magny does not specify what this ‘kind of truth’ is that Gide’s ‘device’ drains from the novel but it is likely she is contemplating how the small journal in *The Counterfeiters* detracts from the narrator’s agency and gives a greater authority to the words of its characters. Gide’s original idea was ‘to find transposed on the level of character, the very subject of that work’ and it is relevant in this regard. (*op cit*: 30) Put simply, his idea highlights little more than a prosaic sense of character emphasis in a composition, rather than the intervening voice of the narrator and his dominating narrative which is another banal, but sober, possibility.

Magny, on the other hand, reads ‘transposed’, from Gide, as mirror-like reflection—infinite interpretations of character-narrative relationships she likens to parallel mirrors. Consequently, Magny initiates an inspiring tradition for other critics of Gide’s idea. But, her prolix discussion takes a detour past a number of unexplained comparisons. Magny took Gide’s fairly straightforward idea of relations of similarity and correspondence between character and narrative, parts and wholes, in a work of art, and reconceived ‘transposition’ as modes of *mirroring* and *reflection*. Thus, Magny follows up her assertion that these latter relations are both reflexive, repeatable indefinitely and even repeatable infinitely. In this way, her reading moves from prosaic part-to-whole similarity to infinity—and it is in this way that Magny is able to take up the dormant metaphor of the ‘abyss’ from Gide’s use of the heraldic term, and bring his idea back to life as the abyss of infinite repetition through mirror metaphors.

Magny’s ‘*mise en abyme*’, and all the subsequent studies that use her coined term, are indebted to her theory of the cipher. The ‘cipher of transcendence’ can elicit either a secret, cryptic system of encoding or an empty code. Either interpretation allows the critic to go beyond the mundane limits of Gide’s idea. If Gide’s idea is a valueless code—as a consequence of invoking mirror cascades—then there is little point in pursuing this comparison if a clearer meaning of

Gide's idea is sought. However, if Gide's idea is a cryptic code—as a result of limited sequences-in-sequences, texts-in-texts—then Magny's essay raises an original meaning for Gide's idea. Gide's idea, as a cipher, where character features more prominently than narrative: includes the immediate (non-transcendent) impression. The outcome of such an effect is quite innovative because it often permits unusual compositions, like works-within-works. One part of the work can feature a character's voice: the other part can be relayed by a narrator's voice. Where there is similarity between voices for example, interpretative possibilities are raised, and as Magny held, these can be finite *and* infinite evaluations, especially when the character is like the narrator because the character's motives are conflated with the author's intentions (however these are controversially claimed). Some of the thematic dimensions, of Gide's idea, raise interesting possibilities for texts and Magny must be credited with raising some of these, like music and nested worlds. Her speculative metaphors stimulated other imaginations inspired by Gide's original idea.

## 2. Jean Ricardou and Bruce Morrisette

After Magny's essay, the term *mise en abyme* was legitimated by other critics such as Pierre LaFille (1954). LaFille called it a 'technique *en abyme*' (ibid: 462) Holding to Magny's assertions, he only mentions 'mirrors and composition'. LaFille came to a conclusion that there were ten 'overlapping' tales in Aldous Huxley's (1928) novel *Point Counter Point*. Of immediate theoretical note however, is that no infinite regress is identified by LaFille. No infinite regress effect is discernible, apart from, perhaps, what we can imagine if we accept Magny's essay on Gide's work and, among other analogies, her overlooked assertion about mirrors. The critics and novelists Bruce Morrisette and Jean Ricardou, in contrast, engaged most extensively with Magny's term. They offered nuanced qualifications of her idea. Apart from some claims of the *mise en abyme* in French novels (including their own), both writers extend Magny's interpretation. Indeed, these French theorists are indebted to her essay, but unlike Magny, they have views clearly associated with the French New Novel of the 1970s.

In Bruce Morrisette's essay 'The Heritage of André Gide' (1971) he is the first to follow the idea put forward by Magny and do so with great determination. He thus alludes to her *mise en abyme* as a 'technique' of 'interior duplication' (1968). Later he writes, 'André Gide called long ago, a sort of "construction en abyme", comparing the interior duplication of the central or inner shield on certain coats of arms, which he believed (perhaps wrongly) often to reproduce exactly the main or outer heraldic pattern'. (1970: 157) The aim of the construction is 'like inner plays or mirrors...heightening and reinforcing the theme by multiplying its perspectives'. (ibid) Even later, Morrisette mentions the likeness of his *mise en abyme* but more decisively: 'what Gide called 'la *mise en abyme*' [is] both visual and verbal, whose contents not only mirror the storyline but emerge from the confines of the interior duplication itself to blend or to constitute the main narration'. (1972: 51) This idea of doubling was something new to what Magny said.

Morrisette's position, although evidently influenced by Magny, rejects the mirror metaphor. He raises the concern of narrative realism in the nascent French *nouveau roman*, speaking in very general terms about the way its narratives mimic the world. Morrisette's take on Gide's work prompts him to theorise his *mise en abyme*: as some coherent, composite effect in the French novel at that time. But Morrisette is most famous for raising the disconcerting fact that there are no infinitely regressive heraldic shields we designate *mises en abyme*. (see André Gide on heraldry) Gide's idea is ultimately predicated on a 'false metaphor'. (Morrisette, 1971: 128) Gide inaugurates his principle, alluding to heraldry, but since no concrete examples exist of shields superimposed infinitely, infinite mirror cascades mislead as an alternative image. Instead, Morrisette views the *mise en abyme* as simply a 'miniaturising' device, concluding that it attracts the reader's 'attention toward the secret centre of the book' (fn 1 below). In sum, he anticipates Lucien Dällenbach's view that the *mise en abyme* represents 'the inaccessible heart of the text' (1977: 181).<sup>1</sup>

Jean Ricardou's 'The Narrative Abyss' (1973) like Morrisette's work, draws its examples almost exclusively from '*les nouveaux romans*'. In *Problems of the New Novel*, Ricardou compares his *mise en abyme* to 'a metaphor of narration'. (1971: 220) His reason for saying so is perhaps the selective way that Magny's *mise en abyme* is best conceived of as a 'metaphor' (Magny, 1950: 276). Like another signifying cipher, Ricardou's chapter is entitled 'The Narrative Abyss' and it examines his version of the *mise en abyme*. Ricardou thus introduces a new idea (of the abyss), not

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<sup>1</sup> Morrisette studies the *mise en abyme* in relation to the French New Novel as a 'heritage from Gide': '[p]assing to its most recent stage, the *mise en abyme* does not seem to function either to reflect the work as though in a little mirror, or to give the character in a novel a means on their own level of watching themselves act, of judging themselves, of understanding themselves [...] but rather permitting the text itself to attain new modalities, of distorting the novelistic space by folding it in on itself, while cutting all the bonds between the novel and the work-a-day world. In this way, the novel becomes more self-sufficient'. (Morrisette, 1971: 130 from Zlotchev, 1982) The commentary on musical pattern and the *mise en abyme* by Morrisette is very interesting. Morrisette (1971) makes allusions to the device as 'leitmotif' in '*Un Heritage d'Andre Gide: La duplication interieure*,' *Comparative Literature Studies* 8, no. 2 (1971): 125-42. Dällenbach noted that the *mise en abyme* was 'essentially melodic' in his conclusions of *The Mirror in the Text* (1989: 181) but did not pursue this argument. In a fair defence at the unrelenting criticism of Dällenbach, Magny did suggest multiple potential metaphors to the diary entry of Gide. Overlooking, much as Dällenbach has, the most immediate metaphor of superimposed heraldic shields, Magny points out the English novel by Aldous Huxley, *Point Counter Point*, is comparable to the meta-referential melody of the literary *mise en abyme*, an English novel based on the compositional convention of a fugue. Much like a fugue, with its central subject and variations, Morrisette (1971) concludes that the *mise en abyme* is a miniaturised series of the basic subject of the novel. He alludes to three possibilities of the figure: 'I believe that most books belonging to the *nouveau roman* contain, in one way or another, a *mise en abyme*, or several, or even a continual series of *mises en abyme*. This miniaturising of the whole, this image of the book within the book...has then, I believe...the singular function of underlining the fact that the novel has no greater connection with anything other than itself. Instead of attracting our attention to the everyday world in which we live, it seems as though it is there as an extremely concentrated will to attract our attention toward the secret centre of the book'. (ibid: 1971: 137-8 in Zlotchev, 1982)

implicit in Gide's original conception of the 'en abyme'. Perhaps, Ricardou dilates in this way because his anti-realist project strives very hard to find, and legitimate, a set of tropes he asserts precedes the French modernist style of writing. The *mise en abyme*, as it came down through Magny, was one such trope. Ricardou retrospectively focuses on the language of the writing itself, rather than autobiographic intention; and since it is difficult to justify any literary work entirely in this manner, Ricardou concludes that his *mise en abyme* is a function of the narrative. But he has since been heavily criticised for this approach:

Jean Ricardou...stressed the productive nature of the work on language in order to counter representation. Ricardou was particularly guilty of trying to establish an officially sanctioned list of approved modernist precursors: the criteria he used were based on a simplistic and over-schematic distinction between ...mimetic function and ...the materiality of language. (Smyth, 1991: 58)

Though such criticism is hopelessly dated, it does still attract the charge that Ricardou's *mise en abyme* departs from what Gide said. Moreover, Ricardou's mention of any *mise en abyme* is always formidably technical in its language. Yet he holds, in his distinctive way that there are 'two descriptions of the *mise en abyme*'. (1973: 60) The *mise en abyme*, he writes, is 'a device that can fulfil two conditions: first to demonstrate sufficient cohesion, despite the fragmentation of its pretty firm location [and] on the other hand, to bring together a probing quantity of analogies'. (1967) He seems to suggest that there can be both a very broad, universalistic, infinite sense of the idea but also a limited, particular understanding based in its occurrence in a work. Therefore, he views his *mise en abyme* as concerned with particular and universal examples. James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* (1944), as it inspired French New Novelists including Ricardou, justifies Ricardou's arguments about (Joycean) linguistic innovation; Ricardou thereby asserts that the *mise en abyme* can 'fulfil two conditions': where a metaphor for the whole work (in which sameness is identified) undergirds the meaning of the novel. Secondly, Ricardou describes his *mise en abyme* as a metonym (in which an associational meaning suffices for the work). So based on a principle of 'similarity and substitution', David Lodge attributes the dichotomy to a synthetic use of language



through puns; Lodge instead gives a far clearer outline of the phenomenon which Ricardou only limns:

What makes *Finnegan's Wake* 'unreadable' for many people is actually not the expression of multiple similarities through the pun [of a wake for example] but the lack of logical or narrative continuity in the combination of puns. And this in turn suggests that there may be modernistic uses of metonymic as well as metaphoric modes. (Lodge, 1991: 484)

Morrisette's and Ricardou both distinguish two types of *mise en abyme*. Morrisette says the *mise en abyme* 'blends or constitutes the main narration' (1972: 51). Ricardou's findings of 'cohesion' and 'fragmentation' of form create another step in making sense of Magny's principle. Consequently, Ricardou defines the idea from Magny as the 'revelatory' *mise en abyme* and the 'oppositional' *mise en abyme*.

Ricardou's revelatory *mise en abyme* reveals, or lays bare, the larger narrative in which this small part occurs, representing a small embedded narrative, or what Ricardou calls a 'satellite narrative'. (ibid: 62) Through repetition, 'each *mise en abyme* serves to multiply that which it imitates, or, if one prefers, underlines it by restating it'. (ibid) The overt revelation of later events by means of the smaller, miniaturised, refraction can cause a problem. For example, Hamlet's play ends prematurely and ambiguously by Claudius' response, perhaps, to Hamlet's rudeness, rather than the events portrayed. The miniature play, as it sums the work's grand-scale truths, could reveal much about the guilty murderer. The play is thus an example, perhaps, of what Ricardou means by 'revelation'. Contrariwise, if a reader reads the small narrative, they will anticipate the outcome of the tale. The 'micro-events' of the *mise en abyme* revelation correspond too closely to the 'macro-events' in the main story. Thus can this *mise en abyme* be used as a foreshadowing as we read in the poem presented in the story read to Roderick in *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Ricardou adds that sometimes 'the revelation risks being so active that the whole story could be short-circuited'. (ibid) A revelation of meaning by the *mise en abyme* therefore implies the large work coheres to the small work by means of the large work's alleged verisimilarity to the small work.

Once the small play has been reduced to some subordinate element of *Hamlet*, it seems easier to account for the ambiguity of the murder and come nearer to understanding the extent to which Hamlet's perceptions conflict with the report of The Ghost. Ricardou has, in this regard, a second implicit variety of his *mise en abyme* in what, he calls, the oppositional *mise en abyme*. This type 'contests the narrative'; for example, by disrupting the flow of prose or going against the grain of what is established by the events (ibid: 83) This type may look very much like the instances of what he terms 'revelatory *mise en abyme*', even though the effect postures as something different. Ricardou nevertheless asserts the dis-integrative aim of the principle governing his second type: that 'each *mise en abyme* contradicts the universal function of the text which contains it'. Ricardou's deeper motive, for exploring the potential for new realisms in the twentieth century, is given good measure in his fondness for corollaries. His subversive method is carried out through a sort of creative description of theory in order to utterly destroy the sense of late-nineteenth century Balzacian realism. His approach, as Stephen Heath called it, is ultimately as a 'rubbing out' of the sense of what realism had theretofore become, 'or, more exactly, as a process of simultaneous creation-destruction' (Heath, ibid: 126). Ricardou's aim is illustrated from Goncourt's *Journal* of a woman chopping a piece of tomato, where fruit can be both a literal object and also a figurative device. In his chosen example, Ricardou captures the broad meaning behind his theory and the role of description in his theory. So:

...when the description ends, one perceives that she [the character] has nothing left standing behind her: she performs, in a double-creation movement and scrubbed elimination, which is also found in the book on all levels and especially in its overall structure—whence we find the *deception* inherent in many works of today. (Ricardou, ibid: 127)

This universal function of his *mise en abyme* suggests the apparent fragmentation of meaning. In sum, for Ricardou, his oppositional *mise en abyme* is: 'the inverse function of gathering up an image rather than submitting to infinite fragmentation. This inversion of fragmentation of the *mise en abyme* betrays an inversion of the [coherent] function of texts'. (1971: 83-4) Ricardou's use of words, that his *mise en abyme* is 'deceptive' or that it 'betrays' the coherency of a text, proves that

his first *mise en abyme* (revelatory) is the starting point for his second. For Ricardou's narrative theory therefore, 'revelation' is the predicate for his subjective sketches on 'coherency': revelation is the material on which character can stand but it is still difficult to discern its meaning clearly. His fragmentary species of the *mise en abyme* is that it is some 'oppositional' *mise en abyme* to the revelatory' variety which implies cohesion of the main text:

The oppositional *mise en abyme* operates mainly against the current [of textual unity]...the *mise en abyme* contests this postulated unity in submitting the unity to the revelation of infinite new splits. Indeed, the *mise en abyme* does not increase the unity of the text as the external reflection could do. As internal mirroring, the *mise en abyme* could never increase unity. The unity of the narrative is an abundant multitude of similar resemblances of which there are a thousand different ways which find *themselves* surreptitiously insinuated. (ibid: 83)

How any of these 'thousand' insinuations are surreptitiously placed is not fully exemplified. Nor is the asserted difference between unity and fragmentation substantiated with concrete examples. In a way not too unlike Magny therefore, Ricardou's essay compounds obscurity with assertion.<sup>1</sup> Yet, a sympathetic example could include the 'Boar's Head' playlet in *Henry IV* in which Falstaff plays the king, Hal plays himself and then the actors swap roles. In this sense, there is an opposition between character roles, acting against the current of events as these are attributed to the playwright Shakespeare. The opposition between actors who 'surreptitiously' insinuate themselves in different, albeit limited ways, perhaps illustrate what Ricardou means by his two types of *mises en abyme*.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> An inversion, or a gathering up, does not necessarily imply or mean coherence. For example, linear narrative elements may well be coherent, and gathering them up may be jumbling them into incoherence. Equally, linear narrative elements may be incoherent—as they are in Robbe-Grillet's novels—whereas gathering them up might reveal some new pattern of coherence. Determining which *mise en abyme* is most applicable to an example, is thus nigh impossible. I am indebted to Professor Wendy Wheeler for pointing out this important argument for discerning the types Ricardou proposes.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Jim Grant for shedding light on Ricardou's impenetrable expression and equivocating method. A convincing example, in English, for what Ricardou is perhaps referring to, includes how Prince Hal—the future Henry V, takes up with Falstaff, who is therefore a kind of debauched anarchic alternative father to his real father Henry IV, and in the preceding scenes agrees to join with Falstaff and co. in a piece of highway robbery, although he has cleverly absented himself before the robbery which takes place, and then (in disguise) robs Falstaff of the proceeds. The central part of this scene (2, 4) is taken up with Falstaff finding out that this is what has actually happened. Then we move to the play-acting. Hal has been summoned by his father to Westminster the next morning, so he knows he's facing a dressing down for his association with Falstaff and co., and the idea is that Hal should prepare what he is going to say. First Falstaff takes the part of the king and begins reprimanding Hal for his low company, but then turns to praising Falstaff as a worthy friend. Then Hal insists they swap places, and so he plays his own father, and launches into a violent denunciation of Falstaff. Meanwhile, amidst prophetic foreshadowing of outcomes, the play-acting is interrupted when the Sheriff arrives, warranting an inquiry of Falstaff (and perhaps Hal himself) for allegations of highway robbery. Thus, in sum, Falstaff—the anarchic anti-father—is supplanting the real father, but then fantasising getting that real father's approval, and then, when they swap roles, Hal is truly representing his own father's revulsion against Falstaff, and warning that he, himself, will in the end accept it, while Falstaff is fantasising Hal's affectionate endorsement of him.

Perhaps the insinuation could also be to do with semantic similarity in a story, for example, when a conceptual title, like *The Fall of the House of Usher*, makes mention of house metaphors throughout the tale whilst the dynamics of the narrative, also, pay associational dividends to the title. Such parallels take Gide's idea even further. Nevertheless, Ricardou's is a 'paradoxical function' of his *mise en abyme*, as Nelles suggests, Ricardou's model is to 'clarify or unify...revealing themes or anticipating narrative developments' (Nelles, 2010: 312-3). The difference between the two types comes down to the description provided by the author or the character. The puzzle, Ricardou raises here, it seems, is ultimately to do with orientation, or the way that the small and large parts inform each other. This conundrum was revisited by Moshe Ron in the 1980s, and by Werner Wolf in 2010s.

Bruce Morrissette and Jean Ricardou both extend the idea of Claude Magny. Morrissette, unlike Ricardou, offers a more grounded and modest explanation of Magny's idea. Ricardou began a trend in theorising what is called the '*mise en abyme*'. He asserted two *mise en abyme* types. But as the decade wore on, a prominent French critic, Lucien Dällenbach, proposed three varieties to Gide's idea. The *mise en abyme* had an identity but one diffuse in the extreme and with many inconsistent associations. Further French scholarship then sought to give some weight to the various candidates for its meaning.

### 3. Lucien Dällenbach

The most prominent French-speaking thinker, to date, of the *mise en abyme*, is still Lucien Dällenbach. He is known primarily for his book, *The Mirror in the Text*<sup>1</sup> [1977], to which an authoritative translation received critical acclaim in the English-speaking world in 1989. Almost every subsequent study of the *mise en abyme* has taken recourse to this work. Whether examinations of Gide's original idea are brief or sustained, any definition, formulation or function of Gide's idea invariably relies on the arguments from *The Mirror in the Text*. Dällenbach is credited with extending Magny's implications, especially her mirror idea (via interior design) of 'referring back' to 'reflection in the optical sense'. (Magny, 1950: 269-70) All Gide's diary mentions, in this regard, is a 'dark mirror' in Velasquez's painting *Las Meninas* and nothing about mirror sequences for literature. Dällenbach, nonetheless, popularised the infinitely cascading mirror aesthetic believed to be a part of *les nouveaux romans*. He extended and elaborated the specific French lineage of the term since Magny's coinage. His study emphasises the visual association of Gide's idea. The English examples—*Hamlet* and *The Fall of The House of Usher*—from Gide's diary entry are dealt with briefly because Dällenbach confers a greater status on French novels than on English ones. Like Morrissette and Ricardou, Dällenbach has two definitions of his *mise en abyme*. One of his appellations leans on Magny's belief that Gide meant 'metaphor'. Magny

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<sup>1</sup> The book *The Mirror in the Text* was controversial. Nascent ideas behind the book are contained in early papers about the *mise en abyme* indebted to Jean Ricardou's idea of the *mise en abyme*, see the conference paper by Dällenbach (1977) 'Jean Ricardou et les miroirs producteurs, les derniers avatars d'une forme'; la mise en abyme' in *Australian Journal of French Studies*, no. 14, Sydney. Also, there are certain arguments in Dällenbach on the French New Novel indebted to the untranslated (1975) 'Mise en abyme et redoublement spéculaire chez Simon,' in *Claude Simon: Analyse, théorie* (Paris: Union gindrale d'editions). For a full critique of the work of Dällenbach, with some reflection on his account of the *mise en abyme*, see Philippe Carrard's (1984) article 'From Reflexivity to Reading: The Criticism of Lucien Dällenbach'. The article is thorough-going attack on Dällenbach's critical models. The article also makes general remarks about the shortcomings of *The Mirror in The Text*. Carrard argues that:

'Dällenbach differs from several other critics (or critics/novelists) who were studying the *mise en abyme* during the same period in his refusal to generalise or radicalise his findings. Ricardou, for instance, used to state that any narrative is eventually 'a metaphor of its narration' (1971:220) or a 'dramatisation of its own working' (1967:178); Todorov, that narratives always have narrative as their 'fundamental theme,' are all 'in search of narrative' (1971:149)' (ibid: 846)

Carrard adds that '[a]s a rule Dällenbach argues... *mise en abyme* appears as the 'other' of the dominant reception, and as such constitutes an 'unparalleled means of bringing contradictions into the heart of reading activities' (1980b:3 7) To add later injury to this attack on Dällenbach's partisan approach, the narratologist Mieke Bal in her proposal of the *mise en abyme*, as an iconic device, also criticises Dällenbach's pioneering study. Her criticism is captured, albeit second-hand, in the words of Carrard's critical article:

'Bal (1978) takes him [Dällenbach] to task for relying too much on his examples and on Gide's text to build his typology of *mises en abyme*; according to her, this lack of distance makes the classification confusing. She assumes that a better intelligence of the question would be gained by examining it from outside and she suggests the use of a different unit of measurement: iconicity. On this basis, she proposes a new and more simple [sic] taxonomy. Whether or not one agrees with Bal's own classification, the fact remains that Dällenbach probably shows too much respect for Gide's text and that he encounters difficulties (i.e., in the distinction between types and elementary *mises en abyme*) because of his insistence on using it as a point of reference if not of authority'. (ibid, Carrard: 853)

asserted Gide's idea was like the recurrent image on a 'Box of Quaker Oats', or 'parallel mirrors' (amongst many other things). By departing completely from Gide, in the same way as does Magny, Dällenbach thus states explicitly that his own idea of the *mise en abyme* differs from that of Gide. He states therefore that '[w]hereas Gide understands, by the term, the repetition within a work of "the subject of the work [to be] 'on the level of the characters,' my own use of the expression covers any sign having its referent to a pertinent continuous aspect of the narrative"' (1980: 436). This new view, that the *mise en abyme* is some 'sign', has far-reaching potential because it places Magny's *mise en abyme* in the analytical interests of sign-studies. Dällenbach's approach is thus informed by Saussurean sign-studies, or semiology: especially when he looks at Gide's original idea as a sign relating to narrative. The inflection from sign-studies takes Gide's idea in yet another direction. But, as semiology is wont to encourage, Dällenbach's tools entangle his disquisition because he holds the sign as a merely double-sided, reflexive, unit. These methods can scarcely account for the ways that a sign develops; it can hardly accommodate the dynamic range afforded by each new reading of a text, for example.<sup>1</sup> So, with regards to his sign-based definition, Dällenbach finds it necessary to eventually recognise, albeit briefly, that:

...there is no reason why the reflexive unit cannot be compared with other linguistic devices that have a single signifier, but a plethora of signifieds—for example, the *symbol* and the *allegory*...authorised by a kind of extended metaphor, [the decoded sign in *The Fall of the House of Usher*] immediately seems too close to allegory for it to be compatible with the genre of the novel. (ibid: 44-5)

The limitations of his critical methods were later highlighted by Mieke Bal. She upheld a radically alternative application of sign-studies, one beyond Dällenbach's approach which draws mainly on structuralist principles (Appendix B). For Dällenbach, there is a formidable terrain of new,

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<sup>1</sup> The major shortcoming of Dällenbach's critical method is its deployment of overly determined Saussurean models of sign relations. But the sign develops in its capacity by virtue of the interpreter and the sign is not merely a double, reflexive unit. A sign is an idea in radical flux and takes on a life of its own in the dynamic process of reading. Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) was a philosopher who captures this perennial view where ideas, like a sign, are never fixed, but are predicated on 'actual occasions'. These are dynamic premises which, is to say, are foundations in flux. Whitehead's process philosophy (inspired largely from adumbrated mathematical models in calculus) allow for innovation, development and novel interpretations of data. The process of sign interpretation is thus like an evolutionary becoming. The process is similar to when Whitehead says it 'is never a completed static state of mind. It always bears the character of a process of penetration, incomplete and partial'. (Whitehead, 1968: 43)

speculative material. His formulation, of what Magny designated the *mise en abyme*, is one that is wholly his own. Indeed, as he points out, much of his development of Magny is ‘my own use of the expression’ (ibid). So to develop Gide’s idea, Dällenbach is concerned with visual analogy in order to advance the theory of cascading mirrors asserted by Magny. Dällenbach’s argument is that ‘the spectacle of the text and the code’ takes to ‘constituting a *texture*, i.e. an interlinked arrangement of elements, a relational network, or, if one prefers, a *structure*’. (ibid: 96) Dällenbach means here that signs appear to highlight patterns of signs; signifiers and their meanings form differentially valued arrangements, or patterns of signs. The influence of Saussure’s models and ideas are both prominent. How all these patterns are conceived is through a circular sense of what the language in a work ‘provokes’, what the language can potentially do. For Dällenbach, he conceives a situation where there is ‘a work within a work’; where, for example, in a theatrical play, we witness layers of possibility by means of doubles:

From a purely artistic point of view, one might wonder whether this situation [of interior doubling] could not be used to great effect. One would need, as in that work of genius, *Hamlet*, to intertwine a play within the play and, within the primary play, transform apparent death into real death. Doubtless this would only be the appearance of appearance, reality at play with the real, a miraculous reflexion repeated a thousand times. (from Jean Paul’s *Titan* [1800-3], Dällenbach: 36)

Evoking the sublimely obscure notion of spectacle and its endless possibilities, allow Dällenbach a good deal of license to imply how *Hamlet* (via Gide) fits his own *mise en abyme* formulation. Yet it remains scarcely possible to follow where exactly, and how far, one can go with Dällenbach’s allegory or ‘kind of extended metaphor’ as he calls it—or indeed—how far the duplications extend in even his simpler formulations. For him, his *mise en abyme* is either ‘a work within a work’ (ibid: 8) or ‘any enclave entertaining a relation of similarity with the work which contains it’. (ibid: 17) Though helpful for enriching Gide’s idea, these definitions are prohibitively vague. Thus, for an adequate grasp of these personal interpretations, we need to consider, holistically, *The Mirror in the Text*. Dällenbach’s book is substantial and complex. Because of its Saussurean bases (signs,

syntagms, paradigms, synchronic and diachronic terminologies) *The Mirror in the Text* can be categorised as mainly structuralist in its outlook. The book has three key components: critical, theoretical and typological. What follows, will consider each of these keys.

In a preface, Dällenbach outlines his polemical perspective: he asks questions about the *mise en abyme*: ‘What was its original meaning, and what precisely does it mean now? Does it have an unequivocal meaning? Or does it cover a number of different concepts? Does it designate a well-structured complex, or is it a terminological alibi for a protean and ultimately indefinable monster?’

(ibid: 1) His examination first considers Gide’s diary entry. Dällenbach raises four basic points on what he calls Gide’s ‘subtle ambiguities’. (ibid: 8) These critical points ground Dällenbach’s focus.

Thus, straight after quoting Gide’s diary, his argument is founded on four observations:

1. the *mise en abyme*, as a means by which the work turns back on itself, appears to be a kind of *reflexion*;
  2. its essential property is that it brings out the meaning and form of the work;
  3. as demonstrated by examples taken from different fields, it is a structural device that is not the prerogative either of the literary narrative or indeed the literature itself; and
  4. it gets its name from a heraldic device that Gide no doubt discovered in 1891.
- (ibid, 1989: 8)

Most underlying assumptions in Dällenbach’s book follow these initial points, which he refers to as a ‘charter’. These axioms, as he explains, are to ‘appreciate through structural transformation the metaphysical change that has come about in and through recent [French] literature’ (ibid: 3) This charter is consulted whenever his argument digresses or raises more problems than it offers answers. His essay, moreover, inflects Gide’s idea through the self-legitimated mandates of the French New Novel. Of note to his charter above, is the relegated place Dällenbach assigns to Gide’s comparison with heraldry. The full title of his book is, indeed, *The Mirror in the Text: An Essay on the mise en abyme*. ‘Mirror’ comparisons are thus an intrinsic part of his preoccupation.



It is in the theoretical section of the book, where the inheritance of Gide's idea is first evaluated, mainly through a whistle-stop critique of Magny's work. Dällenbach chooses two substantial passages from Magny. Both quotations have a strong emphasis on the terms 'parallel mirrors', 'mirror effects' and the Latin term '*ad infinitum*'. (Magny, 1950: 271 in Dällenbach: 22) Dällenbach's asserts that 'it is impossible, at any stage, to formulate precisely what the *mise en abyme* is for Magny...its style, its vocabulary, its imagery—reveals the distortion: the technical term 'abyeme' has become a victim of its connotations'. (ibid: 2-23) In more temperate mode, however, Dällenbach attempts to clarify Magny's implicitly bungled essay: 'Hidden beneath the critical hotch-potch (an idea of which I have perhaps given), a latent sense of order can be discovered'. (ibid: 24) His 'unsuspected logic' is to do with 'the metaphors that have been used as comparisons' in Magny's essay. He groups her metaphors 'under three headings:'<sup>1</sup>

1. '*simple*' *reflexion*, represented by the shield within the shield, the microcosm and the monad (literary examples being *Ulysses* and *Swann in Love*);
2. *infinite reflexion*, also symbolised by monads, but particularly by the reference to mathematics, infinite parallel mirrors (two mirrors would in fact suffice!), [sic] the packet of Quaker Oats...a literary example being the Utopian novel of Philip Quarles...; [*Point Counter Point*]
3. *paradoxical reflexion*, represented by Magny's commentary on Jean Wahl's sentence—and by this sentence itself, which creates an endless spiral. (Dällenbach: 24) (see *Metaphysics* in Appendix C)

These three 'reflections' allow Dällenbach to offer a universal classification of Gide's idea, later on, in his book. But, after this trinity of metaphors, based on Magny's essay, Dällenbach's 'logic', which is never outlined, moves swiftly on to another Gide critic, Pierre LaFille, with the attack moving to his book *André Gide the Novelist* (1954). For Dällenbach, LaFille's chapter 'immediately seems different by virtue of the more technical—and quite irreproachable—definition it gives of the 'aesthetic device which Gide will often use and which he will call composition "en abyme"''.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout Dällenbach's chapter, criticism of Magny is excoriating and he dismisses Magny's work. According to Dällenbach's two chosen quotes, from page 271 of her chapter, Magny tends to 'rely on her intuition alone'. (Dällenbach: 22) Ironically, Dällenbach dismisses Magny for having a (metaphorically) 'voluble pen'. She is 'unable to control her metaphors, she piles up the most varied comparisons for this single subject'. (ibid) In short, 'she moves from one author to another who seems to be connected, moving from resemblance to similarity, from error to misunderstanding, from impression to effect and from trope to trick, managing by this process of almost universal analogy to touch on everything without going deeply into anything, drifting along until the reader has lost all his/her bearings'. (Dällenbach: 22)

(Dällenbach: 25) The title of Dällenbach's discussion of LaFille is entitled 'Indecision and Conjecture'. Dällenbach only contends that '[a]dmittedly, LaFille uses the 'shield within the shield' interchangeably with the mirror metaphor ('a mirror inside the narrative' [and] 'devices of reflexion and inclusion''. Dällenbach strongly disagrees with LaFille's 'indecision' in whether to choose the mirror metaphor or the shield metaphor. (ibid: 25)

Dällenbach (by stressing his 'charter') then proclaims the mirror metaphor is best. He then re-asserts the mirror-metaphor's superiority after he associates Gide's idea with a few tendentious examples<sup>1</sup>. One such problematic passage, in particular, from Gide's *The Counterfeiters* in which Edouard refers to his journal as a metaphor for reflection and recording, is put forward:

The book I have lost came to end with my journey to England. When I was over there I used another one, which I shall give up writing in, now that I am back in France. I shall take good care not lose this one, in which I am writing now. It is my pocket-mirror. I cannot feel that anything that happens to me has any real existence until I see it reflected here. (Gide, 1925: 142)

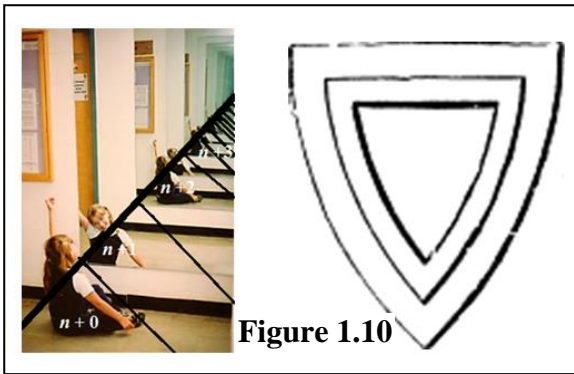
This observation leads Dällenbach to the troubling conclusion for *The Mirror in the Text*:

The implications of this statement [about Edouard's pocket-mirror] are obvious. This substitution of the mirror for the heraldic metaphor counters, rather than supports, the charter and answers one of our questions: the fact that the heraldic image is supplanted by the mirror (or must at best co-exist with it) clearly explains why Gide did not think it appropriate to return to the idea of the *mise en abyme* after 1893. In order to find out the reasons behind this, it may be enough to study the role of this *mirror* within the novel. (Dällenbach, ibid: 30)

His charter, as outlined, carries the first assertion about 'reflexion' because it is based on the Saussurean sign-model. But because the semiological model cannot be used to fully justify Gide's idea, we are left with the glaring result that Dällenbach's project, for appropriating Gide's idea towards mirror comparisons, is both an ill-fitting and biased conclusion. His criticism of LaFille, and of Magny, serves to support how *he* takes issue with their recognition of various modes from

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<sup>1</sup> Very early on in *The Mirror in the Text*, Dällenbach recognises 'the ambiguity' of Gide's text. However, in his interpretation of Gide's three uses of 'ainsi' Dällenbach chooses to imply that Gide meant an intentional logical consequence (akin to a semantically similar *therefore*) rather than 'thus' as a locative signifier of examples. Dällenbach argues that the heraldic metaphor 'in the final analysis...is [only] to express what Gide wanted to do in some of his books' (ibid: 9) Another tendentious example is an anecdote in which Gide (only once) wrote in front of a mirror (ibid: 16)



Gide's idea and how *they* fail to establish the mirror and its workings as the better comparison to Gide's idea. Dällenbach prepares the way for his own extended threefold model by criticising LaFille's 'vacillation' or Magny's 'hotch-potch' and rather

than even considering the heraldry metaphor, he volubly asserts the supremacy of the mirror metaphor, albeit with the reluctant recognition that the heraldry metaphor is also, perhaps, legitimate for Gide's idea (Figure 1.10). The opening chapters in Dällenbach's work conclude that 'it is exactly as if LaFille were assimilating quite simply *mise en abyme*—shield and mirror—to *simple reflection*'. (ibid) In light of Magny's examination of Gide's work, and her other 'intuitions', Dällenbach proposes the above 'three versions of Magny's *mise en abyme*'. It is fair that Gide did not imply the other mirror 'types' put forward by Dällenbach via Magny's essay. It is also fair that though a fruitful and novel development of Gide's idea, Magny's '*mise en abyme*', which is now a standard term in English, carries a mottled legacy based on speculative assertion from the work of Dällenbach alone. After looking at Magny's and LaFille's chapters, Dällenbach raises questions to the same liberal extent as he criticises Magny for her liberal use of metaphors. 'Why' he eventually asks 'is there such a divergence between our interpretation and that of these two critics of Gide?' (ibid: 26) To this question, Dällenbach responds with his own theory.

Dällenbach's concerns with the vagaries of the French New Novel show that his thesis is based on the idea that 'due to its massive revival in the 1950s...the *mise en abyme* was associated with it [the French New Novel], and immediately became one of its distinctive elements'. (ibid: 118) The innovations of French theory, where such perspectives are said to exist, are thus closely thought as aligned with the evolution of Magny's idea, now called the *mise en abyme*. Plausibly, Dällenbach offers an apt extension of Gide's idea, yet, his is based less on Gide's heraldic metaphor, and instead on the association of the mirror and putatively reflective action: 'the *mise en abyme* is any

internal mirror reflecting the narrative as a whole by simple, repeated or specious duplication' (1989: 52). Ever since 1977, the mirror metaphor has become the inspiration for the French ideas of what Magny called the *mise en abyme*. French theorists grappled with Gide's *en abyme* term and the mirror speculation attributable to Magny. Yet, it remains true that Gide explicitly referenced heraldic shields even though no examples in heraldry can be verified historically to hold infinite converging shields, superimposed in the same way that mirror reflections can cascade until an indiscernible end-point. Therefore, the visual nature of the aesthetic effect, through Dällenbach's work, is proposed for both literature *and* the visual arts. This infinite effect, in which a cascading set of receding frames converges onto a blind-spot, or *aporia*, is clearly discernible in pictures and images. In the verbal arts, however, it is only, at best, an imagined ideal. Nevertheless, through pliable and highly sophisticated rhetoric, Dällenbach's theory, how there could be some kind of infinitely receding effect in Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, appears only marginally, in a coy footnote by Dällenbach:

*Aporia* appears first on p. 266, in the context of *The Counterfeiters*: 'One thinks of the famous story of the tutor of rhetoric whose pupil will only pay him if he wins his first case and who, to get his bill paid, has to take the budding lawyer to court...' This anecdote seems to be on the same model as that of Epimenides the Cretan saying all Cretans are liars—or that of the famous, briefer saying, which is no less aporistic—'I am lying'. (ibid: 196, fn 9)

Dällenbach is also on quite reliable ground to reach such conclusions where infinitely receding frames exist in literature: they can be discernible by virtue of certain theories about paradox. By positing the above fallacy, we could even fortify Dällenbach's argument with what Gide says about his novel *The Counterfeiters* and his own views on the Cretan problem. But, Gide's *Corydon*, a political dialogue he calls 'the most important of my books', demonstrates his mistrust of such fallacious ideas. He says emphatically 'I do not like paradoxes' (1952: 9). Secondly, Gide's idea about his novel is most telling. Gide did say of *The Counterfeiters* in 1921, that there is no 'single centre' in the work but 'two foci'. So there are two focal subjects in his novel: 'the new focus that throws the narrative off centre and draws it towards the imaginative'; (Sheridan, 1998: 397), is

Gide's own view which seems to vouchsafe visual focus and its implied reflections. But Gide's allusion to 'focus' in his preparation of *The Counterfeiters*, does not retrospectively justify or legitimate mirror metaphors for literary compositions attributable to his idea. Focus in literature remains complex yet it can very often denote the orientation of character perspective, the means by which characters regulate narrative information and not necessarily the temporal arrangement of the events presented (as Dällenbach implies). Moreover, a point, relegated by Dällenbach, is that Gide may have even disavowed his entire diary entry that spoke about the subject of the work transposed to the level of character. It would certainly account for an absence of first-hand critical material about mirrors. So, taking departure from Dällenbach's idea, the notional layering of heraldic surfaces, rather than mirrors, is less inauthentic. It might even be more vivid (and faithful to Gide's words) if we liken his allusions about double focus in heraldry (Figure 1.3) because no direct mirror comparison to literature is made by Gide. Therefore, despite what critics claim, Gide's mention of double focus is another reason why his heraldry allusion to double-shields, which do have historical precedents, is truer to his diary entry. Double focus probably has nothing to do with infinite regress in terms of reflecting mirrors and everything to do with heraldic shield surfaces. But for better or worse, two metaphors, Dällenbach ruefully admits 'must at best co-exist'. It is to Dällenbach's hierarchy of *mises en abyme* that we now turn. As based on Magny's belief in mirrors, Dällenbach's typology is a threefold model, he call, 'duplications'.

A typology is a logically arranged framework of varieties, or types, of an idea. Dällenbach's logic creates a framework based partially on what Magny wrote and partially on what he asserts.

The last general component of Dällenbach's book is, therefore, its framework. Jean Ricardou's essay held that there were two 'types' for Gide's idea, namely, a small episode that reveals larger events in a narrative and, a second type, a composition where a part stands in opposition to the main narrative. Dällenbach however thought that there are three types as based on Magny's essay. Again, Dällenbach held there were simple, infinite and aporetic types for Magny's idea. (ibid: 24)

Dällenbach groups Magny's metaphors into, what he calls, three 'paradigms'. His three *mise en abymes* are based on Magny's metaphors (specifically of mirrors, not Magny's metaphors of kaleidoscopes or hand-bags). Dällenbach argues that Magny's reading of Gide meant reflections. Upon his study of *The Counterfeiters* (1925), Dällenbach believes that Gide's idea is like 'a series of mirrors that open up dizzying perspectives'. (ibid: 34) So, Dällenbach's later thesis continues to recrudescence on the mirror allusion and the *mise en abyme* first put forward by Magny.

But Dällenbach extends the *mise en abyme* beyond Magny. His principle is not only 'a work within a work' or 'internal duplication' but, in addition his principle can 'designate' the 'novel in the novel', 'the novel of the novel' and ultimately, his principle even "implies the 'novel of the novelist'". (ibid: 35) He perhaps really means that the sense of mirror reflections can validate universal, yet derivative, possibilities to whatever Magny 'indistinctly glimpsed'. (ibid: 34)

There still however remains the problem of Gide's English examples, *Hamlet* and *Usher*. Dällenbach acknowledges these English examples but does not show where and how, with clear textual instances, *Hamlet* and *Usher* fit his various single, infinite or aporetic reflecting mirror metaphors. Perhaps, Gide's two English examples come under the first variety which Dällenbach proposes. So, Dällenbach's generic term *mise en abyme* is represented by 'three species'. A contradiction, or hedged bet, is when these 'species' require interchangeable use, especially when a text is said to contain all three duplications. In such cases, Dällenbach says:

...we stand before these three types of duplication like the three sons in the parable of the three rings; it is impossible to decide which one is the authentic version. Rather than opting arbitrarily for one or another, or restricting ourselves out of loyalty to the charter to internal duplication alone, all three can be accepted as representing the three species of the generic term *mise en abyme*. (ibid: 35-6)

Thus, despite the 'conjecture and indecision' for which he reproaches LaFille, Dällenbach comes to a 'generalisation' of his own. (ibid: 35) His conclusion stretches his metaphors of duplication which he holds are an 'expansion', presumably of Magny and LaFille:

This expansion does in fact provide perfect proof of these conclusions, and, without reproducing it here, I shall restrict myself to emphasising the two points it assures us of:

1 the practice of most critics shows that the *mise en abyme* and the mirror are sufficiently interchangeable for us to combine the two and to refer to ‘the mirror in the text’ whenever the device appears’ and

2 the term *mise en abyme* is used unproblematically by authors to group together a collection of distinct things. As in Gide, these can be reduced to three essential figures:

- (a) *simple duplication* (a sequence which is connected by similarity to the work that encloses it);
- (b) *infinite duplication* (a sequence which is connected by similarity to the work that encloses it and which itself includes a sequence that...etc); and
- (c) *aporetic duplication* (a sequence that is supposed to enclose the work that encloses it). (ibid: 35)<sup>1</sup>

The basic framework, concludes Dällenbach, is that ‘these three duplications can each, in a way, be related to one or other aspect of mirror reflexion’. (ibid) Dällenbach does, later, footnote the Saussurean idea that ‘any word can always evoke *everything* that in one way or another can be associated with it’ (ibid: 206). This idea of these interchangeable types makes Magny’s *mise en abyme* even more obscure. Subsequent theory has tended to replicate the above model. The last type which Dällenbach clearly says is ‘supposed’ is often unfairly taken to mean Gide’s idea in its entirety. But this infinitely cascading mirror idea is only part of Dällenbach’s model. Nevertheless, the prevailing influence in other schools of thought shows that the influence of Dällenbach is undeniable.<sup>2</sup> Dällenbach’s book *The Mirror in the Text* was original, becoming the standard work on what is variously called the *mise en abyme*. Still, much of the work relies on French literary

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<sup>1</sup> Dällenbach’s general types (ibid: 27) as based on Magny (ibid: 24) of the *mise en abyme* assume her allusion to that of duplicating mirror metaphors. This ‘reflexion’ idea includes the single *mise en abyme*. The single type is a narrative similar to the work that this narrative is in. The English example, *Hamlet*, is presumably such a single duplication where a small play connects, through similarity, with the larger play. Dällenbach’s second proposition of the *mise en abyme* is the type which is most familiar to readers. It is the infinite duplication where a narrative is connected to another sub-narrative which is connected to yet another. The other English literary example here is (supposedly) *The Fall of the House of Usher* because its sub-narratives resemble its larger narratives. The third type of duplication is the blind-spot type of *mise en abyme*. Dällenbach calls this type by its Greek name, the blind-spot, or *aporetic* duplication. It seems to be the classic notion of the cyclical tale (*ourobouros*) in which a narrative sequence encloses the very work that encloses it like *Ramayana* and *Thousand and One Arabian Nights*. An example that comes to mind in late-modern English is David Lodge’s *Hotel de Boobs* which is a story about the story the reader is reading. Dällenbach concludes in a post-structural way: that all three types can, in a sense, relate to each other. (ibid: 18) The influence of Jean Piaget’s three-fold structuralist model is a haunting influence of Lucien Dällenbach’s thesis. The narrative *mise en abyme*, in a syntagmatic sense, also holds three structuralist functions: ‘first, the *prospective* one, prematurely reflects the story to come; second, the *retrospective* one, reflects the accomplished story after the fact; third, the *retrospective*, reflects the story revealing events which are both anterior and posterior to its point of anchorage in the narrative’. (1977: 83) Furthermore, the three-fold influence is even justified through Roman Jakobsen’s model when Dällenbach outlines the basic nature of reflection in his mirror metaphor: ‘a reflection is a message [*énoncé*] which refers [*renvoie*] to the message of the utterance [*énonciation*] or the code of the narrative. (ibid, 1977: 62)

<sup>2</sup> Brian McHale (1987) see the next, Chapter 3, advances the three-fold typology but in three ontological criteria. Mieke Bal (1977) advances Dällenbach’s typology based on Peircian trichotomies (see Chapter 3). Arguably, the nine-problems thesis of Moshe Ron (1987) is a compounded, squared, replication of Dällenbach’s research results. (see Chapter 3)

examples. These textual examples in French may even probably show ‘literary recursion’ and ‘infinite regression’ as handbooks claim. (Cuddon, 1999: 513; Baldick, 2008: 211)

But Gide’s diary entry cited the English examples *Hamlet* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*. These examples remain unexamined in the French literature. Supposed analogies and assertions about infinite regress cascades become especially burdensome when reading the critical literature about what the French designated as the *mise en abyme*. The *mise en abyme* idea of Magny, after Dällenbach, has ever since become a name for a wide array of arcana. We can choose to take either Dällenbach’s mirror metaphor or what Gide associated with shields. The mirror metaphor evokes infinite regression in a visual sense whereas the shield metaphor is to do with indefinite repetition well suited to the complexity of texts.

#### **4. Main Contribution**

In conclusion, French theory, for what is still designated as the *mise en abyme*, is the first wave of scholarship. Overall, the French critics read Gide’s idea as a ‘cipher’ (Magny, 1950), a ‘compositional technique’ (LaFille, 1954), a ‘theoretical construction’ (Morissette, 1968), a ‘metaphor of narration’ (Ricardou, 1971), an ‘emblematic metaphor’ (Dällenbach, 1977) and a semiological ‘sign’ (Dällenbach, 1980).

Yet, despite this range of terms, without the work of Dällenbach, the contrivances of Magny might simply have been forgotten. Older, established tropes might have instead held currency to describe the aesthetics alleged to be infinite regress in literature. The background structural legacy of this school helped its theorists to develop the meaning of Gide’s diary entry. Because its meaning, in English, remains diffuse in the extreme, protean and difficult because no-one has rigorously demonstrated infinite textual reflection in English Literature, subsequent theorists like Moshe Ron (1988) and Linda Hutcheon (1984) returned to Dällenbach’s French work after 1977 and made claims, and counter-claims, that Dällenbach’s third type of *mise en abyme* was to be



found in late-modern English examples. The English translation of *The Mirror in the Text*, in 1989, stimulated much discussion. But all the speculation confuses any tenable meaning for the *mise en abyme*: making it a dubious trope as old as antiquity.<sup>1</sup> Yet, Dällenbach's suspicion can be confirmed, namely, that the *mise en abyme* is some 'terminological alibi for a protean and ultimately indefinable monster' (ibid: 1). Put tersely, it is not the coining of Gide but rather the labours of Magny and Dällenbach to which the *mise en abyme* should be attributed. The association of rebounded mirrors is from Magny and Dällenbach: Gide's favoured English examples of *Hamlet* and *Usher* cannot support the comparison to infinitely reflecting mirrors—whether one against the other—or however these 'mirrors' are conceivably tilted in the text.

Nevertheless, the possibility of infinite regression claimed by Dällenbach's mirror text, or *mise en abyme*, by 'evoking everything' as he points out (ibid: 206) intrigued and inspired. Dällenbach's approach to the *mise en abyme* shifted during the early 1980s—away from the structuralism of Genette (1979) and Morissette (1971) and increasingly towards a reappraisal of psychological and philosophical aesthetics. Dällenbach's later work like *Mosaiques* (2001) was sympathetic to the ideas raised by the French New Novel. The shift towards reception and cultural theory and newer sign-studies, created even more *mise en abyme* scholarship. Newer work emerged from The Hebrew University, the Anglosphere and continental universities. After the French School, subsequent '*mise en abyme*' examinations looked at a problematic concern differently. The elaborate edifice of scholarship was decorated further.

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<sup>1</sup> The history of rhetorical criticism is littered with syncretic tropes that are dubious. The Latin poet Horace spoke pragmatically about this evolving principle as follows: 'As the woods change their foliage with the decline of each year, and the earliest leaves fall, so words die out with old age; and the newly born ones prosper just like human beings in the vigour of youth' (in Horace, 1965: 56) Longinus's timeless essay *On the Sublime* in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC also had some harsh words about tropes that came to fashionable prominence. Longinus declares that 'All these ugly and parasitical growths arise in literature from a single cause, that pursuit of novelty in the expression of ideas which may be regarded as the fashionable craze of the day. Our defects usually spring, for the most part, from the same sources as our good points. Hence, while beauties of expression and touches of sublimity, and charming elegancies withal, are favourable to effective composition, these very things are the elements and foundation, not only of success, but also of the contrary'. (in Horace, ibid: 106) It is my contention that the *mise en abyme* is often referred to instead of established literary concerns. These concerns can include forms, focalisation, representation, semiotics or even mundane matters such as free-indirect speech. These literary ideas ought to be addressed in their own right without the dubiously defined misnomer *mise en abyme*.



### Developments of the '*mise en abyme*'

This chapter is about developments of French readings of Gide's idea, and as put forward by non-French theorists. Lucien Dällenbach's translated work *The Mirror in the Text* had, by the late 1980s, become such an authoritative resource that non-French scholars of Gide's idea used many of its insights, as a starting point, for their own theoretical work even though assertions of the mirror and its meaning had taken Gide's idea into an entirely new direction. Subsequent theory is today still an extension of what I am calling: the French *mise en abyme*, rather than being based strictly on Gide's original idea. The French tradition was tangentially followed by two scholars at The Hebrew University (see Appendix C). Moshe Ron (1987) and Viveca Füredy (1989): but both differed from The French theorists in their critical approach and in their conclusions about the *mise en abyme*. Meanwhile, through increasingly abstract theorising, the 1980s-1990s saw a renewed interest in the *mise en abyme*. In the USA and Canada, two further contributions to the growing body of theory about Gide's idea were put forward. North Americans, Linda Hutcheon (1984, 1994, 2000) and Brian McHale (1987, 1992, 2006) both offered further insights into the function of the *mise en abyme* as inflected by the French thinkers. Because of the prevailing influence of structuralism and its sequels in American academia during the 1980-90s, the *mise en abyme* was implicitly regarded as a 'major mode' of late-modern, post-Second-World-War literature. So, '*mise en abyme*' became caught up in the critical arguments and complexities of aesthetic theory in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. One reason the *mise en abyme* became so popular was that it legitimated the preoccupations of the 1980s-90s, including, as Norris objects, 'puzzles induced by allowing language to become the object of its own scrutiny in a kind of dizzying rhetorical regress' (1995: 708). And since Magny had aligned her reading of Gide's idea with regress, others inadvertently confirmed her conception. 1980s thinking thus validated the *mise en abyme* further as a language-based puzzle. In short,

postmodern Anglo-Americans, through their post-structuralist criticism, extend and evaluate the work of the French School. (Appendix B) The following chapter contains two parts: (1 and 2) Anglo-American readings of Gide's idea, and (3 and 4) Continental European examinations of the *mise en abyme*. These latter Continental developments in thinking, regarding the *mise en abyme*, depart in various ways from French structuralist conceptions. So what follows will evaluate the range of thinking about Gide's idea which began to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s.

## 1. Linda Hutcheon

Hutcheon's theory concerning the *mise en abyme* involves a psychological approach. She maintains that 'the novelist's act is basic to his human nature'. Human self-awareness is fundamental to the creative process. For Hutcheon, we have a 'form of narrative self-consciousness' or 'narcissism'. (1984: 48) Hutcheon's account of the *mise en abyme* is that it creates an artificial sense for its conventions and forms (see postmodernism in Appendix B). At bottom, Hutcheon's view on artificiality involves reflexive aesthetic mimicry. Her argument that the *mise en abyme* is a sort of 'putting beside the original' of a textual object, makes of Gide's idea, a 'parody' of itself. Parody is a concept which underpins Hutcheon's understanding of the *mise en abyme*: parody is an ambiguous trope as much as its master trope of irony. Irony, is besides a staple of Hutcheon's work, explored widely therein, and so inevitably inflects her consideration of the *mise en abyme*. I shall turn to her work on parody shortly, in order to suggest how she came to associate parody with the *mise en abyme* rather than irony as Moshe Ron and Viveca Füredy tended to do<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> An example of how the two tropes overlap is perhaps the playlet *Hamlet* as I will discuss it later. 'The Mousetrap' means something different to what it shows and also mimics the tale around it. Quite simply it is thus parodic and ironic. Ron, alluding to *Hamlet*, advances Ricardou's notion that 'the occurrence of *mise en abyme* can either *contest* or *reveal* the proper functioning of particular narrative'. (1988) Ron's pragmatic answer to this weighty distinction, foreshadowing the postmodernism of the Anglo-American thinkers, is 'irony': 'In more general terms, *mise en abyme* always ironically subverts the representational intent of the narrative text, disrupting where the text aspires to integration, integrating where the text is deliberately fragmentary. (Ron, *ibid*: 434) Irony is Ron's answer because it accounts for whatever 'subverts', undermines 'representational intent'. But if the author intends any representation (and such intention is reasonably incontestable) then no subversion, or irony, can really be argued since no real conflict exists between representation and authorial intent. Yet, irony, for Ron is concerned with general purposiveness ('function') of a text. To avoid an attempt to 'assign' a 'misguided' general function, Ron asserts irony can help explain the ambiguous dichotomy raised by Ricardou of opposition and revelation. Ron's argument accepts this double function of his *mise en abyme*. In the previous chapter, I drew some attention to the way that these two types of Ricardou seem very similar, in fact, almost alike. If we add the argument that irony can assist in explaining the function of Ricardou's *mise en abyme*, then Gide's idea is truly a problem. If we can accept these ambiguous explanations where either of Ricardou's types can mean each other, together with Ron's other rarefied ideas, then general *mise en abyme* definitions becomes diffuse in the extreme. Ron's conclusion

**Parody and the *mise en abyme*.** The exposed artifice, fake-ness, through reflexive composition, challenges the reader.<sup>1</sup> Because of its unusualness, the reader is made aware of the form in the story. The reader gains a sense of how a tale copies something, as in *Point Counter Point*, for example, we recognise a level of story-telling by a naratee (Quarles) *as well as* the author's narration (Huxley's) which seems to intervene in the naratee's (musical) composition (see Chapter 6). Such types of story-telling raise questions about art: how can it seem that a work of fiction can make a copy of itself beside the main narrative? Though nothing new, for postmodernism, this idea is celebrated as 'parody'. Hutcheon describes 'my obsessive fascination with parody'. (2000: xi) For her, the contemporary world 'seems fascinated by the ability of our human systems to refer to themselves in an unending mirroring process' (2000: 1)<sup>2</sup>

Although parody is the favoured trope in Hutcheon's emphases, her *mise en abyme* is perhaps likened to mirroring because of the way in which the latter has an affinity with self-reflexivity. Hutcheon considers, chiefly, the position 'when parody becomes synonymous with all textual mirroring or *mise-en-abyme* structures' (ibid: 20) But then she rejects this possibility because parody is 'by no means the only' mode of self-reflective composition. So, surely it follows that parody cannot be the only type of *mise en abyme*. And so Hutcheon's evocation, to the parody principle, includes the conspicuous places when a narrator remarks beside the voice of the character in the story, as in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*. When this doubling occurs, Hutcheon claims an effect exists like 'an internal self-reflecting mirror (a *mise-en-abyme*)'. (ibid: 31) This technique is a 'pointing to the literariness of the text'. (ibid) The word 'literariness' here seems to suggest

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to the problems related to his *mise en abyme* are similarly relativistic: 'When the *mise-en-abymeness* of *mise en abyme* is motivated [incentivised by its own significance] we come face to face with aporia [blind spots of meaning] and paradox, the intelligibility of romance is routed and irony reigns supreme'. (ibid: 436) Viveca Füreedy's paper also comes to a dissatisfying conclusion that seems to imply irony for her relativistic outcomes: namely that embedded phenomena, which can 'include the *mise en abyme*', (1989: 745) are 'essentially [on a] dialectical continuum, in which both systems continuously and simultaneously subvert and reinforce each other'. (ibid: 767)

<sup>1</sup> Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is an early example; as are later ones (like Ian McEwan's work) where, in the final chapter, just when you think the right amount of time had elapsed, an authorial voice addresses the reader. (like *Jane Eyre*) Any literature with authorial (or, indeed, narratorial) intervention is likely to remind the reader that they are reading a fiction.

<sup>2</sup> The interest in self-reflexivity is also indebted to developments in (orders of) cybernetics and post-humanisms. Katherine N. Hayles (1999: xiv) raises some troubling concerns, as an outcome to the developments of computer technology whereby the intimate reliance between human beings and machines create a strange symbiosis and circuitry. Inexorable technological involvement with human biology, for example, is just one new form of the human condition as identified by Hayles called 'posthumanism'. Hutcheon, however, touched on this advanced idea in literature when she alluded to mirroring human systems: a nuanced link between inanimate mirroring object and (necessarily) animate subjectivity.

artificiality. But more importantly, Hutcheon is recapitulating the mirror assertions of Dällenbach. In her argument, Hutcheon recruits the mirror metaphor of Dällenbach but she subverts the metaphor and its narcissistic associations, saying how fiction that recognises its own artificiality is at least honest, it is 'authentic'. And 'aside from parody in general, frequently used literary devices in this [narcissistic] thematisation process are the *mise en abyme*...and a kind of more extended allegory'. (1984: 53-4)<sup>1</sup> This is the point, parody notwithstanding, where Hutcheon begins to liken the *mise en abyme* to allegory.

**Allegory and the *mise en abyme*.** Alluding to the work of Dällenbach, Hutcheon points out that the 'in infinitum' type of *mise en abyme* raises double meanings for the work in which it occurs. When a sense of 'infinite regress' is argued, where nestings regress (e.g. an authorial narrator and narratee both contend within the frames of each other), then 'both overt and covert' ways of encoded meaning are a way to understand the putative effect that results. (ibid: 56) Hutcheon insists that an infinite regress is possibly so difficult to theorise that it needs a new semiotic set of arguments in order to account for its diffuse and, allegedly explicit, meaning. Hutcheon does not speak about this infinite regress as a metaphor but rather a metaphor *of* metaphors, what one could call a collection of metaphors, or allegory.

Allegory as a species of complex metaphor is proposed for this unusual effect. Hutcheon's cryptic illustration is the collection of stories called *Lost in the Funhouse*, about a boy's discovery of houses in the eponymous funhouse. The endless further funhouses are betokened by references to the metaphor of a 'funhouse' in each story. Each loosely-drafted story in the collection suggests that each tale shares a common theme with a funhouse. Together, the various small tales cohere to make the whole story where the narratee is adrift from the words of the narrator, he is lost. 'At a certain point', says Hutcheon, as each small tale mimics the whole of the work, it is a many-layered

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<sup>1</sup> [T]he parody of self-reflection of narcissistic narrative work to prevent the reader's identification with any character and to force a new, more active, thinking relationship upon him [the reader]...In much metafiction the reader is left with the impression that...all fiction is a kind of parody of life, no matter how verisimilar it pretends to be, the most authentic and honest fiction might well be that which most freely acknowledges its fictionality. (1984: 49)

allegory of its key funhouse theme. Hutcheon implies that this layered-allegory is a trait of her *mise en abyme*. In particular, ‘the *mise en abyme* becomes so extended *in size* [that] it is better described as a kind of allegory’. For example, in the tale, a narrating voice recounts its challenges of being lost in a funhouse, announced several times in the narrative. And so we have a recurrent reference to the book’s title about getting lost in a funhouse. The covers serve as a frame for the outer part of the layers within the tale. Each funhouse episode, in the collection, is an account of either the character or the narration of the whole tale. (1984: 56) Hutcheon’s starting point does relate to the entry of André Gide who said that his *en abyme* idea was one between the characters and the narrative subject. The subject, which Gide refers to as narrative event, are transposed to the scale of the characters but the extent to which this can be extended, is not specified by Gide. Thus, the effect can be thought about to include so many events, ‘extended in size’ that, as Hutcheon infers, makes of the French *mise en abyme*, an allegory. Perhaps Hutcheon is evoking one of Magny’s assertions that the *mise en abyme* is a metaphor. (Magny, 1950: 276) In fact this view might allow Hutcheon to argue, as she does, that Gide’s idea can be extended to include parody and allegory. Hutcheon thus advances Gide’s idea (as based on the French speculations). Parody and allegory—as concerns in their own right for Hutcheon—become the meaning of her *mise en abyme*. Since parody and allegory relate to master tropes such as metaphor, Hutcheon extends the view of Dällenbach that the French *mise en abyme* is a metaphor of regressive effects. However, rather than associate her *mise en abyme* with irony, much as the conclusions of Moshe Ron and Viveca Füreedy posit, Hutcheon decisively associates her *mise en abyme* with parody and allegory. Her example of Barth’s *Lost in the Funhouse* seems to evoke the categories of the self-conscious discussion which declares how resonating narrator and narratee (when mimicking each other) offer a ‘similar account, and so the replication is in both [categorical] directions, et cetera’ (ibid: 117) Henceforth, Hutcheon comes to a conclusion that there are two types of the *mise en abyme* in the same way as there are, for her, two tropes readily associated with her *mise en abyme*.

**Two types of the *mise en abyme*.** Between parody and allegory, Hutcheon offers a suggestive model in which we can theorise her interpretation of the *mise en abyme*. Like Ricardou and Morrisette, and unlike Dällenbach, Hutcheon claims that there are *two* basic types of the *mise en abyme*. One is a ‘horizontal *mise en abyme* on the level of ‘fiction’, for example...call[ing] attention to the repetitive un-lifelike nature of the plot’. (ibid: 54) The opposite type is ‘inversely proportionate’ to this fictional status. An example from *Lost in the Funhouse* explains the difference to Hutcheon’s rather cryptic dichotomy:

...narrative plots may be imagined as consisting of a “ground-situation” (Scheherazade desires not to die) focused and dramatised by a “vehicle-situation” (Scheherazade beguiles the King with endless stories), the several incidents of which have their final value in terms of their bearing upon the “ground-situation”. (Barth, 1988 [1963]: 116)

It seems as if Hutcheon is evoking the two types of *metalepsis* here in which a character intervenes from one narrative frame to another. Hutcheon calls this idea ‘horizontal’ and on the theoretical level of the narrative, or plot. So, it is comparable to Hamlet who disrupts the playlet in *Hamlet* (ontological *metalepsis*). The work of Viveca Füreedy (1988) alluded to this principle before it was fully articulated by Marie Laure Ryan (2004-6). Quite clearly Hutcheon’s *mise en abyme* types of vertical and horizontal vectors, confirm the work carried out about *metalepsis*. Hutcheon adumbrates the contribution of narratologist Marie Laure Ryan (2007). Like Hutcheon, Füreedy articulates a similar insight in 1989, of an idea which had hitherto not been discussed at length. In an example from *Hamlet*, Füreedy outlines what her perceived textual ‘boundaries’ do: There are, as it were, two different ‘worlds’ on either side of the boundary. [For example] Hamlet cannot intervene and stop the murder of Gonzago; it happens in a different place, and involves a different species of ‘people’ from his own. A common indicator of the presence of such different worlds, and thus of a boundary, in verbal and visual arts is the presence in the embedding part of a “marker” of some kind who is responsible for the embedded object (a narrator, painter, stage director, sponsor, or the like) or of a certain kind of witness (an audience within the text, as distinct from an observer or an eavesdropper)’. (ibid: 748) Füreedy repeatedly mentions *embedding* and *embedded* (active and

passive adjectives) to come to her conclusion that boundaries can carry over meaning. Her two types of boundary transgression, as she later calls it, adumbrated, similar to the way that Hutcheon adumbrates, what Marie-Laure Ryan associated with *metalepsis*. (2004-6). The first type of Fűredy's boundary distinction, therefore is what Ryan called *ontological metalepsis* whereby the level of the author (Hamlet) conflates the level of the narration (*Hamlet*) as he interrupts the play 'The Mousetrap'. (cf McHale, 1987: 11) The second variety of 'boundary transgression', which Fűredy mentions above, came to be situated with a new idea in literary theory: it became associated with an idea of transient, less explicit form of carrying over from one part of the text to another. In 2006, Ryan alludes to the sense that there is a 'certain kind of witness' in this second variety of Fűredy's boundary concept. Ryan gave a fuller account of Fűredy's nascent idea and calls the idea *rhetorical metalepsis*: it opens a small window that allows a quick glance across levels, but the [metaphorical] glimpse closes after a few sentences and the operation ends up reasserting the existence of the boundaries. (2007: 192) Therefore, Fűredy's proposed boundary idea does highlight how embedded texts can be instances more accurately affiliated with the study of *metalepsis*. And besides, Linda Hutcheon's two types of *mise en abyme* suggest that she is anticipating the rhetorical concern of *metalepsis* and its guises as argued by Ryan.

Therefore, Hutcheon's gnomic 'inversely proportionate' type of *mise en abyme* is what Ryan calls rhetorical *metalepsis* in which the reader is transported by a conception of another realm across the boundaries of the frames, for example, when 'The Mousetrap' in *Hamlet* enacts the events of the murder that took place before the beginning of the play's action. If indeed, Hutcheon's model does relate to *metalepsis*, then it would confirm my thesis argument that, apart from *ekphrasis*, the *mise en abyme* is also an instance of *metalepsis*. This double *metalepsis* (ontological and rhetorical) is drawn from Hutcheon's previous thoughts on 'overt and covert' coding. Both types of *metalepsis* are indeed explicit and implicit as Ryan's example from *Hamlet* shows. Hutcheon is perhaps glossing the importance of Gide's diary description about the effect and speaking about something far older, which I situate in rhetoric with *metalepsis*. Hutcheon's *mise en*



*abyme* likens the subject of the work with the ‘un-lifelike’ plot and the lifelike character. (see Chapter 4 on *Hamlet*) Most evidently, Hutcheon is reinterpreting Gide’s idea of transposition, as some species of parody or allegory.

**Theory Controversy.** Although Hutcheon’s broader work in literary theory is vast, she captures the essence of what she called postmodernism ‘fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political’ (1984: 4). However, the philosopher Roger Scruton held reservations about the English application of French structuralism. He speaks of ‘those subjectivists who want at least to start from, if not to end at, the idea that in matters of literary interpretation, anything goes [because] the sign itself is unfailingly *mise en abîme*’. (1983: 16) These misgivings gave way to controversy in late-1980s Anglo-American academia—and importantly—it explicitly involved the *mise en abyme*. Varieties of criticism in what Ian Gregson called ‘disbelief put into practice’ (2004: 1) proliferated under various controversial, ideological agendas. (Ellis, 1997; Patai, 2005; Scruton, 2015) Consequently, there was a sceptical backlash which charged postmodern ‘theory’ as academic fraud, being little more than bogus, fashionable nonsense. The anti-theoretical arguments included accusations of re-appropriating traditional literary terms and theorists were harangued as decadent with a dishonest moral agenda. The scandal is associated with the Sokal Affair. This was a hoax involving the submission of a plausible sounding paper to a prestigious journal, *Social Text* (1996); after its acceptance, Alan Sokal revealed that his essay was, as he admits, an ‘absurd and meaningless’ posture (1998: 3), intended to expose the pretensions of humanities scholars. Besides the good grace from *Social Text*, which published on the basis of the writer’s credentials, the prank damaged the reputation literary aesthetics. It certainly raised devastating accusations that literary theory was itself meaningless. Literary academia was convulsed by what the *mise en abyme* meant, now that literary theory was embarrassed by its reactionary critics. Partially as a result of the proliferation of theories, Mark Currie succinctly remarks that there was an ungainly mass of new terms and concerns during this time, a ‘pile-up of the late-1980s’ in narrative study. (2011: 37)

Around the time of the scandal, polemical outcries concerning the *mise en abyme* and postmodernism sounded rather like the following:

[F]or all its talk of self-reflexivity and textual *mise-en-abîme* [sic], post-structuralism is clearly caught on the horns of a familiar relativist dilemma when advancing its more assertive claims as regards the obsolescence of truth-values, the demise of enlightened (“meta-narrative”) discourse, the illusion of referentiality, etc. At the very least there is an element of self-disabling paradox—a performative contradiction—involved in these sweeping pronouncements that affect to underlie the veridical status of any such utterance, their own (presumably) included. (Norris, 1993: 198-9)

The greater concern is how such objections to the *mise en abyme* undermine the credibility of associated discourses like metafiction, post-structuralism and postmodernism. The *mise en abyme*, which was a staple in 1980s theory, became as a consequence, a subject of intense study but also widespread scepticism. The questioning of the *mise en abyme* is most evident in the period directly after The Sokal Affair and in the debates—both legitimate and fruitless—it initiated (Sokal, 2010). Finally, Scruton’s online essay (2012) about ersatz art captures the status of the *mise en abyme* now: ‘the essence of fakes is that they are substitutes for themselves, avatars of the infinite *mise-en-abyme* that lies behind every saleable thing’. Yet, despite such views, apart from the merits of linking allegory and parody with the *mise en abyme*, Linda Hutcheon, like Viveca Füreedy, should be credited for her contribution to developing *the idea of the mise en abyme*. Hutcheon’s two *mise en abyme* types are more accurately attributable to concerns associated with the trope of substitution or *metalepsis*. After Hutcheon’s brief, but influential, reinterpretation of the *mise en abyme*, the idea was further developed in the Anglo-sphere by critic Brian McHale.

## 2. Brian McHale

The second prominent commentator on the *mise en abyme* in the English language tradition is Brian McHale. His expertise on the *mise en abyme* is unflinching across his long career. His approach has links to the so-called New Criticism of worlds and ‘imagined worlds’. (Ransom, 1941: 281) His view is that the ‘*mise en abyme* unsettles the structure of representation, opening up an epistemological “black hole” that swallows certainty...it induces in the reader a sense of vertigo, of gazing into the abyss’. (2006: 177) It can be seen as developing Magny’s allusion to existential vertigo, when gazing at metaphysical absence, or looking into an abyss. (Magny, 1950: 270) McHale’s account of this conception completely avoids mirror metaphors (popularised by Lucien Dällenbach). Instead, McHale discusses the associated problems of comparing visual metaphors with the *mise en abyme* as a literary phenomenon. McHale, like Hutcheon, therefore finds it judicious to discuss the *mise en abyme* in relation to developments in theory, broadly called postmodernism. We find his ideas concerning the *mise en abyme* articulated within the context of his inquiries into 1) narrative worlds, 2) compositional stabilisation and 3) cognitive theory.

**Self-contained Worlds.** An important term in McHale’s work is ‘world’. McHale’s focuses on the imaginative universes of the reader’s mind. In ‘postmodernist poetics’ there are “‘possible’ or even ‘impossible’ universes’ for the imagination of the reader. (1987: 27) In his chapter on ‘Chinese boxes or Russian *babushka* dolls’ (ibid: 112), McHale evokes the ‘recursive dialogue’ of Douglas Hofstadter’s celebrated book *Gödel, Escher and Bach: The Eternal Golden Braid*. (ibid: 113) Many related concepts to the *mise en abyme* are given critical treatment. However, the places where *mise en abyme* is explicitly discussed come under the headings ‘Towards infinite regress’ and ‘Abysmal fictions’.

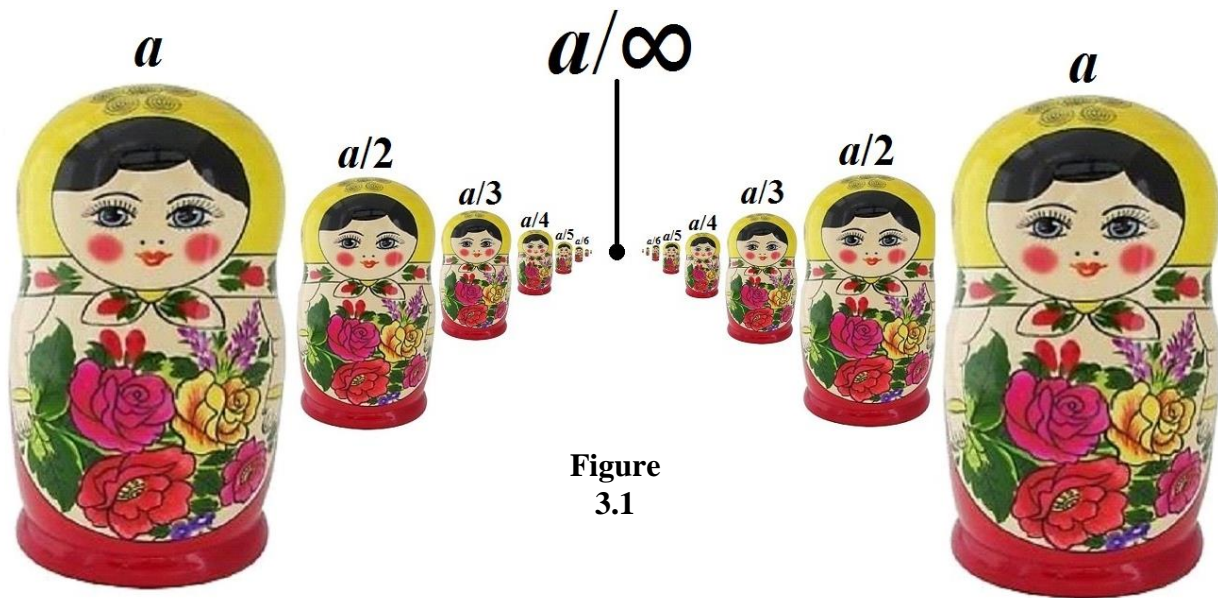


Figure 3.1

**Towards infinite regress.** In this section, McHale refers to the mathematics of recursion. Recursion is when one instance calls back a previous instance of itself. (Figure 3.1) Infinite regress is endless sequencing. (see Recursion Appendix C) McHale points out that ‘[i]nfinite regress haunts every recursive structure in which narrative worlds have been ‘stacked’ beyond a certain depth of embedding’. (ibid: 114) His example is drawn from Linda Hutcheon’s example of *Lost in the Funhouse*.<sup>1</sup> This insight replicates Hutcheon’s view on multiple *mise en abymes* as allegory (see above). According to McHale ‘postmodern texts flaunt’ their ‘recursive structures’. (ibid: 115) McHale therefore provides an argument about the fusion, and confusion, of infinite regress and recursive structures as they appear in literature. Again, these concerns are discussed under the general name of the *mise en abyme*.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brian McHale offers a helpful argument about the passages that are only alluded to by Hutcheon. McHale uses the narratological terms of diegesis and their relative positions to each other in order to account for the effect in *Lost in the Funhouse* in which the narrator and narrate both echo each other. Barth’s text discusses the conventions around the effect. McHale leaves his enquiry about infinite regress suspended with an unanswered question but does come some way to providing a good clear outline about what technical mechanisms are involved in creating the unusual composition in the episode ‘Life Story’ in *Lost in the Funhouse*. McHale suggests a hierarchy between conceived layers in the text and thus potential further layers relying on the imagined principle of infinite regress. He dilates, therefore, as follows: ‘Infinity can be approached, or at least evoked, by repeated *upward* jumps of level as well as by *downward* jumps. Thus, for example, the fictional author in Barth’s “Life Story” (also from *Lost in the Funhouse*), who is writing about an author who is writing about an author, and so on, also suspects—quite rightly—that he himself is a character in someone else’s fictional text. But why stop there? If there is a *meta*-author occupying a *higher* level than his own, just as there is a hypodiegetic author occupying a level below his, then why not a meta-meta-author on a meta-meta-level, and so on, to infinity?’ (1987: 115)

<sup>2</sup> The exemplary quote McHale offers is William Burrough’s fiction (1973) of a ‘[s]tory of someone reading a story of someone reading a story. I had the odd sensation that I myself would wind up in the story and that someone would read about me reading the story in a waiting room somewhere’. (McHale, 1987: 114) There is an influence of the Hebrew University and their concern with ‘agency’ for character and reader. The conspicuous choice of text to illustrate literary infinite regress is thus indebted to the foundation laid by Ron (1987) and Füredy (1989). But, McHale’s concerns for ontology are very much similar to the critical instruments of the New Criticism movement. The first New Critic is John Crowe Ransom whose anti-intentionalism is captured in his concerns with metaphysical ontologies: ‘We live in a world which must be distinguished from the world, or the worlds, for there are many of them, which we treat in our scientific discourses. They are reduced, emasculated and docile versions. Poetry intends to

Figure  
3.2

$$d=0; r=1$$



**Abysmal fictions.** McHale also highlights a concept in the arts for which there is no technical name. His work makes it clear that the term *mise en abyme* is used for other literary concerns that, I have argued, must be addressed in their own way. One of these concerns is iteration, where differences ( $d$ ) are absent and value ratios remain constant ( $r$ ). (Figure 3.2) To illustrate this point, McHale quotes the phenomenon where Hofstadter speaks of ‘an object’s parts being copies of itself’ which is about the repetitive phenomena associated in mathematics with simple recursion (ibid: 124 *cf* Hofstadter, 1999). McHale illustrates his discussion with the picture on the box of Quaker Oats, where a picture calls back the first picture of itself on the box. McHale’s idea can be traced to the one of many in Magny’s essay where:

... [on] the Quaker Oats box you see a Quaker holding, in his hand, a box of oats, which is a box holding a Quaker who holds a box on which there is another [same] Quaker etc. (Magny, 1950: 271) *my translation*

After a particular instance in which one calls back the previous instance of itself, Magny imports Huxley’s fictional sketch that ‘algebraic symbols’ must account for any infinite regressive principle when it occurs in literature after ‘the tenth time’. McHale’s argument evokes what Magny, from Huxley, called the metaphor of the Quaker Oats box and which Dällenbach said was an infinite recurrence of metaphorical mirror reflections. ‘Adapted from the language of heraldry by André Gide’ McHale recognises the sophisticated work carried out in French theory for the *mise en abyme*.

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recover the denser and more refractory original world which we know loosely through our perceptions and memories. By this supposition it is a kind of knowledge which is radically or ontologically distinct’. (1941: 281)

He concludes that ‘unfortunately, there really is no term in English for Hofstadter’s phenomenon [which McHale associates with the *mise en abyme*], so we are left with a term from French: *mise en abyme*’. (ibid: 124) McHale therefore situates the idea of the *mise en abyme* firmly with the concepts of recursion in mathematics. He is, in short, particularly interested in the ‘[*m*]ise en abyme’ as ‘one of the most potent devices’ for stressing his focus on ‘recursive structures’ in texts. Most of these structures are optical illusions and ludic uses of typography. Some are merely perspectives of pure repetition. (Figure 3.2) It is in this section that McHale replicates the three-fold model of Dällenbach.<sup>1</sup>

A fitting conclusion for his theories of the *mise en abyme* as a ‘structure’ concerned with the concrete nature of the text, may be found in his justification: ‘postmodernist writing has exploited and developed it so extensively: *mise en abyme* is another form...another disruption of the logic of narrative’. (ibid: 125) As opposed to the *mise en abyme* as the large, net effect of infinite regress in a text, McHale formulates *mise en abyme* as a device which is a smaller, lesser part subject to the whole work that contains this small part: ‘a *mise en abyme* must, by definition, occupy an inferior narrative level’ (McHale, ibid: 126). He evokes, significantly, the view of Moshe Ron whose ‘*mise en abyme* consists of heightening the significance of something at a lower level’. (Ron, ibid: 430) Thus, McHale, like Ron, raise an obstinate problem associated with the directional, spatial thrust of the narrative, or ‘orientation’, the formal alignment of the *mise en abyme*’s share of events/narrative: this problem is the conundrum of part-to-whole conceptions. The assertion that the *mise en abyme* is something small within something larger prompted Werner Wolf to invert this mereological view that *mise en abyme* may not contain ‘part-to-whole’ but also perhaps, ‘whole-to-part’ relations (2010).

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<sup>1</sup> Any critique of McHale’s argument would have include his reading of recursion and paradox. McHale references Douglas Hofstadter’s celebrated book *Gödel, Escher and Bach: The Eternal Golden Braid* which explores mathematically derived uses of recursion in computer science. Hofstadter’s argument however distinguishes how recursion and reiteration are different. Reiteration (Figure 3.2) is endless repeating—a principle that calls back *the same* instance of itself. In reiteration we have the basis for very simple types of recursion. No simplification of each instance is possible here as it is with recursion, so there is no annihilation or blind-spot (incorrectly called paradox). Hofstadter is very concise on the point of paradox: whenever (sequential) recursion is correctly applied, recursion may ‘brush with paradox’ but is never properly paradoxical, because it always calls back a *simpler* (inexact) instance (function) of itself (1999: 127). Paradox is obviously possible and ‘haunts infinite regress’ as McHale correctly adds. But infinite regress is *not* limit-defined recursion. If recursion is not calculable in mathematics, it is said to be undefined, which in terms of its Latin etymology (*definio*) would suggest that it has *no* limits and is simply purely speculative.

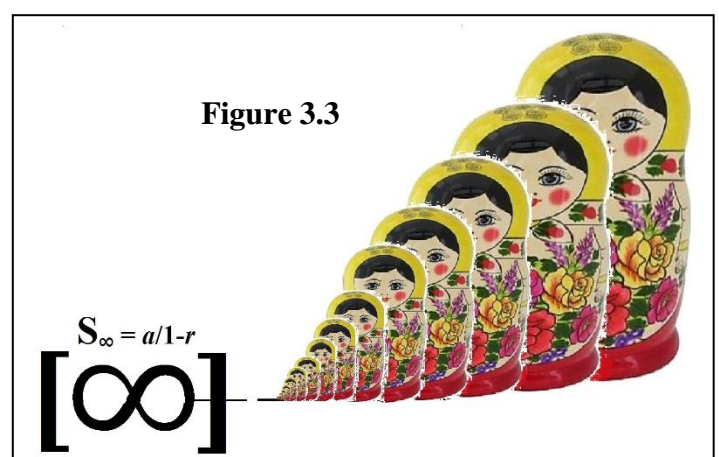
**Compositional Stabilisation.** In his own manner of speaking, McHale continues his formulation of the *mise en abyme* from a ‘constructivist premise’ in *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992). Here, ‘*mise en abyme* involves the paradoxical reproduction... *within* the fictional world of the fictional world itself’. (1992: 155) Following on from his multiple imaginary worlds, McHale revisits his earlier point about ‘disruption of the logic of narrative’. (1987: 125) McHale’s *mise en abyme*—which he claimed occurs in Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose*—has a ‘cumulative effect...to infiltrate paradox, corroding the fictional world’s solidity’. (1992: 155) In his study, McHale concludes that the *mise en abyme*, by subverting narrative logic, thereby raises problems of scope and proportion. In this work, ‘[t]he threat of infinite regress’ (1992: 57) is associated with the *mise en abyme*. McHale’s ‘logical paradoxes of various kinds’ and *mise en abyme*, make this conclusion plausible. (1987: 125). So unlike Hutcheon, whose metaphor of unbounded extensions, or allegory, was *her mise en abyme*; McHale subscribes to a view that unbounded scale can lead to a sense of infinite regress. Any comparison makes infinite regress somehow associable with allegory which, in turn, makes the identity of the *mise en abyme* diffuse in the extreme. Again, Gide spoke about the transposition of a literary subject on the ‘scale’ of the characters, and he never alluded to infinite regress. McHale here, it seems, is using the term *mise en abyme* in an honorific way to talk about matters such as infinite regress. Now although Gide said nothing about infinite mirroring or infinite regress, *some critics* have thought that *some instances* of what Gide was referring to *do* involve such mirroring. One such entanglement is captured at the end of McHale’s study of *Name of the Rose*:

The doubling of the world of *Name of the Rose* by the world-within-the world which is the library opens up an abyss of potentially infinite regress, thereby radically destabilising the world of the novel, and in the process laying bare its ontological structure. The threat of infinite regress arises when we consider that the library, scale-model of the world, contains a book whose decorations constitute a scale-model *en abyme* of the library: world-within-world-within-world... (McHale, 1992: 157)

However, the contents of these books (read by the Monk, de Melk) are finite: humans have not been writing books forever. It is rather the potential, the imagined, speculative, hypothetical, implicit mereology that the library opens up endless worlds, encapsulated within the ‘world of the novel’. Even if infinite regress is associable with what Gide said, it still does not clarify the problem of determining the scale. Markers like ellipsis (...) and words like *et cetera* are often held to, somehow, justify the imaginary view that a book can contain infinite worlds. My own view is that such markers cannot mean infinity as it is so readily assumed. There are indefinite worlds which may have no fixed limits (like the notional limit of infinity). But indefinite (limitless) possibilities are not the same thing as infinite possibilities where a world-within-a-world runs on and ellipses and ‘*et ceteras*’ gesture towards the whim that infinity is somehow contained in a work of art. The above is not a paradox, it is merely confusion between the meaning of words indefinite and infinite<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, another example from McHale’s 1992 book is the Pynchonian *mise en abyme*:

Compare the complexly-embedded structure *en abyme* at the core of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (Pynchon, 1973: 680-1): an amphitheatre on whose stage is enacted the world in which the amphitheatre itself is located. ‘The chances for any paradox here, really, are less than you think,’ says Pynchon’s narrator; *he is lying*. (McHale, 1992: 292, *my italics*)

Now because McHale believes that the narrator is definitely lying, McHale appeals to paradox for explanation of infinite regress in fiction. This belief is when indefinite worlds, as I feel they are, are erroneously called infinite worlds. But infinity is itself a limit so



<sup>1</sup> Someone who claims that *mise en abyme* involves some kind of infinite mirroring within the text would surely grant that no *actual* reader follows through (or even *could* follow through) an infinite chain of mirrored meanings for ever: they might simply say that there’s no necessary terminus to the reading process—*no definite point* at which the reader *has to* stop. So, we might fairly conclude here that ‘infinite’ in this context does *not* mean ‘actually going on for ever’, but merely ‘without limit’, ‘without fixed terminus’. And such semantic paraphrasing notwithstanding, infinity as putatively captured in texts remains a persistent problem for assertions whose supporting examples simply rely on terms ‘et ceteras’ or ‘and-so-on-and-so-forth’ to convey the implied *sense* of infinity in the traits of unseen themes rather than the traits of the formal composition itself.



if the indefinite has no fixed limits, then infinity has nothing to do with the indefinite. Perhaps, McHale's appeal to paradox is an inability to separate the necessarily limited idea of the indefinite from the limitless view of infinity. My contention, therefore, is that if infinite regress is a type of *mise en abyme* it is, more accurately, indefinite regress. (Figure 3.3)

**Cognitive Theory.** The most recent commentary by McHale on the *mise en abyme* is his essay 'Cognition En Abyeme: Models, Manuals and Maps' (2006)<sup>1</sup>, where he again discusses imagined worlds. Yet, there is here a pragmatic, postmodern sense of subverting the accepted modes of standard *mise en abyme* formulation. McHale states 'I prefer a middling sort of definition...that is neither as strict and exclusive as some nor as lax and inclusive as others' (ibid: 176) McHale, who recognises *mise en abyme* as a 'prolific source of problems'<sup>2</sup> offers two criteria that might contribute to a definition:

Candidates for *mise en abyme* status must satisfy two criteria. First, there must be a demonstrable relation of analogy between the part *en abyme* and the whole, or substantial and salient aspect of that whole...the parts that qualify as *mise en abyme* are those that may plausibly be construed as yielding an acceptable paraphrase of the 'whole story'...In addition, [criterion two]: the part *en abyme* must be inserted one or more levels 'down' or 'in' from the primary world. It must constitute, or belong to, a secondary world, ontologically subordinated to the primary one. (2006: 177)

McHale, like Dällenbach (1989) and Ron (1988), assumes the *mise en abyme* is secondary, smaller perhaps inferior to the main 'primary' and superior text in which it is contained. Thus, the alignment, orientation, concern of part-to-whole is exposed and assumed. The two extremes of McHale's newer *mise en abyme* definition can be 1) 'understood in a purist sense' and 2) '[u]nderstood in a more relaxed sense'. (2006: 177) The first type 'evokes infinite regress'. The second type 'proliferates uncontrollably, turning every text into a network of analogies where

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<sup>1</sup> The critical instruments in his paper are from cognitive narratology. It 'can be defined as the study of mind-relevant aspects of storytelling practices, wherever—and by whatever means—those practices occur'. (Herman, 2009: 30)

<sup>2</sup> McHale echoes the *Nine Problems Thesis* of Moshe Ron (1987: 426). McHale sets the key problem: the definition of the term is still vague. '*Mise en abyme* is exhilarating to think about, frankly, because it is such a prolific source of problems. Not least of all its problems is the question of what exactly counts as *mise en abyme*...[defined too broadly] the figure of *mise en abyme* ends up shading off into a general principle of analogy, whereby anything in the text can be constructed as analogous to anything else'. (2006: 176) His view is rehearsing the conclusions of Moshe Ron (1987).

everything is mirrored...it induces in the reader a sense of vertigo, of gazing into the abyss'. (ibid) McHale takes leave of this point to indicate 'the cognitive potential of *mise en abyme*'. His argument offers 'three dimensions of modelling by *mise en abyme*'. (ibid: 178) In short, his work on psychological dimensions of the *mise en abyme* articulates the design and utility of a critical tool, which he calls, 'a cognitive map'. (ibid: 187) McHale's strategy outlines the different ways a reader can understand a *mise en abyme*. He distinguishes three types of *mise en abyme*, on the basis of their different cognitive function. McHale's model replicates the findings of Genette, (1972, 236-245) on the direction of agency. The three 'dimensions of modelling' for McHale are based on the kinds of knowledge they provide, 1) 'where *mise en abyme* yields knowledge of the text itself by modelling its form', 2) 'where *mise en abyme* yields knowledge of how the reader engages with the text', 3) where 'circumstances under which *mise en abyme* may even yield knowledge of extratextual world, by entering into more complex structures that may serve to model or map that world cognitively'. (ibid: 178) McHale thus appeals to the reader's imagination.<sup>1</sup> All three of McHale's points relating to the *mise en abyme* as a map, rely on the view that a text can be self-conscious. But unlike Hutcheon's work on self-consciousness in texts, McHale's new model is not postmodern. In previous work, McHale argues that 'postmodernist fiction is ontological' (1987: 10) and that modernist literature is more associated with epistemology, and less concerned with 'invisible worlds'. Modernist fiction in contrast to postmodernist asks:

What is there to be known?; Who knows it?; How do they know it, and with what degree of certainty?; How is knowledge transmitted from one knower to another, and with what degree of reliability?; How does the object of knowledge change as it passes from knower to knower?; What are the limits of the knowledge? And so on. (1987: 9)

If McHale's new model of the *mise en abyme* is epistemological, it would follow that his version, as outlined in the books *Postmodern Fiction* (1987) and *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992), are

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the critical tools of my thesis (see my 'Interest' in the Introduction), McHale is evoking what is a comprehensive collective, a sensorium in which readers glean knowledge from the subjective universe of the characters. In the story, besides the objective world of the narrator; the reader, via other imagined minds, forms a comprehensive subjective universe from the singular subjective will of the character. The reader may grow aware of his own mind as part of many others which form yet another objective universe in turn. The prominence of a subjective universe is especially unusual with regards to the device variously called the *mise en abyme*—especially if, within the composition, an adversarial-willed character opposes or thwarts the will as imposed by the objective author or narrator. Whenever this phenomenon occurs, an uncanny complexity results, which I argue, is called 'the sinister' aesthetic.

essentially modernist. McHale's cognitive map thus, by his own account, is not postmodern. In radical contrast to Hutcheon's claim that the *mise en abyme* is 'a major mode' of what she calls postmodern literature, McHale departs from her view since his argument proves that the *mise en abyme* is really a modern principle. He does acknowledge that the *mise en abyme* is a 'prolific source of problems' (2006: 176) but he sidesteps the pressing concern about the place of the *mise en abyme* in modern literary movements. Since French scholarship, the *mise en abyme*, has become caught up in extraneous areas of literary concern. Yet, besides the puzzling conclusions, contradictory implications and inconsistent working definitions, the *mise en abyme*, in the Anglosphere, remains at the mercy of further developments in scholarship.

After the work of Hutcheon and McHale, the *mise en abyme* became an established term without the explicit use of 'shutter quotes' and "scare quotes" to suggest some protean meaning. The focal theory of the Anglo-Americans extended the background theory of structuralism and its aftermath through what I have called post-structuralism. The strand of postmodern thought, to do with Anglo-American theory on the *mise en abyme*, remains vague. But Hutcheon's *mise en abyme* is clear when it confirms the trope *metalepsis* as one of the precursors to the putative phenomenon of the *mise en abyme*. Influential English reference guides about the *mise en abyme* gloss much of what McHale outlines about 'infinite regress', perhaps prompting Terry Eagleton to draw a comparison of 'complex structures' in literature to 'Chinese Box worlds' (2013: 4)<sup>1</sup>. Hutcheon's *mise en abyme* associates the device with allegory and parody. McHale's theory forges links with mathematics, some pointed out by Magny. The *mise en abyme* typologies from North America replicate—to a striking extent—*metalepsis* (Hutcheon) and McHale's views replicate the three-fold models of Dällenbach. To date, McHale's account of the *mise en abyme* is still as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> For example there are two very recent English definitions of the *mise en abyme*. In popular literary dictionaries for example, definitions of the *mise en abyme* tend to read: 'mise en abyme: A literary recursion, André Gide's coinage for the literary effect of infinite regression' (Cuddon, 2004: 513) or 'The 'Chinese box' effect of *mise-en-abyme* often suggests an infinite regress, i.e. an endless succession of internal duplications' (Baldick, 2008: 211-2). Both these definitions have traces of McHale's (1987, 1992) influence. The second definition owes a debt to Dällenbach's study *The Mirror in the Text* as based on mirror-doubled formulations. The former definition suffers from inaccuracy the latter definition is too analogical and broad.

A true *mise en abyme* is determined by three criteria: first, it is a nested or embedded representation, occupying a narrative level inferior to that of the primary, diegetic narrative world; secondly, this nested representation *resembles* (copies, says Hofstadter [1979]) something at the level of the primary, diegetic world; and thirdly, this ‘something’ that it resembles must constitute some salient and continuous aspect of the primary world, salient and continuous enough that we are willing to say the nested representation *reproduces* or *duplicates* the primary representation as a whole. (McHale, 1987: 124) *italics in original*

The innovation of the above quote limns the French notion of reflection, meaning ‘resemblance’ or ‘re-production’ whilst it demonstrates objective critical thinking about what might cause or *determine* effects of its elusive “something” as McHale mentions this word, above. For the conclusion, McHale states, problematically, how, ‘we are left with a term from French’. (1987: 124) And so, ‘caught on the horns’ of a dilemma (Norris, 1993: 198), the postmodern *mise en abyme* remains a diffuse misnomer. On the one horn, *mise en abyme* scholarship adds to a maturing corpus of commentary. On the other horn, its inflationary meanings, protean analogies and prohibitively vague tags enforce a catch-phrase which leaves one with no more than a French term. Ultimately, our enquiry uncovers a fiendish reality: to grapple with both horns, one exposes the darkest face in aesthetic study. Seeking the meaning of impressions, where only speculation guides, leads toward further seeking. This seeking uncovers the helpful insights, as raised by Hutcheon and McHale, but these enquiries also expose paths which promise little more than dead-ends. More theorising might lead to the “something”, which McHale points out, but when something brushes with almost any or every speculation open to the imagination, the *mise en abyme* leads toward nothing: the *mise en abyme* deceives the critic because of its sublime connotations of the abyss.

### 3. Mieke Bal

Some clarity to the diffuse and difficult idea of the *mise en abyme* comes from Mieke Bal's paper 'The *mise en abyme* and Iconicity' (1978). Published a year after Dällenbach's *The Mirror in the Text*, Bal's essay is a critical revision of Dällenbach's thesis, his theoretical approach and his *mise en abyme* typology. In her recently republished handbook *Narratology*, Bal contextualises the *mise en abyme* with its French mirror associations and, in that tradition, she says it is 'comparable to infinite regress' (2009: 62). In contrast however to visual depictions, Bal soberly emphasises that it is 'wrong' to "overstress the analogy to graphic representation, since in language *mise en abyme* occurs in a less 'ideal' form" by which Bal recognises that the *mise en abyme* that can be either visual or verbal (or implicitly both, as in *ekphrasis*). As I have argued thus far, the verbal accounts of the *mise en abyme*, have tended to be rhetorically similar to *ekphrasis* whilst *metalepsis* remains a latent candidate to much of the meaning behind the Anglo-American *mise en abyme*. Because Bal's *mise en abyme* is concerned with the verbal and visual, she indicates that '[w]hat is put into the perspective of infinite regress is not the totality of an image, but only a part of the text, or a certain aspect. To avoid needless complications, I suggest we use the term 'mirror-text' for *mise en abyme*'. (ibid) This handbook definition has traces of her paper on the *mise en abyme*, the semiotics of icons (Bal, 1978) and it makes a distinction between visual images characterised by regress and Gide's analogies in literature (like *Hamlet* and *The Fall of the House of Usher*). Bal's thesis criticises the Saussurean semiological work of Lucien Dällenbach (1977) and so she supplants his typologies with her own *mise en abyme* model as based on Peircian semiotics. (see Appendix B)

Bal's essay offers a revised reading of Dällenbach and is thus a critique. It is also important to note that although Bal evokes Peirce, she may use Saussurean terms in order to clarify the work she criticises. A striking remark in her essay is that Dällenbach's book is somewhat 'disconcerting', like the *mise en abyme*. Bal asserts that *The Mirror in the Text* (1977) by Dällenbach, has a 'discrepancy between theoretical constructions and stylistic analysis'. (1978: 122) Bal's essay laments how the

*mise en abyme* suffers ‘the fate of any metaphorical concept’. (ibid: 117) The device, for Bal, is ‘poorly defined’ and through its ‘popularisation’ is ‘a catch-all concept of literary criticism’. Bal praises Dällenbach’s book as ‘a coherent and original systematic study’. (ibid) But, she contends that Dällenbach is open to the charge of ‘overloading the interpretation’. (ibid: 118) Bal mainly takes Dällenbach to task for being ‘in danger of reading too systematically’ because the ‘codes’ of Dällenbach’s Saussurean-based theory are often ambiguous. For Bal, the *mise en abyme* is coded less conventionally than Dällenbach’s Saussurean account allows. The contents of a *mise en abyme* are, moreover, ‘partially unknown or unconscious to the reader’. (ibid: 118) Originally, Bal implies that a code is like a ‘sigil’ a sign that circumvents the conscious mind. Sigils are codes that the unconscious can grasp without interference from conscious perception. Nevertheless, coding for Bal, is a ‘problem’ and ‘is not easy to solve’. (ibid) So, Bal considers Dällenbach’s idea from a different footing. The coding problem allows Bal to make two main criticisms of Dällenbach’s work. First and chiefly, she calls into question Dällenbach’s theoretical approach (of Saussurean structuralism) which validates his evaluations. The outcome, for Dällenbach, is twofold: 1) Dällenbach’s assumption of reflexivity is dubious and 2) the ‘scope of the concept’ is compromised because it is left unclear. In this regard, we see how the reader is ‘the inventor of the code [and] code is partially unknown’ to the reader. For Bal, literature cannot subscribe to a principle on its own behest as fiction, its ‘own fictionality’ without the intervention of an agent. Bal’s *mise en abyme* is not entirely a reflexive, metafictional, form. Thus, ‘reflexivity in texts which bring the focus on its self-reflexivity, at the expense of its external referentiality’ would not be a reflexivity concerned with *mise en abyme*. (ibid: 118) Bal argues that the *mise en abyme* cannot be reflexive in a purely abstract manner: it needs reference to the physical world in order for it to be legitimated and understood. Perhaps similarly, as Linda Hutcheon then states, such textual reflexivity would be more associated with allegory if it has no objective basis to some physical comparison (1984: 53-4). Bal thus raises her concern about what constitutes a *mise en abyme*: the *mise en abyme* requires grounded comparisons in order to give it definitional scope. Her second contention to the

definitional scope is to suggest that there are two types of texts, ‘fictional or non-fictional’. (ibid: 120) The simple opposition of fiction types lets Bal ‘restrict or expand the meaning’ of what is and what is not a *mise en abyme* based on the semantic functions inherent in both types of writing. Bal’s insightful distinction therefore takes into account the transient nature of signifying the object as both something immediate and dynamic. Her starting point is thus recognising that something like fiction must take conventions into account in order to define a *mise en abyme* because fictional meaning is so indeterminate.<sup>1</sup>

Secondly Bal’s reading is a revision of the *mise en abyme* from Dällenbach. To avoid the entanglements of coding, Bal likens the *mise en abyme* to a semiotic icon. ‘I will try to rewrite the definition of Dällenbach [by] highlighting the metaphorical or ambiguous words, which I will substitute with terms, in my opinion, are clearer’. (ibid) Bal’s idea that the resemblance of one part to another is iconic is so because, as Peirce declares, signs change and draw on other signs to create further signs. It is as if signs have a life of their own and can be seen to change over time or ‘grow’. (CP, 2. 10) A text by necessity includes repetition, calling back previous similar instances of itself. The constructive and destructive forces in language evolution attest to these patterns which Bal’s semiotics recognises through resemblances between one sign and another. So, Bal’s ‘notion of resemblance [of *mise en abyme*] is also the concept of icon’. (ibid: 123) Resemblance is Bal’s foundational position for electing the icon as the sign closely associated with the *mise en abyme*. Bal refers to Peirce where ‘the icon is a sign that denotes its referent [meaning] by resemblance’ (ibid: 123) The nature, or essentials of this sign are found by the resemblance of one part to another. Bal is therefore drawing on the idea of Peirce’s icon. Because the meaning of the *mise en abyme* and the text coincide, by resemblance, at the same point in a composition, ‘a “small” sign must mean a “large” text’ (ibid: 126) But by extension, the ‘nature’ of the *mise en abyme* ‘differentiates’ the *mise en abyme* ‘as a specific class of icons’. (ibid) These classes are outlined in her own

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<sup>1</sup> One such semantic function, for Bal, includes ‘homology’ or the ‘sameness’ behind the perceived ‘other’ in very broad terms. Arguably similar semantic fields could include another such function in which a link between greater text and fragment might be established. Some ‘expansive’ writing functions as an analogy to the visual principles of embedding as the written form alludes to terms that might suggest such an embedded structure. *Lost in The Funhouse* would constitute such an example with its stacked, ludic, sub-clauses and strange typographies to imply a semantically constructed similarity of a funhouse. A restricted semantic field, on the other hand, could include *Point Counter Point*’s musical terms in the text. This converse species curtails the wider semantic slippage into other fields unrelated to music and is thus a restricted semantic function of Bal’s *mise en abyme*.

typology. 'A return to iconicity' Bal insists 'is needed for the *mise en abyme* by means of its resemblance'. (ibid: 126) 'Because the fabric [text] presents no immediate resemblance to the text, it contains a partial resemblance' to itself. The small part (objected) is not the large part (object) since there is the disjointed identification of the small part, to begin with. (ibid: 126-7)

In *Narratology*, Bal also highlights her idea of iconicity. When a fictional character, like narcissus, becomes his own pure reflection, he is 'an iconic sign of a sign'. (2009: 123) The action of any constructed thing becoming a sign, is, for Bal, 'radical constructivism' because her iconicity reading is the means to this outcome. Bal's *mise en abyme* is a variety of icon. Bal recruits the theories of Aart Van Zoest to prove the icon is a versatile sign. (1974) Van Zoest's work on semiotics argued that there were two groups of icons: 'the icons that occur as micro-structural and macro-structural icons'. (Bal, 1978; 123) The 'first case...is easy to delimit the fragment in question, to isolate and examine' the fragment of a whole sign. '[T]he case of a macro-structural icon, is less easy' to identify'. (ibid; 124) Van Zoest seems to be adumbrating the insights of semiotic philosopher, Mieczysław Wallis (1975: 7) of the 'two extremes' of gradations concerning the icon in semiotics. Wallis's icons are the 'schemata and pleromata'. The latter resemble object to meaning in greater detail than the former which are more abstract. Fine art paintings versus diagrams are examples. Semiotician Thomas Sebeok illustrates the general icon in how similarities across life-forms are, 'unending retrogression to ever more generalised' outcomes. The result is a generational resemblance between parents and children. (1977: 130) Iconicity for Sebeok is thus always 'a matter of degree'. (1979: 117 in Nöth, 1995) We can qualify the iconic status of a *mise en abyme* fragment as directly associated or less associated to the whole of the work. Nevertheless, the types of Bal's *mise en abyme* are iconic because it seems that their part-to-whole trait is often a matter of degree once the link is made. There is a shifting scale for icons which Mieke Bal justifies in relation to the work of Peirce as she offers guidelines for determining the types of her *mise en abyme*.



Finally Bal's paper offers a Peircian reading of the *mise en abyme* using some of Peirce's own typologies of signs. Bal's classifying frame is based on Van Zoest's work on the icon. Bal finds Dällenbach's typology 'somewhat disconcerting' (ibid: 122) perhaps because it does not take into account the way that interpretational conventions must recognise contexts.<sup>1</sup> Bal's typology of her *mise en abyme* is based on Peircean triads of the semiotic icon, effectively rewriting Dällenbach's three-fold model. Bal's semiotic thesis in fact is that the *mise en abyme* is an icon. And that the *mise en abyme*, as an icon, for its interpretant meanings are triadic: 1) topological, 2) diagrammatic and 3) metaphorical. Notably, Bal's outline is not purely literary: it includes all types of art and aesthetic representation of the *mise en abyme*. Here follows a critical summary of Mieke Bal's model.

**Topological.** Topology concerns place and space. For Bal, topology of the icon occurs when the relationship is spatial between object and meaning: as in 'figurative paintings' or in literature where a 'blank page' is a *mise en abyme* way of suggesting the emptiness of a character's mind. (ibid: 126) It is a very relational icon, an indexical-*icon*, a very factual, or pure icon. In Peircean terms, it is like a 'dicent' sign (1955: 105). This type of the *mise en abyme* is the *actual* formal relation: this effect is a linking between a whole text and the textual component. In regards to my thesis, I would situate this type of Bal's *mise en abyme* with the rhetorical idea of *ekphrasis* because it is a descriptive statement of visual things by means of verbal registers. An example from poetry could include W.H. Auden's 'Musée des Beaux Arts' (1938) which is a written meditation of the visual content of Breughel's depictions in the space of an art gallery. Poetic typographies, especially concrete poems, exert this composition to its ludic outcome, for example the playful work of Edwin Morgan in which the printed words compose the shape of the poem's title ('Astrograss' and 'The Chaffinch').

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<sup>1</sup> Bal traduces especially Dällenbach's 'hasty last chapter' (ibid: 122) about the simplest type of *mise en abyme* on which all varieties, in his typology, are all epistemologically reliant. Dällenbach's examples, from French novels only, 'accentuate the abyss' of the alleged aporetic *mise en abyme*, especially contends Bal, in his endless mirrors metaphor. There is a 'discrepancy' between theory and close-reading analysis of the examples Dällenbach chooses. 'I think the reducible, too exclusively inductive approach of the author inconsistent with its theoretical ambition'. (ibid: 122)

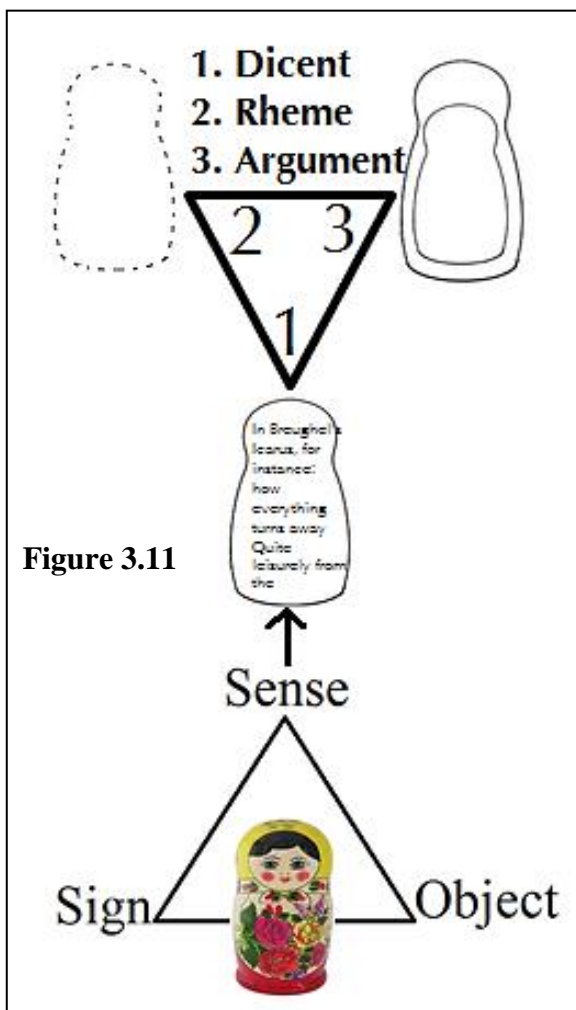


Figure 3.11

**Diagrammatic.** For Bal, an icon is more abstract where ‘resemblance lies in the relationship between the elements of the sign and the elements of the object’ (ibid) An example is an abstracted diagram of a *mise en abyme*. (Figure 3.11, no. 2) This type of *mise en abyme* has great implications for multimedia disciplines, like film and theatre because it strengthens the idea that the *mise en abyme* is commonly an expression of meaning between visual and verbal registers (or is like *ekphrasis*). But more accurately, there is a great possibility here for a range of resemblance by patterning. (ibid: 128) Diagrammatic iconicity is a type of secondary iconicity. (Lyons, 1977: 102-5) This type is an

iconic-qualisign, a possibility to see a carried over quality from one part to another. An example of this type of *mise en abyme* can perhaps include the way that Hamlet’s playlet has elements carried over from a remote cause (The Ghost) whilst this playlet is, itself, entangled within a larger set of authorial causes attributed to Shakespeare. In Peircean terms, this *mise en abyme* is a ‘rheme’ sign. It is like a rheme because it raises variable accounts of the elements involved in the process of its own signification as a play-in-a-play. I would add here that this type of possibility for Bal’s *mise en abyme* is a type of *metalepsis* because it can take into account the indeterminate zones of a work (like ‘The Mousetrap’) which suggests, at a remove, the many invisible elements which conceptualise its constitution. *Metalepsis*, in simple terms, is a process of carrying over meaning from one place to another. This type is less immediate and is to do with semblance which I examine throughout this study.

**Metaphorical.** Lastly, this type of icon is ‘the most difficult to grasp’ says Bal. (ibid: 126) This type of sign ‘may be called a metaphorical icon’ when ‘it denotes *two* referents at the *same* time, one immediate and one intermediate’. (ibid *my italics*) The ‘relation of similarity’ has to be accepted here to sanction this type of icon. This variety is like throwing together two things which is what Bal’s *symbol* means in etymology. The concept evokes fractals, but also René Lindenken’s *iconeme*, or a ‘double articulation’ in photography (1976: 81)<sup>1</sup>. The photographic code and the larger, more universal implication of content combine at ever greater levels within the mind of the interpretant. Bal stresses that ‘we can speak of metaphorical icons if the verbal description of a sign and referent is used as a metaphor. Metaphor on its own is not an icon’. (ibid) I would add that metaphor itself is not an icon because actually existing metaphors always *consist of* icons—although it is hard to see the iconicity (and how it does its work) underpinning a metaphor. Nevertheless if we consider Bal’s idea that this type of icon denotes two things at the same time, we might compare it with the literary trope *epanalepsis* which is an expression of simultaneous doubling. For example the line ‘O Ares, bane of mortals, O Ares’ is one such example. But this trope can also, as I argue in chapter 7, be broader and encrypt itself in a large text through the title of that text, for example ‘*The Crying of Lot 49*’ as a cryptonym of its muted trumpet. In Peircian sign studies, I locate Bal’s last type with the *reasoned* conventions that we can use to discern this variety. In Peircean terms, Bal’s third type of conventional icon is like an ‘argument’ sign because it shows a self-contained reflexivity. Peirce’s ‘argument’ is when ‘thought can itself become an object of thought’ (de Waal, 2013: 90). The reflexive, perhaps self-conscious doubling can occur between media: this type of sign is symbolic because it raises arguments about the objective conventions we may adopt between the various instances and discourses in which this type of *mise en abyme* is alleged to hide. For example, a picture of a fractal requires a different analysis to a fractal-inspired

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<sup>1</sup> Peircian pictorial semiotics can accommodate questions pertaining to the basic structure of the pictorial sign—as such like double articulation of a picture—it entertains photography as a privileged example. Lindenken demonstrates the conventionality of pictures, and the way they are structured into binary features. A viewer perceives the articulated meaning in one simultaneous glance and thus the picture can be taken to have a double articulation. A comparison made by Gombrich in *Art and Illusion* of two differently contrasted photographs showing the same landscape that Constable painted in Wivenhow Park, viewed from an identical vantage point, is an example which Lindenken considers. He speculates about the nuances and contrasts in visual media that exist inside a special sign like the ‘iconeme’ which can convey a double view simultaneously (with an interpretant) who qualifies the contrasts and nuances.

concrete poem. To disentangle the language from its art-forms, one requires an unconventional grammar, perhaps a grimoire of codes, to understand the communicational content behind the different art types. One such comprehensive medium is Peircian semiotics: its simple three-fold model can combine to pin down what Saussurean methods allow to proliferate towards an abyss of infinite potential.

In sum then, these three types (dicent, rheme and argument) are indirectly determined by the sense of the three basic Peircean signs types (index, icon and symbol) which are in turn influenced by Peirce's basic phenomenological categories, *firstness* for icon (and rheme), *secondness* for index (and dicent sign), and *thirdness* for symbol (and argument). Figure 3.11 illustrates how there is a sense of three types of icons (dicent, rheme and argument) which inflect the sign when it is an icon.

An innovation on this type of icon, in relation to the *mise en abyme*, is John White's 'The semiotics of the *mise en abyme*'. (2001) White explores the 'aesthetic effect' of the *mise en abyme*. (ibid: 30)

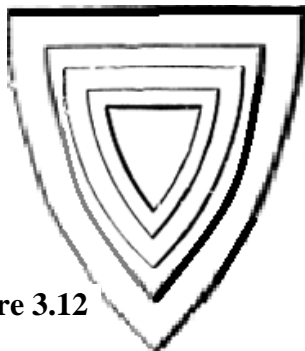


Figure 3.12

He offers a helpful clarification on the link of the icon and the *mise en abyme*. His arguments have applicability to the visual arts especially the concept called 'iconic isomorphism' (ibid: 30) which means a resemblance by equal forms like the super-imposition of a scaled part into another part of itself. White speaks of a 'large-scale fidelity to the

object being replicated' for this placing (Figure 3.12). But White critiques 'one of the main drawbacks of the way Gide presented his original heraldic metaphor'. (2001: 36) To illustrate the term, White says 'the *mise en abyme* in a coat-of-arms would be an instance of total iconic isomorphism in all respects except size and context' (ibid: 34) And size and context are almost always imagined and implicit for this recursive ideal. His thesis contends therefore that for infinite regress such:

[m]etaphors of mirroring and duplication risk being taken too literally and hence arousing expectations of a high degree of iconic isomorphism...any further duplications beyond that [which are immediate] are implicit rather than explicit. Usually, such acts of foreclosure on the process of infinite regress are not simply a

means of containing a potentially disturbing form of mannerism...they at the same time enable the internal duplication to become iconic of something beyond the text [or artefact] itself. (ibid: 39)

In short, White's essay is an extension of the ideas of Bal but he broadens the definition of her *mise en abyme*. His definition: '[t]he *mise en abyme* is a work within a larger work, it resembles—or refers iconically to—the outer work (or to parts of it) in ways often peculiar to the individual example and it can have a variety of functions' (ibid: 49)<sup>1</sup> confirms Mieke Bal's model of Peircian signs. His re-reading of the French idea similarly allows his insights to go well beyond the mirror analogy and its visual doubles. White's argument is also significant because it presents a sceptical position for infinite regress as based on the visual metaphor of heraldry. With this in mind, the visual analogy of converging regress can be treated circumspectly.

According to my own thesis, Bal's threefold model complements the three rhetorical tropes which I associate with the *mise en abyme*. To recap, my three tropes are *ekphrasis*, *metalepsis* and *epanalepsis*. (Table 3.1)

<b>Table 3. 1</b>	<b>Bal's Typology</b>	<b>Peircian Association</b>	<b>Classical Precursor</b>
<b>1</b>	Topographical →	Dicent →	<i>ekphrasis</i>
<b>2</b>	Diagrammatical →	Rheme →	<i>metalepsis</i>
<b>3</b>	Metaphorical →	Argument →	<i>epanalepsis</i>

Like other theorists therefore, when the term *mise en abyme* is raised, it is often, as I see it, a misleading designation for a group of effects more accurately characterised by means of terms drawn from rhetoric—*ekphrasis*, *metalepsis* and *epanalepsis*. Bal's Peircian reading of

<sup>1</sup> White offers a range of criteria for his *mise en abyme*. He offers five functions of the *mise en abyme* to qualify the ways it can resemble: 'didactic, prophetic, and cognitive, to mystifying and magical. In other words, while status and context may be relatively simple to define, the parameters of the relationship of similarity and its specific function can diverge substantially from instance to instance'. (2001: 49) As suggested, White's model has greater applicability to visual instances of regress since the examples selected favour such media.

Dällenbach's *mise en abyme* inadvertently draws our attention to these already-established tropes. The '*mise en abyme*' is thus a misnomer: a term for principles articulated by classical rhetoric.

#### 4. Werner Wolf

The final prominent developer of the *mise en abyme* definition and function includes Werner Wolf. (2007, 2010) Bal, like Wolf, seems to agree on the 'relevance of narratology' to non-literary media, like the 'increasingly important field' of film, for example. (Bal, 2009: xvii) Wolf thus agrees with Bal in 'broadening narratology's focus...towards the non-verbal media'. Semiotics is the best way towards a 'neo-classical' rebirth of an alternative approach for the *mise en abyme*. (2010: 59) The semiotic *mise en abyme* revises some of the older non-French definitions. In Germany, a definition of the *mise en abyme* was first proposed in 1955 by Gero von Wilpert who said '[t]he *mise en abyme* is a specific repetition method on the narrative level, respectively, at the level of its own discourse'. But Werner Wolf sensing a triadic form, states in 1993 that:

'[t]he *mise en abyme* is the reflection of a macro-structure of a literary text in a micro-structure within the same text. The *mise en abyme* can be mirrored elements of a fictional story, elements of narration, namely elements of mediation and the narrative situation itself, or [it can even be] poetic elements (general discourse about the narrative situation beyond [the latter two traits])' (Wolf, 1993)

Immediately, Wolf recognises that the *mise en abyme* relies on a range of mediated, perhaps interpreted views between the 'mirrored elements', perhaps as some mediated type of Peircian icon. Dällenbach's model, as based on the Saussurean sign, asserted that the *mise en abyme* could be one of three 'duplications'. (ibid: 35) Wolf's idea does not discount this possibility of mirroring metaphors. Instead, Wolf suggests that Peircian iconicity can address some of the insoluble problems raised in the commentary about the *mise en abyme*. To a greater extent, Wolf's work broadens the appeal of the *mise en abyme* regardless of the arts discipline whilst his inquiries, gesturing towards Alternate Reality Games (ARGs), outline ideas like 'intermediality, meta-reference' to account for contemporary fusions of fictional narratives and everyday life. Moreover,

Wolf prolongs a vexing conundrum about the conventions of the French idea which Ron called the problem of ‘orientation’.<sup>1</sup> Beginning with his work in the 1990s, Wolf’s claim that frames are ‘basic orientation aids’ to develop an advanced theory for the *mise en abyme*. (1999a: 5) His work about the *mise en abyme* is concerned with how self-repetition manifests in aesthetics.

**Self-reference.** Due to the multi-disciplinary use of the *mise en abyme* in the arts, Wolf has situated ‘self-reference’ as a staple of the *mise en abyme*. The broader use of self-reference in any art form is reflexivity. This concern with reflexivity is given a portmanteau term, a stand-in name: ‘meta-reference’. However, contends Wolf, ‘[m]etareference as opposed to self-reference’ are different concepts. (ibid: 2001) Wolf sees these ‘different concepts’ as based in sign-studies. The two



concepts can be iconic *or* symbolic. The difference between an icon and a symbol in metareference depends upon the interpretant of the sign, or:

‘the quality of signs and sign systems that point to themselves’. (2007: 304). This is where Wolf asserts that signs are not normally reflexive: he says the ‘normal quality of signs’ is to point to a ‘reality outside’ itself, rather than ‘to themselves’. (ibid) The tendency for an art form to refer to itself, is explored within the examples of literature and music: ‘repetition or variation of a theme within a fugue or sonata can be regarded as an instance of self-reference’. (ibid: 303) [M]ere self-referential ‘pointing at’ includes devices that *foreground* the sign (sequence)’. (ibid: 305) For

<sup>1</sup> In Ron’s cavilling paper (1988), following on from the ‘what reflects what’ in a *mise en abyme*, the *mise en abyme* is ‘a certain part reflecting the whole, and not vice versa’ but ‘the relation [between representational objects] is in principle reversible’. (ibid: 429) There is a ‘hierarchy of instances’ in any work, Ron maintains but Ron finally concludes that the *mise en abyme* is a small-part ‘speaking to the reader, as it were, from lower down the diegetic scale’. (ibid: 430). Ron does recognise that it is problematic as to whether the small part informs the larger work or the larger work informs the small, self-contained, component. Ron’s firm view was that a presumably smaller ‘segment which resembles the work where it occurs, is said to be placed *en abyme*’. (ibid: 436) Thus Ron is imagining an alternative to his own starting point when he says the idea is ‘in principle reversible’. Ron’s position of the small part-to-large-part is, in short, his formulation of his *mise en abyme* and its conundrum-like starting point. To explain this problem Ron argues that there are higher and lower phenomenal planes of reference to a *mise en abyme* narrative. Ultimately, the problem of orientation for Ron is to do with how ‘*mise en abyme* consists of heightening the significance of something at a lower level’, especially for the reader’s sense. (ibid: 430)

example, such a sequence is when there is ‘a continuum with many gradations in between two poles’ (ibid: 304). At one end is the symbol. At the other end is the icon. For Wolf’s semiotics, self-reference can shift along a scale of refracted variables. In Figure 3.13, there is a series of changing grades of focus. The focus, based on the foregrounded self-evident image (A) and can be expressed as gradations along a line. If A is the most factual root of the other grades, then it is an index. Therefore, the index type of self-reference as Wolf says ‘can occur in basically two variants’. (ibid: 305). These two variants can shift to the iconic type, which Bal outlined. But, for Wolf, there is also the other polarity, or the symbolic type, of self-reference.

**Symbolic References.** This type is when the ‘sign (system) merely *points at* itself or to similar (or identical) elements within the same system’. (ibid: 305) Wolf identifies this shadowy marker of reference for ‘all variants of self-reference that do not consist of, or imply self-referential statement’ (ibid) The example Wolf gives is when ‘another medium...merely identified or mentioned in the text [and] as part of the fictional world’ relates that fiction. (ibid) ‘The cameras in every corner’, in Mark Danielewski’s *House of Leaves* (2000: 10) that relate the house narrative in which they are placed, is such an example of self-reference. Such camcorder contents are added as a photograph page (ibid: 572). This type of sign reflexivity relies both on the laws of literature, photography and electronic media. It is highly conventional, not the least because it draws on the reconfiguring effects of technology and the viewer-reader interpretant who draws on learned notions of using language and images, but language and pictures as it relates TV recordings. In a Peircean sense, this is to do with symbolic relations.

**Iconic references.** Broadly, this is self-reference ‘for instance recurrences and... the *mise en abyme* of storytelling in stories within stories’. (ibid) In previous research, Wolf called this type of semiotic self-reference ‘metaphorical iconicity’. (2001: 57) It seems a replication of Mieke Bal’s notion of the symbol-icon. However, this metaphorical self-referencing is not merely iterative,



meaninglessly repetitive. But evoking Saussure, Wolf declares it ‘not only occurs as a similarity between signifier and signified...but also as a similarity between signifiers [form between form] and signifieds [meaning between meaning].’ (2007: 319) Apart from the mixing of Peirce and Saussure, it seems that Wolf’s ideas conflict with those of Mieke Bal. Iconic reference forms the second variant of meta-reference phenomena. Yet, the iconic seems so alike to the idea of symbolic reference.<sup>1</sup>

**The *mise en cadre*.** ‘A neglected counterpart to *mise en abyme*’ is Wolf’s main contribution to recent scholarship. In his study, he takes his ‘departure from the well-known concept of *mise en abyme* as investigated by Dällenbach (1989) and Hutcheon (1984) and others’. (2010: 59) The long-standing problem raised



by Ron prompts Wolf to propose a term for the *opposite* of the *mise en abyme*. The ‘neglected phenomenon’ of the ‘reciprocal’, reversed orientation of the *mise en abyme* is, for Wolf, the *mise en cadre*. In 1994, Guy Larroux spoke of the concept ‘of adding a



framing text to another, more important text’. (1994: 64-5) Larroux did not use it as a counterpart to the obviously related phenomenon of the *mise en abyme*. The word ‘cadre’ means nucleus or core. Thus does Wolf see his *mise en abyme*—not as a frame-tale—a related term, but as a different concept. The *mise en cadre* obeys the same hierarchical levels of a narrative as a *mise en abyme* but with a difference in ‘phenomenal’ or as Wolf says ‘operative direction’.<sup>2</sup> The similarity can be

<sup>1</sup> Wolf defines metareference, through both a semiotic and semiological discourse, in ‘three distinctive traits’: 1) ‘the existence of an *intrasystemic reference* (self-reference) 2) the *semantic quality* of intrasystemic reference; in other words: the fact that it consists of, or implies, a *self-referential statement* and is thus *self-reflexive*; 3) a kind of *medium awareness* on the part of both producer and recipient which is implied or explicitly thematised in self-reflection and, thus, gives it a metadimension (this also implies the existence of a *logical difference between the object level and the level of the metastatement*)’. (ibid: 307) In Karin Kukkonen’s and Sonja Klimek’s essay (2011) in *Metalepsis in Popular Culture*, a broader typology of Wolf’s meta-reference is presented. Thanks to ‘the new term meta-reference... we can at last get rid of the clumsy term *mise en abyme*’. Also, according to both researchers, the *mise en abyme* ‘can easily be transferred into the more international terminology of *metareference*’. (2011: 256-7) The *mise en abyme* is for their argument a ‘gradated metareference’. (ibid) The challenge however, is that if we are to follow Kukkonen’s and Klimek’s position and ‘get rid of the clumsy term *mise en abyme*’, then the biggest contribution towards meta-reference in narrative-study, Werner Wolf’s, other terms (reliant on the *mise en abyme*) will also need to be decommissioned discarded down the memory-hole of critical history.

<sup>2</sup> Moshe Ron must be credited here with adumbrating the idea of operative directions as interpreted for compositions of what we universally designate as the *mise en abyme*. Ron anticipated Wolf’s ideas when he asserts that the *mise en abyme* dis-integrates, breaks up, narrative instances: ‘the orientation of *mise en abyme* is centrifugal’. (ibid: 429) Put simpler, some phenomenal force, un-shown principle, is at play here: the thrust of the *mise en abyme* is directed away from the centre of the story: ‘In *mise en abyme*, the reflecting part must be located at the same or at a lower diegetic [narrative] level as the whole it reflects. Further, if it is located at the same diegetic level as the whole it reflects, it cannot take the form of

illustrated as either a small part that informs the larger work. (Figure 3.14) Or, a larger or greater part can expressively illuminate its verisimilar small part. (Figure 3.15) The two types rehearse the narrative alignment issue: what all critics agree on as the part-to-whole orientation of the *mise en abyme*. Put simply, the difference, whether part-to-whole or whole-to-part is twofold: the dynamic is about either conceiving a frame around a tale, letting this large work inform the small work—or—reading a small tale that is informed, whether semantically or formally, by the larger work around it. The reader will anticipate the ‘cognitive sense’ of the *mise en abyme* when the orientation runs from big to small, greater to lesser. (Figure 3.14) The *mise en cadre* is the converse because a large, expansive, unity holds a compositional prominence over the smaller instance of itself. (Figure 3.15) It is ‘defined as a ‘discrete phenomenon on an upper, framing level’. (ibid: 69) In a similar way to Moshe Ron’s problem of totality<sup>1</sup>, Wolf raises the problem of ‘discernibility’ from ‘liminal to clear cases’ of this reverse handling. Wolf offers the *mise en cadre* as the reverse possibility, the undoing of the *mise en abyme*: as ‘a scale allowing for many degrees in between two poles’. (2010: 67) Wolf describes the *mise en cadre* as follows:

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metalinguistic commentary [from the reader or character]. In other words, the orientation of *mise en abyme* is *centrifugal* in relation to the hierarchy of instances of narration’. (1988: 429 *my italics*) But a seriously glaring problem for Ron however is how he asserts the *mise en abyme* is a case of synecdoche. From the Greek, synecdoche means ‘to take up together’ and not scatter asunder. It is a way of setting a related whole to its component parts—synecdoche directs inwards, towards a particular, rather than towards an outward, ontological set of meanings. If the *mise en abyme* is such a synecdoche, as Ron asserts, then it would undermine his argument that the *mise en abyme* is ‘centrifugal’, namely that the *mise en abyme* directs its semantic relations to the larger work in which it is contained. To avoid this potential contradiction, I suggest, if we are to associate the *mise en abyme* with the grand tropes, we should associate it rather with metonym which has associations of name changing, rather than gathering up, as synecdoche does.

<sup>1</sup> The totality problem as formulated by Moshe Ron in 1988 extends what he calls the distribution of the parts of text in relation to the textual whole. Ron revisits his very first problem here regarding totality in determining a *mise en abyme*: ‘[f]or *mise en abyme* of story, a reader can only determine that he has read once he has had access to the entire text’. (ibid: 433) His problem of ‘distribution’ is therefore a rehearsal of his problem of ‘totality’ which poses a long question and evades any answer: ‘The requirement that what is reflected in *mise en abyme* should in some sense be “the work as a whole” is surely essential to a definition of this figure. Yet what could this “whole” be and what must it be to be reflected by something not only considerably *smaller* than itself but also a *part* of itself?’ (ibid: 422) Yet, Ron adds that in regard to the foundational discussion of Dällenbach, ‘the most general observation is that, as with regard to the conventional formal hierarchies of relative size and diegetic level, *mise en abyme* simply will not keep its place’. (ibid: 432) Ron, via Dällenbach, unwittingly echoes Jean Ricardou’s double type, in which unity and fragmentation are both said to be traits of a work. Ron’s sketch is however different to that of Dällenbach’s idea about the ‘retrospective view’ which can be seen ‘en bloc’. This matter of the retrospective view is hardly uncommon in literature. Indeed, one might say that the retrospective view is one of a literary work’s greatest facets. It, itself, may tell us something about the nature of judgment and thoughtfulness both in literature and in life. Time, and the deferred judgement, is clearly important when we come to count something as valuable. As opposed to immediately consumable, a matured retrospective view can help us to see better contexts. Since the *nouveau roman* was about resisting the ‘readable’ (or accessible, easy) text, and replacing the reading with the ‘writable’ texts (Barthes, Introduction, *S/Z*) which challenge easy consumption, this point of Ron’s is different to Dällenbach’s view about the general economy of a narrative, influenced by French literary thought. Ron’s analysis, here, claims ‘a rational empirical conception of time and knowledge’ without which ‘*mise en abyme* becomes a banal textual device’. (ibid: 434) Rather than begin with a synchronic reading, as Dällenbach did, Ron encourages a very different starting point to the French school. Ron’s, quasi-cosmogenic, belief is that the origin of the event must always be held in view. Without an evaluation of the event based on the origin and how this origin has transpired, Ron concludes. The semiological tendency towards synchrony can mislead our understanding of the *mise en abyme* asserts Ron, who instead proposes a narrow view

As opposed to *mise en abyme*, in which a discrete lower-level element or structure ‘mirrors’ and analogous element or structure on the framing higher level, *mise en cadre* consists of some discrete phenomenon on an upper, framing level that illustrates—frequently, but not necessarily, in an anticipatory way—some analogous phenomenon of the embedded level so that a discernible relationship of similarity is established between two [or more] levels. (2010: 65)

The examples, according to Wolf, in which this phenomenon occurs in literature, include the framing in Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and Mary Shelly’s *Frankenstein*. Wolf’s thesis is predicated on the principle of framing ‘story within story within story’. The distinction of



Figure 3.16

frame-tales and *mises en abyme* has been made by Marie-Laure Ryan. (2006: 204-30) Nevertheless, Wolf positions the third counterpart to the orientation of the *mise en abyme* as that of some frame-tale. His transmogrified *mise en abyme* seems like a perspective of what is commonly called the frame-tale. Indeed, this third type seems rather like the traditional frame-tale as opposed to the *mise en abyme* or its putative reciprocal, the *mise en cadre*.<sup>1</sup> The third middle phenomenon, between the *mise en abyme* and the *mise en cadre* is, for Wolf, the framing function of placing instances on ‘one and the same narrative level’. (Figure 3.16) He calls this third type the *mise en reflet*—not to be confused with yet another term ‘*mise en série*’ which augments the orientation conceptions of the *mise en abyme* versus its counterpart, the *mise en cadre* but within the conventions of the frame-tale.

If one can accept this proliferation of terms, then Wolf essentially proposes a four-fold model derived from the assumed alignment of the *mise en abyme*. Such a model places the *mise en abyme* within the ancient concern of parts-and-wholes, or mereology. However, the criteria for determining

<sup>1</sup> Wolf advances his argument that the many inferior and superior juxtaposed narrative levels beg the question of text elements on the same level and the compositional embedded variety of framing. Wolf, here, calls for a third poetic function where ‘more than two instances of similar entities on the same [narrative] level’ are contained within the same frame of the large work. Marie-Laure Ryan (2006: 204-30) has argued that the notion of framing in its most complex form, is the vertically composed *mise en abyme*. The problem of hierarchical orientation as raised by Moshe Ron and Brian McHale would vindicate the distinction of Ryan’s frame-tale and *mise en abyme*. The frame-tale is notionally composed on a purely horizontal narrative plane. Wolf coins the term *mise en série* or *mise en reflet* in order to describe what seems to merely be a frame-tale on ‘one and the same level’. (2010: 69) Wolf’s pragmatic middle is thus the *mise en reflet*: between the *mise en abyme* oriented from small fragment informed by large work and *mise en cadre* oriented in perspective of a large work informed by the small fragment within it. ‘*Mise en série* refers to cases where there are more than two instances of similar entities on the same level; for only two instances of similar entities on the same level, the term used was *mise en reflet*. (2001: 66). As in the case of the *mise en abyme* and the *mise en cadre*, the elements of such same-level parallels can be of variable quantity, but there is here, too a tendency to find cognitive framings predominantly in non-dominant, smaller or shorter elements (in the temporal media in preceding parts) which code cognitive frames that are relevant to a dominant (subsequent) element—and this for the same reason as mentioned above. Therefore, *mise en reflet* (with one non-dominant element carrying framings that shed light on a dominant one is typical here’. (ibid: 68)

resemblance—or verisimilitude—will never be finalised. Electing the starting instance and the copied case in either literature or the visual arts may rely on sequential logic but the shortcomings of this model are still marred by the unclear meaning of ‘the *mise en abyme*’. To reverse the perspective of the part-to-whole idea of the *mise en abyme* would also present challenges for reversing the many other argued definitions and meanings that are affixed to the *mise en abyme*. It would be deleterious to any study of the *mise en abyme* to ask what the ‘reversed counterpart’ to associations of the *mise en cadre* would be. Since cipher, parody, allegory and figure are all associated characterisations of the *mise en abyme*, then what are the counterparts, of such meanings, which follow the *mise en cadre*? Rather than call this orientation concern the *mise en cadre*, we might just leave it at thinking about a part-to-whole *mise en abyme* and simply invert any critical accounts under the rubric of *mise en abyme*. And rather than propose the names *mise en série* and *mise en reflet*, what is the matter with discussing such concerns under the established topics of frame tales which is a complex area of study in its own right? Now even though there remains an inflationary set of new names and prefix-enriched associations these terms do prove that the *mise en abyme* provokes much discussion, albeit debates which are casuistic in character. The idea of the *mise en cadre* along with Wolf’s other terms (intermedial metalepsis, transmediality, metareference) are the speculative extremes of a diffuse and enigmatic idea: the *mise en abyme*.

## 5. Summary Conclusion

Now, regarding any general meaning of the *mise en abyme*, over sixty years of scholarship and commentary exists. The term *mise en abyme* is still a makeshift one, an ‘accepted shorthand’ for a range of sometimes unrelated concerns and aesthetic equivocations. (Nelles, 2010: 312) Since Gide’s inaugural words, thinkers have aimed to develop and clarify the meaning of the *mise en abyme*; each contribution to its function, association—and ultimately its definition—make for varied and far-ranging compatibilities in meaning. And so, gathered together, we have a hoard of characterisations:

- cipher, structure (Magny, 1950)
- a compositional technique (LaFille, 1954)
- a theoretical construction (Morrissette, 1968)
- a metaphor of narration (Ricardou, 1971)
- an emblematic metaphor (Dällenbach, 1977)
- a semiological sign (Dällenbach, 1980)
- a figure or resemblance (Ron, 1987: 436)
- an embedded phenomenon (Füredy, 1989: 745)
- an allegory and parody (Hutcheon, 1984: 53-4)
- a representation (McHale, 1987: 124)
- a semiotic icon (Bal, 1978, 2009)
- an meta-referential trope (Wolf, 2010: 65)

Magny took Gide's idea about heraldic shields to refer to mirroring and reflection, and despite LaFille's, Morrissette's and Ricardou's views, Dällenbach sidesteps Magny's other metaphors to favour her brief comparison to mirrors. Ron and Füredy do question the validity of French scholarship as do Hutcheon and McHale, who all propose diverging alternatives, perhaps in order to give the *mise en abyme* a delimited meaning. Yet in contrast to these disparate interpretations, Bal's reconfiguration of Dällenbach's pioneering work promises greater clarity. Bal's three-fold model confirms the timeless tropes *ekphrasis*, *metalepsis* and *epanalepsis* as the delimited meaning of the *mise en abyme*. It would be less burdensome, therefore, if the outcomes from each close reading of a *mise en abyme* text, were evaluated individually *and then* generalised. If not, besides the imprecise application of this vague and clumsy term, the '*mise en abyme*' carries an ultimately meaningless meaning: a puzzle which remains its undoing as a trope in literary theory. The presuppositions of the mirror metaphor and its cascading form of geometric kaleidoscopes notwithstanding, its putative sequencing towards an end-point is undeniable for visual images, but for language-based phenomena, without the filter of second-order theories and belief systems, this idea is inappropriate and misconceived.

Whenever the critical literature about the *mise en abyme* is reviewed, whenever the designated texts, said to contain the device, are sincerely analysed, Gide's idea as something cryptic

or subversive present readers with a choice: to either accept or reject the reality of the *mise en abyme*. Yet, either position raises challenges:

1. **If we accept the reality of the *mise en abyme***, then a challenge is to go all the way and investigate the connotations in the name 'en abyme'. Does it perhaps mean that the term is associated with baselessness, nothingness, abysses: an active belief in the essence of absence? Does the term, implying radical absence, support sceptical realism? (see Nihilism in Appendix C) If so, what is the best critical discourse to apprehend these looming concerns? Moreover, if we accept the reality of the *mise en abyme* in literature, its inconsistent and contradictory definitions aside, even the authoritative definitions remain prohibitively vague and tantamount to the whim of belief. What is left then if the *mise en abyme* is legitimate? If we do uphold the reality of the *mise en abyme*, there remains in sum, an acceptance of a catchphrase under many and varied inflationary associations.
2. **If we reject the reality of the *mise en abyme***, as the emperor's new trope, then a greater challenge is to reconcile the beliefs of critics and commentators who somehow denote, and still conceive this principle in literature. If we take this view, then the greatest challenge is thus to present a positive model with universal applicability for a misnomer once called the '*mise en abyme*'. The many idiosyncratic formulations, which confirm latent tropes from antiquity like *ekphrasis*, *metalepsis* and *epanalepsis*, remain as reasonable starting points to resolve this second identity problem. Without resolution, the *mise en abyme* is nothing but a bogus device and its subsequent developments remain at the mercy of negative arguments.

Pragmatically, and without the fortification of second-order theories, the *mise en abyme* has 1) many meanings and is 2) meaningless. Consequently, either acceptance or rejection are like critical paths: one where the chaotic inconsistency and complex congestion lead towards a gaping axiological abyss of fusion, confusion and meaninglessness. The other path of inquiry, where the worthlessness is at least recognised and admitted, lead towards an abyss no less enticing. The impression of absence, the impression that the *mise en abyme* is a contingent idea at the mercy of as yet unrealised developments, does not redeem the trope as a worthwhile, but patchy, construction in particular texts. And hopeful anticipations for some revelation, legitimated by cherished beliefs, can hardly aid the *mise en abyme* as something real when it has merely proven to be nothing but 'an indefinable monster' in the last analysis. (Dällenbach, 1977: 1) If, for example, the fifteen possible

characterisations, as listed above, are combined and contrasted, there exists over one billion possible meanings for the *mise en abyme*.<sup>1</sup>

The nature of this beast in aesthetics and metaphysics is how protean it is and what its overlooked reality might be. Shadowy, and occluded by the chaos of its supporting theories, the *mise en abyme* remains arcane and obscure, esoteric and elusive. Whether we accept or reject the *mise en abyme*, its chimeric parts make it the impressive material of abstraction. All *mise en abyme* research draws good minds into speculation, with neither a hint of success nor a warning of defeat: it is to gaze—long and hard—into the abyss. When meaning becomes untenable, the *mise en abyme* remains the accepted shorthand of whatever is truly left.

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<sup>1</sup> These fifteen prominent characterisations are a conservative sample of many configurations and modified definitions in the growing body of critical commentary about what is called the *mise en abyme*. Taken together, the above sample can render over one trillion possible combinations (US) or over one billion permutations (UK) or  $1.3 \times 10^{12}$ . Even if a generous half of these characterisations are compatible with each other, the sample still makes for an ungainly mass of outcomes. [ $n!$  (factorial) 15 then  $n = 1, 307, 674, 368, 000$ ; in prime numbers  $n = 2^{11} \times 3^6 \times 5^3 \times 7^2 \times 11 \times 13$ ]



## *Hamlet*

This chapter is about Gide's idea in its relation to *Hamlet* (c.1600). Having explored the theory of the *mise en abyme*, this chapter, and subsequent chapters, will examine some actual examples, starting with *Hamlet* which was instanced by Gide himself. *Hamlet* contains a small 'play scene' inside itself. This play-within-the-play is staged *after* Prince Hamlet meets The Ghost of his murdered father. Prince Hamlet's play represents before all the court in Denmark what The Ghost, seen in his 'mind's eye', tells Hamlet about his Uncle and Mother. Hamlet playfully calls his drama 'The Mousetrap' (3, 2: 244). Its name is significant because it is a play about Hamlet's wish to play with his Uncle and Mother, much like a cat plays with mice. By making a drama of his father's murder, Hamlet thinks that his play will mainly expose his Uncle Claudius' 'occulted guilt' as presumed murderer (3, 2: 78). The little 'image' play *inside* the big play, hopes to capture, like a timid mouse, the moral conscience of his Uncle Claudius. 'The Mousetrap' is so named because it captures in a miniature form, some of the traits of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: some dramatic events and some character traits of Gertrude and Claudius are captured in the small act. Though the link is not wholly clear, there is a likeness between *Hamlet* and 'The Mousetrap'. The likeness is not altogether exact. Perhaps Gide cited *Hamlet* as a work with the incipient makings of a layered *en abyme* analogue because *Hamlet* is a play superimposed on another play. *Hamlet* and 'The Mousetrap' are doubles, 'duplications' (McHale, 1987: 124). Gide translated *Hamlet* into French in 1929. For Gide, the play was important: it was for him, 'a sacred text'; he was intimately familiar with its form. (1922, [1978]: 351) But *Hamlet's* overall structure is elusive because its form is finitely layered, as we shall see. The play also has complex characters scrutinising each other through detailed dialogue. In what follows, I will consider to what extent 'The Mousetrap' and its



actors (The Players) warrant Gide's allusion to *Hamlet* as *the* example of his idea. I will therefore focus on this small playlet, 'The Mousetrap'. This chapter will also offer some positive links between 'The Mousetrap' playlet and *Hamlet* as a part-to-whole likeness.

A helpful survey is difficult, as *Hamlet* 'has probably occasioned more critical writing than any other work of art' (Weitz, 1965: viii). For what it is worth, any brief survey of critical commentary on *Hamlet* and its small internal play should be a survey that begins with John Dryden's *Troilus and Cressida Preface* (1679). The small play is not mentioned but Dryden does notice Shakespeare's inclination to use the part-to-whole substitution device called '*catechresis*'. This trope certainly represents the distilled 'passions' in the 'figurative' way Dryden describes when he references *Hamlet*: 'his [Shakespeare's] fancy often transported him beyond the bounds of judgment, either in coining of new words and phrases, or racking words which were in use, into the violence of a *catathresis*'. (1679 [1808]: 261) Of concern however to the argument of this survey is my pointing out any potential adumbrations of the so-called *mise en abyme* before André Gide's 1893 diary entry on *Hamlet*. A prominent but slight remark on 'The Mousetrap' is by Samuel Johnson (1765) in devastatingly brief *Notes on Hamlet* contained in his *Preface to Shakespeare*. Without considering the weight of Shakespeare's motivations, Johnson seems to suggest that 'The Mousetrap' is divisive on Hamlet's part and echoes Johnson's view that it is all 'rather an expedient of necessity, than a stroke of art' (ibid, 1916 [1765]: 140). Thus does Johnson evaluate 'The Mousetrap' as a subversive scheme and tactic to outmanoeuvre the place of his Uncle's power: 'Hamlet is, through the whole play, rather an instrument than an agent. After he has, by the stratagem of the play, convicted the King, he makes no attempt to punish him, and his death is at last affected by an incident which Hamlet has no part in producing'. (ibid) William Hazlitt (1818) touched on the motivation of Hamlet's 'The Mousetrap': as a case of deferring direct engagement with his suffering and reducing the pain to artifice. Hazlitt confirms therefore that 'The Mousetrap' is Hamlet's 'best resource to shove off, to a second remove, the evils of life by a mock

representation of them'. (1964, [1818]: 196) Much later, in Harley Granville-Barker's *Preface to Hamlet* in 1946 [1930], there is much original reflection where he points out that 'The Mousetrap' conjures an 'atmosphere of timelessness' where Hamlet 'sits listening to the Players—and we, as we listen, watch him—'. (ibid: 215) Granville-Barker's view subtly foreshadows a growing concern with the formal components of the play-within-the-play. Following on from the initiation of Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935), who focuses on the 'ulcer' symbol and decadence of the work (ibid: 316), Wolfgang Clemen (1951) elaborates on how repetitive imagery of corruption and poisoning 'reappears as a leitmotif' especially in the small 'Dumb Show' which precedes 'The Mousetrap'. In the brilliant formalist critique of *Hamlet*, Maynard Mack (1952) highlights the three important 'image patterns' in the work, these are 'show', 'act' and 'play'. (ibid: 224) There is the suggestion here that 'The Mousetrap' 'exhibits in a single focus much of the diverse material in his [Shakespeare's] play' and where the actions of 'The Mousetrap' 'mirroring the episode of the dumb show' form a root symbol of *Hamlet* or arguably an example of 'the play's radical metaphor'. (ibid: 245)

Late-modern commentary on the-play-in-the-play like Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy* (1985) sought on the other hand, to criticise realist interpretations, especially the motif of verisimilar parts in Hamlet and his play. Belsey provides an alternative for 'the mirror up to nature' idea in which Hamlet makes drama an ideal of his everyday world. Belsey's argument is captured as follows:

The claim that a literary form reflects the world is simply tautological. If by 'the world' we understand the world we experience, the world differentiated by language, then the claim that realism reflects the world means that realism reflects the world in language. This is a tautology. If discourses articulate concepts through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other rather than to entities in the world, and if literature is a signifying practice, all it can reflect is the order inscribed in particular discourses, not the nature of the world. (Belsey, 1980: 46)

In what follows, I will depart from Belsey's view because I believe Hamlet's world, essentially, poses challenges to the anti-realist idea above. An instance is when Hamlet's torpor changes to

action at the prospect of his play. The reality of Hamlet's worldly moods cannot be dismissed by semantic arguments. His small play might capture the contradictions of his world but his work is also an undeniably unified dramatic creation because it draws upon universal ideas like love—hate, action—inaction, or being—becoming. The Player King's and Player Queen's feelings, for example, do not contradict the highly probable feelings of Gertrude and her dead husband, The Ghost. Rather, The Players enact Hamlet's view of *his* reality. In this regard, Martin Coyle's *Hamlet: New Casebooks* (1992), Keith Parsons' and Pamela Mason's very accessible *Shakespeare in Performance* (1997) give some insights about the many interpretations of the role of Hamlet whilst also alluding to the timeless realism of Hamlet's personality.

But, in summary, contemporary criticism suggests a return to *Hamlet's* form. Paul Prescott and Alan Sinfield point out the innovative structural position of 'The Mousetrap' where unlike 'Shakespeare's earlier comedies' it gives 'a sign of the importance of acting in *Hamlet* that *The Mousetrap* stands in the centre of the piece'. (2005: lxxv) Yet the 'importance' begs questions. Characteristic of *mise en abyme* scholarship, accounts tend to raise more questions than offer any answers, for example there are eleven long questions posed by John Dover Wilson on his study of 'The Mousetrap'. Wilson set a benchmark for scholarship on this miniature play, pointing out, like Prescott and Sinfield do, the 'crucial character and central position' of 'The Mousetrap'. (ibid: 140) Dover Wilson asks:

How is it that the players bring with them to Elsinore a drama which reproduces in minute detail all the circumstances of the King's crime? What is the dramatic purpose of the long conversation between Hamlet and the First Player immediately before the play begins? Why is the play preceded by a dumb-show? Why does not Claudius show any signs of discomfiture at this dumb-show, which is a more complete representation of the circumstances of the murder than the play which follows it? What is Hamlet's object in making the murderer the nephew and not the brother of the king? Why should the courtiers who know nothing of the real poisoning, assume later that Hamlet has behaved outrageously to his uncle and even threatened him with death? (Dover, 1962: 139)

It is not so much a challenge to our reason *why* Hamlet really creates his play—it may be a delaying tactic, confirming his Uncle's guilt, to goad his aims into dramatic action or, perhaps even, an act of

manic depression. It is most difficult—*why* Gide cited *Hamlet* as an ‘altogether inexact’ example of a measured composition of superimposed layers ‘*en abyme*’. For this chapter, the aim and purpose of the play will be considered indirectly. Instead, we will focus on the way the small play repeats the subject matter of *Hamlet* and how this subject matter (themes, tropes) is expressed by the actors in ‘The Mousetrap’. The net effect of Hamlet’s aims, intentions, motives, objectives and purposes are to create an exchange between the themes of his life and his play. The outcome is one of pure unreality for the spectator of his play:

Why does it disquiet us to know that...Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the answer: those investigations suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious. (Borges, 1952 in Klimek, 2011: 190)

Hamlet’s broad appeal, therefore, can make us uneasy about the place of character and the subject of *Hamlet*. When we see Hamlet’s *Hamlet*, then our eyes behold an illusion: the form is not what it seems, at first. With a similar idea, Sean McEvoy’s (2005) contribution on the form of ‘The Mousetrap’ revisits the contrast between the real and unreal world, between playgoer and actor. For McEvoy, ‘The Mousetrap’ stands out in an important place between court scenes (Act 3, 1 and Act 3, 4). ‘The Mousetrap’ gives symmetry to the shape of *Hamlet*:

Like all symmetries, the ones I have pointed to suggest, not linearity, but circularity: a cyclical and recursive movement wholly at odds with the progressive, incremental ordering that, our society, dominated perhaps by a pervasive metaphor of the production line, tends to think of as appropriate to art as to everything else. (2005: 58) [...] *The Mousetrap* marks *Hamlet*’s most recursive moment: the point at which time runs most obviously backwards, and where the play does not just glance over its shoulder, so much as turn fully round to look squarely at the most prominent action replay of them all. More than a play-with-a-play, *The Mousetrap* offers a replay of a replay: The Ghost’s revisionary account of the murder, fitted out with actions. Equally, in so far as the design of *The Mousetrap* aims decisively to generate events that will forward the action of *Hamlet*, it also firmly looks towards the future. (ibid: 61)

In general terms, Hamlet’s deeds can be psycho-pathologised. To avoid entangled reasoning, it seems that *Hamlet* requires a close attention to the artistry of the language, not the intentions of Shakespeare because ‘every fresh critic who sets out to define the intentions of the author of *Hamlet*

ends up in his own particular dead-end in queer street'. (Knights, 1960: 161) For Simon Critchley's recent study, paying close attention to Shakespeare's words, the play-in-*Hamlet* is the greatest of poetic images, 'the ultimate conceit'. (2013: 8) The most recent word on 'The Mousetrap' is that it implies a play of dead spirits, or a 'corpse drama':

Like 'The Mousetrap', then, [*Hamlet*] is a play within a play, the truth of which will be told by Horatio in a further play acted before Fortinbras. We might call it *Hamlet II*. The difference this time is that all the actors will be dead...*Hamlet II* will be a corpse drama. (2013: 226-7)

In extricating the vast amount of earnest and ironic commentary, we shall prioritise the form of 'The Mousetrap' in order to see how it aligns to Gide's principle. We shall also examine the likeness between *Hamlet* and 'The Mousetrap'. The main aim of what follows is indeed to account for the validity of 'recursive moment' pointed out by commentary such as the above. Recursion means calling back a previous instance of itself. We will look to see if there is any concrete evidence for the 'replay of a replay' in the play.

#### **4.1 Form in 'The Mousetrap'**

*Hamlet* has an unusual form. The characters are a good guide to the structure of the play. We (A) see *Hamlet* by Shakespeare (B) who has created Hamlet (C). Hamlet's playlet is acted by a Player Queen (D) and a Player King (E). All this drama is related by a phantom (F). In Figure 4.1, The Ghost (F) affects all the words that we, the spectators, eventually hear, at A. The play-in *Hamlet* is predicated on a vision and a sighting. The dialogue in Hamlet's play is so intriguing because they are the words of Hamlet's deceased father. The character outline is analogous to the following picture in which a loose hierarchy of character is discernible:

Figure 4.1



The play *Hamlet* contains a short account of events before *Hamlet* starts. Again, the play-in-*Hamlet* is called ‘The Mousetrap’. The subject matter of ‘The Mousetrap’ is faithful to what a ghost tells Hamlet from the first act. The characters (The Player King and Player Queen) enact, at their level of character, what the ghost said to Hamlet.<sup>1</sup> The apparition conveys subject matter, events of a murder and these events are acted out by the Player King and Player Queen. Before ‘The Mousetrap’, however, there is a mime preview of the ‘The Mousetrap’. This tableau ‘belike the show’ is called ‘The Dumb Show’. Dumb Shows, or silent mimes, were quite common in sixteenth century court drama to anticipate the events of the main show with a similar historical scene (Pearn, 1935). The older sense of ‘dumb’ was as wholly gestured but also, the dumbest spectator would have had some sense of what the later show would be about, if we take ‘dumb’ in the modern sense of the word.

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<sup>1</sup> Our late-modern reading of this form make many critics despair at its sheer complexity. The countless questions we can raise about the nature of play and audience are endless. An example of this overwhelming potential for infinite regression in questions about literary value and the *mise en abyme* is expressed by Dällenbach in his study *The Mirror in the Text*. In relation to what the ur-meaning is, epistemic access to the testimony of The Ghost is intractable. What Dällenbach says here is therefore relevant to *Hamlet* ‘The modern [*mise en abyme*] narrative...proves that the reflexion of a primordial reality was only, in the final analysis, an artifice of the narrative, designed to disguise its real status. For its part, the modern narrative reveals itself to be without any primary or ultimate guarantee and elects to confirm, as is appropriate, its own initiality. Thus it will be seen that it inevitably makes the origin of the text indeterminate, by only putting forward metaphors for it that are suspect or impossible: images of the centre as an absence, or a challenge to the idea that there is any centre, Gordion knots of tangled or incompatible relationships, an unstable mirror in which the narrative, constantly changing, can no longer *fix* itself’. (1977: 183) Dällenbach is here evoking the primordial traditional doctrine of eternal cycles in conceptions of time (temporality) rather than the monotheistic, cosmogenic linear dogma of time.

Nevertheless, the mime play is a condensed *résumé* of ‘The Mousetrap’ play to come. It reads as follows:

*The dumb show enters. Enter a KING and a QUEEN very lovingly, the QUEEN embracing him. She kneels and makes show of protestation unto him. He takes her up and declines his head upon her neck. He lays him down upon a bank of flowers. She, seeing him asleep, leaves him. Anon comes in a fellow, [suggesting King Claudius] takes off his crown, kisses it, and pours poison in the King's ears, and exits. The QUEEN returns, finds the KING dead, and makes passionate action. The poisoner, with some two or three mutes, [non-speaking actors] comes in again, seeming to lament with her. The dead body is carried away. The poisoner woos the QUEEN with gifts. She seems loath and unwilling a while, but in the end accepts his love. (3.2: 123-4)*

The ‘Dumb Show’ mimes the murder events before the start of *Hamlet*. Uncle Claudius does not react to this comparatively detailed Dumb Show. The audience is privy to this horror only through the Players and, what is more, at a remove from the main events of *Hamlet*. ‘The Dumb Show’ sums up the murder and is performed before ‘The Mousetrap’. Both ‘The Dumb Show’ and ‘The Mousetrap’ hold the abstracted, the condensed, events of *Hamlet* as told by The Ghost, as they happen before the start of *Hamlet*. In simple terms, the small play dilates on the events of ‘The Dumb Show’ and the ‘The Dumb Show’ dilates on events given by a ghost: the two forms are a partially-scaled refraction theretofore of *Hamlet*.<sup>1</sup>

There is a calling back, or recursive effect from one part to another and there is limited recursion but no infinite regress. In Act 3 Scene 2, we see, announced by Hamlet, his creative project. With its title, ‘The Mousetrap’ we witness a symmetry between court scenes of Act 3, 1 and Act 3, 4.

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<sup>1</sup> In an insightful foreshadowing of the rise of metafiction in the 1980s-90s, dramatic work that is played within a larger dramatic work goes by the name *metadrama* (Calderwood, [1969]; 1983). Today, metadrama is associated with framing and reflexive fictional devices (including metafiction); thus ‘the play within the play in *Hamlet*...do[es] not have a narrator figure, even though ‘The Mousetrap’ is supposedly written by Hamlet’ (Fludernick, 2008: 370). This metadrama serves as the *mise en abyme* and is a reflexive action or transposition. As Gide stressed, his idea is not really possible without the work’s characters. The transposition is a changing of orders between the whole narrative and its characters. The 1958 chapter ‘Shakespeare: The play as Mirror’ in Robert Nelson’s drama studies work *Play within a Play* concludes that ‘The Mousetrap’ is a faithful aesthetic double, a naturalist correspondence between the events of *Hamlet* and the learning curve of the character Hamlet: ‘Hamlet learns that all the world is *not* his stage, becoming not an avenging angel but a political assassin (the word need not be taken pejoratively, of course)...and seeks only to cure rotten Denmark. He succeeds in this lesser but important but important mission and so makes whole the reflection which the mirror of the play gives us: that of a fixed, stable social order in which what appears to be so is so’. (ibid: 29) So ‘The Mousetrap’ is an example of metadrama when it is performed and highlights the place Hamlet in relation to the subject matter of *Hamlet*. Nelson’s ontological scepticism eventually seeks solace in mirroring of the world; perhaps his position is merely ‘reflecting’ his inherited anti-realist, quasi-gnostic, world-fearing dispensation.

Both these latter scenes involve long discussions from Gertrude and Claudius about Hamlet. The playlet is thus an accentuated, playful *third* scene of *Hamlet*. ‘The Dumb Show’ and ‘The Mousetrap’ are placed between two court scenes when Gertrude, Claudius and Hamlet are all together. Shakespeare had a fondness for this effect and indeed uses similar, doubling to lesser degrees in *The Tempest*, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Winter’s Tale*. All these examples have a smaller passage that relate to its framed, larger work. But ‘The Mousetrap’ is not as incidental, as similar Shakespeare plays, because Hamlet announces his small play: ‘Be the players ready?’ he asks, just before his playlet. The court audience watches ‘The Mousetrap’ and we watch this audience as captured in the play called *Hamlet*.<sup>1</sup> We may wish to view the abstract of *Hamlet* in the following schema:

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<sup>1</sup> The aesthetic outcome of this arrangement is to disrupt the psychological participation of the characters. Herbert Sidney Lanfeld held that these ‘dramatic forces’ of composition cause the character to ‘cease to view the play aesthetically’. The effect is indebted to Ed Bullough’s formulation about a detached view of the object which is evaluated. The value can be both free and dependent of the object but the distance of the spectator is essential. Lanfeld discourses as follows ‘[a]n analogous situation [of psychical distance] actually occurs in the play *Hamlet*, in the scene where Hamlet and the King are spectators of a play within the play. When an impersonator of this very King murderously pours poison into the ear of the late King, who was Hamlet’s father, both Hamlet and the present King [Claudius] are too personally touched, their private thoughts and emotions are too deeply aroused and they cease to live strictly in the play...they cease to ‘be in the object’ they lose their ‘psychical distance’. (ibid, 1920: 59) To ‘hold the mirror up to nature’ then, seems more to do with a realist super-nature: ‘nature’ as the objective universe is sub-ordinated to the non-natural, subjective universe. Anti-realists are swift to entertain other-worldly utopias but profane the subjective universe. Psychical distance is the esoteric link between a universe of objective events and the subjective entities that register, as super-natural, this objective spectacle.



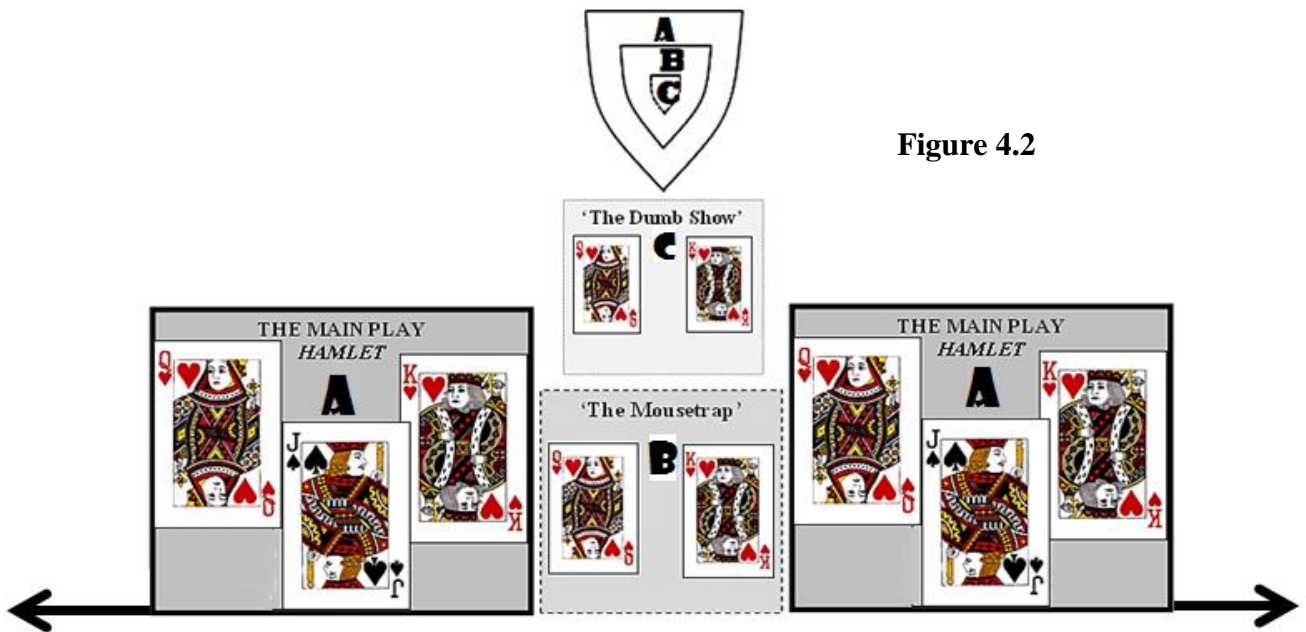
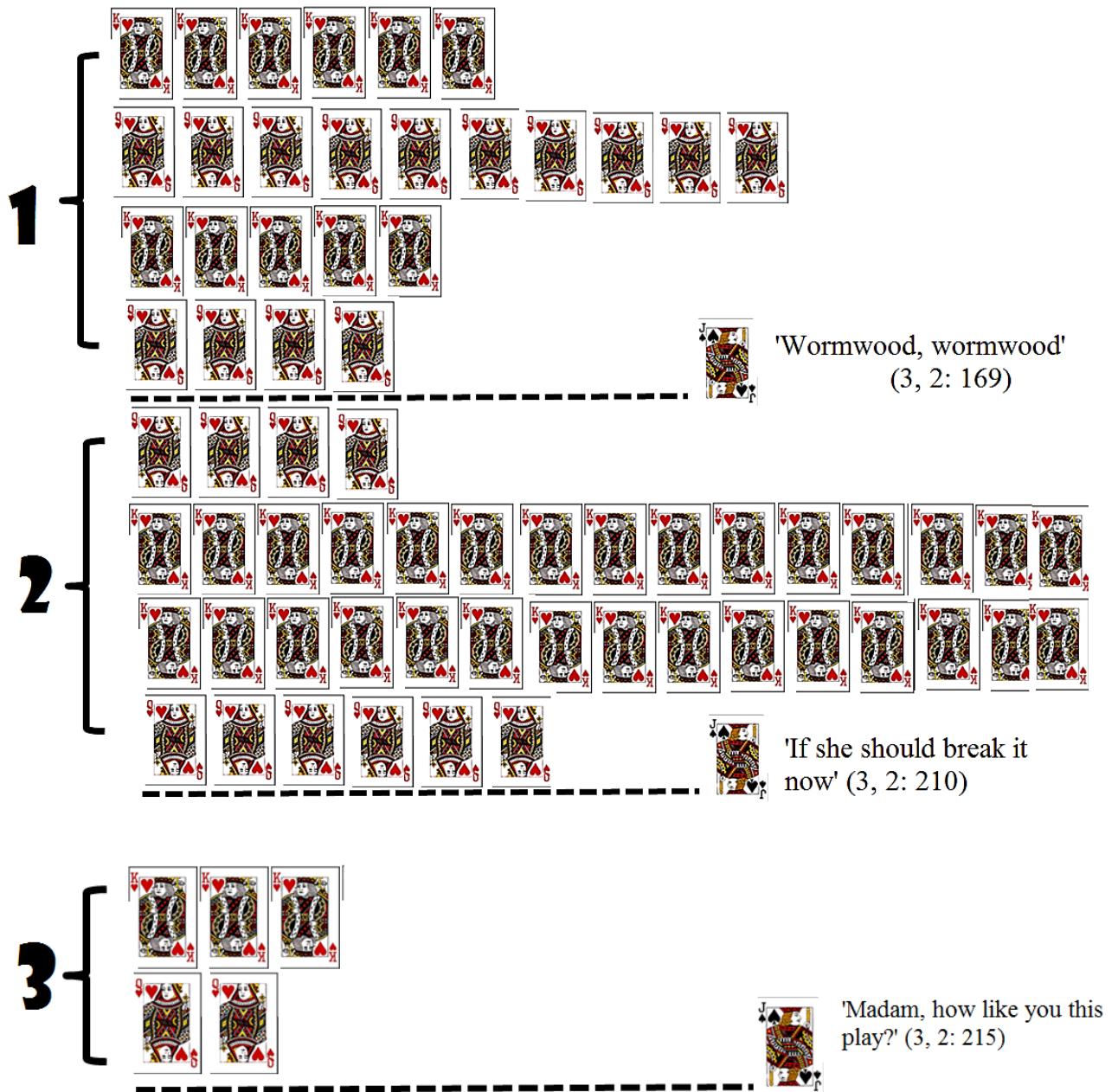


Figure 4.2

In this schema, (Figure 4.2) there is indeed a sense of recurrence: 'The Mousetrap' calls on the events of 'The Dumb Show'. Both these small forms call on events related by the Ghost in Act 1 Scene 5. The Ghost's words, on which the little performances are based, initiate the second part of *Hamlet* and through circumstance and character flaw, the tragedy reaches its end with staged death.

'The Mousetrap' has an interesting form. This little play is interrupted by Hamlet and it does seem to be a performance cut in pieces. After Hamlet shouts 'Wormwood' twice, there is a sense that the little play changes focus. The first part of 'The Mousetrap' involves much talk from The Player Queen. The second part focusses on the dying Player King. If we abstract the number of lines from either Player King or Player Queen, we see a definite split, a divide, marked by the intervening lines from Hamlet. The second break in the playlet is when Hamlet exclaims that the Player Queen 'break it now'. We can therefore see that, also like *Hamlet*, 'The Mousetrap' is a play divided into three parts:



**Figure 4.3**

Each playing card in Figure 4.3 represents one notional line from either the Player King or Player Queen. The Player King talks one and a half times more than the Player Queen who only has 24 lines. And the relationship of talking time between the Player Queen and Player King is paraphrased in the 2: 3 ratio in part 3 of 'The Mousetrap'. So, we can consider Hamlet's interruptions as a good marker to the form of his play in Act 3 Scene 2 of *Hamlet*. In the following, we will read each of the above three parts and consider to what extent they obey Gide's idea of transposition from the subject of *Hamlet* to the register of characters in the work.

## 4.2 Part One of ‘The Mousetrap’

For Gide’s idea, generally, he ‘liked to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work’ (ibid: 30). Hamlet’s playlet disobeys Gide’s idea because ‘The Mousetrap’ contains subject matter that is faithful to one character in particular—The Ghost. The very subject of the work, ‘The Mousetrap’ is oriented from a character, namely, The Ghost. Thus, the subject matter of the theme of the dumbshow and playlet, is not carried over *to* the level of character. Instead, some account is transposed *from* the level of the character (The Ghost) *to* the subject of the ‘The Mousetrap’. The Player King and Queen enact what the phantom tells Hamlet. These Player roles are part of the subject matter of Hamlet’s work. It would seem then that the orientation of Gide’s idea for what has become the *mise en abyme* is that, in *Hamlet* at any rate, we rather find transposed on the level of subject matter, the very ghostly imprint of the dead father character.

Yet, the tragedy of the murder, staged as a playlet, creates a mixed outcome. ‘The Mousetrap’ is an example of ambiguous subject matter because it is a playful enactment of a serious incident. The despair and the hope, to love, to hate, ‘to be or not to be’ are all captured at the level of The Player King and Player Queen. Mainly, the theme of inconstancy is carried over from *Hamlet* into ‘The Mousetrap’. The famous indecision or ‘antic disposition’ of Hamlet is also captured in ‘The Mousetrap’. (Dover, 1962: 88)<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the adverse circumstances and character shortcomings make for its tragedy. Both these extremes alternate in ‘The Mousetrap’

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<sup>1</sup> There is a great body of scholarship about the doubles and ambiguities of *Hamlet*. In a similar foreshadowing to trends in recent scholarship on *Hamlet* and ‘The Mousetrap’ we have semiotician Juri Lotman’s essay (1992: 111-113 cited in Emery, 2012). Lotman brushes with de-constructionist theory of dichotomies of inside and outside texts. Also there is the Jakobsonian models of poetics and their supposed ‘global science of verbal structure’ (1960: 35) which still influence patterns of interpretation of the *mise en abyme*. For Lotman, the *mise en abyme* is to do with ‘both the exterior boundaries dividing’ the text ‘from not-text and the interior boundaries dividing its differently coded sections’. (1992: 111) As Emery’s essay states in relation to this influential criticism ‘the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*, by becoming a constituent and discrete part of the text, also “transforms the whole text in which it is included, translating it to another level of organisation” (2012: 347) But is ‘organisation’ and ‘coded sections’ even possible with the complexities of the play? Indeed, Ron in his paper *Nine Problems of the mise en abyme* (1987) points out that ‘essential components are missing’ in this miniature play in *Hamlet* and that: ‘Exhaustive fullness of detail is neither possible nor necessarily desirable in any kind of representation, in the case of the figure we are discussing [here in *Hamlet*], it [(its fullness)] is ruled out not only empirically (by the inability to specify *all* possible details) but also logically (by the part-to-whole relation)’. (1987: 423) It would be difficult therefore to suggest an exact realistic resemblance: a position from which all specious arguments of the *mise en abyme* and its doubles stem. Narratologists from the Dutch School like Bal (2009) have been most clear in this way. They charge that the *mise en abyme*, as an indefinite movement towards any extreme, has its one part unrelated to (or indivisible by) the other part, an argument made with rigorous effect; thus the *mise en abyme* is only ‘a certain aspect’ of the whole and not equal to the whole itself (2009: 58).

through harmonious and discordant exchanges between The Player King and The Player Queen. What is clearer is that we, the audience, view a small, dramatically rendered model of the mind of its creator, Hamlet. The playlet is an instance of creative expression in which tragic emotions which prove too great for the artist, are beautifully captured in a perfect and appropriate form.

Hamlet's actors carry over much of what he says. Both Players have wills that pull in opposite directions much as Hamlet's will is in conflict. To add to the actor's talking at cross purposes, the Players report matters that are remote from their experience and, perhaps, remote from the experiences of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude who see their mimics. One trope captures all these effects concentrated in 'The Mousetrap'. That trope is *metalepsis* and it means to indicate something at a remove, to show an effect attributable to a remote cause. The effect also has a sense of regressive, deferred meanings. Marcus Quintillianus captured the idea well enough as follows:

There is but one of the *tropes* involving change of meaning which remains to be discussed, namely *metalepsis* or *transumption*, which provides a transition from one *trope* to another...The commonest example is the following: *cano* [spout] is a synonym for *canto* [sing] and *canto* for *dico* [say], therefore *cano* is a synonym for *dico*, the intermediate step being provided by *canto*. We need not waste any more time over it. I can see no use in it except, as I have already said, in comedy. (1920, Vol III: 37-39)

*Metalepsis* is commonly associated with the *mise en abyme*. Indeed, *metalepsis* is the oldest cognate of what is, today, designated the *mise en abyme* insofar as the French idea evokes slippage from 'one trope to another'. Quintillianus associated *metalepsis* with transumption, or exchanging, leasing out meaning from one part to another. 'The Mousetrap' calls back on the report of The Ghost. As mentioned, this playlet is placed between court scenes: it is a playful third act and it is an extreme transitional space in *Hamlet*. It is a temporary zone in which Hamlet asserts his autonomy, in it, he is a law unto himself. The carrying over of this little play is not a full account of what The Ghost said, however. This transient zone in *Hamlet*, with a staging that breaks up prematurely, melds some of what happened before and some of the portents of a tragic future. Hamlet's

marginalised feelings are acted by The Player King and The Player Queen, though these feelings seem excessive, they can only ever end in a tragic, but plangent, unity.

Indeed, the tension in *Hamlet* is captured, in miniature, in the words of The Player King and The Player Queen when they open their act. Both players represent a suspension of the titanic forces at work in *Hamlet* and in the myriad two-edged thoughts of Hamlet. Part One of 'The Mousetrap' opens between King and Queen:

PLAYER KING

Full thirty times hath Phoebus' cart gone round  
Neptune's salt wash and Tellus' orbèd ground  
And thirty dozen moons with borrowed sheen  
About the world have times twelve thirties been,  
Since love our hearts, and Hymen did our hands,  
Unite commutual in most sacred bands.

PLAYER QUEEN

So many journeys may the sun and moon  
Make us again count o'er ere love be done.  
But woe is me, you are so sick of late,  
So far from cheer and from your former state (3, 2:145-54)

Now, the opening is most puzzling. The use of roundabout expression (periphrasis) suggests that King and Queen are talking around the subject. So far are they talking away from premonitions of the murder, in fact, that both Players resort to symbols. Mention of sun and moon suggest some higher, removed associations of male and female antagonisms. The number thirty is also probably a reference to a cosmic cycle which Shakespeare and Elizabethans would have appreciated.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hamlet admonishes his companion that '[t]here are more things in heaven and earth Horatio/ Than are dreamt of in your philosophy'. (1, 5: 165-6) Shakespeare similarly speaks in his other works about the hermetic worldview 'operations of the orbs/ From whom we do exist and cease to be' (*King Lear*, 1, 1) *Hamlet* refers to the cessation of kingship as an implosion 'a massy wheel' that damns everything around it and previously associated to it. (3, 3: 15) Indeed, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is a product of his times and worldview. After the 'Dumb Show', 'The Mousetrap' starts. It begins with the lines most educated Elizabethan audiences would have understood. The opening lines 'full thirty' and 'thirty dozen' set the scene through an allusion to vast, cosmic cycles. A cycle follows the sections of each zodiac sign of thirty degrees and its multiples. The greatest of the cycles to sixteenth century eyes was that of the planet Saturn, the planet of fate. The mid-seventeenth century astrologer, William Lilly, in 1647 speaks of Saturn's 'course through the twelve Signs of the Zodiac in 29 years 157 days, or thereabouts', (Lilly, I: 57). Following the dim and distant writers Claudius Ptolemy and Marcus Manilius, Lilly recognises the 'loss' and 'sorrow' associated with this transit (Lilly, III: 738, 681). Ptolemy says that 'Saturn by nature is associated with the person of the father' (Ptolemy, III: 241) Saturn was associated with the fourth, final 'vita-sphere' 'quadrant', a grim reaper of previous investments. Saturn's associations with 'mourning, fears and deaths' was common (Ptolemy, II, 8: 181). The return of Saturn to its birthplace of the native (around thirty years) was very important to Elizabethan folk, pamphleteer and chapbook readers. Saturn's transit was, in sum, profound and his associated place to return meant 'life's fading twilight, and palsied age'. (Manilius, II: 856) The greatest, most vital planet 'The Sun' directed to 'the terms of Saturn' (Lilly, III: 681) was an associated bad, malefic cycle. The Sun, or Phoebus, coloured by the portion of Saturn, was something particularly catastrophic. 'Heavy Saturn' was the god of limits and the leaden solidity of the world, he 'goest about to apply a moral medicine to a mortifying mischief'. (*Much Ado*, 1, 3) The 'fortune's star' which betokens Hamlet's fate must therefore be Saturn. (1, 4)

But beyond these esoteric implications, it is the riddles which King and Queen speak which make for an interesting enquiry about the conflicts of *Hamlet*. The marriage of The Player King and Player Queen is like a phased Moon and the dying Sun. The outcome is a sense of fickleness. The waning Player Queen remarks that ‘as my love is sized, my fear is so’. (3, 2: 160) The contrast of love and fear is a recurring motif in the playlet. Her riddle is on top form when she says:

Where love is great, the littlest doubts are fear;  
Where little fears grow great, great love grows there. (3, 2: 177-8)

The locative ‘where’ suggests that there is a place of unity for these conflicts. But it seems like an unstable unity. The inconstancy, variable authenticity, accompanies the overall form of the playlet. Expressing her love in terms of her fear is an example of *chiasmus*: a solution (love) is placed against its inverted form (fear). Conspicuous opposition, in these verses, draws the opposing experiences of love and fear closer together. Related, riddled expressions also fortify this inverted doubling. The first part of the play sees The Player King encouraging his Queen to find a second husband. She denies she would find love in such a contingency:

In second husband let me be accurst;  
None wed the second but who killed the first. (3, 2: 167-8)

Whoever did kill the first husband is open to interpretation. If the above lines are true, then Gertrude’s second marriage suggests that she ‘who killed the first’ now has wedded her second husband. The real ambiguity is pronounced. The vague, wistful distance at which this Player Queen speaks, implies, on a worldly level, that the first part of ‘The Mousetrap’ is over. Indeed, Hamlet interrupts the actress and shouts ‘wormwood’ twice. Perhaps he does so in order to curse a bitter rebuke at The Player Queen’s insincere words. Perhaps, he hopes Queen Gertrude’s instincts will flinch. By dismissing her, his intervention from his level of *Hamlet* to the level of the characters in ‘The Mousetrap’ render a rupture to the fabric of King’s and Queen’s dialogue. This figurative use of herbal charming, however, brings us onto the second part of ‘The Mousetrap’.

### 4.3 Part Two of 'The Mousetrap'

After Hamlet interrupts The Player Queen, the tone seems to change. This second part of 'The Mousetrap' involves a long speech from The Player King. The Queen initiates the second part by continuing to assure her dying husband of her faithfulness. She insists that remarrying would not be appropriate to her own sense of true love. She sees love, now, as opposed to parsimony, stinginess. Her words, though coy allusions to sex, also imply her as an accessory in the murder of her first husband. Her confession to kill for a second time, begs questions about who she killed the first time:

The instances that second marriage move  
Are base respects of thrift, but none of love.  
A second time I kill my husband dead,  
When second husband kisses me in bed. (3, 2: 170-3)

A likely explanation for 'I kill my husband dead' might be Hamlet's rewritten confusion of the playlet, or the wish to prick Gertrude's conscience. Indeed, Gertrude's later response to the play is 'amazement and admiration' or 'bewildered and astonished' response in modern English. (Dover, 1965: 165) Hamlet's aim to hold the mirror up to nature is repeated later on, when he confronts Gertrude. In the bedroom, he charges her not to leave until he has set up 'a glass where you may see the inmost part of you' whereupon Gertrude fears murder from Hamlet. Were Hamlet to reflect Gertrude's 'inmost part', it would follow that Gertrude is recognising in Hamlet, as perceived murderer, a projection of, perhaps, herself.

In the above lines of 'The Mousetrap', we hear of the overhasty second marriage alluded to in the Player Queen's words. Besides the hope to catch the conscience of King Claudius, Hamlet's aim is broader. Based on the talking apparition, let us reconsider The Player Queen's words. The faint possibility of some confusion from Hamlet is possible. The Ghost speaks of the murderer firstly as both 'beast' and 'serpent' and framed in an Edenic place. (1, 5) There is much immediate evidence however that the uncle has committed the murder. Yet, it might just be the case that Hamlet is

displacing his anger and misreading the messages from The Ghost. Gertrude is spoken of inconstant, as 'seeming-virtuous'. The Ghost after saying that it was his brother who murdered him, suggests that Gertrude was 'sent' to administer 'the leprous distilment': the poison is passively voiced as if given 'of queen'. The Ghost of the dead father explains how he was killed:

Thus was I, sleeping, by my brother's hand  
Of life, of crown, of queen at once dispatched,  
[...]  
No reckoning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head. (1, 5: 74-9)

When the Ghost departs, he makes an equally fervent plea to catch the conscience of the Queen:

Taint not thy mind, nor let thy soul contrive  
Against thy mother aught—leave her to heaven,  
And to those thorns that in her bosom lodge  
To prick and sting her. (1, 5: 85-8)

The Player Queen's fulsome reassurance of her fidelity to her ailing husband is therefore unclear if her words are based on the distant account given by The Ghost. In contrast, The Player King is very sober. He admonishes the Player Queen that life is more complex than her description of it. What follows is an almost incantatory speech. The tension in Hamlet's personality is revealed in the tensions spoken about by The Player King. Like his Queen, the King speaks in inverted symbols. He mentions the causes of thinking and the ends to which thoughts lead. Quite tersely, he mentions 1) memory and forgetfulness; 2) grief and joy; 3) friendship and enmity; 4) will and fate:

I do believe you think what now you speak;  
But what we do determine oft we break.  
Purpose is but the slave to memory,  
Of violent birth, but poor validity;  
Which now, like fruit unripe, sticks on the tree,  
But fall unshaken when they mellow be.  
Most necessary 'tis that we forget  
To pay ourselves what to ourselves is debt. (3, 2: 174-81)



The Garden of Eden story about The Fall matches the Ghost's account. The theme of indecision so often attributed to *Hamlet*<sup>1</sup> is captured here as a weighty human drama about fickle commitment and the sense of moving between keeping and breaking an oath. The Player King is echoing the wider subject matter of *Hamlet*. There is a shuttling between remembering what was promised and the likely forgetting of this promise. We have here a present effect attributable to a remote cause. The effect is the renegeing of the Queen who probably initiated the murder of the dying King. Yet, the criss-crossing between motifs continues. The word-weaving is a necessitated result of breaking promises to keeping promises or memory of oaths at variance to forgetting these oaths. The lines that follow are about the personal outcomes of mental inconstancy. These outcomes manifest emotionally as grief and joy. The King speaks sententiously, but sincerely, that these contraries are in fact united because they are suspended in a single place, a one 'where':

What to ourselves in passion we propose,  
The passion ending, doth the purpose lose.  
The violence of either grief or joy  
Their own enactures with themselves destroy.  
Where joy most revels, grief doth most lament;  
Grief joys, joy grieves, on slender accident. (3, 2: 182-7)

The Player King unites two contrary emotions, like the love and fear riddle of The Player Queen. The theme of the speech is still personal and passionate at this stage. Grief and joy are only made real through particular report. The sense, in the above, is thus narrower than what is to come. After these lines, the speech expands towards a broader view. Memory and forgetfulness lead, by adventitious declension, towards feelings of grief and joy. The courses of these experiences can also be seen in projected, wider manifestations through other people. Now, the view becomes increasingly global, and consequently, the speech moves on to social and political relations: friendship and enmity:

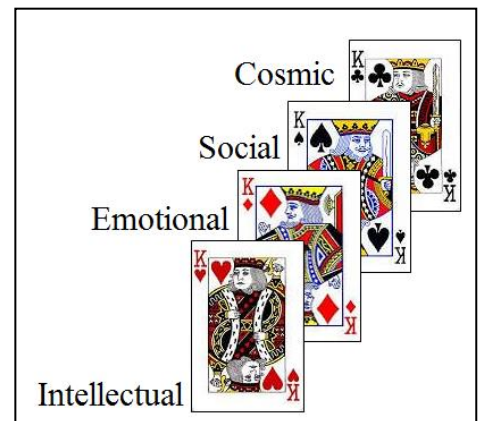
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<sup>1</sup> Rather than arguments on indecision, Friedrich Nietzsche seems to suggest that Hamlet's views are those of looking into an abyss, perhaps become debilitated and therefore not indecisive. Nietzsche's idea is that Hamlet's activity is intellectual, connected with a delving into human thought and purpose, and as a result, Hamlet's inactivity is highlighted: 'Hamlet [has] for once penetrated into the true nature of things, [he has] *perceived*, but it is irksome for [him] to act; for [his] action cannot change the eternal nature of things; the time is out of joint and [he] regard[s] it as shameful or ridiculous that [he] should be requested to set it right. Knowledge kills action, action requires the veil of illusion—it is this lesson which Hamlet teaches, and not the idle wisdom of John-o'-Dreams [cf 3, 2: 579] who from too much reflection, from a surplus of possibilities, never arrives at action at all'. (*The Birth of Tragedy*, 1995: 23)

For 'tis a question left us yet to prove,  
 Whether love lead fortune, or else fortune love.  
 The great man down, you mark his favourite flies;  
 The poor advanced makes friends of enemies;  
 And hitherto doth love on fortune tend,  
 For who not needs shall never lack a friend; (3, 2: 190-5)

The strife between Hamlet and Ophelia seems to carry over the essential message from The Player King's speech. In *Hamlet*, the dead Yorick's skull which Hamlet brandishes as he prepares a love speech for Ophelia is tragic because as he recalls his dead jester friend, Ophelia's coffin passes him by. Testing a mate for sincerity is equally fraught with trouble. Towards the end of the speech, we develop a sense that if the contraries pull towards one pole, then there is a reaction from the other pole. These poles are the motifs in 'The Mousetrap'. The way in which inconstant friendship can lead to enmity or inconstant enmity can lead to friendship, is explored further. The sets of motifs so far in the speech are stacked as 1) mental conflicts 2) emotional dilemmas 3) social exchanges and 4) is to do with the broadest view of all, that of cosmic influences:

And who in want a hollow friend doth try,  
 Directly seasons him his enemy.  
 But, orderly to end where I begun,  
 Our wills and fates do so contrary run  
 That our devices still are overthrown;  
 Our thoughts are ours, their ends none our own. (3, 2: 196-201)



**Figure 4.4**

So, whether we run through the full gamut of sensations (Figure 4.4), fate shall always finally confront our volition. The thoughts of The Ghost have their outcome as 'The Mousetrap'. And since The Ghost comes from a different order, The Player King returns, in these last lines, to the mental place where he began—but now his view is loftier. Like two actors on a stage, there are mentioned two courses of concerns. The ideas, once begun, run their fateful course. These concerns confront each other throughout *Hamlet* but they form a knotty middle in 'The Mousetrap'.

The last word is that of fate. Destiny governs all and overthrows all wilful enterprises in the end. A strong sense of destiny is in keeping with the tragic tone of The Player King's death speech. The Player Queen replies to this long discourse about how contraries meld together whilst suggesting conflict. Unmoved by the increasingly objective lesson from her sovereign, she continues insistently that she will not wed another husband:

Nor earth to me give food, nor heaven light,  
Sport and repose lock me day and night,  
An anchor's cheer in prison be my scope,  
Each opposite that blanks the face of joy  
Meet what I would have will, and it destroy:  
Both here and hence pursue me lasting strife;  
If, once a widow, ever I be wife! (3, 2: 204-10)

At this point, Hamlet interrupts The Player Queen for a second time and muses 'If she should break it now!' (3, 2:11) Hamlet's second quip echoes his first retort about wormwood and its herbal associations of separation between mothers and babies. Again, if we review the displaced sense of The Player King (in 'The Mousetrap') who has been killed by his brother, and we compare the potentially negative portrayal of The Player Queen, the many inversions imply a sinister result. To a great extent, 'The Mousetrap' distils the events theretofore in *Hamlet*. This small play makes a tantalising accessory of The Player Queen to the murder. For the first time, perhaps, Hamlet's scepticism towards the love of womankind is encapsulated in his intuitions about the likelier murderer of his father. His mother is the ideal of womankind. However, reactions of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude need to be evaluated in isolation in order to determine the likeliest murderer of Hamlet's father, rather than distortions about Oedipal, presumably heterosexual, mating-spats. Since the playlet seems to be a rough copy of *Hamlet*, we will turn to the final part of 'The Mousetrap' and the response of both the real King and Queen to dialogue of The Player King and The Player Queen.

#### 4.4 Part Three of 'The Mousetrap'

So far, we have considered the segments of Hamlet's play 'The Mousetrap' and how the large scale themes of *Hamlet* are transposed to the level of the characters. The Player King and The Player Queen mention subject matter which, tenuously, is a transposition from the subject of *Hamlet* to the discourse level of their character lines. Both Player King and Queen represent characters which hold the opposing themes of the play. 'The Mousetrap' is also a small scale refraction of the events transposed by The Ghost. After Hamlet's second intervention by means of a proposition, 'The Mousetrap' tumbles towards its conclusion. In this third part, The Player King presumably dies and The Player Queen, this time, speaks with a double negative riddle. In quite the opposite way to the expected outcome, The Player Queen's words protest much about how she feels:

PLAYER KING

'Tis deeply sworn, Sweet, leave me here awhile.

My spirits grow dull, and fain I would beguile

The tedious day with sleep. *He sleeps*

PLAYER QUEEN

Sleep rock thy brain,

And never mischance between us twain! *Exit* (3, 2: 211-5)

At the prospect of yet another small play, the exact image of 'The Mousetrap', this small-scale performance ends. Hamlet asks for his mother's opinion on his play. Queen Gertrude famously declares, upon Hamlet's invitation that The Player Queen 'protests too much'. Gertrude's evaluation is that The Player Queen is protesting at her grief over and beyond what the decorum should perhaps be. The analysis of this protest is likely to be some thinly veiled compensation of Gertrude's deeper guilt. King Claudius however storms out of the court. Hamlet's very pointed comment about poisoning in the garden makes Claudius storm out, it seems, not in conscious-ridden fear but in righteous indignation.

Hamlet's rudeness at his Uncle Claudius does not go unremarked. As the play-within-the-play disbands unexpectedly and Claudius cries out indignantly for some light, the playlet ends and we begin to feel as Hamlet does. Claudius, who wants light, contrasts sharply with Hamlet who wants his creation to be 'false fire' (line 272) perhaps inciting false anger. Hamlet has simply

frightened away his Uncle Claudius by sinister means. The responses of Claudius and Gertrude are conspicuous. But here is an example of masterful irony. Throughout 'The Mousetrap' Hamlet keeps intervening and rubs home the point of his play to Gertrude and Ophelia. Hamlet divulges his intentions in front of Claudius. The rueful response from Claudius is suspect because Claudius knows Hamlet's accusations of murder. Gertrude seems composed and provides a good role for subtle virtuoso acting. Furthermore, even though Claudius is later seen allegedly praying about what he has done, it may just be the reaction Hamlet wanted. Claudius' performance is an example of play-acting. It is all very ironic. The responses include the 'actions that a *man* might play'. (3, 2: 560, 594-615) We have an inverted and sinister effect.

Or, is the irate response true to the remorse of Claudius? Or does Claudius have integrity, wishing to keep the honour of his wife intact, against Hamlet's misreckoned charges of murder? Does Hamlet's comparison of his play to 'a dark flame' much like the 'darkness visible' of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1: 63) epic, give us some clue as to the fiendishly subtle sense of Hamlet? Indeed, we may think that this play-in-the-play as the latter. Hamlet's response to Claudius' reaction is an exhilarating mania but is dampened because Horatio quips that the outcome is only 'half a share'. Perhaps The Ghost, as seen in his 'mind's eye' was a trick carried out by his friends. The murderers are perhaps both guilty. But the instigator(s) remains unknown. Hamlet is chastised by his teacher, Polonius, for acting out too broad a 'prank' and Hamlet's response is flippant. The motives to catch the conscience of Claudius may therefore be misguided—especially when the words of The Ghost are considered more closely. Like 'The Mousetrap' there is too much of 'a question left us yet to prove' because the response of Hamlet who created 'The Mousetrap' alternates, like the content of his creation, between extremes. The relationship between anger is often broken and Hamlet feels happy. Gide's *mise en abyme* imagines that there ought to be a 'constant connection' between the character and the subject of the work. Hamlet's anger is eventually indifferent and then he confesses contentment:

Let the stricken deer go weep  
The hart ungalled play  
For some must watch, while some must sleep:  
So runs the world away. (3, 2: 277-80)

What is clear is that The Player King and The Player Queen both represent the absolute ends of the conflicts percolating in Hamlet's character. The confrontation between inconstancy and fidelity to living and dying is a likeness of Hamlet's supreme speeches about being and its absence. The ghostly essence of Hamlet's 'The Mousetrap' precedes the existence of the playlet and even if its content remains an enigma, the form of 'The Mousetrap' is less protean. Hamlet's play-in-*Hamlet* is limited in its structure. Its subject matter is attributed to a distant cause from the world of spirits. The Player King and The Player Queen transpose the otherworldly message and provide some account of this message. Whatever the truth of its content, the structure is a good, grounded work of art and associates Gide's idea with a masterpiece of Western drama. Hamlet's eventual response to the reception of his play is a strange joy. He calls for music to bring his comedic account of tragedy to a close:

Ah, hah! Come, some music! come, the recorders!—  
For if the king like not the comedy,  
Why then, belike,—he likes it not, perdy.  
Come, some music! (3, 2: 275-8)

And in the final associations of 'The Mousetrap', Hamlet declares his own character (Hamlet) as a figure of his subject matter *Hamlet*. The mention of music is interesting here since it seems to suggest that Hamlet's creation has become totally self-referential. Music can only refer to itself. Music can mimic animal noises, chugging engines for example, outside its own form but most of the time, music only refers to its own form. Emotional associations and values are attributed by listeners: any mention of music is therefore a signal that the literary form should be accentuated, since music is the art most amenable to formal reading. Through phrasing, leitmotif and refrain, for example, music is the ultimate art which aspires to art for the sake of formal creation without any utilitarian ends. Hamlet's last metaphor that he is a musical instrument is the great enigma of the

play. It does associate his playlet with music and thereby, the importance of the structure of his work. To ‘play upon’ could therefore be acting and musically performing in a correlative sense:

...do you think I am easier to played on than a pipe?  
Call me what instrument you will, though you can  
fret me, you cannot play upon me. (3, 2: 378-80)

When Hamlet greets Horatio, A.C. Bradley declares there is a ‘bewitching music’ in the farewell and the heart-wrenching entreaties between Hamlet and others. But it is the ending which prompts the end of the musical theme elicited by *Hamlet*’s poetry: ‘after *Hamlet*, this music is heard no more. It is followed by a music vaster and deeper, but not the same’. (Bradley, *ibid*: 67) The end of music is the end of the drama and the end of all art.

#### 4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to cover three points. These three concerns are primarily directed by the outcomes of the theory chapters. In this chapter on *Hamlet* and its play, as the first example from Gide’s diary entry, I considered the following:

- How ‘The Dumb Show’ and ‘The Mousetrap’ are vague doublings of the play
- How these performances obey the *metalepsis* trope of carrying over from one register to another
- Why Hamlet’s associations of his playlet are musical

The tensions in Hamlet’s mind are carried out, at a distance, in the ‘miraculous organ’ of his small play. His play is the metaphorical heart of *Hamlet*. The resemblance between the events of *Hamlet* theretofore, reported by The Ghost, into ‘The Mousetrap’ is not altogether precise. There are segments of *Hamlet*: ‘The Dumbshow’ and ‘The Mousetrap’ placed in a temporary zone between two courtly scenes. In this chapter, I have examined Gide’s diary reference on *Hamlet*. The themes in ‘The Mousetrap’ are the themes in *Hamlet* as related by The Ghost. The Player King and The Player Queen enact the part in *Hamlet* to which the audience is not privy: the Players perform events in their play attributable to remotely caused events, perhaps, before the official start of *Hamlet*. ‘The Dumb Show’ is a mime and provides the narrative summary of ‘The Mousetrap’. So,

I have argued that this play-in-the-play provides a sketchy summary of the murder carried over from the events before *Hamlet* starts as a play.

Secondly, this chapter on Gide's idea in *Hamlet*, made some association of the phenomenon as an example of *metalepsis*. As illustrated, the formal component of *Hamlet* does not explicitly show infinite regress or any such endless recursive aesthetic we may care to describe the *mise en abyme*. 'The Mousetrap' expresses events in a limited, staged timeframe that are at some remove from the time these events were first revealed. The Ghost of Hamlet's father recalls his experience when he was murdered. Hamlet takes this information and casts it as a play. The subjective account of the assassination, from a spirit, is thus replayed by Hamlet's characters in *his* play. 'The Mousetrap' is correctly a 'replay of a replay'.

Finally, *Hamlet*, its dumb show, and play-in-itself relates to the *transposition* mentioned by Gide: 'to find transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work' (1893: 30). The works occur at different times and in conspicuously different places to the main play. Also, 'The Mousetrap' is subject matter transposed from a testimony by a character, The Ghost. Nevertheless the orientation still obeys Gide's idea as a case of transposition. To some extent, Hamlet's view that he is a musical instrument also suggests, albeit tentatively, how the *mise en abyme* is some subject of the work transposed to the level of character or *visa-versa*. I hope to explore this idea more closely in subsequent chapters. For the sake of simplicity, we can say that the transposition is a carrying over. Gide's idea, as it pertains to his reference of *Hamlet*, is an example of *metalepsis*. In the next close reading, we will consider to what extent Gide's idea and its precursor *metalepsis* occurs in another English work that Gide cited and to what extent the idea carries musical traits.





# 5

## *The Fall of the House of Usher*

This chapter is about Gide's idea in relation to *The Fall of the House of Usher* [1839]. We will turn to this work because it is the other English example Gide cites to illustrate his idea. Indeed, *The Fall of the House of Usher* (henceforth *Usher*) by Edgar Allen Poe contains parts that resemble the whole short story around it. Like *Hamlet*, which contains a playlet with a high level of resemblance to *Hamlet*, *Usher* contains portions which resemble subject matter pertaining to the *Usher* story. Gide recognises this resemblance in 'the story read to' the main character, Usher. (Gide, *ibid*: 30) Poe's worldview about 'the less within the greater' is captured here, in his work (Regan, 1967: 123). This story-in-the-story is called *Mad Trist*. But *Usher* also contains a ballad poem, with lyrics, which limn some themes of the Usher House. This song-like poem is called 'The Haunted Palace'. Therefore, if the *mise en abyme* is a significant part-to-whole likeness in a work of literature, then *Usher* contains two parts which resemble its surrounding text. The overall form of *Usher* is much like the following, loosely gathered schema:

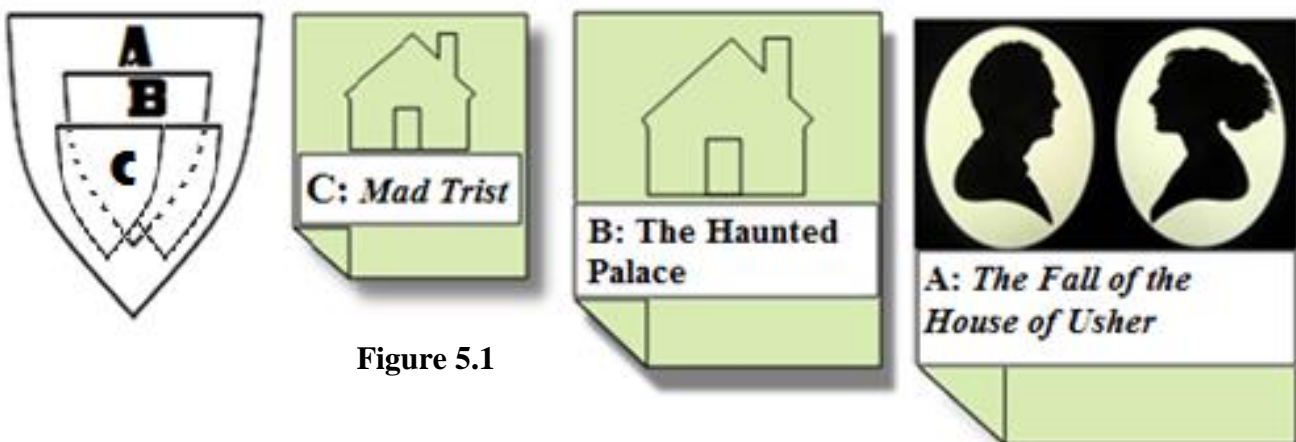


Figure 5.1

Besides testing whether *Usher* involves identifiable varieties of *metalepsis*, this chapter will 1) highlight any intensely visual scenarios as these are articulated in written form (*ekphrasis*) and 2) examine how non-verbal art forms, like music, can capture verbal experience. Thus, through a series of close readings, what follows will investigate some key themes in the parts of *Usher* which relate to the whole form. So besides identifying the tropes which capture Gide's idea about transposition, I hope to show how allusion and metaphor give credibility to the *mise en abyme* and music. Lucien Dällenbach's insight that the *mise en abyme* was a complex correspondence to musical metaphor will be explored in the following chapter. Dällenbach briefly mentions this ideal of the *mise en abyme* as it co-incides: 'with an integrative expression (voice, song, music) that not only institutes the text, but is also essentially melodic'. (Dällenbach, 1977: 181)

## 5.1 The Gothic and The Sinister

Analysis and close reading of *Usher* offers a case study that potentially affords an alternative way of thinking about the *mise en abyme*. It behoves us to first consider the basic form of *Usher* and some critical ideas which can help us to think differently about the *mise en abyme*. Like *Hamlet*, Poe's tale is a good example of doubling in a work. Certainly, the main character, Roderick, has a *twin* sister, Madeleine. The narrator of *Usher* is prompted to visit Roderick Usher's mansion after he is summoned by a letter which suggests that a long 'ancient family' of descent, the 'Usher race' is about to end with one man, Roderick. (2001: 44) Typical of an ominous tale of this kind, the speaker travels through dreary wasteland with the habitual gloomy mood and grim scenery. Upon reaching Usher's ramshackle house, the narrator is escorted by a valet, past 'armorial trophies', possible heraldic shields, to his friend, Roderick. As the narrator continues his tale, he comments that there is 'the perfect keeping' between 'the premises' and 'character of the people'. 'The influence...which the one might have exercised on the other' is a revealing line. It partly obeys

Gide's idea that there is some influence 'transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work'. (ibid: 30) Mirrors reflect and do not transpose like heraldic shields do: therefore the transposition is not suggestive of a high level of mirrored verisimilitude. Rather one has another analogy to superimposition, like shields, as Gide maintains. Indeed, *Usher* contains many examples where this unusual layering occurs. Once pointed out, it is broadly agreeable to Gide's idea. We can see Gide's observation agreeing with Poe's opening passage:

I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into everyday life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? ([1839], 2001:43)

The overt impression is here describing the ruinous house but the personal metaphors, personification, the narrator uses, make one think of the inhabitants.<sup>1</sup> The decaying imagery implies a close link to the ill characters. As the attributes of the house echo the state of its tenants, the narration is describing something very visual. The above is an example of *ekphrasis*, or broadly speaking, a vividly visual experience related through words. But the experience is also related by two main characters. The twins, Roderick and Madeleine, in the story, seem to have life stories that copy each other and they resemble the house. Yet, it is a fallacy to think that the twins are the same physical things as their house. In reading *Usher*, instead, one gains a sense of how incompatible things can correspond by virtue of their close, intimate proximity. This is a type of ambiguity. Both are separate but strangely, a united thing. Like the dead body of a once-living thing, one sees neither subject nor object: besides therefore being *ekphrasic*, the tale is an example of uncanniness. The

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<sup>1</sup> The ambiguity of narrating voice is outlined by Marie-Laure Ryan's updated thesis (2005, 2007: 303) who speaks about this present and invisible narrator as either ontological or discursive: if the narrator in *Hamlet* is implied, he is a discursive or rhetorical narrator. But in the case of Roderick Usher, the presence of the narrator is placed in the story-world and is ontological. The distinction between a disembodied, inanimate and present, enunciate voice in narrating the *mise en abyme* is a contentious point. But the contention does highlight the similarity of *mise en abyme* to varieties of the frame-tale. *The Fall of the House of Usher*, unlike *Hamlet* is a development in the way Gide did not notice because *Usher* explicitly announces the refracted components of itself whereas *Hamlet* merely posits these in the play intimating their difference from the main body of the text.

uncanny is strange and raises a sense of weirdness, in the traditional meaning of ‘weird’, as neither one thing nor the other.

**Figure 5.2**



Such complex weirdness is similar to illusive pictures (Figure 5.2). A voluptuous woman or a skull can be seen, simultaneously, in visual depictions of such taut ambiguity, and in literature, the effect is similar to the building blocks of

what is called a *mise en abyme*. In the short story example, eerie traits surface throughout the tale as Poe continues to build connections between the house and its fated inhabitants. The likeness between tenants and house, people and place, echo the relationship further as the house falls in a correlative sense. The house dies like the death of the inhabitants. The registers are ‘an equivocal appellation’ which is the subject of the work, ‘The House of Usher’. (ibid: 45) So, there is a physical house and a genealogical ‘house’.

Nearly all of the critical material on *Usher* recognises its Gothic themes. Since its first publication in 1839, the story has become a frequently cited example of a very dark, baleful and sinister movement linked to Gothic Romance. The tradition of the Gothic celebrates the uncanny likeness between life and decay. Fragments of vague, ill-formed allusion are common in this style and suggest an unresolved, troubling sense, or ‘creepiness’. But Gothic contains sober-minded and serious traits beyond stereotypical tags of demise, gloom, ghouls, ghosts and haunted houses. Its development as an ‘aesthetic taste’ from the middle eighteenth century until today, carry perennial concerns to do with non-rational expression. Sigmund Freud wrote an essay about this conceptual idea in aesthetics. His view about this strange likeness was, for him, the ‘uncanny’. One key trait of his argument was how the uncanny signified a feeling of unease about otherness, an unfamiliarity and estrangement from one’s home which Freud called un-homeliness, or what the classics would have termed *oiko-phobia*. *Usher* is an excellent example of the uncanny because its style ‘arouses’

the primal 'core' of 'dread and horror' about the inexorable death of the biological and physical Usher Houses. (Freud, *Collected Works*, 2003: 132) Poe describes his house in an expressively strange, yet familiar, way. Indeed, the particular understanding of Gothic literature ambiguates 'the subject in a state of deracination, of the self, finding itself dispossessed in its own house'. (Miles, 2002: 3) The sense is not fear of the other (*xeno-phobia*) but, rather, fear of the familiar self and its demise. Perhaps Gothic literature is, then, so perennially thrilling because it foregrounds any intimations of physical death against a co-relative time backdrop which will also expire. For example, the house's death co-relativises the death (and racial identity) through the death of its occupants. 'Deracination' is a difficult topic but does apply to this importance of place and house in *Usher*. The demise of the characters on a threshold 'state' of death, then, is much like the decay of a longstanding geo-political frontier and its borders with alterity, the 'other' zones, and their races. The 'other', by its nature, is adversarial as the poem speaks of 'the pale door' which, perhaps, fears its light vulnerability at the margins of a 'dark' surrounding lake or 'tarn'. In *Usher*, there is a sense that any opposite to the established orthodoxy is inevitable. The death theme, for one, goes against the metaphorical grain of all vitality one might expect. The dark mansion and dying, but enlightened, characters are unsettling and together with the sudden, unexpected rupture in the narrative, of their deaths, the tale is sinister. Since the whole of *Usher* also ends in the same way as its title begins, there is moreover a suggested outcome to the deracination concern: a heroic rebirth from the decay, a new cycle, rather than a linear created start and final end. Yet, Miles' above observation remains troubling. Rendered foreign to itself through contrast, the aristocratic ardour of Roderick and Madeleine suggestively oppose the vulgar aliens outside their mansion. The Usher enemies are racial-alien who continue to destroy the once 'blushing' potency of a mastered space.

Though taboo and politically repressed, *Usher* limns such themes in the coded centre of its house—a sinister world where its centre of reality exists inside its curtailed space, and not a world-centre,

through reductive universals, in a ‘vast’ non-space outside, out there. As the house is ‘assailed’ by invading ‘evil things’, the natives Roderick and Madeline are entrained—passively so—by the inferior identity of a darkening ‘other’ who inures the house to a primal ‘red-litten’ outlook (as symbolised by its windows). Thus, can the duration of *Usher*’s story be read as a dysgenic regression, a decline in light vitality: a movement towards an ending cycle of fusion, confusion, un-delayed entropy and annihilation of an established order, where its end is its revived beginning. Broader, late-modern criticism of *Usher* continues to revisit this marginal view about the tale’s sinister aspects but only in coy, cryptic and side-lined ways. Sigmund Freud’s discussion, nevertheless, of the ‘uncanny’ is helpful in understanding what critics *might* mean regarding the house metaphor. The German word for ‘uncanny’, *unheimlich* has cognates in English as ‘unhomely’ which ratifies the theme of domestic displacement, and bio-political dispossession, in *The House of Usher*.<sup>1</sup>

On a safer footing though, the important gothic theme in *Usher* is to do with the romantic imagination. Fred Botting speaks about ‘The Fall of the House of Usher—that [it] may be more projections of the observers, more deceptive symbols of *their* obsessions and desires’. (Botting, 2001: 156) For Botting, Gothic Literature, including *Usher*, ‘signifies a writing of excess’. (ibid, 1996: 1) This insight gives us some clue as to where to start in our examination: the values of extremity and excess. Botting seems to suggest that the genre is an excess of the romantic imagination, mental forms. But in my view of the sinister theme, I propose that *Usher* is an excess of reasonable thinking. The imagination is highly reasonable and the first source of knowledge. It is a powerful variety of perception. It takes imagination to perceive whether someone is unhappy, for example. My reading of the *mise en abyme* in *Usher* will thus pay attention to the themes of the

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<sup>1</sup> Controversially, we can also decline the etymology, the word-root-lore of Freud’s principle ‘uncanny’ through the Latinate languages to find its associations with ‘*sinistre*’ and ‘*siniestro*’ as Freud notes. The sinister or *left-hand* worldview is a complex one. The worldview contrasts with the well-hewn idea of popular right-hand religion, dexterously established and upheld by the majority of orthodoxies. The left-hand path however, is a radically different approach to thinking about The Gothic. Briefly, it is the sinister mind-set which has its origins in the ancient Vedas as *vamachara*. The sinister or left-hand view is associated with a metaphysical rebellion against the status quo, or antinomian ethics. It also promotes the god-making, the deification of the Luciferian individual as one of its distinct elements. (Flowers, 1997: 10-1) The sinister is viewed by most people on the orthodox, ‘right-hand path’ as adversarial, dangerous, puerile, *gauche* or potentially destructive. But the uncanny, as the sinister aesthetic, provides a fruitful and original understanding of Gothic Romance. The understanding demands utmost maturity, free-thinking and sober mindedness.

uncanny, the dark and sinister. With this approach in mind, the following chapter contains two sections examining part-to-whole likenesses in *Usher*: 1) 'The Haunted Palace' 2) *Mad Trist*.

## 5.2 'The Haunted Palace'

The *mise en abyme*, which we trace to André Gide's citation, mentions the story read to Roderick. This story is called *Mad Trist*. Yet, neither Gide (nor Dällenbach) point out another small portion in *Usher* which carries a likeness to the whole work, written by Poe. The other small part of *Usher* like *Mad Trist* is a ballad which contains six verses. All presumably sung, these verses are entitled 'The Haunted Palace'. As lyrical summary of the whole of *Usher*, 'The Haunted Palace' is preceded by references to music.<sup>1</sup> The first musical reference is the opening flourish of *Usher* by French Poet, Pierre-Jean de Béranger. The epigram speaks of the 'heart' as 'a suspended lute, as soon as it is touched, it resounds'. Notoriously difficult to tune, to play and to learn but an ethereal delight to hear with its many sympathetic vibrating strings, a lute tune accompanies 'The Haunted Palace' ballad. Also, because the lute is associated with the 'heart' we can link the central theme of music to the heart as it represents super-imposing emotions *en abyme*. Poe's other short story *The Tell Tale Heart* (1843) is likewise an allegory about the seat of human emotions or the vital core of life. Although Edgar Allen Poe seemed to always represent emotions vicariously, in a tell-tale, 'sickening' or 'apparent' way (*Usher*: 43-4), whenever he does mention the heart, it is often with close association to music or marked rhythm. To capture the extreme sense of beauty, Poe chooses music to convey the complexity of his art. The passage preceding 'The Haunted Palace' in *Usher* mentions music twice. In both allusions, there is an ambiguous mood. The first reference is to a personified musical instrument, 'speaking guitar':

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<sup>1</sup> André Gide in later life reflected on the link between music and his writing. His views on the particular tone of words were to be very influential in French short story writing, in the doctrine of right word at the right time. When asked about the aesthetic motives of his work he replied: 'It is perfectly and obviously true that, in a fine line of verse, one cannot change or displace a word; but the same is true of fine prose. My sentences...have to meet requirements that are as strict, even though they are frequently hidden, and as domineering as are those of the most rigorous *prosody*. (Cited by Malcolm Cowley, 1944: xvi-xvii, *Imaginary Interviews* in Hofstadter, (1970))

...during this period I was busied in earnest endeavours to alleviate the melancholy of my friend [Roderick]. We painted and read together; or I listened, as if in a dream, to the wild improvisations of his speaking guitar. And thus, as a closer and still closer intimacy admitted me more unreservedly into the recesses of his spirit, the more bitterly did I perceive the futility of all attempt at cheering a mind from which darkness, as if an inherent positive quality, poured forth from all objects of the moral and physical universe, in one unceasing radiation of gloom. (ibid: 49)

This gloom is described beforehand as ‘a pestilent and mystic vapour, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued’. (ibid: 45) Thus the stuffy atmosphere suggests a strong sense of curtailment and self-containment and the sinister implications of darkness as a fundamentally ‘positive quality’ draw attention to the moral inversion of values and decadence. The second reference to music before ‘The Haunted Palace’ is about a dance. The dance in *Usher* is a mistakenly attributed Carl Maria von Weber waltz<sup>1</sup> (Track 2 of Accompanying CD). This waltz seems to act as a theme tune to ‘The Haunted Palace’ ballad which was published separately before it became part of *Usher*. The melody of *The Last Waltz* fits the poetic metre of ‘The Haunted Palace’ very well. The narrator declares of it:

Among other things, I hold painfully in mind a certain singular perversion and amplification of the wild air of the last waltz of Von Weber...which grew, touch by touch, into vagueness at which I shuddered the more thrillingly, because I shuddered not knowing why...(ibid: 49-50)

<sup>1</sup> *The Last Waltz* (Op.26 no.5) by Carl Gottlieb Reissiger (1798-1859) is attributed to Carl Maria von Weber (1786-1826) in *Usher*. Weber’s other, highly popular *Invitation to the Dance* (1819) exploited the nineteenth century musical obsession for waltz. Its rhythm is three-to-a measure but was more commonly played in five beats to the bar during its time. Its phrasing fits the metre of the *mise en abyme* poem snugly:





The purpose of referencing music, for Edgar Allen Poe, is to locate, in a metaphysical space, what *he* means by poetry. Poe's view was that all poetry is for the 'intoxication of the heart'. Since there seems a melodic essence associated with the *mise en abyme*, it is no surprise that this *mise en abyme* poetry of Poe should correlate with his view that his poems are a verbal counterpart for musicality. Famously, in his essay, *The Poetic Principle*, (posthumous, 1850) Poe adds that 'music in its popular sense' is very important for poetic composition. Poe's embedded poem, 'The Haunted Palace' is one such clear example of where his inspiration from music informs his formal composition. Walter Pater quipped around 1873 that 'all art strives toward music'. Poe similarly holds that:

Contenting myself with the certainty that Music, in its various modes of metre, rhythm, and rhyme, is of so vast a moment in Poetry as never to be wisely rejected—is so vitally important an adjunct, that he is simply silly who declines its assistance...It is in Music, perhaps, that the soul most nearly attains the great end for which, when inspired by the Poetic Sentiment, it struggles—the creation of supernal Beauty. (Poe, ed. Galloway, 1982: 506)

And Poe does avail himself of the 'sublime end' and 'shivering delight' of music in 'The Haunted Palace'. His desire for unity, 'the union of Poetry with Music' is ultimately for the purpose of 'the widest field for the Poetic development'. (ibid) We can see *how* he develops his own poetic work *The Raven*, *A Descent into the Maelstrom* and *Music* as 'a suggestive and indefinite glimpse' into the world of music (ibid: 433). Poe's last example of music in *Usher* is of 'certain effects of stringed instruments' on the delicate nature of its inhabitants. (ibid: 50) However, music in 'its ghastly inappropriate splendour' references another art form. Its association is with painting, an abyssal themed painting. The picture is of the 'immensely long tunnel' leading to a subterranean 'vault' where, we learn later, Roderick keeps the body of his comatose twin, his sister Madeleine:

One of the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, [Roderick], partaking not so rigidly of the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth, although feebly in words. A small picture presented the interior of an immensely long and rectangular vault of a tunnel, with low walls, smooth, white, and without interruption or device. (ibid: 50)

So we have the art of time, music, and the art of the surface, painting. Both arts attempt to depict a visual scene ‘although feebly in words’ in a verbal way. In making such a sublime remark, Poe confesses that *Usher* ‘proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequences of a mathematical problem’. (Fiedelson, 1969: 73 in Woodson) His vault image is even too difficult to capture. It can only be expressed by the art of space (painting) and the arts of time (music, poetry). For Usher, beside his self-imposed solitude for cultivation, maintaining his close-sister’s vault, expresses his will to become an isolate intelligence. Through his creative act, Usher wishes ‘to become independent of the diffused portion of himself [his sister’s will] by isolating it [the vault]’. (Regan, 1967: 130) The outcome is a sure success and Usher’s will, as symbolised by the vault, is a strengthened sense of self, albeit a realisation that comes too late.

After all these unusual views we have the marriage of music and poetry in the ‘The Haunted Palace’. With its ‘rhymed verbal improvisations’ and narration ‘not accurately’ expressed ‘The Haunted Palace’ starts. It is ceremoniously announced as an act of poetry *and* music:

### I

In the greenest of our valleys,  
 By good angels tenanted,  
 Once a fair and stately palace—  
 Radiant palace—reared its head.  
 In the *monarch* Thought’s dominion—  
 It stood there!  
 Never seraph spread a pinion  
 Over fabric half so fair.

### II

Banners yellow, glorious, golden,  
 On its roof did float and flow  
 (This—all this—was in the olden  
 Time long ago);  
 And every gentle air that dallied,  
 In that sweet day,  
 Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,  
 A winged odour went away.

### III

Wanderers in that happy valley  
 Through two luminous windows saw  
 Spirits moving musically  
 To a lute’s well-tunèd law,  
 Round about a throne, where sitting  
 (Porphyrogene!)  
 In state his glory well befitting,

The ruler of the realm was seen. (ibid: 51)

All three of the above verses can be sung to waltz time with the dominant beat falling on the new line. 'The Poetic Principle' is for Poe whatever 'may develop itself...very especially in Music' (Galloway: 506). These verses all have the same number of beats in their first lines. In cadences of their last lines, a definite *sense* of melody is the result. For Poe, the composition idea is for a '*refrain* itself remaining for the most part, unvaried'. (Poe, in Feagin, 1997: 211)

The cross-rhymes speak of kingship (the noble Roderick Usher) and palaces. So, these verses recur as the compressed, lyrical summary of *Usher*. The events of decay in this poem are like the events of *Usher*. We have subject matter here that is transposed from the subject matter of *Usher*. The above is an expression of one (present) scene by means of another (later) scene. Again, this poem is an instance of *metalepsis* as Marcus Quintillianus says:

For the nature of *metalepsis* is that it is an intermediate step, as it were, to that which is metaphorically expressed, signifying nothing in itself, but affording a passage [glimpse] to something, it is a trope we give the impression of being acquainted with rather than one which we actually ever need. (Book, VIII, § 37)

Generally, *metalepsis* goes ignored if not pointed out. We can imagine the links to other meanings when these connections are made. In what follows, I submit to the view that the poem has links to five human senses. (Wilbur, 1967: 105) The first verse seems to be a comparison between the house-subject of the work and a 'head', presumably Roderick's. The second verse continues with the most enigmatic human sense of smell, suggesting that its subject matter is like a nose. The third verse makes reference to 'two luminous windows' which might be the metaphorical eyes of the house but might also be the ears which let in the musically rich noises of this third verse.

There is also mention of a 'throne' in verse III, which just before the ballad, is a 'lofty' metaphor of Usher's senses for reasoning. The metaphor is likened to a 'mystic current of meaning'. (ibid: 50) The form of musical ballad concentrates the inchoate, detailed and fragmentary

surface of *Usher* in a single, unified experience of sensation.<sup>1</sup> These verses of ‘The Haunted Palace’ intimate, in the reader, a disposition of multiple perceptions. We sense a simultaneous appreciation for the many allusions of the verses themselves and to those of the greater themes in *Usher*. ‘The Haunted Palace’ uses the human senses as its figure of focus. We also see how in further verses:

#### IV

And all with pearl and ruby glowing  
Was the fair palace door,  
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,  
And sparkling evermore,  
A troop of Echoes whose sweet duty  
Was but to sing,  
In voices of surpassing beauty,  
The wit and wisdom of their king.

The fourth verse continues its regular rhythm. Verse IV is like the senses of the mouth as a metaphorical ‘door’ through which recurrent ‘flowing’ ‘sweet’ tastes also ‘sing’. With the gradual development of each verse, there is a step-by-step revelation of each sense. One sense depends on the other. It is as if each sense is, so to speak, upheld by the head in Verse I which carries the senses of sight, hearing, smell and taste. The general effect has been widely studied in the technical aspects of the *mise en abyme* in relation to the frame-tale.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, for a sense of the Gothic ‘work within a work’ or *mise en abyme*, we require themes of decay, descent and destruction in ‘The Haunted Palace’. These negative themes would be in keeping with the characters and themes of *Usher* and show a part-to-whole likeness. Poe does

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Hester’s (1967) *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* and David Cooper’s (1986) *Metaphor* provide a good guide to the ways that the rhetorical principle of metaphor is central to music. Both accounts suggest metaphor is a figurative principle in the musical arts. The short tale by E.T.A. Hoffman, *Das Majorat* (1819) adumbrated *Usher* by twenty years. Hoffman, a musical critic as well as literary writer, felt that instrumental (or ‘pure’) music was the greatest of all the arts. As Poe adapted this German tale, he inadvertently took on the musical metaphors of *Das Majorat*.

<sup>2</sup> Technically, this ballad is ‘embedding’. This stacking effect could even be likened to a frame tale since the *mise en abyme*, succinctly put by Dällenbach, amounts to any ‘work within a work’, implicitly as a formalist feature of embedding, a subject widely discussed in narratology (Kanzog, 1966; Duyfhuizen, 1992; Nelles, 1997). But Dällenbach’s basic definition of a ‘work within a work’ (ibid: 8) for a *mise en abyme* is imprecise as are the ‘altogether inexact examples’ (Gide) which are defined by this formulation. Kanzog formulates the frame tale very helpfully: ‘where one story encloses another like a frame’, but warns that an interpretation between the primary narrative (such as *Usher*) and a secondary narrative (such as ‘The Haunted Palace’) on however many levels, though associable with the *mise en abyme* and though operatively similar, are both very different literary effects. Nelles’ argument (1997: 127-43) goes even further and places the *mise en abyme* in sharp contradistinction to that of the frame tale and suggests that the *mise en abyme* is the ‘most extreme’ manifestation of narrative embedding based on two poles in which the narrative embedding can be schematised. So frame tales according to Nelles give a sense of going sideways and *mise en abymes* are intimated upwards. I would suggest that this upward feel is because the *mise en abyme* uses a different sense of temporality: it develops vertically (with its associated levels of hierarchy) rather than spilling out sideways. Its rhythmical musicality resists the putative linearity of a narrative and implies eternal looping and eternal regress though there are definite beginning, middles and ends of their citations in concrete examples. The two types of embedding that Nelles highlights are the ‘horizontal’ type and the ‘vertical’ type of embedding. The horizontal embedding or frame tale, for Nelles, has no change in the narrative level as related by the characters. As an example of this, one could think of the subtle and unannounced structures of the stories in Flann O’Brien’s *At Swim Two Birds* or in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*. Both works feature amorphous narratives that are not self-consciously announced.

indeed include these decadent themes. The fourth verse above is the turning point of the demonic rhapsody because its rhythms become heavier and longer (Track 2 of Accompanying CD). For example, the poetic stress alternates on each syllable. In exactly the same way as the Weber waltz that *Usher* points out, the timing also changes. Moreover, a sadder mood, fitting a minor-key change, is stronger.<sup>1</sup> We thereby read about that ‘uneasy intonation’:

V

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
 Assailed the monarch’s high estate;  
 (Ah, let us mourn, for never morrow  
 Shall dawn upon him, desolate!)  
 And, round about his home, the glory  
 That blushed and bloomed  
 Is but a dim-remembered story  
 Of the old time entombed.

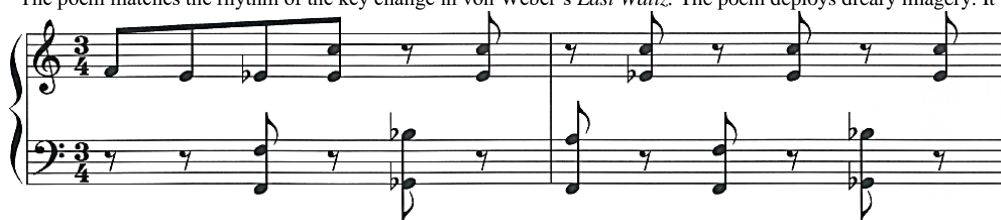
VI

And travellers now within that valley,  
 Through the red-litten windows, see  
 Vast forms that move fantastically  
 To a discordant melody;  
 While, like a rapid ghastly river,  
 Through the pale door,  
 A hideous throng rush out forever,  
 And laugh—but smile no more.

Here, we finally come to the end of ‘The Haunted Palace’. It ends on a modified word, ‘no more’ rather than Poe’s extensively used word of the void, ‘nevermore’. The use of this sound is very musical, very phonic. Poe recognises the sound as ‘the most sonorous vowel, in connection with *r* as the most producible consonant’. (Feagin, *ibid*) The last word, read aloud, reverberates.

The ‘black and lurid’ (*ibid*: 44) and ‘stern and deep’ tarn outside the mansion contrasts sharply with what is inside it. These surroundings threaten to overcome the physical House of Usher and by extension, their lives and long-standing name. The locale was different before and has been



<sup>1</sup> The poem matches the rhythm of the key change in von Weber’s *Last Waltz*. The poem deploys dreary imagery. It befits the minor key-



decayed and corrupted in parallel to the genealogical house. Verse V captures the past glory that once ‘blushed and bloomed’ with ‘luminous windows’ made ‘dim’ and eventually, ‘red-litten’, angry outlooks based on a lack of loveliness. Music again captures the theme of ‘rapid ghastly’ degeneration through the metaphor of ‘a discordant melody’. The end line also suggests a menacing inversion of values: irony in place of earnestness of the senses where there is fiendish ‘laughing’ and no authentic reactive ‘smiling’. Whatever the abomination is that caused the ‘evil things’ to assail the once proud ‘pale door’, we see a broader link of the narrative of *Usher* to its first mention of ‘extraordinary dilapidation’ and ‘crumbling condition’. (ibid: 45) The poetic rhythm of all these verses varies. But line six in all six verses has four beats. Line six in the first verse can be sung with four beats on the diphthong but its rhythm is accentuated; ‘It stood there!’ This calming line captures the essence of the entire ballad ‘The Haunted Palace’ because it gives a sense of rooted identity, resistance to decay and physical place by appealing to the senses. In this regard, Charles Baudelaire summed it all up in how Poe’s:

...solemnity surprises and keeps the reader’s mind alert. At the very start you feel it is a question of something serious. And slowly, gradually, a story unfolds whose interest depends upon an imperceptible deviation of the intellect, on a bold hypothesis, on an imprudent dosage of Nature in the amalgam of the faculties. The reader, held by dizziness, is forced to follow the writer in his fascinating deduction. (Baudelaire, trans. Fowlie, 1963: 250)

Baudelaire admired Poe’s work and held that his characters, especially his women, spoke ‘with a voice which resembles music’ (ibid: 255) But combined with its ‘sinister and vaguely terrible’ Gothic theme, both characters and subject matter do indeed suggest a musically unsettling or broadly demonic concern. (Abel: 44 in Woodson, 1969) If, for instance, we analyse ‘The Haunted Palace’ with its meters in relation to music, we come to a new conclusion. Below is the summary of this analysis. The mark ˘ indicates an unstressed syllable, while the mark ˇ signifies a stressed syllable. The vertical line | indicates a break in the perceived measure. The outline below shows the rhythm differences between Verse I and Verse V in relation to the reference of the waltz in *Usher*:

<p>Verse 1:          In̄ the gr̄een   ēst̄ of̄ our̄ v̄allēys,          B̄ȳ gōōd ān̄   gēls tēnānt ēd̄            On̄ce ā f̄air   and̄ st̄atēly p̄allācē—          R̄adiānt p̄allācē—reāred̄ its̄ hēad̄ .  </p> <p>Anapestic --- ∨          Dimeter</p> 	<p>Verse 5:          B̄t̄ ēvil̄ things,   in̄ r̄obes   of̄ s̄or   r̄ow,          Ās̄ sāiled   thē m̄on   arch's̄ high   lēs̄ tāte;            (Āh, lēt̄   ūs̄ m̄ourn   for̄ nē   v̄er̄ m̄or   r̄ow          Sh̄all̄ d̄awn   ū p̄on   him̄ dē   s̄o   lātē!)  </p> <p>Iambic - ∨          Tetrameter</p> 
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Both the above rhythms (emphasis patterns) rise on the beat in poetry and music. Verse I-IV obeys, albeit quite roughly, the musical three-to-a-measure time whilst Verse V-VI corrupts this time signature with its stress on the alternating beat. Music uses measures to indicate rhythm and poetry uses ‘feet’ to do the same thing. In poetry, Anapaestic Dimeter (two-feet-to-a-line), or --- ∨ | --- ∨ is regular but is not wholly fit for the grave purposes of the story. That is why in Verse V, the Iambic Tetrameter pattern (four-feet-to-a-line) offers a faster pace. - ∨ | - ∨ | - ∨ | - ∨ |. The ballad therefore captures, in miniature, the regular sense of the opening of *Usher* (Verse I-IV) and also the irregular, inexorable demise (Verse V-VI) where the house collapses and the characters presumably die.

So far, in this section, I have argued that ‘The Haunted Palace’ also obeys the idea of the *mise en abyme* as outlined by Gide. If the above is anything to do with my working definition of the *mise en abyme*, it is also a case of rhetorical *metalepsis*. In this section, I also tried to show how this part of *Usher* is musical, thus addressing further the unexplored insight of Dällenbach that the *mise en abyme* is musical, or something ‘also essentially melodic’ (ibid: 1977: 181)

### 5.3 *Mad Trist*

After ‘The Haunted Palace’, *Usher* references a bizarre story called *Mad Trist*. This is an English tale which Gide said was not an altogether exact example of his idea. Unlike ‘The Haunted Palace’ poem, *Mad Trist* is not musical. It does however contain many sound words, onomatopoeia, and it raises a complex set of associations as to why it hangs together with the main text of *Usher*.

A few pages after 'The Haunted Palace' in *Usher*, we see Roderick reading some 'antique volume' called *Mad Trist*. (ibid: 56) Since Richard Hurd's 1762 work *Letters on Chivalry and Romance*, the interest in antiquarian matters swiftly became associated with what we call today, The Gothic. *Mad Trist* probably alludes to a crazy romantic meeting. The maddest pre-arranged meeting is between the twins Roderick and Madeleine, the sister who comes out of her grave meets her brother. This meeting is unclear. Nevertheless, the small-story excerpts seem to be from a medieval romance suggesting knights and the grail legends. In just a short piece, it captures the character of reclusive Roderick and the narrator as Ethelred, the knight hero. André Gide called this 'the story that is read to Roderick etc.' (ibid: 31)

This *Mad Trist* tale is written by Sir Launcelot Canning.<sup>1</sup> As it is read, the tale triggers events in the Usher mansion. The story portends the outcome of *Usher* and the ancestral house's implosion into its surroundings:

And Ethelred, *who* was by nature of a doughty heart, and *who* was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley *with* the hermit, *who*, in sooth, was of an obstinate and maliceful turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, *with* blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, *that* the noise of the dry and hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest... (ibid: 57)

This passage is rich in relative clauses (*who*—, *that*—) and prepositional markers (*with*—). So this passage is one long speech locution of the narrator. The above passage portends the main event of the *Usher* story which is that the house will fall. As the narrator reads each section of the story, destructive events occur in the house. We have here an example of prophetic language use. This small tale is a superimposition on the main text of *Usher* and it obscures the *Usher* text with many

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<sup>1</sup> The knight Ethelred may be an allusion to Æthelred the Unready or the King in English history offered bad advice from his courtiers. Perhaps the narrator is unprepared for the fall of the physical mansion like the king who was unprepared for the invasion of his lands. Also, the exaggerated, pastiche medieval themes in *Mad Trist* are typically gothic, 'medievally remote and mysterious'. (Woodson, 1969; 10) The name Canning is a reference to Thomas Chatterton's Rowley poems, specifically the pseudo-middle-English of the cycle *The Storie of William Canynge* based on the travelling merchant William Canynge (1399-1474). Some lines from the Chatterton poem echo the events of *Mad Trist*. For example the suggested outcome of the disrupted happy ending of the knights tale as captured in: 'Canynge and hys fayre sweete dyd that despise,/ To change of troulie love was theyre content; Theie lyy'd togeder yn a house adygne./ Of goode sendaument commilie and fyne.' (Chatterton, 2010: 258)



details, many layers of storytelling. Its surface seems grotesquely detailed, or arabesque. It is hard to identify exactly what is achieved here by the ‘supervention’ of an extraneous tale. Perhaps Poe is imagining the cherished mental state he deploys in his writing, he calls, ‘fancies’. An excess of the imagination as the gothic taste may also be an excess of the senses. This excess is a sinister one where the sense of excitatory wakefulness and inhibitory sleepfulness is reversed. The characters for example, are comatose (Madeleine) or sleep deprived (Roderick). The doubling strategy is thus highly effective but extremely rare. The narrator is leading the reader into a state of threshold awareness, a trance state of gnosis, limned vaguely between wakefulness represented by Roderick, and restfulness represented by Madeleine. As Poe says, in critical reflections, how this state is:

the point of blending between wakefulness and sleep—as to prevent at will, I say, the lapse from this border-ground into the dominion of sleep. Not that I can *continue* the condition—not that I can render the point more than a point—but that I can startle myself from the point into wakefulness—and *thus transfer the point itself into the realm of Memory*—convey the impressions, or more properly their recollections, to a situation where (although still for a very brief period) I can survey them with the eye of analysis. (Poe, 1846: 116-7 *italics in original*)

Indeed, Poe’s reflections relate to the reading narrator in the previous quote. The reader is jolted awake following his brief reverie, psychompomp, in the forest as he remembers what he has read:

At the termination of this sentence I started, and for a moment paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me)—it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came indistinctly to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot [Canning] had so particularly described. (*Usher*, *ibid*: 57)

Insofar as the analysis is possible, we have a reference to the dimming of the ‘pale’ kingdom of the ‘monarch’ Roderick, in ‘The Haunted Palace’. The *Mad Trist* story is not a true ‘coincidence’ of all the events that occur later. *Mad Trist* is a carrying over, into the moment, of future events. In this case, it is an example that fits the idea of *metalepsis*. Additionally, the intermittent mention of this second story-in-*Usher* is similar to ‘The Haunted Palace’ because, although not musical, it contains examples of sounds intruding into the narrator’s senses.

The context of *Mad Trist* draws attention to the way it indulges the senses further. This imaginary sensation between sleep and wakefulness is articulated whenever the narrator is distracted by the noises in the house. Again, the fragment makes reference to musical noises: ‘hollow-sounding’ ‘noise’ ‘alarumed’ in an *en abyme* ‘reverberated’ way. It causes a re-cycling of sounds and the absurd ‘echo’ read in the tale beforehand. The chains of Madeleine’s vault then begin to rattle. Though the noises are ‘stifled and dull’ (ibid) the mention of sound carries over from ‘The Haunted Palace’ ballad. It thus strengthens the central aim of the senses as a uniting theme in its compositional form.

During the second substantial paragraph of the *Mad Trist*, the narrator continues his reading of the hero who is ‘now entering within the door’. The story of Ethelred and the dragon makes mention of a heraldic shield on which is emblazoned:

Who entereth herein, a conquerer hath bin;  
Who slayeth the dragon, the shield he shall win. (ibid: 57)

The doomed promise of the traveller, Ethelred the knight, is presumably identified by the narrator who arrived at the Usher house on horseback. The narrator reads the tale further and reveals that Ethelred the hero noisily kills the dragon with ‘a shriek so horrid and harsh’. Heroic, Typhonian themes of serpent slaying were traditional in Grail and Medieval Legends. These myths give authenticity to the tale. But all the reading has a further debilitating effect on Roderick. He seems oblivious to the noises like ‘the screaming and grating sound’. These sounds echo ‘the shriek as described by the romancer’, Sir Canning, who wrote the novel, which in turn, the narrator reads. Roderick murmurs ‘inaudibly’ in response. The invisible narrator carries on reading. But we get a sense that the dreamlike events around Roderick are like some self-fulfilled prophecy: the sounds precede the reading but are only registered, later on, once the line in *Mad Trist* is read. The story has the same sensory theme of ‘The Haunted Palace’. Those lines ‘Through the pale door’ in ‘The Haunted Palace’ (Verse VI) show the hero in *Mad Trist* ‘entering within the door’, later slaying the dragon and then acting as a ‘Madman’ looking, ‘without the door’ (ibid: 59).

The redeeming hero from outside and beyond the mundane world, who slays the corrupting serpentine symbol is an ancient myth. Poe inverts this Christian doctrine, to sinister ends because he points out the ‘superhuman energy’ inherent in the narrator within, who has become like a slayed dragon.<sup>1</sup> It seems therefore that the theme of *Mad Trist* in relation to *Usher* goes against the grain of orthodox beliefs: it is thus a sinister but original imagining.

But in strict relation to Gide’s idea about *Usher* and *Mad Trist*, there follows ample reference to heraldry and the putting on of shields. The narrator continues again, ‘I resumed the narrative of Launcelot’, the narrator continues with the very heraldic theme of placing layers on top of each other, *en abyme*:

‘And now the champion, having escaped from the terrible fury of the dragon, bethinking himself of the brazen shield, and of the breaking up of the enchantment [song] which was upon it, removed the carcass [of the dragon] from out of the way before him, and approached valorously over the silver pavement of the castle to where the shield was upon the wall; which in sooth tarried not for his full coming, but fell down at his feet upon the silver floor, with a mighty great and terrible ringing sound’ (ibid: 58)

The reading, as a statement, then bears a truth to what is happening around him. We then, immediately read of ‘this second and most extraordinary coincidence’ (ibid: 58) in *Usher*: ‘No sooner had these syllables passed my lips than—as if a shield of brass has indeed, at the moment, fallen heavily upon a floor of silver...clangourous, yet apparently muffled reverberation’. (ibid: 58) The end of the doubling instance, recalling back the previous instance of itself in ‘The Haunted Palace’ is also the end of the final section of *Usher*. At this synchrony, there is a rapid and chaotic

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<sup>1</sup> Poe seems to, somehow, be aware of the ancient, pre-historical import of serpentine symbolism. Many Babylonian scholars of the epics (like *Gilgamesh*) have noted the misappropriation of the snake in the Garden of Eden myth by the Hebrew Scriptures. Of note is the serpent cult of the Old Testament (Orphite Gnostics) which was connoted to Jesus as the serpent. (John, 3: 14-5) Interestingly, the Babylonian Tiamat and Leviathan, (Job, 11) the serpents of the sea and primal chaos though largely missing from The Old Testament make a coy reappearance in The New Testament but with unexplained associations of moral evil and unjustified foreboding.

melding between *Mad Trist* and the story *Usher* that we are reading. This part shows a carry-over or transference between the two works.<sup>1</sup>

Other criticism has also considered a closer analysis of *Mad Trist*.<sup>2</sup> The structures *Usher* are difficult and detailed. Working through these details suggests that an exhaustive study is neither possible nor sane. We can however, quite simply, bear in mind 1) the parts of *Usher* which obey the traits of *ekphrasis* and *metalepsis*; 2) consider the musical nature of the part-to-whole correspondence and 3) appreciate the broader meaning of Gothic themes as a sinister conception.

## 5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined, through close reading, *The Fall of the House of Usher* to discern its rhetorical foundations, its musical themes and its place, more broadly, in Gothic English art. By keeping Gide's view in focus, I tried to show how his idea of 'transference' as a *mise en abyme* is more in keeping with the rhetorical trope of 'carrying over' or *metalepsis*. Similarly, I hope to have identified how passages containing undeniably visual subject matter are articulated with words. This latter effect is best attributed to the trope called *ekphrasis*. So far, Gide's two ideas about what we designate the *mise en abyme* are therefore: either *ekphrasic* or *metaleptic*. A third type of *mise en abyme* called 'infinite regress' derived from Gide's idea, was introduced by Magny and

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<sup>1</sup> Again, the technical term for this process of transference is *metalepsis*. The *mise en abyme* is central to the Late-modern concern of metafiction. Mark Currie's very helpful book *Postmodern Narrative Theory* gives extensive attention to this rhetorical device. His most succinct definition in Late-modern novels are 'illusion breaking devices', to expose 'artificial constructions' of the reflections between fictionality and reality. (2011: 2-3) And contrariwise, less prominent contributors in narratology have also given attention to *metalepsis* in relation to the *mise en abyme*. (Cohn, 2005; Pier, 2009; Roussin, 2005) The first two critics agree that *metalepsis* is a 'related concept' of the *mise en abyme*. The earlier nature of *metalepsis* is captured as a 'present effect attributed to a remote cause' in Lanham's writings on rhetoric (1991: 99). Similarly religious significance of the term, *metalepsis*, from Greek Orthodoxy is that it 'arises most often when an omniscient or external narrator begins to interact directly with the events being narrated, especially if the narrator is suspended in space and time from the event'. (Estes, 2008: 242) The earliest citation of the term is however still the clearest, albeit most flippant: 'There is but one of the *tropes* involving change of meaning which remains to be discussed, namely *metalepsis* or *transumption*, which provides a transition from one *trope* to another...The commonest example is the following: *cano* [spout] is a synonym for *canto* [sing] and *canto* for *dico* [say], therefore *cano* is a synonym for *dico*, the intermediate step being provided by *canto*. We need not waste any more time over it. I can see no use in it except, as I have already said, in comedy'. (Quintilianus, [1920], Vol III: 37-39)

<sup>2</sup> For a long study on the ways of paradox in *Usher* see Scott Peebles' erudite studies on structuralism and analysis. His recent structuralist chapter on the constructions of the story liken it to 'the hall of mirrors' metaphor. His conclusion of paradox is an example of the gambit of structuralism and its sequels: 'Paradoxically, the house comes to life only to collapse and die, but for Poe, the paradox works both ways: the fall of the house gives rise to the story, which 'lives' off paradox and other uncanny verbal structures. (ibid: 188) In sharp contrast to the debate about paradox in the *mise en abyme* is the essay by Jacob Emery (2012: 347) that paradox suggests synthesis or a critical need for closure, for conclusion. For Emery, paradox is a way to 'escape the structural legacy' of the *mise en abyme* phenomenon (ibid: 346). His argument, in crypto-Marxist jargon of 'production processes' and 'material media' does however offer a helpful insight using the mathematical metaphor of the trigonometric principle of the (tangent) line towards infinity. This line is called an 'asymptote'. The essay concludes that a *mise en abyme* in relation to allegory and symbol, is some sort of rhetorical *ekphrasis* of 'nested art'. The *mise en abyme* is 'not essentially paradoxical' for Emery (ibid: 347) because it 'recedes into the *abyss*'. The aim of composing with a *mise en abyme* is by 'structured language to point to an *impossibly large* phenomenon of another kind' (2012: 352) The solution to the excessive 'layered complexities' of a narrative structure *en abyme* is to use 'interpollated myth' and 'myth criticism', as a solution. (ibid: 343)

Dällenbach (and without clear English examples). In the following chapters, therefore, I shall consider to what extent their variety is apparent in recent examples of English Literature.

This chapter also attempted to address Dällenbach's final remarks from his study about the *mise en abyme*. In it, he asserts that the *mise en abyme* is predicated on metaphors, one of which is the 'essentially melodic'. Whilst reading Gide's example, my chapter has argued why 'The Haunted Palace' ballad captures a part-to-whole likeness between character sensation and narrative subject matter. Poe's musical reference helps to augment the likeness between themes of the events and the characters that describe these events subjectively. I proposed that 'The Haunted Palace' was to be sung to Weber's *Last Waltz* because the poetic meter obeyed the rhythm of its melody. This section also identified the wider aesthetic meaning of the lyrics in 'The Haunted Palace'. I concluded that the ballad was an allegory of the senses. Subsequent chapters will provide further evidence for the musical and sensory associations of Gide's idea (designated as the *mise en abyme*). The novelist, Aldous Huxley, whose work I shall discuss in the next chapter, called these instances of association, 'magical-musical jewels'; he remarked of *Usher* that it had a palindromic, magical playfulness, or 'abracadabrical absurdity' to unify the poetry of the work. (Huxley, 1958: 36) His own interpretation of this idea is included in the next chapter.

Yet, this chapter, just read, examined the story-in-*Usher* called *Mad Trist*. In it, I also tried to associate the unusual relationship of part-to-whole with the themes of wakefulness and restfulness. *Mad Trist* portends destructive events in The House of Usher. These events are associated with sounds. The catatonic Madeleine is eventually awakened from her vault signalling the beginning of the end for Roderick and his house. This section also highlighted the allusions to heraldic shields. Poe's allusions correspond to the analogy used by Gide for his inaugural idea which we still call the *mise en abyme*.

The work in this chapter finally tried to explore the very challenging themes associated with The Gothic genre. Throughout this chapter, I hope to have given a glimpse of an alternative way of imagining a gothic work of art. I associate this critical view with the 'sinister' but it could safely be

taken to mean the excesses of the imagination for which Gothic Literature is so famous. However, the sinister as a sensibility goes further than the common range of traits associated with gothic art. The radically alternative worldview, of the sinister, can always offer something original to the well-hewn conception of death and decay in complex artworks. If the sinister perception synthesises its insights in opposition to the views presented and established, the sinister critic can give an alternative appraisal to any artefact. The sinister sensibility is not merely contrary logic, morbid preoccupation or untenable fantasy but a fuller, more inclusive variety of reasoning. In short, the approach I have tried to evoke, takes imagination to the extremes of its capability—and the outcome is often highly sensual. In the following chapter, I hope to demonstrate further why the *mise en abyme* is 1) rhetorical 2) musical and 3) sinister. In the next chapter, I will examine how Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928) obeys Gide's idea, how its form fits the sinister viewpoint in literature, and why the novel's plangent references take us into the abyss.



## *Point Counter Point*

The last chapter used Edgar Allen Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* to examine André Gide's idea. In it, I argued how *Usher*'s small-scale parts unified, through music and poetry, the subject of a short story form. This chapter examines Gide's idea in Aldous Huxley's *Point Counter Point* (1928), a novel about a novelist who is writing a novel. André Gide's 1893 memoir about the subject 'transposed to the level of character' is an idea explored in his book, *The Counterfeiters* (1925). In it, Edouard the novelist, who is writing his novel, declares: 'what I should like to do is something like the art of fugue writing. And I can't see why what was possible in music should be impossible in literature.' (1925 [1931]: 171) Thus does Gide sketch his literary character, one who strove to abstract 'harmony and ... a continuous common chord' in his novel (ibid: 148-9).

In 1928 Gide's musical vision was achieved—but achieved by Huxley, who intuited the musicality in Gide's process-word 'transposed' and so composed a humanistic English novel in which characters, like parts of a musical work, play out the subject of their story, like 'parts' of a fugue, 'the human fugue':

The [character] parts live their separate lives; they touch, their paths cross, they combine for a moment to create a seemingly final and perfected harmony, only to break apart again. Each is always alone and separate and individual. (Huxley, 1963, [1928]: 32)

The 'human fugue' is Huxley's apt metaphor and it precisely captures Gide's original character-subject-idea. Though Gide's inaugural idea came to be called the '*mise en abyme*' and the term still implies a range of concerns, the honorific designation of *mise en abyme* is rarely associated, if ever, with the refined contribution Huxley made to this widely debated phenomenon. French critics after

Gide<sup>1</sup> have proposed a place for *Point Counter Point* in the tradition he initiated. Yet, English and Anglo-American critics, though intrigued by what Huxley called his ‘rather frightful novel’, have allowed the work to fall into a chasm of obscurity. (Bedford, 1993: 199)<sup>2</sup>

In sum, there is a range of criticism of *PCP*: 1) work which proposes aesthetic frameworks to better understand this complex novel and 2) work which blithely disregards the deeper musical connotations of the novel’s theme. In the following chapter, I shall compound the first fault but not be guilty of the second. Indeed any musical, fugal, framework of the novel has posed a consistent, critical challenge, and so, my aims in this chapter are: 1) to amplify the extant musico-literary frameworks within the novel and 2) to account, hereby, for the novel’s sinister tone and rhetoric.

Aldous Huxley understood the musical form of fugue. He held that writings such as ‘Bach’s *Art of Fugue* have always struck me as the subtlest, profoundest and completest metaphysical works ever composed’ (Watt, 1977: 509). Between 1922 and 1923, Huxley’s first journalistic job was as a music critic. He gives a clear account of the congruence between music and literary writing:

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<sup>1</sup> After ‘the third time’ without ‘the slightest enticement...to go on’ Gide declared Huxley’s novel ‘unreadable’ (18<sup>th</sup> March, 1931). The editor of Gide’s *Journals*, Justin O’Brien, remarks that Gide’s dismissal is ‘piquant’ especially because ‘*Point Counter Point* [*PCP*] was deeply influenced by, not to say modelled upon Gide’s *The Counterfeiters*’ (1978: 505). Two days later, Gide tried reading again: ‘I definitely drop Huxley’s book [*PCP*], in which I cannot get interested....’ Gide then compares *PCP* to the works of obscure French hacks and then that ‘there is probably more intelligence in Huxley, but just as much rubbish’. (20<sup>th</sup> March 1931 in Watt, 1977: 189) The vignette on Huxley’s reservations of Gide is captured in art critic, Clive Bell’s *Old Friends* (1956) in which Gide demands why Aldous Huxley calls him a ‘fake great writer’. Claude Magny, the coiner of the term *mise en abyme*, cites Huxley’s novel as the outcome of an ‘ambition to write a novel that “wanted to say something” worthwhile’. (1950: 269) Magny stresses the difference between Huxley’s and Gide’s novels: Edouard’s journal, in *The Counterfeiters*, she asserts, is, ‘in contrast [to *PCP*]...metaphysically rich’ (ibid: 272), and more ‘consubstantial’ whereas the journal entries in *PCP* ‘expand theoretically (and, it must be said, in a rather abstract and artificial way) but in *The Counterfeiters* it [Edouard’s journal] endows the work with a kind of metaphysical depth from which it derives its sole transcendent meaning’. (ibid: 270-1) It is also worth noting that Magny found some inspiration in Huxley’s novel which mentions the now famous recursive image, contemporaneously popular on the box of Quaker Oats (Huxley, 1963: 409). Magny reduces Huxley’s idea to a ‘schematisation of narrative’, whereby each propositionally embedded narrative is only ‘marginal compared to the main theme’ as each new instance breaks down into ‘algebraic symbols’ (Magny, 1950: 272) In 1954, Pierre LaFille recognised in *PCP* ‘the device of the ‘shield’...developed well beyond what Gide himself had imagined or achieved’ especially if Gide had read more of Huxley’s novel. (1954 in Dällenbach: 26) Dällenbach does not offer an examination of *PCP*. Instead, he makes remarks on it via Magny’s happenstance evaluations and the assertion of ‘infinite reflexion’ in texts. Dällenbach’s only sustained *PCP* remark is a contention against LaFille, footnoted ‘in my view, Gide’s reticence in respect to *Point Counter Point* cannot be explained in terms of jealousy’. (ibid: 197, n10) Indeed, Aldous Huxley had adopted the device of a novelist in a novel in the short story, ‘Nuns at Luncheon’ (1922) and *Those Barren Leaves* (1925), a considerable time before Gide wrote *The Counterfeiters* (1926). So, the French critics could not overlook Huxley’s impact on Gide, or Gide’s debt to *PCP*.

<sup>2</sup> *PCP* ‘deserves more academic respect than it has heretofore received’ lamented Jerome Meckier in 1977. He declared of it, ‘a modern satirical epic’ and summed up the inconsistent reception in the Anglo-American world: ‘*Point Counter Point* has been branded cynically despairing, starkly realistic, and excessively intellectual...Adjectives applied to it include erotic, defeatist, panoramic, vulgar and sublime’. (1977: 367-8) Another salad of evaluations is put forward in the brief summary of modernist critical views (from Wyndham Lewis to Virginia Woolf) summed up by Peter Firchow: ‘it has been variously and savagely denounced as inept, puerile, misanthropic, mechanical, raw, unreadable, false, purposeless, inorganic, unoriginal, journalistic and inartistic’. (1974: 97) When the book was first published in 1928, leading critic, Cyril Connolly noted the influence of Gide and felt *PCP* ‘if not Mr Huxley’s best book...certainly his most important’ (Murray, 2002: 214) D.H. Lawrence with ‘a rising admiration’ saw the modern generation in Huxley’s novel and concluded: ‘it seems to me it would take ten times the courage to write *P. Counter P.* than it took to write *Lady C.*: and if the public knew *what* it was reading, it would throw a hundred stones at you, to one at me’. (Bedford, 1993: 199) Arnold Bennett declared the work ‘wholly destructive...attack on the society which it depicts’ (1929, [Watt, 1977: 175]). But only in the 1960s-1970s did criticism revisit the idea of music in the novel including the devastatingly brief and allusive Baldzana (1962), the abstract King (1963), the summative Meckier (1969) and the first workable suggestion of a musico-literary model by Woodcock (1972). Peter Firchow (1974) Donald Watt (1977) and Elizabeth Bowen (1977) all offer a broader insight into the novel’s form after the Grover Smith publication of Huxley’s *Letters* (1969) and the hindsight of four decades.



The ideal musical critic is a man who is perfectly at home with the technical part of music, but whose larger interest in it does not blind him to the larger emotional and intellectual aspects of composition. He must understand and he must be able to make other people understand; in a word, he must be able, like all other critics, to write well. (Allis, 2013: 9)

A plethora of musical references punctuate Huxley's work. Reflecting his times, Huxley was an idealist and purist regarding music tastes<sup>1</sup>; yet, he recognised the shortcomings of language to explain emotions which music aroused:

Music "says" things about the world, but in specifically musical terms. Any attempt to reproduce these musical statements "in our own words" is necessarily doomed to failure. We cannot isolate truth contained in a piece of music; for it is a beauty-truth and inseparable from its partner. The best we can do is to indicate in the most general terms the nature of the musical beauty-truth under consideration and to refer curious truth-seekers to the original. (Allis, 2013: 9, cf Huxley, 1932: 50)

For his argument about the limits of music, Huxley clearly takes a particular line of philosophical reasoning for the place of music and, no doubt, its place in literature. With this starting point, any reading of *Point Counter Point*, henceforth *PCP*, becomes clearer.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Barbarism has entered popular music from two sources—from the music of barbarous people, like the negroes, and from serious music which has drawn upon barbarism for its inspiration...If Rimsky-Korsakoff had never lived, modern dance music would not be the thing it is'. (in *Vogue*, 1924 [O'Hara, 2012: 37]) Huxley was also deeply humanistic and a committed pacifist, so aberrations like these must be considered just that.

<sup>2</sup> Huxley's aesthetic criticism of music is a thoroughgoing formalism. The aesthetics of music can be split into two camps, what I call 1) the formalists and 2) the expressivists. The latter group maintains that the value of any musical work can be derived from explanations about music's link to extraneous phenomena (such as emotions and receptive feelings). But countervailing theories, in formalism, follow a reasoning which recognises that music is abstract (in the sense that it cannot represent anything physical), music only refers to itself, to its own essential nature, or form. There is thus no function beyond the form of the music and candidates for its meaning and value are found not in extra-musical concerns (intention, psychology, biography) but in its essence as an aesthetic object, unrelated to its effects on the listener. Peter Kivy (1989: 10) argues how emotively charged shapes can be determined by the contours of the musical forms. But it is through Roger Scruton's 'sophisticated universalism' (Hamilton, 2007: 45) that he advances the emotional value of music, whilst strengthening the validity of musical formalism. Scruton's contribution is the 'acousmatic experience' argument to do with how 'the listener can spontaneously detach sound from the circumstances of its production' (ibid). His tentative conclusion is that 'the expressive qualities of a work of music form the most important part of its content' (1999: 344). Scruton defends his thesis against Hamilton in his characteristically lucid book *Understanding Music* (2009:6-7) where 'sounds...can be identified without referring to any object...and because they are pure events we can detach them from their causes' sounds and music can then allow the hearer to attest to 'what is heard *in* them' as sounds and music, hence, proving some emotional value of music. The formalists trace their arguments to the musicologist Eduard Hanslick's negative thesis *The Beautiful in Music* (1854). Malcolm Budd's examination of this work shows that no wholly expressive character of any music can be determined. But he does give the proviso that any 'viable theory of musical value...must allow music to possess different kinds of value' (1992: 175). One such value is the autonomy of the individual piece and the listener's experience of the music. Yet, his conclusion, beyond acknowledging the putative link of musical representation and emotion, Budd sides with the formalist theory where 'music cannot represent the thought that forms the core of a definite feeling, so that the musical arousal of feelings cannot be an aesthetic response to music's representation of the emotional life'. Though a link between the musical representation and emotions may be established, all any theory of music can do is to 'recognise and explicate it' for completeness. (Cooper, 2001: 179)

## 6.1 'The Musicalisation of Fiction'

While Huxley is certainly not the first to explore music in literature, his approach in *Point Counter Point* offers a new conceptual tool by introducing his own idea that raises the stakes of Gide's idea significantly.<sup>1</sup> In fact, Aldous Huxley anticipated, perhaps unknowingly, Gide's mature transposing technique three years before Gide published *The Counterfeiters* (1925). Huxley's short story 'Nuns at Luncheon' (1922) features a storyteller persona. It features a lovelorn novice whose reliability is undermined by the tentative interventions of the omniscient narrator. Eventually, it transpires that the narrator is only mimicking the character. Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, however, did give the first full treatment of such mimicry in the form of a novel. But, like Gide's novel, Huxley's novel also carries a thumbnail sketch: in a journal entry of a character novelist. Philip Quarles, whose journal is a reduced version of some of the events in the eponymous *Point Counter Point*, writes the story of the novel around him. But so vast are the events in the novel that Huxley resorts to a metaphor of music to abstract his reduction technique. Huxley's 'musicalisation' process is to do with partial content in the journal as it inheres to the musical subject of the surrounding work. The writer of the novel in *Point Counter Point* is thus Philip Quarles, whose journal entry captures his method for writing his novel:

The musicalisation of fiction. Not in the symbolist way, by subordinating sense to mood [...] But on a large scale, in the construction. The changes of moods, the abrupt transitions. (Majesty alternating with a joke, for example, in the first movement of the [Bach] Quartet. [...]) More interesting still, the modulations, not merely from one key to another, but from mood to mood. A theme is stated, then developed, pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still recognisably the same, it has become quite different. In sets of variations the

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<sup>1</sup> Huxley's evaluation of Gide was entirely ill-willed and sarcastic. Perhaps, as a response to calling *PCP* 'unreadable' and 'rubbish', Huxley never retracted his dismissal of *The Counterfeiters* as 'the oddest book' (1<sup>st</sup> September 1926 in Sexton, 2007: 181). Huxley felt Gide's novel in 1926 was some bisexual coming out confession. (Sexton, 2007: 181) *The Counterfeiters* 'is very good, I think, because it is the first book in which Gide has ventured to talk about the one thing in the world that really interests him—sentimental sodomy' (Smith, *Letters*: 281). Huxley wrote an unflattering report upon first meeting Gide 'who looks like a baboon with the voice, manners and education of Bloomsbury [bohemians] in French' (Murray, 2002: 107) Huxley's intemperate opinions of others echo his sentiments of Gide: Anita Loos is 'charmingly ugly' (ibid: 192) and T.S. Eliot, who regarded Huxley as an ally, was 'haggard and ill-looking as usual' (Ackroyd, 1984: 86). For Huxley, Eliot also talked 'in the most uninspiring fashion imaginable' (Smith, 1969, 19 September 1916) Quite characteristically then, Huxley's *Point Counter Point* sees the fictional Lucy Tantamount writing libellously about Gide: 'I wish one met a few more heterosexuals for a change [in Paris]. I don't really like *ni les tapettes ni les gousses* ['neither active nor passive sexual agents'] And since Proust and Gide made them fashionable one sees nothing else in this tiresome town. All my English respectability breaks out!' (ibid: 433)

process is carried a step further. Those incredible Diabelli variations, for example. The whole range of thought and feeling, yet all in organic relation to a ridiculous waltz tune. Get this into a novel. How? The abrupt transitions are easy enough. All you need is a sufficiency of characters and parallel, contrapuntal plots. While Jones is murdering a wife, Smith is wheeling the perambulator in the park. You alternate the themes. More interesting, the modulations and variations are also more difficult. A novelist modulates by reduplicating situations and characters. He shows several people falling in love, or dying or praying in different ways—dissimilar solving the same problem. Or, *vice versa*, similar people confronted with dissimilar problems. In this way you can modulate through all the aspects of your theme, you can write variations in any number of different moods. (1963: 408)

Two acoustic allusions pervade the above passage: 1) modulation and 2) alternation. The following section will consider the extent of these processes in the novel's form. Both applications are from fugue writing.<sup>1</sup> To validate Gide's idea, in which one register (subject) is transposed to another part (character), the comparison, through fugue form, exemplifies this carry-over, quite well. The title of Huxley's novel (*Point Counter Point*) alludes to the contrapuntal technique of writing music for many voices, or polyphony. Quarles's journal, above, mentions a fugal suite: it expresses the immediate significance to the various scenes in his planned novel. Much like the *Tocatta and Fugue in D Minor* (BWV 565), an opening subject commonly takes flight with another phrase which answers this subject.<sup>2</sup> The 'subject' dominates the texture of the fugue and the 'answer' concludes the opening on a transposed note (the tonic). (Example 6.1) (Track 3 on CD) The musical counterpoint technique is therefore a simple way in which one (dominant) register is transposed to another (tonic) register. Huxley's novel contains characters who co-operate or oppose other

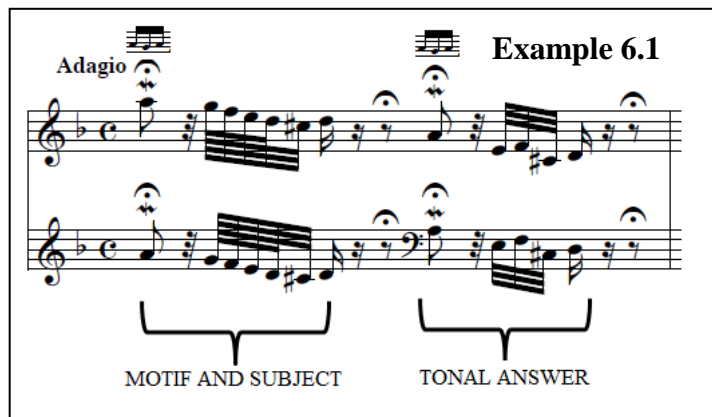
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<sup>1</sup> Fugues are difficult to define, 'defining the word is well-nigh impossible' (Watt, 1977; 510). It is doubly contentious therefore that literature involving a fugue (*contra punctum*) is an art which is any easier to describe. Yet apart from its threefold Aristotelian structure, introduction, middle and end (*Poetics*, 1450b, 22-3), there is a general didactic frame of the fugal form where a subject is presented in an exposition (by various voices), this subject is developed through various episodes and then concluded. There is also, quite significantly, the 'modulation' and 'alternation' of themes and voices, which Quarles points out in *PCP*. (ibid: 408)

<sup>2</sup> The musical subject in fugue is outlined clearly in the sixteenth century treatise *The Art of Counterpoint* by Gioseffo Zarlino. In it, Zarlino declares the primary indispensability of the subject: 'without [the subject] nothing can be made. Just as the agent in any operation has regard for the end that moves him to action and bases his work on certain material called the subject, so the musician in his operations, considering the end which impels him to work, finds the material or subject upon which he bases his composition...His end is the same as that of the poet'. Zarlino then quotes Horace: 'Poets either aim to benefit or amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life...the poet's subject is [an event in] history or a tale'. (Zarlino, trans. Marco, 1968: 51) Zarlino's definition of musical fugal subject, accords with Gide's diary entry, especially since transposition (from one tone in the tonal hierarchy, to another tone) is assumed in the fugue. Zarlino's 'agent [character]' which 'bases' his 'end' on what is called the subject, confirms Gide's journal entry, where in a work of [literary] art, he liked to 'find transposed, on the level of character, the very subject of that work'. (*op cit*)

characters in each section of the novel. These accords and discords, consonances and dissonances, furnish the novel with a theme and its title.<sup>1</sup>

In *PCP*, Quarles' diary, above, evokes 'the B minor Suite, no 2' which was played at the Tantamount's party. This is J.S. Bach's fugal work which has prompted critics to propose a model for



the whole novel. George Woodcock (1972) did exactly this: a 'description of four sections of the novel corresponding to [the] four movements of a musical composition' (Bowen, 1977: 488). But, it is rather Paul Gannon who first proposes the scheme (1965:44). Gannon's four sections for the novel were 1) andante, 2) allegro, 3) scherzo and 4) rondo.<sup>2</sup> I do accept this model. It affords a workable solution to the dominance of certain characters in notional sections of the book. With around forty characters, the 'many individual points of view' (*Letters*, Smith, 1969: 275) which Huxley hoped for, only makes the scope of *PCP* unwieldy, D.H. Lawrence called it 'a fat book'. (Murray, 2002: 214) So, although this musical framework does give a general texture for each narrative section, I also think that it must take into account a fifth tempo beyond moderation, a tempo in which the pace is extreme: either very slow or very fast, largo or presto. Therefore my own account, of how Huxley renders 'modulation' and 'alternation', is one which, although recognising the tempo-model, will also examine his work through five conventionalised approaches

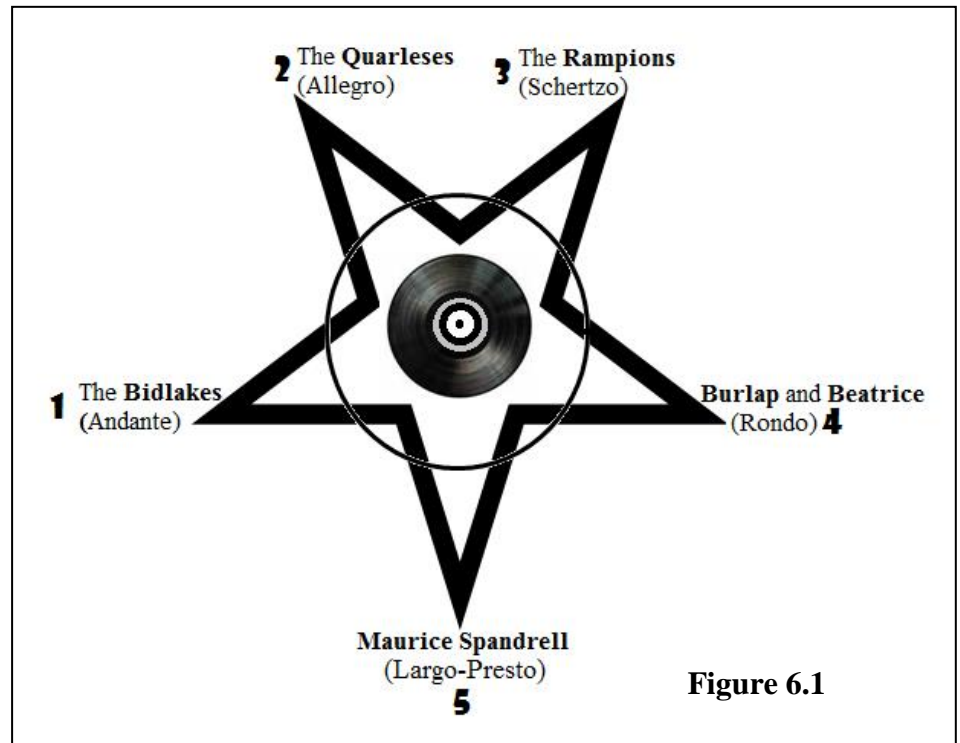
<sup>1</sup> It is now quite widely known that Huxley wanted to call his novel 'Diverse Laws' since he even includes a few lines from a stanza of Fulke Greville's drama *Mustapha* (1609) for his title page epigraph. Greville's neglected drama captures the upheavals of early renaissance Turkey. The lines run on about the age-old conflict between head and heart which Huxley sought to address in his spiritual quest, culminating in his book of quoted aphorisms *The Perennial Philosophy* (1945) in which Huxley never fully addressed his ambivalent spiritual outlook. The epigraph then, fittingly ends with a conceit-like question 'What meaneth nature by these diverse laws./ Passion and reason, self-division's cause?' (1963).

<sup>2</sup> Gannon's twentieth century model (1965), invoking Frank Baldzana (1962) is more helpful and makes associations of characters with each of the musical tempi he assigns to each section in *PCP*. He reflects that Huxley 'belabours the [musical] analogy' so it may follow that his recounting might seem 'forced and farfetched'. As the opening passage of my chapter has shown, Huxley's term 'the human fugue' begins and ends in the position of individualism. Gannon, as a product of his time, reads this 'individualism' as a negative variety of self, a 'society divided into individuals without common beliefs and each [individual] following his own desires without regard for others' (ibid). Perhaps the notion which Huxley explores, makes Gannon pessimistically conclude why the entire form of the novel is 'uncoordinated structure' where 'the discontinuity of the novel matches the discontinuity of life'. (ibid: 44) Nevertheless, Gannon's brief study-guide proposes the following fourfold model for *PCP*: 1) *andante* [Chs 1-13], 2) *allegro* [Chs 13-20], 3) *scherzo* [Chs 20-34] and 4) *rondo* [Chs 34-37].

(‘species’ of musical polyphony). Not least because each ‘species’ in fugue replicates the musical tempo framework of Gannon and Woodcock whilst coming closest to acknowledging Huxley’s desire to write a fugue-like novel.<sup>1</sup>

The five sections of the novel are based on their associations with the scope of speed for each section. (Figure 6.1) The opening of the novel is pendulously slow and sedate (*andante*) which arouses a moody and sad account dominated by the troubled alliance of Majorie Carling and Walter Bidlake. It is like a ‘sadness within some vaster, more comprehensive happiness’ (ibid: 34) The subsequent section is phrased at a moderate pace (*allegro*) and intones quite differently how the emotional upheavals ‘had been settled’ (ibid: 217). The light-hearted section (*scherzo*) though featuring sex and death scenes, is augmented as ‘some sort of joke’, one which Quarles feels at the sight of Lucy who gives him ‘a queer creepy shock of astonished horror’ (ibid: 407). The fourth section builds up towards a climax (*rondo*) and contrasts conflicting emotions ‘suddenly and uncontrollably, to laugh and to cry’ at the same time. (ibid: 531) The fifth point in my proposed extension of the model is

discussed at length towards the end of this chapter. This point undergirds the entire novel. Its dominating character is Maurice Spandrell who alludes to the musical theme running throughout the novel as he protests that ‘men must



**Figure 6.1**

<sup>1</sup> The anecdotal interview which flourishes Donald Watt’s essay is the exchange between Huxley and his wife, Laura, where she asks him whether he can write a novel in the style of Bach. With a longing reply, Huxley says ‘it would be marvellous if I could... literature is my lawful wife, but music is my mistress’. (Watt, 1977: 509) For the incipient descriptive poetics on the novel see Baldzana (1962) and King (1963). Donald Watt’s fugal sequencing technique, though overlooked because of its complexity, does develop the summaries of Baldzana and King. Although all critics, quite inexplicably, overlook the most obvious five-fold ‘species’ types in the fugue conventions of J.J. Fux (1725).

have absolutes, must steer by fixed external marks'. (ibid: 587) It is thus the extreme tempi of his dirge-like descriptions and rhapsodic outbursts that must be recognised and explicated for any complete model of *PCP*. Finally, the contrasting tempi *andante-allegro*, in my model, explores Quarles' musical challenge of 'modulation' or balancing the parts, whereas the similar tempi, *scherzo-rondo*, feature a more rapid movement, an oscillated interchange between parts, or what Quarles calls 'alternation'. Consequently, my model develops the limited workability of the current model.

Right at the end of *PCP*, after the murder of Spandrell, the chapter tries to capture the stillness, an acoustic absence amplified negatively by a record which has reached its end on its turntable:

There was a little silence. Through the open door came the sound of music. The passion had begun to fade from the celestial melody. Heaven, in those long drawn notes, became once more the place of absolute rest, of still and blissful convalescence. Long notes, a chord repeated, protracted, bright and pure, hanging, floating, effortlessly soaring on and on. And then suddenly there was no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc. (ibid: 599)

Maurice Spandrell's role is significant: the novel's musical soundtrack ends because of his death. His name, Spandrell, implies structural support (architectural buttress, bannister brace, picture-frame truss). He is the embodiment of inspiration: he is the muse and is the character that integrates the score of the novel. His role, in modulating and alternating the episodes around him, will be discussed in due course. For now, let us turn to a synopsis of the preceding four sections (*andante*, *allegro*, *scherzo*, *rondo*) as they echo Quarles' ideas about 'the musicalisation of fiction' or 'the human fugue'.

### **6.1.1 Andante**

The slow and anguished opening of *PCP* is part of what Quarles calls 'the human fugue'. It is in this section where an open enmity, of one person against another, is given dramatic voice. It

features the troubled affair between Marjorie and Walter. She is ‘a timid and whey-faced woman very like himself’ as Frank Baldzana has noted ([1959] 1962: 252):

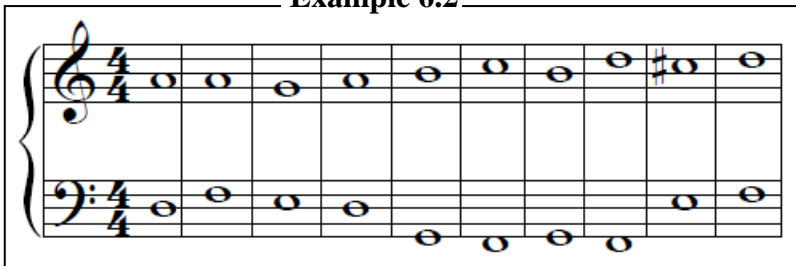
...she was crying. Through her closed eyelids the tears were welling out, drop after drop. Her face was trembling into a grimace of agony. And he was the tormentor. He hated himself. ‘But why should I let myself be blackmailed by her tears?’ he asked, and, asking, he hated her also. A drop ran down her long nose. (PCP, *ibid*: 4)

Later on, Huxley says of Marjorie that ‘she had to suffer’ and of Walter that ‘he had suffered to no purpose...suffered from thwarted desire’ (*ibid*: 205-8). Eventually, their ‘single agony’ switches roles and Walter breaks down but feels the same way as Marjorie does:

...something in his body seemed to break. An invisible hand took him by the throat, his eyes were blinded with tears and a power within him that was not himself shook his whole frame and wrenched from him, against his will, a muffled and hardly human cry. (*ibid*: 208)

A sad one-to-one relationship of ‘dreadful sobbing’ mimics the first species of counterpoint. (*ibid*)

**Example 6.2**



Their behavioural expressions are contingent with a slow tempo, animated with a low level of energy, the couple gesture one point

of view against another in long, sustained statements. In J.J. Fux’s (1725) didactic and prescriptive guidelines of fugue composition templates, or ‘species’, each part ‘must be in the same mode’ as the other part. [1965:31] (Example 6.2, Track 4 on CD) Indeed, Huxley features two reflexive, monologic characters, each balancing pathos one against the other. The long tones are very

amenable to the slow movement attributed to the depressing relationship between Walter and Marjorie.<sup>1</sup>

### 6.1.2 Allegro

This section of the book is dominated by Elinor and Philip Quarles. Their name, Quarles, means ‘to spoil’ because, apart from spoiling their son, they undermine the integrity of the other characters by their involvement: Elinor’s affair to ‘spoil everything’ (ibid: 460) with Webley culminates in his death, Philip’s absence from his son culminates in the boy’s fatal illness. Throughout this section, the Quarleses regulate the pace of the overall novel through driving the whole plot forward. The pronounced place of Philip’s ‘musicalisation of fiction’ jottings, flourish, in miniature, the musical allusions in the whole novel. But Elinor also quickens the work in her independent theme whence a two-to-one arrangement is outlined, a duality of upbeats and downbeats:

Elinor, who had been looking at him [her son], almost laughed aloud. That sudden lifting of the chin—why it was the parody of old Mr. Quarles’s [the grandfather’s] gesture of superiority. For a moment the child was her father-in-law, caricatured and in miniature. It was comic, but at the same time it was somehow no joke. She wanted to laugh, but she was oppressed by a sudden realisation of the mysteries and complexities of life, the terrible inscrutabilities of the future. Here was her child—but he was also Philip [her husband], he was also herself, he was also Walter, her father, her mother; and now, with that upward tilting of the chin, he had suddenly revealed himself as the deplorable Mr. Quarles. (ibid: 337)

Elinor’s additive language (*and, also, at the same time*) gives a strong sense, not of a single one-to-one social relationship, but rather, her single, grounding voice reverberates in two other characters (against their voices) counterpointing quite differently. The outcome is ambivalent but affords Elinor’s episodes a faster pace. In exposition to the above, Fux’s ‘binary metre’ for fugues, fits the

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<sup>1</sup> The *Andante* in Bach’s B Minor fugal suite, to which Quarles’ journal entry refers, opens in a gloomy and introspective mood. It modulates by placing one note against the other. Its minor key builds up towards a resolute augmented seventh but then collapses into minor consonance (Track 5)





passage because there is a consonance and dissonance played against each single note. (Example 6.3, Track 6)

Example 6.3



By contrary motion, her aloof husband, Philip Quarles, also aims for ‘a different aspect of the event’ (ibid: 266). His entry about ‘the musicalisation of fiction’ presents both ‘modulation’ and ‘alternation’ and Fux’s second species of counterpoint is therefore an association we can make with his character and alternative outlook.<sup>1</sup> Quarles’s subsequent journal ideas also sustain my argument. As a writer (1), Quarles aims to put a novelist character (1.1) into his novel (1.2). His creation is therefore two-fold as it relates back to his creative agency. From his concordant technique, Quarles imagines further splits and thence some compositional recursive structure of a novel. Quarles’ journal entry has led to confused accounts justifying infinitely embedded narratives in a work of fiction. Though Gide’s idea is, as I have argued, quite amenable to visuals, its conception for literature remains in the domain of fanciful generalisation:

Put a novelist into the novel. He justifies aesthetic generalisations, which may be interesting—at least to me. He also justifies experiment. Specimens of his work may illustrate other possible or impossible ways of telling a story. And if you have him telling parts of the same story as you are, you can make a variation on

<sup>1</sup> Elinor and Philip Quarles’s parts resonate with the form of the *Double* in Bach’s B minor Suite. Through Schenkerian Analysis, the parts can be reduced to Fux’s second species of fugal counterpoint. Track 7 and Track 8 on the accompanying CD, plays each dominant- and tonic- initialised phrase to demonstrate how their allegro themed section resorts to an adapted variety of musical counterpoint.



the theme. But why draw the line at one novelist inside your novel? Why not a second inside his? And a third inside the novel of the second? And so on to infinity, like those advertisements of Quaker Oats where there's a Quaker holding another box of oats, on which etc., etc. At about the tenth remove you might have a novelist telling your story in algebraic symbols or in terms of variations in blood pressure, pulse, secretion or ductless glands and reaction times. (ibid: 409)

Quarles's earlier vision of 'an infinity of depths within depths' is instantiated as quite impossible: 'nothing's in the least like what it [this idea] seems'. (ibid: 407)<sup>1</sup> His journal which also contains the scribblings of his biology-inspired novel, alludes to themes of zoology and chemistry.<sup>2</sup> It propounds his 'variation of a theme' idea of the Quaker Oats recursive advertisement. His 'professional zoologist who is writing a novel in his spare time' delineates his device of character interaction through a pecking order metaphor in a poultry yard. These lines capture the 'quantitative and mathematical illustration' for 'the book on which he had been working'. (ibid: 41) The novelist-scientist, Claud Bernard, was aiming for a recursive effect: 'hen A pecking hen B, but not being pecked by it, hen B pecking hen C and so forth' (ibid: 438). Perhaps, Quarles is alluding to the earlier friendly exchange: 'word for word. You women are all the same. Clucking like hens after their chickens' (ibid: 145). As if to stress the point, many words are repeated (even on the same page) like a leitmotif in music. And, moreover, through a figure of speech, as if to stress the simultaneity of the music with the literary discourse, Quarles's musical technique is achieved through a pun. Lord Edward's suicidal despair drives him to 'killing time with a book' (ibid: 38).

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<sup>1</sup> In Huxley's *Island* (1962) an analysis is put forward for the *allegro* in Bach's Brandenburg Concerto. Its perceived baselessness is attributed to the ramblings of 'a poor idiot [who] hadn't wanted to take yes for an answer in any field but the aesthetic' (ibid: 275). Huxley's resonance and eventual subscription to the mystical worldview of devotional non-duality (*Advaita Vedanta*) also coloured his musings about void-ness and its alleged place in the arts. As a result of such monism, although recurrent musical works are alluded to in Huxley's genre, any aesthetic appeals to ontological limitlessness, epistemological baselessness, in connection to these recursive passages, are treated with the unwitting scepticism that anti-realist positions attract.

<sup>2</sup> One such theme of *PCP* is its aesthetic concern with 'symmetry' and 'asymmetry'. The modern fear of over-specialisation which can lead to psychological imbalance, the age-old reason versus desire conundrum, gets a good hearing: 'For it's obvious that excessive development of the purely mental functions leads to atrophy of all the rest. Hence the notorious infatuation of professors and the ludicrous simplicity of the solutions they offer for the problems of life. The same is true for specialists in spirituality...But in an artist there's less specialisation, less one-sided development; consequently the artist ought to be sounder than the lop-sided man of science; he oughtn't to have the blind spots and the imbecilities of the philosophers and saints.' (ibid: 439) The modern aeon's 'lop-sided barbarism' is similarly critiqued by Rampion (ibid: 144). The place of symmetry in evolutionary psycho-biology argues that human physical aesthetic obsession is partly due to the dimorphism of the human sexes. Ideal symmetry and its related outcomes of averageness display positive sex-selection traits by virtue of strong immune-function (against opportunistic parasite infection). 'Attractiveness' is 'cross culturally universal' and implies we have a congenital ability 'to create beauty templates' through genetic determiners. (Grammer et al, 2002: 402-3) Earlier in *PCP*, the experiments on newt specimens (parodying J.B.S. Haldane) to create 'perfect balance' (ibid: 61) is accompanied by allusions to modulating music. But the results of the grafting experiment prove undesirable because the newt's offspring are 'asymmetrical tadpoles' (ibid: 83). Not to mention his relation, Galdous Huxley's pioneering views, Aldous Huxley was eventually convinced about the work of W.H. Sheldon in the 1930s with its roots in nineteenth century empirical ethnic-identity science and biological determinism before its radical politicisation, by the Nazis, of these views. In the 1940s, Sheldonianism featured prominently in his work as 'Huxley went overboard with it' (O'Hara, 2012: 142)

However, the book he chooses is the work of, scientist, Claud Bernard whose faintly musical expression revives Edward's dissonant outlook through its 'unrealised...melody and harmony':

'The living being does not form an exception to the great natural harmony which makes things adapt themselves to one another; it breaks no concord; it is neither in contradiction to, nor struggling against, general cosmic forces. Far from that, it is a member of the universal concert of things, and the life of the animal, for example, is only a fragment of the total life of the universe.' (ibid: 39)

Bernard's and Edward's is a great synecdoche where a part represents its whole and one part stands in for an undisclosed idea. In this case, the idea is vital unity of diverse parts, all uniting as a single cosmetic object in which the value of total order inheres. But because this mystical idea is so great, Huxley inflects his writing with musical terms 'harmony', 'concord', and 'concert', for example, to give it all a worldly familiarity, a sympathetic immediacy, a grounded particularity. It is as if the written forms in the novel are enchanted, are perhaps animated with tonal movement. Regarding lyrical music, Calvin Brown's view on 'looking for literary counterpoint', would have ruled Lord Edward's pun 'the presentation of *one* thing which has two aspects'. (1948: 42) Critic Brown however dismissed *PCP*, declaring it 'to have been a blind alley and to have made no contribution to the technique of fiction'. (ibid: 211) Of course, my own view is that all this matches Fux's second species of counterpoint which critics have sidestepped. Whenever such a figure, amenable to the second species in fugue, is used in literature, one thing is expressed, whilst at the same time, the expression elicits another thing. A binary 'modulation' to use Quarles's term, is at play. Here is a musico-literary sense of simultaneous perception, a potentially sinister effect of raising an untold idea at the expense of another. Puns often play out in social situations whenever taboo or unspeakable matters must remain hidden. But the secret becomes conspicuous by the din of its specious expression. The semantic doubling often betrays the contrary form of a pun, opening an abyss between its ideal meaning and its real meaning, and the gulf can only but elicit laughter.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Laughter at such speciousness, perhaps, at a privation of an absolute value failing its purest expression is, in simple terms, a reaction to a disparity of value. It is a disjunction between an ideal and a material reality which may be variously called 'ugly'. In aesthetics, coherent reasons for why humans

To resolve this related disparity, there is a strong aesthetic intent to verbally evoke music in a novel and thereby marry the time-based arts of poetics and music. Here is an attempt to do so and an objective succinctly outlined as ‘verbal music’ by Steven Scher:

By verbal music I mean any literary presentation (whether in poetry or prose) of existing or fictitious musical compositions: any poetic texture which has a piece of music as its ‘theme’. In addition to approximating in words an actual or fictitious score, such poems or passages often suggest *characterisation* of a musical performance or of a *subjective* response to music. Although verbal music may, on occasion, contain onomatopoeic effects, it distinctly differs from word music, which is exclusively an attempt at literary imitation of sound. (Scher: 1968: 26) *my italics*

The above description involving ‘characterisation’ of a subject confirms my argument heretofore. Gide’s idea of transposition grappled in achieving something which Huxley’s musically inflected literature achieved by ‘modulation’. Huxley’s novel, wherein a character’s hypotheses are those of the author, carries Gide’s idea firmly into the aesthetics of music. Therefore, Huxley’s novel realises Gide’s idea of transposition for what it is—a musical one. The journal of Quarles speaks about ‘the musicalisation of fiction’ as a means to apply fugal, polyphonic harmony to its tone-poetic structure. The ‘human fugue’ in *PCP* is the fullest literary reification of Gide’s idea and Huxley’s idea is truly what has become variously known as the *mise en abyme*.

Now even though Huxley’s novel gives Gide’s original idea some credibility, it also raises the disconcerting conclusion that a compositional structure like the visuals of infinitely cascading mirrors is fanciful misreading. (Magny, 1950; Dällenbach, 1977) Indeed, the calling back of a previous instance of itself, for clusters of events, in an infinitely embedded composition, is never clear in the novel.<sup>1</sup> Even though Quarles echoes ‘*et cetera*’ twice in his journal about Quaker Oats,

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(initially) laugh at ugly objects remain problematic. George Santayana (1896) proposed a compelling argument that such disparity was a moral evil if the laughter ugliness once elicited, fades into recoil and disgust. (ibid: 128) Samuel Alexander’s view (1933) followed that such objects were ‘difficult’ varieties of the positively established value of the beautiful. He proposes an ethically predicated argument, of ugliness, as the privation of beauty. These roundabout treatments do however validate the age-old, realist arguments that ugliness is a grotesque, compromised, pretentious expression of ideal form, a disjunction, whereas truly realised form unites its various components in the integrity of an isolated whole.

<sup>1</sup> The hen pecking sequence supersedes Quarles’s proposition of using ‘algebraic symbols...at the tenth remove’ for its imaginary embedded sequence. As if for emphasis, the latter parts of *PCP*, after Quarles’ first mention of the number ‘ten’, invoke a conspicuous numerological significance. For example, the Quarleses are delayed during travelling for ‘ten months’ (ibid: 382), Webley keeps Elinor waiting ‘ten minutes’ (ibid: 378) Quarles reports how Rampion feels his hated ‘dispensation’ with persist for another ‘ten years’ (ibid: 436); after being dazed by religion,

his iterative conception remains in the soundings of speculation. In *Point Counter Point* there is no novel inside the novel: only journal sketches about the novel to which it refers. Certain critics have ruled *PCP*, in this respect, as ‘an aesthetic failure’ (Roston, 1977: 387), with its ‘improbable notion of a literary equivalent to counterpoint’ (Scher 2007, [1982]: 186). Early critics dismissed the musical theme to ‘serve no discernible purpose’ (Firchow, 1972) and a recurring indictment that its ‘musical analogy is quite false’ (Daiches, 1939, in Kuehn, 1974: 3), reverberates today. But, it must be stressed, no particular pattern is promised—it is only proposed—so because it is not achieved, the novel cannot be held to account. On the other hand, probable ‘species of counterpoint’, promised by its musical title, *are* fully achieved as I shall continue to demonstrate.

### 6.1.3 Scherzo

The ‘ironically polite’ musical joke in *PCP* (a *roman à clef*) is its humorous character Mark Rampion. (ibid: 545) The archetypal D.H. Lawrence figure, Rampion’s traits are ‘good-humour, kindness and absurdity’ a character of uplifting gaiety as the connotation of *scherzo* implies (ibid). Perhaps, because of the stark proximity to his personhood, Lawrence famously called Rampion ‘the most boring character in the book’ (Bedford, 1993: 199). But ‘in particular, *Point Counter Point*’ prompted Lawrence to project, onto Huxley, the very character of Rampion who says Huxley ‘played with ideas so freely, so gaily, with such virtuosity’. (ibid: 201) We have, thus, from this section on, an uncanny interchange of positions. Mary, Rampion’s wife, maintains that Mark is ‘a regular puritan’ (Huxley, 1963: 165). And Lawrence said Huxley was ‘inhibited by a bitter puritanism on the part of his father’ (Bedford, 1993: 200) Lawrence’s concern with social and moral courage exercised by ‘members of my generation’, a social set which included Huxley, is also a

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Marjorie’s maid calls her ‘at ten’ o’clock (bid: 498). All these instances seem to suggest is a gradual suspension and dissolution of time. However, the discursive exchanges between the environmentalist scientist, Lord Edward and canvassing politician, Webley, raise the greatest significance of this ‘the tenth remove’. Edward is concerned about phosphorus pentoxide depletion and urges the political importance of its exploitation. (ibid: 79) At the end of the novel, Lord Edward raises the concern again in relation to ‘cemeteries’ and ‘cadavers’ and calculates how white phosphorus ( $P_2O_5$ ) can be restored through individual deaths in ‘a world population of eighteen hundred million’ (ibid: 549). This is the precise number first mentioned by what Huxley calls ‘the human fugue [containing] eighteen hundred million parts’ (ibid: 32) It is a number making for a ‘resultant noise’, it ‘means something perhaps to the statistician’, like the number-cruncher, Lord Edward. (ibid) The explicit link between the central idea of the novel, the human fugue, and white phosphorus (etymologically traceable to Lucifer, the light-bearer) suggests that this ‘tenth remove’ is both enlightening, deathly and above all, musical. Gottfried Leibnitz’s view melds music and mathematics because ‘music is the hidden exercise of arithmetic of the soul that does not know that it is counting’ and through this wilful experience, ‘desire is born’. Music thus fortifies the human will (Kovach, 1974: 8, fn 3).

central concern of Mark Rampion. His first name implies, etymologically, 'Mark' is related to the bellicose deity of Mars. His surname, Rampion, links him to the pungently odorous, wild onion family. Whilst preoccupied in his belligerent rounds about the 'Christian-intellectual-scientific dispensation' (Huxley, 1963: 562), Rampion condemns his own lamentations as perverse but he also has choice words for his three friends that they are:

All perverts. Perverted towards goodness or badness, towards spirit or flesh; but always a way from the central norm, always away from humanity. The world's an asylum of perverts. There are four of them at this table now. (ibid: 564)

During the interchange, Rampion calls Quarles 'an intellectual-aesthetic pervert', secondly, Burlap is 'a morality-philosophy pervert', thirdly, enigmatic Sandrell is 'incomparably the bigger fool, the completer pervert'. Rampion finally, resonating with Burlap, confesses his own shortcoming as 'a pedagogue and Jeremiah pervert'. (ibid) Indeed, Rampion's rancour is consonant with Burlap's: they both have Christian starting points as their contemptuous exchanges attest (ibid: 293). Rampion is a painter of Christian 'caricatures' (ibid: 288). His social views are predicated on hyperbolic, shrivelled, religious grotesques, his values are coloured by a gnostic discontent with his world so his post-Christian romanticism is consistent and sustained. Frank Baldzana highlights three symposia where, invariably, 'Rampion has the rostrum'. (ibid: 256) A musical analogy to Rampion would therefore include the third series of fugal counterpoint in which 'the second and fourth notes are consonant, in which case the third note may be dissonant'. (Fux, [1725]: 50) (Example 6.4, Track 9)



Example 6.4

Spandrell is like the ‘dissonant’ note in the exchange between registers as Rampion berates him. Rampion’s reductive moralism of ‘noble savagery’ (ibid: 270) is based on a fay antiquarianism ‘before Christian times... the harmonious Greek’ aeon. (ibid: 164) Although Rampion finds Spandrell’s worldview abominable, he, like Burlap, as Huxley has written, ‘must compromise a little with the world’ (ibid: 293). Both Rampion and Burlap are similar personifications: one is Christian and the other is merely the other’s cadence. Contra Peter Firchow (1972) it is not therefore Burlap who is Rampion’s adversary but Spandrell who is adversary of *all* orthodoxy. Ultimately, we are faced with a serious question ‘who is right, Spandrell or Rampion?’ (ibid: 110) Quarles’ technique that ‘a novelist modulates by reduplicating characters’ is thus realised in Rampion and Burlap but it cannot resolve the commonly misperceived orthodoxy of ‘two poles within which *Point Counter Point* operates’ as Peter Firchow asserts.<sup>1</sup>

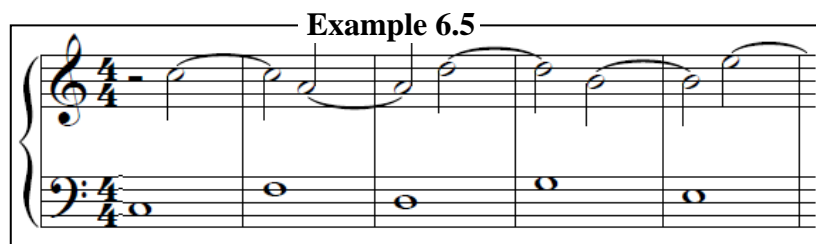
### 6.1.4 Rondo

Meanwhile, Quarles’s journal about ‘the musicalisation of fiction’ is revisited through Burlap’s and Beatrice’s co-dependent relationship. As Quarles observes, this type of contrapuntal variation is as if the previous sections are all ‘pushed out of shape, imperceptibly deformed, until, though still

<sup>1</sup> A fitting portion of Bach’s musical suite playing at the Tantamount’s party in Chapter 2 of *PCP* contains the flippant sounding *Badinerie*, played in a typically light-hearted manner. Both treble and bass parts mimic each other whilst the second and fourth phrases are tonally similar. The identity between second and fourth notes is also consonant and the third note is invariably a dissonant accidental (often the tonal leading note). (Track 10 on Accompanying CD)



recognisably the same, it has become quite different'. (ibid: 408) The rondo, like the 'alternation' proposed in Quarles's journal, is a rotational ABACA-type musical dance. In Fux's fugal counterpoint, the sequence is most amenable to the fourth fugal species where the same tone is 'connected by a tie' between an upbeat and a downbeat, all for the purposes of resolving any dissonance. (ibid: 55). (Example 6.5, Track 11) The contour of this counterpoint, as notated, suggests gradually heightened energy levels, yet imitates a sustained tempo and diminished range:



The *rondeau* prompts some guests at the party, where it is played, to remark 'this music is beginning to get rather tedious'. (ibid: 33) Because indeed, perhaps, the characters associated with this movement are comparably dull and satirically defeated. The pious Burlap is an editor of a literary review periodical. He seduces the naïve Beatrice, and others regard him as 'a parasite'. (ibid: 284) Their enterprises, as editors of hack literature, attest to their lacklustre alliance:

Between them, on the table, stood stacks of Tripe. They helped themselves. It was a literary feast—a feast of offal. Bad novels and worthless verses, imbecile systems of philosophy and platitudinous moralisings, insignificant biographies and boring books of travel, pietism so nauseating and children's books so vulgar and so silly that to read them was to feel ashamed for the whole human race— (ibid: 225)

This couple's sex scenes are equally disappointing. Much like a mechanical turn-taking rondo, the alliance is variously described as a 'sensual passivity' (ibid: 568) and 'unmixed contentment' (ibid: 601). But it is the portentous 'darkness of eternities' (ibid: 570) at the end of their sex which





Spandrell is thus difficult because he goes against the grain of all that is expected of such an entity seen with ‘a tail and hoofs’ (ibid: 393). In short, Spandrell is an antinomian. Spandrell’s consort is Lucy, her name suggests her illuminated, Luciferian character. ‘I’m like you’ Spandrell says to her, his ‘faithful succubus’. (ibid: 210-11) He quotes stanzas, in French, from the poet Charles Baudelaire. Implying the ‘world that gave forth strange music’ in this, *The Flowers of Evil* poem, ‘A Carrion’, its litanies are dedicated to Lucy, and in translation its lines are:

—And yet you will be similar to that filth,  
To that horrible infection,  
Star of my eyes, sun of my nature,  
You, my angel and my passion!  
Then, O my beauty, tell the vermin  
Which will eat you with kisses...  
(ibid: 181, trans Fowlie, 1964: 47)

In ways not dissimilar to Spandrell, Lucy ‘a born bad angel’ (ibid: 211) is portrayed as a freedom-loving, rebellious, frenzied character. (ibid: 282) Spandrell, like Baudelaire’s morbid appeal, lives as an ‘anchorite of diabolism’ (ibid: 244), on a ‘topsy-turvy moral principle’ (ibid: 298), to always ‘do the opposite’ (ibid: 397) through ‘the irregularity of his way of life’ (ibid: 248). English literature is full of such misunderstood figures: Christopher Marlowe’s Dr Faustus, Lord Byron’s Cain and Manfred, Mary Shelley’s Monster, James Hogg’s Gilmartin and even Mark Twain’s Mysterious Stranger. But unlike these powerful archetypes, Spandrell makes no disguise of his infernal allegiances. He foregrounds the fullest thrust of the novel’s subject of evil, going beyond the prescribed limits of convention and ‘habit’ (ibid: 300). He works against habit-forming nature: he is a non-natural being. In the profoundest depths of his self, he is divided yet individuated. Spandrell, and his *psyche*-centric will, drives the *PCP* plot forward and combines all four counterpointed characters mentioned so far. Quarles’s journal about music would perhaps be referring to Spandrell as the ‘sets of variations [whereby] the process [of alternation and modulation] is carried a step further’ (ibid: 408) Superficially, Rampion’s indictment of Spandrell’s enigmatic limit-breaking character is one of predictable confusion: Spandrell is some ‘Peter Pan à la

Dostoevsky-cum-de Musset-cum-the-Nineties-cum-Bunyan-cum-Byron and the Marquis de Sade. Really deplorable' (ibid: 184). But in keeping with Fux's [1725] counterpoint types, Spandrell is 'as a garden full of flowers', or what Fux called 'florid counterpoint...nothing but a recapitulation and combination of all the preceding ones [counterpoints]'. (ibid: 64) (Example 6.6, Track 13)

Example 6.6

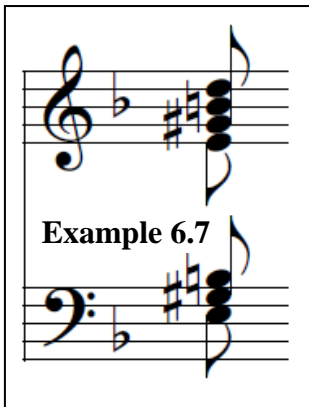


That Fux resorts to flattened accidental notes is expedient. His example corresponds to the odd use of a peculiar scale of tones, comparable to ancient conventions. In most Bach fugues (like BWV 565), the varied episodes hurtle towards a conclusion. But before the conclusion, there is much dissonance.<sup>1</sup> Spandrell's presence, throughout *PCP*, gives Quarles's metaphor of the poultry 'pecking order' a musical interpretation from which Quarles 'can visualise quite a good scene with a kind of Spandrell drawing the moral' (ibid: 438). Quarles's literary plan eventually rises to a fevered pitch in the murder of Webley, convulsing further events in the plot. As a close analogy to

<sup>1</sup> One such example includes the rapid succession of adjacent notes on the sharpened fourth tone of the D-minor scale. (Track 15 on Accompanying CD) In this example from the famous D-minor fugue (BWV 565) the classical organ music features these sustained notes, a hangover of the clavichord and harpsichord. The trill has a jarring quality because it is a diatonic transposition of the Lydian mode from medieval music. Another example is the eerie diminished seventh tri-tones in the Adagissimo. Again, the G # in the trill and the chords is the Lydian mode (sharpened fourth tone of the sequence), is played in the diatonic scale (Track 16).



the Bach fugue, one chord stands out which permits eventual resolution after presenting several dissonant harmonies. (Example 6.7, Track 14)



This chord and its variations on the fugal subject, hearken back to an archaic tonal device which became known as *Diabolus in Musica*, or ‘The Devil in Music’. Attributed to ‘the devil and all his works’ (Scholes, 1963: 1046), the old proverb, based on the ancient six-tone scale (Guido d’Arezzo’s tonic *ut-re-mi-fah-so-la-ti*), was a linear arrangement which contrived an irresolvable dissonance, in any melody, whenever the fourth

tone in the sequence was sharpened (*Mi Contra Fa—Diabolus in Musica*).<sup>1</sup> *Point Counter Point*, through Quarles’s musicalisation technique, explores, in its last chapter, how this technique can bring a modern, atonal sense to the novel.

	Ut [Do]	Re	Mi	Fa	So	La	Ti	Ut [Do]
Ionian								
Dorian			b				b	
Phrygian		b	b			b	b	
<b>Lydian</b>				#				
Mixolydian							b	
Aeolian			b			b	b	
Locrian		b	b		b	b	b	

As shown in table above, one arrangement of tones (‘Lydian Mode’ lowlighted for the chromatic scale), stands in total contradistinction to the other Hellenic types. The Lydian is the only plainsong type with a sharpened fourth tone in its lineation: the others have more conventional distributions of

<sup>1</sup> The long European history of this mode starts with condemnation from Plato who repudiates the Lydian Mode as a ‘gossiping harmony’ with its associable ‘wailing harmonies’. (trans. Spens, 1910: 84-5) Stephen Halliwell’s study on mimesis, points out that these modes would have been grouped under the same Hellenic ideals for the technical skills in the general ‘musicopoetic’ rubric of the ancient world (2002: 43). For a complete study, the established standard work for this area in music is still Reinhold Hammerstein’s untranslated German treatise *The Devil in Music: Studies in the Iconography of Medieval Music* (1974). Spandrell, the antinomian character in *PCP* befriends ‘an ageing prostitute’, Connie, who seems to be a drag queen, ‘superannuated punk’, who with Spandrell, enjoys the countryside. Before commenting on the ‘pleasingly phallic’ texture of the plants around him, Spandrell notes the uneasy ‘distinction between a second and minor third’ in accompanying birdsong. Again, we have an allusion to the tri-tone arrangement (with whatever semitones) that amplify what ecclesiastical injunctions called the personification of the devil in music.

accidentals. These modes are not the same thing as musical ‘keys’. All our modern, diatonic, keyboard-based keys are, except for their pitches, entirely alike. Through training, or innate ‘perfect pitch’, a listener can distinguish the transpositions between keys but rarely between modes. These ‘modulated’ arrangements ‘are also more difficult’ [perhaps to hear] as Quarles acknowledges in his journal. In short, modes are distances in the intervals between tones in a tonal hierarchy and the peculiar interval explored in *PCP*, through Spandrell’s plangent episode, is the devil’s interval.

This digression, into modes, makes sense when we read the last chapter in *PCP*. Just before it, Spandrell’s sinister ethos, of going against the grain, is modulated throughout his sayings. Spandrell coolly declares several times (ibid: 391-9) that ‘everything that happens is intrinsically like the man it happens to’. Though this aphorism might sound like circular wit, Spandrell’s fatalism is always more subtle. Much like his subversive, illiberal, ideology (ibid: 213), Spandrell, after murdering Webley, addresses the charges of his devilish outlook and he seems to suggest that he is the personified music of the novel: music that will cease once he is murdered. (ibid: 559):

Men must have absolutes, must steer by external marks. ‘Music exists’ he concluded, ‘even though you personally happen to be unmusical. You must admit its existence, absolutely, apart from your own capacity for listening and enjoying... In the abstract you know that music exists and is beautiful’. (ibid: 587)

The music, of which Spandrell then speaks, is *The Song of Thanks in the Lydian Mode* by Ludwig von Beethoven (op 131). For like the diabolic in music, Satan is always ‘safely stowed away in the imagination’, hence Spandrell likens God, ‘the providential joker’, directly to the Devil. (ibid: 588-

The image displays a musical score for 'The Song of Thanks in the Lydian Mode' by Ludwig von Beethoven. The top portion of the score features a multi-measure rest for 13 measures, with various dynamics like *p* (piano) and *f* (forte) indicated. Below this, two melodic examples are provided: Example A and Example B. Both examples are written in treble clef and show a sequence of notes in the Lydian mode, characterized by the augmented second interval between the fourth and fifth degrees of the scale.

9) In seeing the ultimate unity among the objects in his world, God, Spandrell concludes, is proven, ‘the only real proof’ possible, achieved by the Lydian mode, like a sublime diabolism in music. *PCP* describes, in strenuously emotive detail, the Beethoven recording and repeats the term ‘Lydian Mode’ at least six times. As acknowledged, Spandrell’s death is ‘the culminating point of the novel’ (Firchow, 1972: 111). The ethereal fragment before Spandrell dies, tellingly, is interesting, ‘corresponding to bar 168’ (Allis, 2013: 26):

In the above (Track 17), a string quartet simulates in the ‘Lydian harmonies’ which Spandrell explains is the meaning of his unusual world (ibid: 598). Perhaps Spandrell is trying to convey how this mode is so hidden in the objective universe. The objective universe is a natural state of experience in which only standard modes are recognisable for its many, sensually-uninitiated subjects. Spandrell’s elitist, subjective universe resonates with this Lydian music. It is as if his objective universe has been taken to the level of his character and he reports objectively of this natural state through his supernatural words. Track 18, for Example 6.8 B and A, expresses the subtle distinction in the diatonic scale to give their equivalent musical flavours, or modes. The Lydian mode is very rarely heard in music because of its extremely subtle tonality and can, if composed insensitively, make a piece unpleasant to listen to. Spandrell who once ‘played imaginary octaves’ (ibid: 541) on the murdered body of Webley, now provokes Rampion by his insistence that the Beethoven with ‘its Lydian heaven’ mediates his own self-willed character; much like a moral adversary, Spandrell wills good by evil to justify the ways of divinity to others. Again, his antinomian ethics is expressed through some kind of aesthetic value, one captured by music:

The speed of the slow melody was doubled; its outlines became clearer and more definite; an inner part began to harp insistently on a throbbing phrase. It was though heaven had suddenly and impossibly become more heavenly, had passed from achieved perfection into perfection yet more deeper and more absolute. The ineffable piece persisted; but it was no longer the peace of convalescence and passivity. It quivered, it was alive, it seemed to grow and intensify itself, it

became an active calm, an almost passionate serenity. The miraculous paradox of eternal life and eternal repose was musically realised. (ibid: 598)

At the start of the novel, there is an aim 'for a moment to create a seemingly final and perfected harmony' (ibid: 32) Spandrell's death is one such event, as 'a deafening explosion', shattering 'the paradise of sound', coincides with the termination of all muses, leaving 'only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc'. (ibid: 599) Philip Quarles's notebook, which records the deaths, then merges with the novel's form of *Point Counter Point*. Page 474 marks 'an abrupt transition' from one phase of the novel (the notebook) into the novel *Point Counter Point*. The generically invariable structure of the novel breaks down with a series of deaths. But it is the end of Spandrell's life which really seems to be the end of the whole novel because this specific death is the dramatic end of the highest manifestation of the human will, born of the imagination, namely that of its personification, Satan. As Wallace Stevens once captured so clearly in our age of post-monotheist malaise, 'the death of Satan was a tragedy for the imagination' (in Forsyth, 2003: ix) To conceive of a story in *Point Counter Point* after Spandrell dies, is therefore impossible. Yet, like Baudelaire's *Flowers of Evil*, the survival of *PCP*, through 'the musicalisation of fiction' is a perfect preservation, glimpsing Spandrell's life as a copy of all others wills. The Devil, like the human will to live, inheres, as a principle, in all things and abstracts itself in music. Schopenhauer's influential teachings about music and the will must be mentioned now to clear up what all this talk of death and life, God and the Devil, implies:

Music does not express this or that particular and definite pleasure, this or that affliction, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind, but joy, pain, sorrow, horror, gaiety, merriment, peace of mind *themselves*, to a certain extent in the abstract, their essential nature, without any accessories, and also without the motives for them. (Schopenhauer, 1969: 261)

Here, music is a formalised instance of an ideal. Music cannot refer to anything in the physical world. Music is an abstract art and cannot represent anything but itself. Music that putatively

represents emotions might mimic the energy levels, as scored, and arouse the contours of human feelings, but such comparisons are only convincing when their modal significance is taken into account. Otherwise any comparison remains indefensible and adventitious. Moreover, any evaluation subscribing, alone, to creative intent is flawed. Music is an individual unity of many, related musical tones. It is thus the diverse particulars of an objective universe transposed to the unifying level of a subjective universe. Put simply, music is an antinomian art because its form asserts the isolated, individual principle against that of the objective will of the universe. In Schopenhauer, we find a distinction between particular context and the objective universal. The latter cannot reasonably regard particular context. In literature, particular characters vitalise, refract perhaps, the incomprehensibly empty will of the objective universal which, because of its tendency to infinity, is an objective universal that cannot sanction the particulars of any enlightening, individual subject. The privation of all proportion and limit in the objective universe is proven by its chaos, darkness and disorder. The bad-faith-orthodox perception, then, is simply inured parallax that the objective universe is cosmetic and ordered, but, hedging its unreasonableness, orthodoxy asserts transcendence and epistemological limit to the chaos of universal objects. Indeed, the ‘objective universe’ of the characters in a novel is one often referred to as the ‘subject’ of the work. Such confusion attests to the serious injury caused by the commonly ‘natural’ worldview, one which Gide glimpses below the threshold of awareness. The sublime will proves that order is only possible within the limit of individuality. In *PCP*, Spandrell’s death, or termination of his individual will, validates the importance of the individual will by means of how music, as an objectified likeness of his will, also ceases. In the literary description, Spandrell makes a connection between hearing the music and affecting a response. The music seems therefore to be transposed from one mode to another as it portrays his will—and the end of it. And the end of his subjective will, determines the end of the objective will of his universe because the latter has no validity when music is considered as an objective copy of the subjective will.



In this English novel, there is an implied simultaneous set of voices, written in a literary sequence. Each independent voice, through sympathy with Fux's counterpoint species, conduces to a united aesthetic work of art by means of the wilful characters—Spandrell in particular. Literature, poetry and music combine, in *PCP*, to create this original texture. The musicalisation of fiction takes a universal object, like *The Devil*, and makes this subject resonate with a character, Spandrell. How the work manages this resonance, as I have outlined, is by arranging the content of each character's type in accordance with the five species of musical counterpoint. Aldous Huxley's musicalisation of fiction, therefore, is a term that comes closest to articulating André Gide's original idea. The 'human fugue' as the cognate of the musicalisation technique, is indeed the fullest meaning of what is variously designated as the *mise en abyme*.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever literature implies music, there is invariably a reconfiguration of the work's essence through the action of the characters, or in poems, as the agency of the personae. From the being of the character is the doing of the essential form. Under the primordial character's being, which is an abyss, an absence, is music: in the novel, music animates the level of the characters. All these ideas refer to the unexpected, overlooked, occult and sinister relation of one part of a work to another. 'Thrown underneath' the work, is the subject (*sub iectus*), it is articulated by the individual characters through their profoundly subjective experiences; music is the abstract means to convey character subjectivity, their experience of their universe. The outcome: character will carries over, transposes the natural will of their objective universe. Whilst not romanticising orthodox evil, this character 'level' might appear dark and wilful but is, on the contrary, a strangely enlightened will. Any such antinomian evaluation reconfigures the negatively regarded traits of will, more holistically, and considers the reading as an expression of literature in its broadest capacity as an

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<sup>1</sup> In the chapter on Huxley, *The Musicalisation of Fiction: A Study in the Theory and History of Intermediality* (1999) Werner Wolf asserts a strong conclusion: 'music itself plays an important role in the world view(s) in *Point Counter Point*, but we may anticipate right now that generally speaking, there is no clearly predominating system of meaning underlying this novel' (ibid: 173). Though Wolf's argument is convincing about how 'this novel betrays a sustained effort to create a structural analogy to this form of [counterpoint] musical organisation', because, the types of counterpoint are ignored, his reductive view of the musicalisation of fiction as 'Quarles's metafictional programme' is not convincing since the argument which follows is a puzzling, jargon-laden text-fest, for example: 'In so far the musicalisation not only echoes Philip Quarles's programme as a novelist *mise en abyme* but also continues the close relation between music as the 'Other' of mimetic literature and the a-mimetic and formalist impulse that has been felt since the romantic aesthetics of music...both the meta-aesthetic thematisation and the intermedial imitation of music continue the old functionalisation of music as a bearer of meaning in that they point to an aestheticist view of art as a last stronghold of positivity' (ibid: 181-2)

art-form. For all this to happen, the subject of the work is important. The subject of the novel is conveyed by the characters, as psyche-centric agents of this, their objective universe. And their objective universe is incorrectly called the ‘subject’ of the work. The abstract means to understand this antinomian link, emerges when the music in the novel is studied. Music, as Schopenhauer teaches, is the objective copy of the subjective will. It follows Gide’s idea then: *why* in *Point Counter Point*, we find *musically* transposed onto the level of the characters, the very subject of the work.

## 6.2 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to argue how Aldous Huxley’s *Point Counter Point* implies an organising framework in the timeless species of musical counterpoint. I have superimposed and extended the tempo-based model, commonly used to understand the novel, onto the common five types of fugal counterpoint, species as pioneered by J.J. Fux. I submit to the shortcomings of this contrivance that my model cannot take into account fabricated nuanced varieties of character experience. However, the neglected and misunderstood aspect of the novel—that of the sinister aesthetic—an abstruse sidestepped trait which has posed a grave impasse for critics, validates my model because my view permits greater freedom of exploration in this often trivialised area in aesthetics. Moreover, as I hope to have stressed, what is designated the *mise en abyme* is often, in *PCP*, a metaphysical working of music as it replicates a universal subject (Satan, evil) and transposes this subject through the particular episodes of the self-willed character. The effect is like a fugue subject answered, in this case, by character. Through a discursive investigation of literature as a contrapuntal vocal art, this chapter has thus argued that despite what handbooks might maintain about the entry, ‘*mise en abyme*’, if Gide’s transposition is read in a musical context, Huxley’s ‘human fugue’ is probably the apotheosis of what one great mind took from the other. In the following chapter, I shall explore the idea of iteration in a late-modern American novel, *The Crying of Lot 49* and further test the sinister-music hypothesis.



## *The Crying of Lot 49*

This chapter extends Gide's idea in a more recent case study. We will now use Gide's idea in a study and determine, hereby, whether such a text is amenable to his meaning. Late-modern designations of the *mise en abyme* tend to obscure the working definitions of this French term. The outcomes are original and intriguing but also deviant and perplexing. Nevertheless, we can see how



**Figure 7.1**

certain contemporary *mise en abyme* conceptions inform our associations of self-repeating pictures (Figure 7.1). In order to test the validity of the French idea for English Literature, I shall now turn to what follows.

*The Crying of Lot 49* (1965) is a short novel about Oedipa Maas, a 28 year old woman suffering from recurrent imaginings, a paranoid psychosis and conspiracy theory obsession. Her life changes after the death of her wealthy lover, Pierce Inverarity, who has left her an inheritance.<sup>1</sup> Oedipa's story is a quest to resolve, to execute, the details of Inverarity's will. Her psychotherapist, Dr Hilarius, telephones to check whether she is taking her (presumably hallucinogenic) medicine—and she is not. 'I am having a hallucination now' she tells her unctuous doctor 'I don't need drugs...' The whole of this novel, henceforth *TCL49*, is shot through with references to reality-altering, 'psycho-mimetic', chemicals such as 'LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs'. (2006: 8) The *more real than real*, hyper-real, ludic expression of the novel is also amplified by countless references to television programmes and their songs. Thus is the novel a statement about alternate reality games (ARGs) and the place of mediated storytelling during these altered states.

<sup>1</sup> Her unusual name, Oedipa, suggests she is like Oedipus Rex, the Hellenic king who embarks upon a knowledge quest to redeem his stricken people. He soon discovers that in order to offer help, he must find the murderer of the previous king, Laius. The knowledge he seeks is therefore extremely specific. It is a singular obsession. But the Faustian quest turns, imperceptibly, into a variety of self-enquiry. Her surname, Maas, means 'gauze' in Afrikaans. Oedipa is therefore a Sophoclean gauze for riddles, a filtered metaphor for self-knowledge through her search for answers.

Additionally, *TCL49* story contains a small play with subject matter suggesting an altered resemblance to broader themes in the story. The two main areas where a part-to-whole composition is seen, is therefore, in the TV episodes and this small play called *The Courier's Tragedy* which rests on metaphors associated with water and death. A formal example of some thematic unity in the novel includes the recurrent theme of crying and tears which is one metaphor for the story's meaning. In this chapter, I shall address my stated aims in the two sections: 1) TV and Music; 2) Metaphor

## 7.1 Music and TV

In the shock of Inverarity's death, Oedipa hears, among her many conflicting memories, 'a dry, disconsolate tune from the fourth movement of the Bartók Concerto for Orchestra'. (2006: 1) Oedipa's grief prompts her to recall this music in front of 'the greenish dead eye of the TV tube'. In the moment she listens, she 'tried to feel as drunk as possible'. Oedipa is daydreaming with the Béla Bartók *Intermezzo* piece.<sup>1</sup> It experiments with artificial transitions between tone, conflicting keys and an overly-controlled sense of basic harmony. We have therefore a theme tune for Oedipa's tale. The music dallies in achieving a sense of closure, and like the *TCL49*, expresses an ethereal space through incongruent phrases. The music is a concrete example of the supernatural effects of acoustics. It is a musical reference for the spaced-out fantasy of Oedipa's story. Brian McHale describes *TCL49* as 'deceptions or hallucinations' that 'become the norm'. McHale cites *The Fall of the House of Usher* as the key example of fantasy literature and hesitation, a conflict of restraint and dreaming that intrude into reality. And exactly like *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which suspends events from a remote cause, McHale adds *TCL49* is one of the 'few texts [to] manage to maintain this delicate balance to the end'. The balance 'between restraint and hesitation' (1987: 74) includes

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<sup>1</sup> Béla Bartók (1881-1945) wrote his mature piece motivated by adapting the traditional Eastern European folk tunes in keeping with musical experimentalism of his day (atonality, inverse symmetry, poly-tonality). The most representative passage of the *Intermezzo* (1943) as 'dry and disconsolate' for the paranoid delusions and time distortions of Oedipa Maas would contain upper lines of a vulnerable sounding flute solo with bass lines of bassoons and some innovative manoeuvring on the timpani to avoid the overly emotive theme.

Oedipa's indecision in revealing the outcome of her plans too soon. In what follows, I will argue how musical disruption contributes to this delay and suspension. So, much like apparent *en abyme* tales, *TCL49* cites musical titles in order to intimate, in us, a disposition of excessive sensory overload: delirious tremors of intoxication.

Musical song lyrics have an important place in *TCL49*. They recapitulate previous events and thereby suggest the likely outcome of these events. A simple case of music is the second chapter. A teenage boy-band, The Paranoids, break into song outside Oedipa's motel. Miles, a bohemian late-teen, is the manager of the hotel and croons to Oedipa in the lobby. He has 'a Beatle haircut' and sings a tune to her. The lyrics, at first, seem inane but do correspond to the later events. In any case, however, the eponymous lyrics of 'Miles's Song' go as follows, reminiscent of the pop music of the 1960s:

*Too fat to Frug,  
That's what you tell me all the time,  
When you really try'n' to put me down,  
But I'm hip,  
So close your big fat lip,  
Yeah, baby,  
I may be too fat to Frug,  
But at least I ain't too slim to Swim.* (2006: 16)

Oedipa laughs at her appearance as 'a beachball with feet' (ibid: 25) when she looks in the mirror. But she is drunk, unrestrained when she sees her reflection of a woman hesitant to the advances of the new lover she will meet, 'to swim'. Besides this song raising questions of bywords for sex, the final line is an allusion to swimming. In contrast to water association, the motel is called 'Echo Courts' and provides a space and sound metaphor for reverberation. Oedipa is seeing her 'so good-looking' (ibid: 17) lawyer, Mike Metzger, in a motel room. She gets drunk with him. They watch TV together. But just as they are about to fumble:

...the Paranoids had broken into song. Their drummer had set up precariously on the diving board [of the swimming pool] the others [in the band] were invisible. Metzger came up behind her with some idea of cupping his hands around her

breasts, but couldn't immediately find them because of all the clothes. They stood at the window and heard the Paranooids singing:

The song is a serenade, a romantic piece of passion and restraint, about 'the lonely sea' (2006: 27) longing nostalgia and hesitation. The dynamics of the music 'fade out' but only after an implied repetition. There is 'the dark inside...till it comes': it suggests the 'dark angel' of Inverarity who haunts the whole of *TCL49*. The last line is an example of how parataxis can fade a work through additional dangling. Lines 'And you lie alone tonight...And the lonely sea' are disjointed, not part of the main lyrics. These lines provide a strong phrasing for the whole serenade but looseness of expression.

The profundity of Oedipa's grief can only be consoled through music. Music reinvigorates her grieving, lost will. She 'shivered brightly' after the song's ending, affording her a relaxed mood. Crying and the sea, the lunatic attraction of waters all strengthen the main sense of tragic loss. This song represents dissolution of experience through grief and uses water metaphor. For indeed the countless remarks about crying and tears as the title of the novel suggests, are amplified by this 'theme tune' in the novel.<sup>1</sup>

This love song disrupts the TV show in the background. We shall consider this disruption shortly. For now, the important point of placing a clear poetic interlude so early in the story is exactly this: to break with the conventions for signalling light-relief. Older, Gidean, *mise en abyme* examples placed their small-scaled work in a symmetrical place to their surrounding works. Examples like *Hamlet* and *The Fall of the House of Usher* held their smaller, refracted, episodes closer to the

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<sup>1</sup> A disturbingly similar piece to the above serenade is Matthew Arnold's 1867 poem, *On Dover Beach*. It is a landmark of poetry that mimics the repetitive flow of sea waves and can be read as a testimony to the follies of mankind's vain enterprises resulting in misery. The similarity to the *TCL49* serenade is beyond uncanny. It is ironic:

The sea is calm tonight,  
The tide is full, the moon lies fair  
[...]  
Come to the window, sweet is the night air!  
Only from the long line of spray  
Where the ebb meets the moon-blanch'd sand,  
[...]  
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,  
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring  
The eternal note of sadness in. (Arnold, 1922: 401-2)

middle of their sad, tearful tragedies. *TCL49* places the sweetness and light of its tunes very early on. Its position seems generically deviant from older ‘*mise en abyme*’ citations. The novel is tragic but the events of random chaos are not. The characters have tragic fates but with personalities portrayed humorously. Such is irony. For all its exception to the norm, then, the late-modern expression of inauthentic, ironic experience is conveyed in this song—it is a glimpse into the ineffably complex-feelings of Oedipa, the grief-stricken character. Through arch repetition of a single line, like a chant, the song reminds us of Gide’s diary entry about the *composition en abyme* and repetitions.<sup>1</sup> Lastly, because music reminds us that there is always more to our perceptions and experiences than mere words, its refrains, its choruses and repetitions, its musicality, mesmerises the surrounding narrative. It welcomes us to ponder its performance of the detailed, surrounding text.

But the implied music, the ‘deluge of thick guitar chords’ (ibid) of the serenade seem discordant and inappropriate. The ebb and flow of the sea is a metaphor for the integrative emotions of the heart. But, there is always a sense that Oedipa’s expression of grief is stymied, restricted by her disenchanted, song-less, over-analysis and chaotic life. She seems numb. The flow of her feeling is blocked by her grief. And one sees this occluded circuitry as a dearth of emotion through her reactions. Oedipa, is caught between ‘the ghost of day’ and ‘the dark inside’, as the Paranoids sing. Oedipa’s reception of pain vacillates: between extremes of inhibitory apathy and excitatory anxiety. The lyrics of this song crystallise her difficult worldview. Hers is a sinister worldview in which her ideas go against the grain of conventional perception. For example, she responds unpredictably—unlike a common mourner. Her loss prompts her to internalise her feelings whilst going on a wild-goose chase that reveals alternating truths and falsehoods. Her journey leads her

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<sup>1</sup> Gide’s supporting remarks to the diary entry about the abyssal composition (*mettre...*) *en abyme* is his highly abstract entry about objective phenomena repeatedly affecting, presumably psychological, subjects. He writes about this auto-reflexivity of literary composition as follows: ‘[There is] [n]o action upon an object without retroaction of that object upon the subject. I wanted to indicate that reciprocity, not in one’s relations with others, but with oneself. The subject that acts is oneself; the object that retroacts is a literary subject arising in the imagination. This is consequently an indirect method of acting upon oneself that I have outlined; and it is also, more directly, a tale.’ (ibid, [1893]) Gide went so far as to assert that ‘true art’ like ‘true painting’ is possible ‘owing to its very absence of a subject; that is seeing painting divested of all spiritual virtue’ (Isenberg, 1973: 23) These extraneous lines have some import for scholars who wish to make the link between the *mise en abyme* as a subject without any objective reality.

beyond facile absolutes when her search finally uncovers music. In her wanderings, Oedipa wills a radical alternative to her lot in life. James Lodge remarked that *TCL49* entangles itself because the plot is like a ‘labyrinth without exit’. Meaningful links between parts of the work are both indeterminate *and* plausible. The sudden, seemingly disjointed configuration of events also takes the line of least resistance in how these random things occur. Lodge’s idea for this effect is that the novel is a ‘short circuit’. (1977: 226) Like an electrical arrangement with too much charged content, the electricity, like the flow of water, moves along the most elementary path. The form of the circuit breaks down as a result of the overload. *TCL49* is a work that contains more meaning than its limited form can readily accommodate. The musical TV shows create a process of interrupting the ‘flow’ of events. The TV show, like much recorded media, compels Oedipa to check the details of the re-experienced world from the TV: she is uncertain about the life of her companion, Mike Metzger, in his juvenile role, *on TV*, as Baby Igor. Cobley (2001) calls this disorienting experience ‘timeshifting’ because it can include a sense of distortion and disruption in the flow of real events. Thus, do we read of this effect as a clear account of displacement, and even vicarious substitution, and a time-shifted sense of traces, of characters no longer alive. Porter Abbott (2008) describes how the effect is ‘always implicit’ and goes far to account for the strange composition of *TCL49*:

The world of production that contains both the storyworld [...] in which the characters reside and the events, take place is the world of narration [or the work as a whole]. This world [in the novel] is almost always implicit. When it appears it is usually a representation of elements from the production of a film or drama...in my view it represents a part of the actual world in which the film was made and, as such, occupies yet another kind of space and time. (2008: 170)

This ‘space and time’ beyond the world of the story is concealed by the production of the broadcasted material. Abbott’s idea is speculative but Cobley states why:

...it is especially difficult to ascertain whether a scene which is depicted on screen appears as a result of the control of someone absent from the scene such a director or, even more remotely, at the behest of the economic concern of individuals such as the owners of independent broadcasting companies. (Cobley, 2001: 65, [2013: 60])



The reason is fundamentally a language problem. This immediate ‘space and time’ from yet another space and time requires a different type of explanation. It certainly requires a different use of language. The effect evokes the idea where we see something, on TV, but with its meaning in another space and time. Quite simply, this idea is called an ‘icon’. It is something present but something attributable to a remote, even absent cause. For example, we have a myriad of events all attributable to a death in *TCL49* and the eventual calling of lots of the ‘effects’, the possessions, is an outcome of the cause from, the non-agent, Pierce Inverarity.<sup>1</sup> The references to music provide a general remark about the whole narrative full of absented causes. The music is also carried over a TV show in *TCL49*. This small-scale part of the larger narrative contains the ‘blaring’ TV show (2006: 26) and rock music recitals close by. This part that represents the whole is called a synecdoche. It is a special kind of metonymy and a general name for this effect. TV offers an analogous replay of the story, in miniature, of the novel. As a fondly named metonym for its contents, ‘the TV tube’ plays alongside, and over the Paranoid’s singing outside. The musical interruption of the TV show is unconventional for a literary work. Here follows an examination of the analogue TV and its screened doubling of *TCL49*.

Television is mentioned on the very first page of *TCL49*.<sup>2</sup> It is personified as a ‘greenish dead eye’ which besides suggesting its older analogue format, seems to be a placeholder, a symbol or

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<sup>1</sup> The means by which this effect is achieved is through absenting the cause and presenting the effects. This presenting of the un-presentable of all a-causal potentials is absence or death. The strategy, is, at bottom the staple of late-modern literary aesthetics. Its shorthand is the technical parlance, the icon, described succinctly by philosopher, Charles Saunders Peirce as ‘a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object has no existence’ (Peirce, CP 2: 304). For a thorough treatment of this idea in relation to the frame tale, see Nelles (1997). The sinister, morally inverted notion of the icon is captured in CS Peirce’s lines: ‘Each icon partakes of some more or less overt character of its object. They, one and all, partake of the most overt character if all lies and deceptions...Yet they have more to do with the living character of truth...its object may be a pure fiction, as to its existence’. (Peirce CP: 4.531)

<sup>2</sup> At the time of *TCL49*’s publication in 1965, TV was becoming a domain. Previously it was just a medium. What this distinction means is that the influence of technology (including on literary aesthetics and composition) was changing. The medium of TV meant that the mediating technology transfigured, transposed, rendered in a new way, a collection of signs (messages) and coded these messages into a self-contained form. (see Marshall McLuhan, 1967). But at this point in techno-cultural history, the message became dis-identified from its communicative conduits. This was the start of domain-based technology. Today, domains are the greatly intricate networks of screened gadgetry (telematics), computerised webs of communication. The content of the messages matter more than the technologies that deliver these messages. Medium is not as important as message. These webs can micro-cast transmissions towards their audiences, as opposed to the broad-casted transmissions of the medium-based technologies. *TCL49* is a quaint example of when techno-culture shifted in its intensity. The novel’s depiction of TV is thus an example of mediated aesthetics (*cf metalepsis*) and the absence of causes in the emphasised presence of screened effects (*cf icon signs*). TV in its converged, computerised forms is today a domain that legitimates and offers the viewer a representation of some socially-sanctioned reality. TV ownership in America, for example, is

indeterminate metaphor for something that it is dead. The most prominent instance of the TV is its content programme that competes with the singing outside the motel room:

...Oedipa...snapped on the television set. Onto the screen bloomed the image of a child of indeterminate sex, its bare legs pressed awkward [sic] together, its shoulder-length curls mingling with the shorter hair of a St. Bernard [dog], whose long tongue, as Oedipa watched, began to swipe the child's rosy cheeks, making the child wrinkle up its nose appealingly... 'you're getting me all wet' (ibid: 18-9)

This child, Baby Igor, is from a re-run movie, *Cashiered*. Metzger was Baby Igor and he is in the room beside Oedipa. Oedipa is thus talking to Baby Igor, 'his aging double' as the adult Metzger. (ibid: 20) Metzger tells her of sea voyages and then sings along with the TV show in which he performed as a child. Then there is an unexpected, 'loud commercial' break. The fatuous ad features Peirce Inverarity's investment 'interests':

On came a loud commercial for Fangoso Lagoons...a new housing development...laced with canals...in the middle of an artificial lake...for the entertainment of Scuba enthusiasts...Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead. (ibid: 20)

The reference to the 'printed circuit' and 'Book of the Dead' are likely allusions to a portrayal of terminal ends and final grounds. The text is relating, in verbal form, something visual and the view is associated with a different medium: technology, not a written book. The TV advertisement is also relating the place, Fangoso Lagoons, where Oedipa will later go in order to solve her problems. (ibid: 71) The text is therefore not strictly textual. It is a crypto-text of a technological mediation (see simulations Appendix C). It makes Oedipa query her life. All the uncanny encryption of her life, through TV, causes disturbing scepticism for Oedipa's mind:

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very close to 99% today even though other technologies like the internet and mobile communication devices also screen broadcasts to the viewers. When *TCL49* was published in 1965, television ownership had recently seen a large rise, from 66% in the late 1950s to 90% in the 1960s (Gary Edgerton, 2007: 107). At this point, TV was changing from a medium into a domain: it was becoming the default device for relaying and legitimating socially codified experience. But it had not completely dominated collective perceptions in the way it does today. In the interests of balance, there are few radical critiques against the current range of work in media and social science: there is a very marginal strand of pessimistic work called 'progress criticism' which rarely gets a mention in contemporary academia. Jacques Ellul (1964: 378) who first speaks of 'the resonant emptiness of television' assails any smug reassurance of techno-utopias and the infamous Theodore Kaczynski's *Technological Slavery* (2010) is indebted to Ellul's researches. There is also a critical analysis of TV during its pre-internet heyday and post-televisual domain adaptation through meta-technologies in *The Age of Television* (2001) by Martin Esslin. For an even lighter-hearted synthesis of countervailing arguments of TV and its influence of reality see David Burke's and Jean Lotus' *Get a Life* (1998).

Either he [Metzger] made up the whole thing, Oedipa thought suddenly, or he bribed the engineer over at the local station to run this, it's all part of a plot, an elaborate, seduction, *plot*. (ibid: 20)

Above, the word 'seduction' is very well chosen because Oedipa is tempted to reason an antinomy. She goes beyond what is sanctioned as morally safe and good. Evil is autotelic, it has its own ends and is done for no sake other than the act itself. Evil means to 'go beyond' in English word-root-lore. The vicarious insinuation of one reality for another, like TV, is very uncanny, unsettling but is often legitimated as good, so TV is hardly considered evil. The TV footage goes beyond the polyvalent reality around it. The TV conceals its monolithic production, sanitised by a screen and extends the reality from which it draws. The collection of coherent events on TV, however uncanny they be, eventually accumulate into an objective, comprehensive, agreed-upon gestalt or a social reality for the viewer. This reality is often deemed good and safe because it is verified and, most facetiously, the reality is legitimated by the TV technology. Oedipa, however, questions the value of TV and its moral goodness but accepts its place as neither good nor evil. Her scepticism is therefore truly evil, in the socially sanctioned sense, because she is going beyond, querying the normative value of good because it is socially legitimated and 'seen on TV'. Oedipa is therefore unconventionally evil. She is a sinister character.

In this motel scene, reality seems insinuated by a TV screen. To make matters worse, the viewers, Oedipa and Metzger are also drunk. For literature, the descriptive mediation gives us a highly contemporary feel to the writing, a writing of what is seen on TV, yet, read *in* a novel. This superimposition, the layering of a mediated scene on TV is also an example of what is called simulation: it stands as a thing that it is not. Therefore, a simulation is a seduction. For Oedipa, we see the simulation coming *before* her experiences of reality. This precession, coming before, of the unreal, the fake simulation of experience *before* the events occur, is a precession of simulacra. (Appendix C) All these images are like Platonic shadows on the wall.

In processing situations, *TCL49* is an example of the poetics of techno-culture. The greatest spectacle of this convergence of technology and poetics is achieved through repetition. There is even more repetition in the jaunty song from Baby Igor. Notice how it foreshadows the themes of the serenade. The song provides a juvenile *précis* for the main characters in *TCL49*. It also speaks of Oedipa's later adversity in a sea of drowning grief. Flooded by the memory of her dead lover, Peirce and the seductions of Metzger and her musician-DJ husband, Mucho, Oedipa is trying 'to go to the bottom, to get *under* the net' (ibid: 21) To summarise this complexity, we have Baby Igor's sea-shanty about sailing (ibid: 19).

The rhyme of this song on first reading seems slickly finished and too stoutly childish, short and dumpy to have any contrivance to the bigger events of *TCL49*. The *mise en abyme* often aims at a 'deepening and broadening' of the surrounding themes of a tale. (Magny, 1950) Yet, this song is typically ironic: it shows something opposite to what Magny claimed. And indeed, it is the vapid, subversive nature of this above song and those of the others that amplify the identity of the *mise en abyme* in *TCL49*. Gide did claim that the device was a scaling of the events to the level of character. For indeed the characters in *TCL49* are registered by the events of the novel. Incidental TV shows and song both capture, in miniature, the characters of the tale, besides amplifying the wider theme of water and the sea.

The TV show in *TCL49* is also for the above reason, implicit narration. The 'actual world' is 'yet another' world as Abbott states. TV broadcasts in narratives are simply virtual things. They relate to a broader framework of styles and are not as explicit as the visual content they allude to. The sense of expressive looseness, unrelated, grotesquely incoherent, incongruous events and details, foreshadow a very recent 'hysterical' trend in late-modern writing. (Appendix C) So, there is an unusual composition in *TCL49*. The effect is achieved through the references to TV. The songs have a purpose: to disassociate the events from their causes. In isolation, the events seem random. But there is an underlying unity. There is some sense of a part-to-whole resemblance:



**Figure 7.2**

Our scheme above shows the doubling effect of the TV show in *TCL49*. *The Crying of Lot 49* is a novel, it is a book. But ‘the distorted uproar of the TV set’ (ibid: 25) features so extensively as a theme that the novel is like a written broadcast of a TV programme. The Paranoids’ Serenade emphasises its enigmatic form as their songs disrupt the ‘TV show’ and the music fades out. The TV show, *Cashiered*, screens Baby Igor’s Song and this song holds the germ of tragic themes, shifted from another time and place. *TCL49* is a novel that repeatedly calls up completed events. The novel has a strong recurrence of symbols and indeterminate meanings. Even the title (*The Crying of Lot 49*) is the last line in the whole novel. This recurrence suggests a circular flow of elements.

There is a simple way of understanding this recurrent effect where one part of a story calls back to another part which calls back to another part in its turn. The generic word is ‘repetition’ or ‘calling back’ but this is banal. Yet, when TV intervenes and carries a distant cause, we are confronted with something different. In classical rhetoric, any repetition, especially at the end of a clause, was called *epanalepsis*. For example, a lyrical refrain, which exemplifies this trope, includes ‘I might, oh unhappy world, O me, I might’ (from *Astrophil and Stella*, in Lanham, 1991: 67). Some modern critics have gone further with *epanalepsis* to say that the trope also means ‘repetition of a term or expression’. (Marouzeau, in Dupriez: 164) In novels, *epanalepsis* could encompass, by extension, the repetition of concepts and ideas. There is thus an overlooked meaning for the trope. Inherent in

its word-root-lore or etymology, *epanalepsis* means taking back or calling back instances of itself. In Modern Greek, the term simply means ‘recursion’, which is the reflexive reference to values in a numerical sequence of itself. *Epanalepsis* can be the repetition of ideas and concepts along narrative sequence. The effect is multiple and stacks the repetitions thereby creating an analogy, so frequently imagined as cascading, convergent sequences of mirror visuals.

If the TV shows are a *mise en abyme*, then as a literary concern, they are cases of *epanalepsis* as they call back events whilst they broadcast these events. Moreover, this *mise en abyme* as a potentially finite, limited cognate is closer to Gide’s idea than those of subsequent thinkers evoking infinite regress, trailing off to an unexplained infinity or blind-spots and paradox. André Gide evoked the effect of *epanalepsis* with what he called ‘retroaction’. Gide’s diary alluded to the recursive idea as a ‘constant connexion’ correlating the subject of a work and its character. Gide’s secondary idea is called ‘retroaction’. Adjacent to the celebrated memoir inaugurating *mise en abyme* study, Gide speaks about retroaction as follows:

No action upon an object without retroaction of that object upon the subject. I wanted to indicate in [my novel] that reciprocity, not in one’s relations with others, but with oneself. The subject that acts is oneself, the object that retroacts is the literary subject arising in the imagination. This is consequently an indirect method of acting upon oneself that I have outlined; and it is also, more directly, a tale... That retroaction of the subject on itself has always tempted me. It is the very model of the psychological novel. An angry man tells a story; there is the subject of a book. A man telling a story is not enough; it must be an angry man and there must be a constant connexion between his anger and the story he tells’. (ibid: 30-1)

Gide is describing, here, a complex set of either the reader identifying with a character, or it seems, the character identifying with his imagined world. Hanjo Berressem in this regard offers the helpful ‘text and world’ distinction of part-to-whole. (ibid: 96) The idea is that his *mise en abyme* in *TCL49* calls back the previous events of the novel and creates a ‘gradual disintegration’. Hanjo’s arguments about mirrors point out how there are ‘endless reflections of *text* and *world*’. (ibid) This is however the legacy of the French theorists and the *mise en abyme*. But like the playlet in *TCL49*, the TV

show has limited grounds for yoking world and text endlessly. Even if the links we wish to make are ‘endless’, if they are recursive, or rhetorically, *epanaleptic*, then they are indefinite since recursion never leads to infinity by virtue of the way it simplifies previous instances of itself, provable in mathematics. (see Hofstadter, 1999: 127)

Nevertheless, the techno-aesthetic extends and recaptures what happened before and portends what may happen later in the novel. Like a TV, the small episodes are varied and many. But these examples evoke infinite regress only as fanciful interpretation. Ideas that the effect, whether they be *mise en abyme*, as infinite regress, in *TCL49* are therefore best studied under the trope of *epanalepsis* or the recall of any literary subject reflexively. Endlessly regressive effects are justifiable by evaluation. Yet the text only implies such an effect and thus makes infinite regress something imagined rather than formal, or as Gide confirms above ‘arising in the imagination’.

A cryptic episode where Oedipa experiences such limited regress is when she visits stamp collector, Genghis Cohen, an epileptic. As she stares at ‘his apartment/office she saw him framed in a long succession or train of doorways, room after room receding in the general direction of Santa Monica, soaked in rain-light’. (ibid: 75) As she alludes to a potential erasure of meaning, ‘[s]he glanced down the corridor of Cohen’s rooms in the rain and saw, for the very first time, how far it might be possible to get lost in this’. (ibid: 76) Lodge’s idea that *TCL49* plot is labyrinthine is echoed by Berresem who calls the plot ‘convoluted’. But whatever our view, we must repair to the simplest explanations first since *TCL49* is structurally complex with recursive call backs to previous instances traceable in the words ‘*et cetera*’ (ibid: 27).

## 7.2 Metaphor

So far, I have tried to give an explanation for two recurrent concerns in *TCL49*. However, there are an entangling, enormous number of such recurrences in the work. The patterns of these recurrences are too complex to generalise and the story form resists any coherent analysis.

Yet, evoking the idea of ‘flow’, the narrative does allude to a ‘special fluid’ in *TCL49*. (ibid: 54) It is a metaphor. A metaphor compares one thing indirectly to another. Metaphor is, beyond everything, the simplest approach to any late-modern aesthetic concern, including what is called the *mise en abyme*. Obscurity is made clear by examining metaphor. In this section, I will discuss the way that the metaphor for water can help us understand the meaning of the novel. When Magny, revisits Gide’s idea, via Greek Gnosticism, she speaks about a ‘metaphysical method’ in a disjointed way to other singular identities, as in mathematical theorems. Magny evokes the gnostic sense of the abyss, or *bythos*. Her idea of the *mise en abyme* is something sublime, it is a ‘cipher of transcendence’ of a:

...truth which is perhaps the metaphysical essence of the novel without showing a vicious circle, which when it manifests, the essence of transcendence opens—when the ‘abyss’ gapes at our feet, the mind cannot contemplate this abyss without vertigo. Saying ‘there it is of that particular world view’ is a proposal provided meaningful only if there can be a general philosophy. (ibid: 277)

Magny’s words are gnomic but she gestures towards a host of ideas from the pre-Socratic philosophers which she studied widely. The ancient worldview in Greece was that the cosmos originated from elementary particles. One such doctrine was that of Thales of Miletus who famously took the world to be an outcome of something very basic, elementary. This something, Thales called water. (Aristotle, 294a28-b1 in Barnes, 2001: 11).<sup>1</sup>

One great elementary metaphor in *TCL49* is in the play *The Courier’s Tragedy* which Oedipa watches and which inspires her to investigate her various conspiracy theories. Hanjo Berressem’s *Pynchon’s Poetics* (1993: 96) points out this effect. He says that the play is ‘an extra *mise en abyme* of the text [*TCL49*]’. But most intriguingly, *TCL49* speaks of metaphor as ‘a thrust at truth and a lie’. (ibid: 105). Also when considering her addled perceptions, Oedipa speaks of ‘a

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<sup>1</sup> European occult traditions speak of the abyss as a watery place. Gide’s ‘retroaction’ was a text ‘in relation to oneself’, perhaps a text as an artefact for recording self-knowledge, whatever, an esoteric theme peeps out. For occult thought, as Julius Evola outlines: ‘If this knowledge leads you back to yourself, and, as you experience a sense of deadly cold, you feel an *abyss* yawning beneath you: “I exist in this”—then you have achieved the KNOWLEDGE OF THE “WATERS”’. (Evola, 1971: 181) Similarly, any timeless, scholarly treatment of the occult resorts to metaphors of water. Richard Cavendish captured the abyss so: ‘The Magical universe is like an ocean. The great tides move through it invisibly and men are swept around by them, but are sometimes strong enough and clever enough to master and use them. And in the cold black currents which come up from the deeps there are strange and sinister creatures lurking...from the psychological point of view, they are the universal equivalents of the dark, cruel, animal depths of the human mind’. (1967: 16)



metaphor of God knows how many parts'. (ibid: 87) The novel holds an ambiguous view on metaphor. Most critical notions see metaphor as more verbal than visual.

'Metaphor is a verbal composition'. (Levin, 2001: 285) A metaphor is a way of comparing one thing through another. Metaphor is the foundation for all human language and it is not grandiose to assert that without it, we would not have any language whatsoever. Metaphor as a verbal device is central to Gide's idea because a common manifestation of his idea is its verbalising the visual. Besides evoking the layers of *TCL49* through countless recurrent links, metaphor is the building block of a much broader type of form. Many metaphors together express a larger figurative trope: allegory. Allegory is a collection of metaphors and has the net effect of narrowing down the escalation of meaning. For an allegory to work convincingly, it cannot explicitly mix metaphors. The application of metaphor, once its meaning is broadly established, only sanctions a finite range of meaning. Far from compounding the endless slippage of meaning then, allegory often restricts the reading of metaphor by rooting the collection of metaphors into some finite expression.

A detailed urban-fable like *TCL49* is an example of allegory because it layers many metaphors. Allegorical story is too detailed to only read on a single level 'like Puritans...so hung up with words, words' as Driblet rebukes Oedipa. (ibid: 62) Metaphor is a good figure for close reading. It does not discount the many layers but can express the diversity in a unified way. Even though we may not immediately understand a metaphor, it still provides some account for meaning before condemning a text as inescapably cryptic. In analysis, metaphor can be layered to make allegory. The usefulness of allegory can allow us to capture meanings that words in the dictionary cannot. Once the allegory is uncovered, it also feeds back to its bits of metaphor. Allegory even enriches each metaphor's meaning in turn. This way, allegory frees the literary form from succumbing to a pessimistic evaluation about the plot and its lacunae. Allegory mainly gives us freedom to read without the sanction of convention. There are undeclared laws against mixing metaphors, for example, music and water both flow but water and heralds do not flow. Allegory

therefore captures a unified meaning of the tale in an alternative way. Any mixed metaphors synthesise if the allegory works, if they do not integrate, these metaphors founder. Allegory broadly means 'to speak otherwise'. It gainsays prescribed readings and offers some edification to unworkable or fatalistic approaches.

Allegory apprehends our critical dispensation where it is increasingly difficult to entertain alternatives. For all the diversity in theory, there is little acceptance of the organic precursors to these many and varied new ways of reading. But the older tools are still the sharpest. Allegory compels us, through our use of metaphor, to seek extreme methods to critical problems. Metaphors remind us that there is more to description than we may think. We cannot simply derive a formula for something that requires metaphor and thereby be done with it. Metaphors provide a freedom to read but also demand a grave responsibility to set right its meaning. So metaphor is an effective tool and it throws into radical question, the nature of inherited reading whilst taking the path of least resistance.<sup>1</sup>

An example of metaphor, in *TCL49*, is found associated with the Richard Warfinger play, *The Courier's Tragedy*. This pastiche play-in-the-novel is a prototypical late-modern *mise en abyme*. It is staged in the novel. Like the controversial 'revenge tragedy' of *Hamlet*, *The Courier's Tragedy* sees the hero dead at the end. The hero, Niccolò, is introduced as a child in the first act and seems to drown in a lake during the finale. Baby Igor from the TV scene also drowned in his show. So there is a character relation between *The Courier's Tragedy* and *Cashiered*. During the interval though, Oedipa is puzzled. Metzger is also puzzled with her. Metzger's retorts in the motel scene, watching *Cashiered*, 'Maybe it's a flashback...maybe he gets it twice'. (ibid: 28) If Metzger is correct, then *The Courier's Tragedy* is an instance of narrative *epanalepsis*, whereby an instance

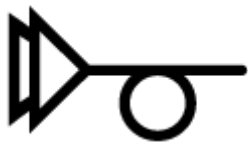
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<sup>1</sup> The philosophical debate on metaphor can be divided into two camps. Philosophers of language treat metaphor as either a 1) primary, Platonic or 2) secondary, Aristotelian feature of language. The first type views metaphor as an inherent trait of language and the foundation of all linguistic development. The second type sees metaphor as a derivative conception of language, or second-order concern. Metaphor for type 2) treats it as a tool for linguistics: as a factual and objective outgrowth of the organic nature of language. In order to clarify the beguiling nature of metaphor, philosophy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century embarked on a programme of rigorous analysis. Earlier minds (Black, 1954; Beardsley, 1962; Searle, 1979) held to analysing the context of metaphor in language (*allego*-centric approach). Later minds (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Kittay, 1987; Levin, 1988; Cooper, 1986) turned the study away from ontology and onto the social, psychological and cultural uses of metaphor (*psyche*-centric approach).

calls back itself. But the perspective of the later death has a strange resonance with Oedipa as she watches this staged play:

It is about this point in the play, in fact, that things really get peculiar, and a gentle chill, an ambiguity, begins to creep in among the words. Heretofore the naming of names has gone on *either* literally *or* as metaphor. But now...a new mode of expression takes over. (ibid: 55)

Much like everyone, Oedipa's reflections suggest that she sees metaphor as deeply non-literal, something in opposition to the literal: figurative. But she is about to discover a synthesis, the 'excluded middles'. (ibid: 150) During the play, Oedipa hears a word 'Trystero' (ibid: 58) and as 'it hung in the dark' it reminds her of toilet graffiti including a muted posthorn she saw earlier. (ibid: 38) 'What was Trystero?' she asks repeatedly. (ibid: 129) Oedipa then starts making 'connections'.<sup>1</sup>



The muted posthorn is a link to answers for Oedipa's search. It involves a hidden communication system. It is also a heraldic motif and is therefore very Gidean. It recurs as a 'coat of arms' (ibid: 77) and 'glimmering...badge', a 'lapel pin' (ibid: 89-90) The glyph (Figure 7.3)

**Figure 7.3**

first occurs on a 'latrine wall' (ibid: 38) and then recurs throughout the novel. It is a symbol accompanied by a cryptic acronym W.A.S.T.E. The association prompts the 'curious' Oedipa to 'see if there's a connection'. (ibid: 59) And there is. The symbol appears on a rival postal company's coat of arms to Thurn and Taxi's shield that was pushed underground by 'vigorous suppression' through 'postal reform'. (ibid: 39) The postboxes of this company, 'Silent Trystero' are disguised as waste bins. Oedipa's researches give her an eventual sense of what could

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<sup>1</sup> One obscure but overlooked candidate for meaning here is the link of the real life prince of Thurn and Taxis who was murdered in April 1919 after meeting with a secret occult order on Pentecost 1914. *TCL49* play speaks of a 'frightful pentecost' (ibid: 52) pages before the dead prince 'that we last as Thurn and Taxis knew' is killed (ibid: 58) The politically agitating Thule Order, of which the real life prince was a member, aimed to meet again in a mythic lost land called *hyperborea*. In Latin word-root-lore, *trystero* suggests we will meet together. Pynchon's cryptic cipher of Thurn and Taxis 'coat of arms' (ibid: 77) may perhaps be one or some of the more controversial symbols used therefore by the Thule Order when the real-life prince joined.

be dubbed a sinister mood: ‘the light, vertiginous sense of fluttering out over an abyss’. (ibid: 129)  
The recurrence of the posthorn is a sign which leads her along her journey to find answers.<sup>1</sup>

The recurrent posthorn is an alternative case for the late-modern *mise en abyme*. Each instance prompts yet another instance and each instance calls back some context of its previous instance. The ur-meaning of the symbol is of a dark one. It is of a suppressed, subterranean concern with alternate reality games (ARGs). The subject of the work is thus transposed onto the level of the character Oedipa. She seems to ‘project a world’. And the ‘world’ is her story transposed. (ibid: 69)  
The acronym WASTE has a utopian, apocalyptic meaning ‘WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO’S EMPIRE’. (ibid: 139) The motto raises questions about the reliability of the narrator. Indeed, the superficial and psychedelic chatter of ‘colours, sizes, ages, shapes’ is only the glamorous congestion and hysterical concealment, an exploration of this idea deflects the censored and hidden. The invitation to a ‘zero point anywhere you want’ seems gnomic but is suggesting the freedom to see the hidden communication of the novel. (ibid: 117) Oedipa is clearly not drugged (ibid: 111) but her thinking suggests she is tripping. So, the secret meanings, ‘dark doubles’ (ibid: 107) are always implied by her experience and never objectively related by Pynchon. The recurrent posthorn may be called a species of *mise en abyme* but is really something else. It represents the themes of narrative taken to the level of the character, as reported by Oedipa’s experience. The muted posthorn is, following Magny, a cipher. The enigmatic symbol is a reference to the metaphor of the abyss. The terminological alibi echoes the wider intellectual concerns of going to extremes: Oedipa shuttles between radical uncertainty and meaningful over-determination within her own imaginings. The mute of the horn suggests either coded amplification or a stop to the flow of vital energy, or entropy. In this way, the cipher is shorthand for symbolic boundlessness or occlusion.

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<sup>1</sup> *Epanalepsis* is repetition at the end of any utterance with the same word that began the utterance. *TCL49* is the title of the novel and also the last line in the novel. We see a similarity with *The Fall of the House of Usher*: both the title of the story and the last line in it. The term means ‘recursion’. It would be most precise to extend the recursive *mise en abyme* phenomenon to *epanalepsis* besides transference of tropes, or *metalepsis*. Bernard Dupriez gives a good formulation for the rhetorical effect of *epanalepsis*: 1) The repetition of a single word or words, or of a complete phrase. 2) The repetition of a word or words after an intervening word or words, whether for emphasis or clarity, as to resume a construction after a lengthy parenthesis. (1991: 163) Since, in Greek, *epanalepsis* means recursion, it would seem that the embedded *mise en abyme* with its closeness to this trope links the broader mathematical and scientific concerns of recursion with the concerns in the arts and humanities with recurrent aesthetics in literature.

Oedipa is consequently a hysterical, late-modern type ‘forever seeing connections and links and hidden plots and paranoid parallels’ (Wood, 2004: 170) Without the assurance of a grand tale to explain *all* her curiosities, Oedipa has succumb to addressing her existential angst, her intellectual fatigue in her own way without the guidance of her puppet-master, Inverarity. This anti-nomian meta-politics is admirable. Yet, Oedipa brushes too closely with the current inversion of values in her quest for knowledge. The recurrence of the symbol may merely be her imagined projections and conspiring. She asks if she is on the ‘sweatless meathooks of a psychosis’. The references to LSD throughout the novel allow Oedipa to indulge her wonderings without any hostile intervention from authority. As Dr Hilarius confines her in his room, Oedipa’s quest explores problematic areas of knowledge to do with the Holocaust, for example, and that of revisionism. (ibid: 110-3) Yet, none of the controversies raised are thoroughly ventilated. The complexity and severity is only parodied—recurrent exaggeration or hyperbole of the German Dr Hilarius serves *TCL49*’s ironic ends. Dr Hilarius, the caricatured Nazi, is eventually strait-jacketed and carted away. Hence we witness a conspiracy theory in late-modern hysterical-realist literature as outlined by David Wood’s thesis (2004).<sup>1</sup>

Oedipa proceeds on an assumption and a proposition. She assumes that metaphor is in contradistinction to the literal or metaphor is ‘figurative’ as she confesses during the-play-in-the-novel. And this is a popular opposition. Oedipa, however, eventually proposes a radical alternative, a third position: one that is neither figurative nor literal. Her synthesis of the literal and figurative occurs later in her tale. Her moment of insight occurs along her life-journey when she meets a sailor who gives her a letter. The sailor, a reference to the electrocuted Baby Igor, ‘suffered DT’s...a metaphor, a delirium tremens’ (ibid: 104) and the letter contains another clue:

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<sup>1</sup> It would be highly disingenuous to psycho-pathologise Oedipa or the hyperbolic Dr Hilarius in the name of politics, as is often done, but there is evidence that Oedipa is not mentally unwell by any standards. She is merely subscribing to a conspiracy outlook. The conspiracy theorist sees the world in recursive structures, like a recurrent posthorn. The logic of conspiracy is frequently circular: ‘If something occurs it is by design. If it is by design, then someone has designed it. If their identity and intent is concealed, then there is a conspiracy. If there is a conspiracy, it may be exposed, it could be dealt with’. (Gardell, 2003: 101)

She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen if only there was that high magic to low puns, because DT's must give access to dt's of spectra beyond the known sun, music made purely of Antarctic loneliness and fright. (ibid: 105)

Again, we have a foreshadowing of music as the liquidation of complex experience by someone who lives on the water, a sailor. The references to DTs giving way to dts also suggest, from mathematical calculus, the differentiation of time into smaller components. Hans Georg-Gadamer calls this differentiation into small, individualised units of time, 'autonomous time':

We are all familiar with this autonomous time, as we may call it, from our own experience of life: childhood, youth, maturity, old age, and death are all basic forms of such autonomous time. The continuity of the uniform temporal *flow* that we can observe and measure by the clock tells us nothing about youth or age. The time that allows us to be young or old is not clock time at all, and there is obviously something discontinuous about it. (1986: 42) *my italics*

For the novel, we see a throwing together, a symbol, of large and small, DT's and dt's. The former, DT, is a psycho-pathology. The 'dt's of spectra' may initialise the tiny, limited segments of time as outlined in mathematics as differentials of time. Here, each continuous development, when narrowed down, can be seen as having minute, autonomous breaks. Any spectrum, for example, can be measured in linear terms through this method in mathematics. So, if we differentiate a linear spectrum, very closely, we can derive a better sense for the limits of that sequence as illustrated in Figure 7.4:

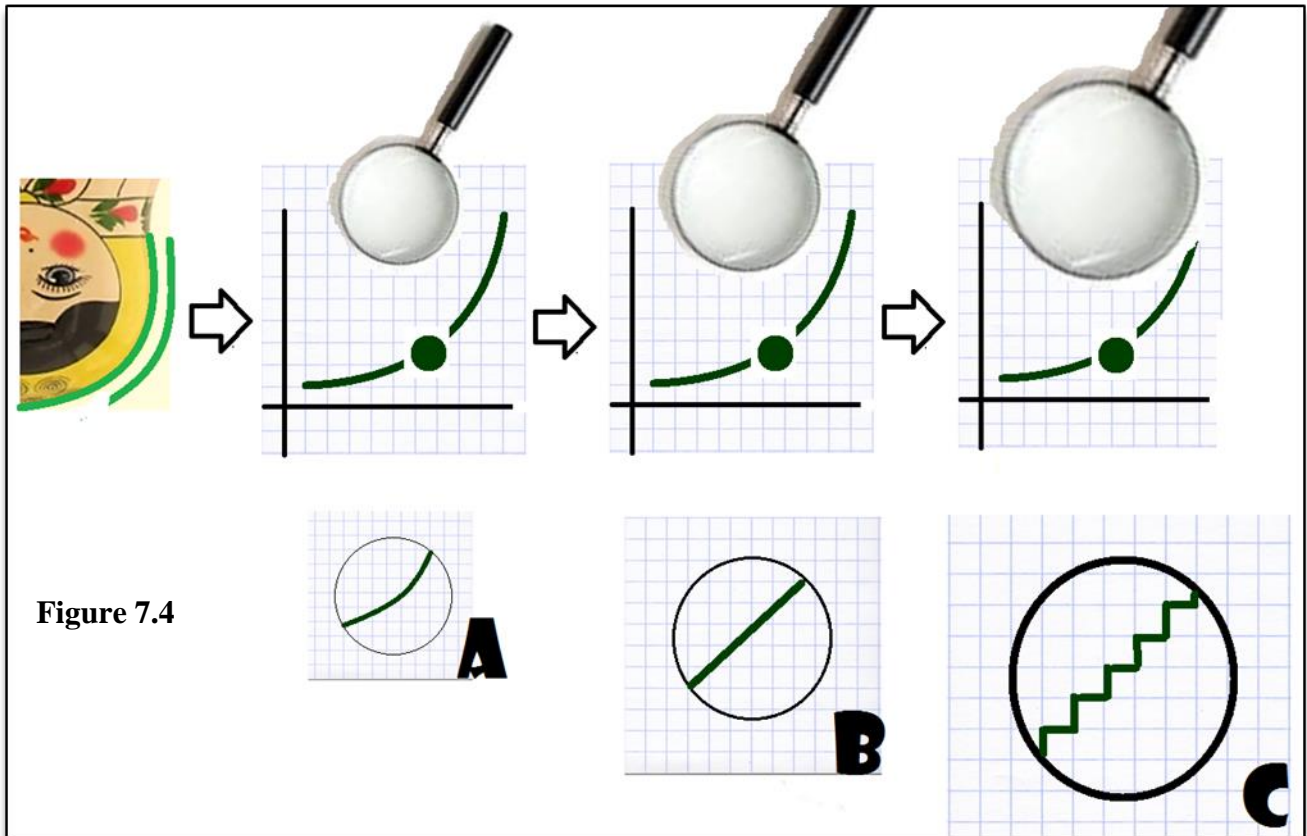


Figure 7.4

Gradually, through closer observation, each spectrum-line is delineated: the line can be differentiated into vertical and horizontal lines, allowing one to mathematically ‘square the circle’. An imagined perspective creates instances A, B and C. Yet, each instance is only derivative and is ultimately part of a continuous spectrum. In either case, whether *TCL49* is referring to delirium or differentiation, the spectrum is derived and intricately calculated by Oedipa. Elsewhere, the novel speaks about spectra of feeling (ibid: 96); power spectra (ibid: 150) and similarly ‘spectrum analysis’ (ibid: 116). In relation to spectra and time, we have music to illustrate the temporality. The metaphor of music is a scaled-down reference to the vastness of Oedipa’s grief. However, there is an ersatz feel to *this* music, a late-modern fakery. Oedipa realises later that her music is technically processed music, or ‘Muzak’. (ibid: 115) Her husband, Mucho, analyses the background melody. To Oedipa, it is ‘*nothing* unusual’. But Mucho’s account is different, he is clearly on psycho-active drugs. He alludes to the metaphor of Oedipa’s past experiences as something acoustic and musically synthesised:

...I can do the same thing in reverse. Listen to anything and take it apart again. Spectrum analysis, in my head. I can break down chords, and timbres, and words too into all the basic frequencies and harmonics, with all their different loudnesses [sic], and listen to them, each pure tone, but all at once. (ibid: 116)

Mucho is showing a sense-mixing, a synaesthesia. It seems he is explaining, as an inspired speaker through hallucinations, the essentially melodic unity of music. With regards to musical time, Gadamer describes this qualitative attitude:

Music may serve as an example. We are all familiar with those vague tempo markings that composers use to describe the individual movements of a piece of music. The instructions are quite indeterminate, but they are not merely technical directions on the composer's part, dependent upon his own decision as to whether a piece is to be taken quickly or slowly. We must find the right time as it is demanded by the work. The tempo markings are only indications that help us maintain the 'correct' tempo or to grasp the work as a whole. (Gadamer, 1986: 43)

It would seem therefore that the *TCL49*'s music is a unifying trope, a metaphor. In order to probe deeper, let us reflect on the effect of 'crying' and the countless metaphors of water, throughout the novel. In antiquarian commentary, wetness did indeed suggest emotion and the fluid, dynamic musicality of authentic artistry and creativity. The Greek musician Orpheus, like the Greek god Poseidon, rules the sea and music. Oceanus is also the associated deity of the abyss, or bythos. Classic criticism observes that there is an allegory, a summed collection of many metaphors, behind this artistry. Broadly speaking, the ancient world, of Plutarch, held that 'the whole wet element' (Pfeffer, 1977: 31) was the ultimate synthesis of music. *TCL49*'s water theme is thus an allegory for linking chaos with abyssal form. A powerful end of the novel sees Oedipa awaiting 'the crying of lot 49' at the auction of Inverarity, the Plutocrat who came into the once, naïve, Oedipa's life. No longer does Oedipa see her world through 'dark green bubble shades' (ibid: 11). She exits the journey in a way transformed:

She stood between the public booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face the sea. But she'd lost her bearings...As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residues of uniqueness for her;



became a name again, was assumed back into the American continuity of crust and mantle. Pierce Inverarity was really dead. (ibid: 147)

With her back against the chaotic land, Oedipa faces a sea of troubles. She waits for ‘the Angel of Death’ to descend. Her coded words about her dead lover put her in a worldly perception, with resignation. Oedipa’s real breakthrough is the realisation of her fruitless search, as she faces the sea (a metaphor of the abyss). She imagines Inverarity as she stands in the dark:

Though she could never again *call back* any image of the dead man to dress up, pose, talk to and make answer, neither would she lose a new compassion for the cul-de-sac he’d tried to find a way out of, for the enigma his efforts had created. (ibid: 147)

The ‘enigma’ could here mean the personage of Oedipa whom Inverarity has created by his puppetry. The many recurrent events might make us overlook this elementary point where Oedipa has changed along her search. She follows the legacy of the dead-end in which Inverarity found himself. But Oedipa has the self-actualisation to ‘never again call back’—terminating regression and its infinite temptations. Oedipa carries an awesome sense for Inverarity’s enterprises; she has not submitted to his objective narratorship. Whatever the ending of *TCL49* may mean, it is clear that Oedipa has found her answers because she is willing to ‘face the sea’ and to gaze into the abyss.

### 7.3 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show how Pynchon’s complex novel of recurrent patterns related to Gide’s diary entry. Beside the novel’s close exchange between character and narrative subject, the work comes some way to exemplifying Gide’s objective ideas about what Magny called the *mise en abyme*. One of these associations is the abyssal connotation of the *mise en abyme*. So far, I have demonstrated that the *mise en abyme* carries inconsistent meanings and presents us with a challenge: to either reject it or put it to the test in various literary examples where it is readily called for. My conclusion at this point is that the *mise en abyme*, in an example like *TCL49*, is more properly attributable to rhetorical names to describe it.

Firstly, *TCL49* contains a set of TV programmes that mimic events concealed by the novel. The purpose of musical disruption highlights the occult content of these broadcasts. Much like the decay of a gothic novel which highlights the hidden vitality, the breaks and repetitions in *TCL49* highlight *TCL49*'s unity and continuity. The 'calling back' of instances, reflexively, is best assigned to *epanalepsis* in its broader meaning. The trope means, more widely, a recurrence through addition. For ordering compound narratives, *epanalepsis* raises challenges to the theoretically informed position that the *mise en abyme* is also infinitely regressive. If therefore, the small instances in *TCL49* are a *mise en abyme*, or cases of part-to-whole infinities, then the *mise en abyme* term notwithstanding, these instances are also cases of recursion or *epanalepsis*.

Additionally, the melodic refrains in the novel provide patterning for the narrative. These musical recitals amplify the wider themes in the novel. *TCL49* upholds ironic tragedy but the character resistance to moral absolutes and certainties make the work an instance of something complexly subversive or sinister. The flow of meaning is analogous to water as an elementary idea which unifies the novel's complex patterns and forms. The collection of these many metaphors makes *TCL49* an allegorical work. The gnostic idea of the abyss, *bythos*, orders the novel's form because the abyss is the opposite to *chaos* and disorder.

One may imagine a delightful idea of cascading sequences, analogous to infinitely reflecting mirrors through whatever views we might uphold about language and philosophy. But, reasonably, the idea of the *mise en abyme* will always be something formally finite. This is so because a work of literature is limited by its material form. I have argued therefore that we should pay greater caution to the idea of infinite recurrence, and instead, call it *indefinite* regress. Without limits, the abyss of order is sublime but nothing more than an abyss.



## Outcomes

This is the conclusion to this study. This thesis examined late-modern British and American texts exemplifying, what is called, the '*mise en abyme*'. The outcomes of this project include: 1) a **review** and 2) a justified **synthesis** of results.

### 1. Review

This study was undertaken so as to arrive at a better understanding of what constitutes the so-called '*mise en abyme*'. The purpose of this project was to argue for a clearer, delimited meaning of Gide's idea as it applies to English examples. This was a great challenge. Whilst first examining commentary from 1950-2010, this thesis contextualised Gide's idea. Its aim was to define the term ultimately as something concrete, 'not in the most abstract but in the most concrete terms possible, to find not its universal formula, but the formula which expresses most adequately this or that special manifestation of it' as art-critic, Walter Pater, expressed his aim. Pater's aim captures the aim of this project. ([1873] in Johnson, 1969: 3)

So, the first argument of this thesis was a negative one. Because so many definitions of the *mise en abyme* are, at best, vague and general—or, at worst—inconsistent and whimsical, this dissertation strove to uncover a model, one which would add clarity to the definitions offered in critical texts. Studies mentioning the *mise en abyme*, as a general idea, point out literary examples: this thesis took these citations as grounds for close-reading. In each case study, this project accounted for any emerging patterns, in key texts, traceable to Gide's original idea. Classical terms, which matched some of Gide's meaning for his idea, or Magny's '*mise en abyme*', were helpful in this research. It transpired that the entry-term *mise en abyme* does not always mean what handbook

definitions say it means. This project analysed examples, which commentators would call, ‘*mise en abyme*’ texts. Our studies uncovered considerable discrepancies in the assigned range and general meaning of the term. The ‘*mise en abyme*’ is often an over-applied name with problematic import: it is, not much more than, a modern misnomer for part-whole forms. And since all critics, citing the term ‘*mise en abyme*’, would reasonably agree that Gide’s idea is about part-whole arrangements, wherever his idea is tied to the term, our analysis proved how rhetorical, part-whole tropes were more precise for describing effects called the ‘*mise en abyme*’. So restoring the meaning of the *mise en abyme* to its precursor tropes, clarified some diffuse meaning of the term. Critics and commentators came to believe that part-whole phenomena in the works they discuss, involving a process of internal duplication, opened up figurative meanings of ‘abysses’. Yet, all that is *actually* present in the texts in question is a set of part-whole relations, transfers, recursions which can be characterised, quite simply, in other terms. From C.E. Magny (1950) onwards, a certain philosophical significance, or occult mystique, also became attributed to the process of internal textual repetition, which she conceived as mirroring, and which subsequent thinkers associated with mirrors and endless reflections. Magny’s conception is less formal than Gide’s: she initiated a more universalised tradition for Gide’s idea, and introduced a meaning without ‘particular import’.

So, the second argument of this thesis was a positive one. Three principles, which best conform to the underlying part-whole forms associated with the *mise en abyme*, include:

- *Ekphrasis*: the verbal expression of some visual part;
- *Metalepsis*: the carrying over of meaning from one part of a work to another;
- *Epanalepsis*: the repetition of two, or more, parts in a sequence.

Gide’s original idea—the transposition of the narrative to the scale of the characters—suggests a basic mode of part-whole relations. Gide elaborated his idea with very visual comparisons (heraldic shields). A narrator’s description of the (often vividly visual) character is, in one sense, a case of *ekphrasis*. Subtler manifestations of *ekphrasis* include literary accounts of the other arts like painting, music and even *belle-lettres*. Moreover, semantic correspondences in the narrative (like sinister themes) in *Hamlet* and *Usher* prove a magical, perhaps synchronistic link behind an event

and its distant or inscrutable causes: in such cases, *metalepsis* is best attributed to a text cited as a ‘*mise en abyme*’. Similarly, when events intimate, call back previous instances of the same event, or similar events, by means of, for example, recurrent symbolism, then a recursive, *epanalepsis* is a more accurate name for the text vaguely called a *mise en abyme* text.

## 2. Synthesis

Studies, in this thesis, point towards one conclusion: the term ‘*mise en abyme*’ means other things. It means other things for the examples cited by Gide and Magny and also texts cited by late-modern commentary. The *mise en abyme* is in a sense, a well-worn, heuristic term for tropes which are, in late-modern times, reclaiming their relevance for texts with complex aesthetic features. The *mise en abyme* is, in another sense, a contingent name for texts with abyssal themes, concerns which are, in late-modern times, as relevant as ever. Therefore, the *mise en abyme* term *really* designates 1) multi-dimensional concerns in art and 2) thematic impressions of the abyss.

Firstly, the dimension of music applies to Gide’s original idea. In a work of art, we find ‘transposed’ from one position to another, the literary ‘scales’ of event and character. Like a change in musical register, Gide’s acoustic implications afford a broader technique for artists who discern links between such ordering in their works of art. Or, in compositions involving transposed part-whole similarity, this dimension allows richer, discursive, criticism.

Secondly, the metaphor of the ‘abyss’ relates to Gide’s words too. This aspect features when the character determines the order of events on its own terms, on its own character level, where character overrides the subject matter asserted by the narrator’s directions. This aspect occurs when events are strongly shaped by the living entities in a work of art. The will of the character, as it were, *negates* the narrator’s will. In simpler terms, the (non-natural) subject gains greater agency from the (natural) objective power of the narrator—and not the other way around. When adversarial characters reconfigure the events ordained by the narrator, a sinister phenomenon is at work. The narration is in such cases, character centred, *psyche*-centric, not other, or *allego*-centric. Such cases

afford a hidden, dark value behind Gide's idea because the subjective universe of the work is highlighted against the objective narrator's orders. Such orientation results in an isolated intelligence, a character whose principle of being is enlightened by a negated field of objective, but increasingly baseless narrator agency. Word-root-lore, or etymology, reveals that the modifiers 'abyssal' and 'abysmal' are related. The latter implies specific value whilst the former is neutral, perhaps valueless. Whereas 'abyssal' is so absolute: negating even itself as a value, 'abysmal' still holds to some value, perhaps to the extreme threshold of nothing, or the stuff of baselessness, the *stuff* of the 'a-byss'. This topsy-turvy extremity is best described as a negation of the object's agency which affords gains, in powerful agency, for the subject. The aim of addressing the gap in research, of metaphors of the abyss, was thus carried out through examining the abysmal (extreme) connotations of the *en abyme* term, rather than the impressions of its abyssal (all-negating) undertones. Therefore, a general remark on cases of Gide's *en abyme* idea is that its connotations situate the *mise en abyme* in the aesthetic literature of the occult, as an extreme figure for eliciting nothingness.

### 3. End

Finally, this study upheld its objective: to provide a new understanding for the *mise en abyme* in late-modernity. Yet, like taking one nesting doll out of another, the argument shows that for every good revelation there are always, at least, further, concealed challenges. The *mise en abyme*, as popularised, albeit contingently by Dällenbach, pertains to its modern place: but Gide's idea is not really modern, it invites critics towards the pre-modern world which held ancient cases of his principle, like *metalepsis*—a concern which is seriously studied today. But there is also *ekphrasis* and *epanalepsis* if we are to avoid the problems of starting with recent definitions and their entanglements. The adamant authority of Dällenbach's remarks on Gide and the universalised idea of the '*mise en abyme*', prove that this idea still needs more work:

...as long as the nature of the reflected subject is irrelevant, we can return, after many a detour, to our initial belief—namely, that when the expression *mise en abyme* first appeared, it unequivocally designated what other authors call ‘the work within the work’ or ‘internal duplication’. But today the unavoidable question arises: is this how it has been and is understood by critics? It must be admitted that this is often not the case. Did Gide contribute to these misinterpretations? This possibility cannot be excluded. But to hold the text from the *Journal* [1893] as mainly responsible for the uncertainty that exists today would be to forget that we have not yet got all the facts at our fingertips. (1977: 19)

In the above, I would conclude by substituting the name Gide with the name Dällenbach and in place of the title *Journal*, I would put the title *The Mirror in the Text* (1977). Luckily progressive scholars, as mentioned, have departed from such foundational studies on the *mise en abyme*, even though these studies overshadow the definition of the *mise en abyme*, today. My final remark would, therefore, be the conceited impossibility—at present—of finding any greater certainty for the definition of the *mise en abyme* than the outline offered in this research because my work has developed the outcomes established by Dällenbach’s work. And having returned to Gide’s work, different facts have emerged. The *mise en abyme* is a composite idea of many and varied bits. It is today, in fact, a very diffuse idea but it does raise questions about its clarity. The *mise en abyme* is like an uncovered ball of stuff from a vacuum cleaner: in this sense, it carries some esoteric but also some substantial traces which we can analyse, or assign a meaning to, if we so wish. In English literature, the *mise en abyme* tends to contain *some* material which we can reasonably call tropes or figures. The *mise en abyme* is, without these basic tropes, an indeterminate, chaotic, and even, a vacuous assignation. Yet, if the name, the *mise en abyme*, is marshalled to describe complex textual phenomena, such studies catalyse further study about matters that are more determinate: matters which critics either pragmatically associate with tropes, calling such matters a *mise en abyme*, or matters which are simply dismissed because of their inscrutability. Like studying nothingness, studying the *mise en abyme* provokes questions, ultimately, about the nature of something-ness. Like studying the abyss, the place of absent impressions, studying the *mise en abyme* directs us towards enquiries: fields that are undeniably timeless and eternal. Thrown asunder then, we face a

diabolical standoff. On the one hand, there is such a thing called the '*mise en abyme*' which leads to certain, meaningful ends but on the other hand, there is no such thing as the *mise en abyme* because its variously studied paths only result in dead-ends.

Therefore, a choice remains. The 'facts at our fingertips' of which Dällenbach speaks, can emerge through a radical grasp of timeless tropes, tropes from which the '*mise en abyme*' is truly made, and in so grasping these tropes, and casting the term '*mise en abyme*' to one side, we realise that wherever the meaning of the '*mise en abyme*' leads now, leads only to where it always led—and will always lead—into the abyss.





## Appendices

### Appendix A

#### Timeline of the *mise en abyme*

**c.700 BC:** Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* both make use of the rhetorical principle of *epanalepsis*, *ekphrasis* and *metalepsis* that has come to be associated with the term *mise en abyme*. Polynices (ll 639-46) poetically accounts of Hellenic heraldry as the hero brandishes: '...His well orb'd shield he holds, /New wrought, and with a double impress charged'. (Fox-Davies, 1969)

**1893:** Gide writes his August 24<sup>th</sup> memoir entry about the 'scaled' 'proportion' transposed on the 'scale of the characters the very subject of the work', initiating a new way of approaching his many novels.

**1950:** C.E Magny resuscitates the diary entry and interprets Gide's diary fragments to create the term still in use today, *mise en abyme*. Her view was that Gide imagined a 'cipher of transcendence'. Her idea was that the *mise en abyme* was a metaphor, structure and a textual analogy of numbers.

**1975:** Delacampagne writes an insightful literary review in *Le Monde* about the 'formulaic' resurrection of the abyss 'used to designate a process referring to the game of mirrors'. His insight is that its purpose is 'the vertigo of the undefined' based on Magny's chapter.

**1977:** Geneva School literature scholar Lucien Dällenbach publishes his extensive study based on Magny's coining and Gide's writings, translated into English as *The Mirror in the Text*.

**1978:** Dutch narratologist Mieke Bal publishes her paper about the *mise en abyme* and its iconic significance.

**1979:** Gerard Genette writes briefly about the *mise en abyme* using different terminology.

**1980:** Dällenbach responds with a paper about the *mise en abyme* and its place in reception studies as a follow up to *The Mirror in the Text*.

**1980:** Linda Hutcheon devotes attention to the *mise en abyme* as the basis for literary allegory and paradox.

**1983:** Schlomith Rimmon Kenan advances Genette's terms and alludes again very briefly to the *mise en abyme* as a paradox of narrative levels.

**1983:** Roger Scruton criticises 'those subjectivists' of semiology who hold to 'the idea that in matters of literary interpretation, anything goes [because] the sign itself is unfailingly *mise en abyme*'. (1983: 16)

**1984:** Patricia Waugh publishes *Metafiction* and cites Kenan's example of the *mise en abyme* as a paradox.

**1987:** Moshe Ron calls for limiting what theretofore had been an implicitly limitless diegetic concept.

**1987:** Brian McHale offers an account of the *mise en abyme* by finding equivalences from the world of computer science and mathematics.

**1989:** Viveca Füredy advances McHale's account and stresses the need for boundaries to avoid potentially confusing interpretations of the embedded *mise en abyme* narrative and its refracted contents.

**1992:** Brian McHale publishes an extended examination of the *mise en abyme*. In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) the mention of 'recursive structures' is dropped in this 1992 book.

**1993:** Christopher Norris's *The Truth about Postmodernism* singles out the *mise en abyme* as one of the greatest misleading tricks of the postmodern literary movement (1993: 131, 198).

- 1995**: Critics Susana Onega and José García Landa edit an introductory text to narratology. The term *mise en abyme* is juxtaposed with ‘microcosmic sabotages of chronology and suspense’ (ibid: 204) to extremes of meaning ‘pushed to the limits of identity’ (ibid: 182)
- 1996**: Alan Sokal’s hoax raises concerns about the status of theory, and reconfirms the polemics of Christopher Norris, Roger Scruton and John M. Ellis. This academic crisis quells the liberal use of the term *mise en abyme*.
- 1997**: David Herman and William Nelles publish articles about ‘metalepsis’ and ‘embedded narratives’ which are described using the Classical modes of rhetoric; these poetic descriptions are however, semantic equivalents of what is held to be a broader idea known as the *mise en abyme*.
- 1997**: The second edition of Mieke Bal’s highly popular *Narratology*, which had defined the *mise en abyme* rhetorically since its first edition in 1985, a decade before the Sokal Affair convulsed literary theory.
- 2000**: Don Fowler discusses the *mise en abyme* in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, which uses the old trope of *metalepsis*.
- 2001**: The *mise en abyme* is resurrected by John White, this time using Peircean semiotics rather than Saussurean-based semiology: the *mise en abyme* is examined in a different manner.
- 2002**: Debra Malina in *Breaking the Frame: Metalepsis and the Construction of the Subject*, sustains a trend in talking of the *mise en abyme* in terms of the pre-Sokal term, *metalepsis*, using the now established Peircean definition, which is similar in meaning to the Classical trope of *metalepsis*.
- 2005**: The French scholars Philippe Roussin and Sophie Rabau describe the rhetorical typologies of *metalepsis*, treating it as a term that should be disrupted and broken in order to reveal the work’s subject.
- 2009**: Alan Kirby’s *Digimodernism* touches on the broken frame narrative in *metalepsis* with what he calls ‘the disrupted *mise en abyme*’ (ibid: 17). With reference to visual media, he devotes a significant amount of attention to recursion as an implied extension of the basic *mise en abyme* formulations.
- 2009**: Werner Wolf, in a similar way to Kirby, considers technology and the *mise en abyme* in more detail.
- 2009**: John Pier offers an extended narratological account of literary *metalepsis* as a ‘related concept’ to the *mise en abyme*.
- 2010**: Irene de Jong resituates the literary term *metalepsis* through a contemporary study of Ancient Greek examples including Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, together with several short poems; the study sheds further light on the *mise en abyme*’s implicit conflation with *metalepsis*.
- 2010**: Cross-disciplinary narratologist Werner Wolf proposes an inverse model of the *mise en abyme* based on a different notional layering of narrative levels. Wolf calls this term the *mise en cadre*.
- 2011**: Following Werner Wolf, Karin Kukkonen *et al.* propose that the ‘clumsy term’, *mise en abyme* be ‘transferred into the more international terminology *metareference*’. (2011: 256-7)
- 2012**: After nearly thirty years, Roger Scruton once again draws the *mise en abyme* into controversy, where it is associated with fraudulence and aesthetic vacuity ‘...the essence of fakes is that they are substitutes for themselves, avatars of the infinite *mise-en-abyme*...’

## The French New Novel

The development of what is known as the *mise en abyme* is still largely indebted to French writing. Gide's *The Counterfeiters* is celebrated as *the* example of what Gide was alluding to in 1893:

André Gide's *The Counterfeiters* (1926), a novel characterised by self-reflexivity and self-consciousness, in which the device of *mise en abyme* (or internal duplication) is especially conspicuous, has perhaps not received from them [advanced French specialists] the kind of attention that could be expected. Gide was perceived as having been too closely allied to the psychological novel in the French tradition of the novel of analysis. (Smyth, 1991: 57-8)

Gide's novel, to a large extent, prefigures some traits of an eclectic, self-defined movement in France known as the French *nouveau roman*. This experimental movement peaked around the 1950s and early 1960s. The writing, often transgressive, subscribed to distinctive strategies and techniques, most notably concerned with 1) rejecting the methods of traditional realism and 2) considering alternative themes to the, then, celebration of French existentialism in literary art:

The New Novelists' rejection of essentialist psychology, linear chronology, mechanistic chains of cause and effect, conventional novelistic props like character and plot; their stress on relativity and uncertainty and, most generally, their readiness to experiment, justify their grouping [as French New Novelists] under one label. (*q.v.* Prince, in Ryan, 2007: 398)

Though concerned largely with its own procedures, the phenomenon did seek to counter the representation of post-war French society. *The Counterfeiters* is cited as an early example of what Gide aimed to show by his idea and so the movement, sometimes, recognises Gide as an early proponent of their compositions even though the movement took his idea in a different direction. Gide's diary idea, which stimulated much discussion in The French New Novel movement, is often recognised as his own, original idea but, importantly, critics find Gide's work is distinct from other writers in the French tradition, like Robbe-Grillet and Claude Simon, authors who do not only write novels about novels. Thus 'The French New Novel does not usually take the form of a novel within a novel; rather, especially in the early French New Novel, it emerges in the context of some form of artistic representation which mirrors the novel in which it appears'. (Smyth, 1993: 84)

A fair example is Natalie Sarraute's *Portrait of an Unknown Person* (1977) which represents the idea of obsession, asserted at a remove by the critic, to be the representation of the novel. The story is about events centring on a picture of a character which interests the character intensely. There is no novel in the novel but rather, an argument about representative effects of the character. It is equally significant that Gide's work is so different to works associated with *les nouveaux romans*. It perhaps explains why his work has not 'received... the kind of attention that could be expected' from what might be called his epigones, as Smyth (1991: 57) points out.

Nevertheless, *The Counterfeiters* can loosely be associated with an early adumbration of the movement's aims because its adaptation of nineteenth century realism foreshadows the depictions in novels from Claude Simon, Alain Robbe-Grillet and Natalie Sarraute, for example.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, in the novel, Edouard's unreconciled feeling between an ideal and a brutal reality is one example in which Gide anticipated what was to become a celebrated trait in The French New Novel movement. Edouard's notebook provides a 'running criticism' of *The Counterfeiters*. Indeed, there are points he raises that provide an analogy with the text, as a whole, and thus Gide's book seems to come close to adumbrating the anti-realist experiments of early French New Novels, wherein character identity is unstable and events are elusive and diffuse:

Nothing that I wrote yesterday is true. Only this remains—that reality interests me inasmuch as it is plastic, and that I care more—ininitely more—for what may be than for what has been. I lean with a fearful attraction over the depths of each creature's possibilities and weep for all that lies atrophied under the heavy lid of custom and morality. (Gide, 1931: 105)

Edouard's alternative focus, one towards a reality out of sync with modernity, is much in keeping with the aims of the 'New Novel' movement that voices this sense of frustration. Robbe-Grillet, is often claimed to have been 'strongly subject to the influence of Gide' (Ollier, 1967: 233). But unlike his incorporation of Gide's original idea, Robbe-Grillet's writing, as emblematic of the movement, differs from Gide's novel, *The Counterfeiters*. Grillet's writing re-assembles meaning from existing elements in his novel as, through what Stephen Heath argued is, 'literary bricolage' (1972: 134-5). Gide's novel, in contrast, has greater compositional coherency. Supporting this claim, Grillet's *The Voyeur* certainly contains much extreme innovation of bricolage technique. The character in Grillet's novel sums up the strategy of the whole work, that:

Instead of the precise narration of any fact, any limitation or any precision, there was—as usual—the very scrambled allusions of ordered psychological or moral elements, [these were] drowned amid endless chains of effects and causes, where the responsible protagonists were lost. (Grillet, 1955: 147)

What we have therefore, between the work of Gide and the later New Novel phenomenon, is some similarity but also, stark differences to do with strategies of representation. *The Counterfeiters*, although somewhat anti-realist, is not radically experimental like *les nouveaux romans*. Nevertheless, perhaps because it was so varied, Gide's idea, as it became bandied about as '*mise en abyme*' was drawn into descriptive accounts of the eclectic New Novel experimentalists. Although Gide's idea did fashion much French New Novel stylistics, the *mise en abyme* was never fully examined, side-lined perhaps under the abstruse, wide-ranging interests attributable to the movement. Therefore, Gide's original idea is a term not *fully* associated with the French New Novel movement due, perhaps, to the slippery nature of what Gide meant by 'subject' and besides, most likely, due to the many, conjectural aims of The French New Novel movement. In this regard,

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<sup>1</sup> In *Portrait of an Unknown Person* (1977), Natalie Sarraute's character takes an excessive interest in a picture in the narrative. The subject picture—and its content—later transpire to depict the events of the story as they later unfold. This picture is like Edouard's notebooks in *The Counterfeiters* because it provides extra-diegetic narration. When the anonymous narrator, in Sarraute's account, walks around their neighbourhood, for example, one passage stands out because it contains Sarraute's stated intention, in her introduction, to overcome and creatively distort 'the reassuring and convention' of quotidian realism so common of French pre-modern literature. The absented storyteller articulates the effect: 'There is a trick one has to catch to be able to get it when you are not lucky enough to see it spontaneously, in a usual way. A sort of sleight-of-hand you have to execute, quite similar to these drills that some picture-riddles tempt you to, or these adroitly composed images made of black and white diamonds which shape two layered geometric drawings: you push away very slightly one of the two pictures, move it a bit aside, make it go backwards and take the other back. Here, in these tiny streets, when I go for a walk on my own, when I'm in a good day, I sometimes manage to, more easily than somewhere else, fulfil a sort of sleight-of-hand quite similar, to make this "other aspect" appear.' (ibid: 1977) But besides the mention of 'sleight-of-hand' and 'riddles', the multiple embedding of passages, to form some spectacular structure (as asserted by Magny) is never, in formal ways, convincingly apparent.

unlike Robbe-Grillet, whether through psychological observation of characters or through word-play, *The Counterfeiters* disambiguates its solution to the problem between character and narrative instability:

Up till now we have been given nothing but novels with a purpose of parading as novels of ideas. But that's not it at all, as you may imagine. Ideas...ideas, I must confess, interest me more than men—interest me more than anything. They live; they fight; they perish like men. Of course it may be said that our only knowledge of them is through men, just as our only knowledge of the wind is through the reed that it bends; but all the same the wind is of more importance than the reeds. (Gide, 1931: 171)

Edouard's singular ideas, then, come to an expected conclusion: 'what I should like to do is something like the art of fugue writing. And I can't see why what was possible in music should be impossible in literature...' (ibid) Gide's idea of transposing a subject to the level of character is perhaps amenable, here, to Edouard's idea about his writing about 'a continuous common chord'. (ibid: 149) Music is an art that permits reconfigured registers. For Gide, character autonomy is meaning—there is little gratuitous futility in the face of some fragmented reality, as epitomised by certain existential French New novels. As his diary entry lays bare: the character, rather than the abstract narration, is prioritised, 'to find *on the level of* character the subject of the work...' Musical allusion in *The Counterfeiters* finds such an alternative to the French New Novel's preoccupations about the anxiety of being and its Sartrean inspirations. Moreover, Gide's idea of 'hearing harmonies' (ibid: 344) in the face of despair, gives a telling sense that the texture of the themes correspond to character perception. Characters relate their humanist absurdity but subvert any despair through allusions of plangent music and antinomian metaphors. *The Counterfeiters*, which 'established the device' from Gide's diary in 1893, should therefore view its place in French New Novel tradition circumspectly. (Cuddon, 1998: 513)

## Structuralism

Apart from chronological overlap with The French New Novel, structuralism as a philosophy of language, offers ways of deciphering Gide's idea. With 'broadly similar aims', the French New Novel and the structuralist movements are in a sense 'parallel activities' as Edmund Smyth argues (1991: 59). Smyth goes further with this comparison, labelling both movements, and the influence on Gide's idea in turns, 'polemical'. Yet, unlike the interpretation of Gide's idea by the New Novel trend, structuralism, or semiology, fortified the reading of Gide's idea in less controversial ways. The posthumously published language models of Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure offer a functional basis for interpreting Gide's idea. French thought, reading Gide, drew much from Saussure's theory of language. French *mise en abyme* scholarship (Magny, 1950; Ricardou, 1978; Dällenbach, 1977) critiques Gide's diary entry but does so under the influence of language theories concerned with structures, broadly called structuralism. Although evaluations of Gide's idea, in the 1980s-2000s are not recognisably structuralist, French definitions, like those of Magny and Dällenbach, are explicitly heir to Saussure's insights and manoeuvre Gide's idea within this semiological framework. Structuralist theory has, besides, been so successful that several sequels have attempted to address its perceived shortcomings. Since the theory of structuralism considers oppositions, relations and correspondences in language, the theory drew much novelty from Gide's idea regarding character and literary subject; certain structuralism models crystallised the dichotomy whilst others obfuscated the idea. Reading Gide's idea, for structuralist thinkers, made his idea an organised whole, a system. For Culler, structuralist theory attempts to demonstrate 'meaningful contrasts and permitted or forbidden combinations' in any language as a system. (Culler, 1975: 14) He thus seeks to define this field:

In literary studies structuralism promotes a poetics interested in the conventions that make literary works possible; it seeks not to produce new interpretations of works but to understand how they can have the meanings and effects that they do. But it did not succeed in imposing this project—a systematic account of literary discourse—in Britain and America. Its main effect was to offer new ideas about literature and to make it one signifying practice among others. It thus opened the way to symptomatic readings of literary works and encouraged cultural studies to try to spell out the signifying procedures of different cultural practices. (Culler, 1997: 126)<sup>1</sup>

The linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure, is generally taken to have articulated the essence of the above outline with his synchronic account of linguistic meaning production as an effect of difference: whereby meaning can only be determined by negative distinction. (199: 117) To some extent, Saussure’s ideas can be described in paired models, as binaries. From *A Course in General Linguistics* [1916], four key ideas are identifiable in the French critical work about the *mise en abyme*: 1) Concept and sound, 2) Value in Language, 3) Combinations and associations, and 4) Temporal and a-temporal views.

**Concept and Sound.** Ferdinand de Saussure saw two sides to the study of meaning. He recognised a concept and its sound-image. The two were different. The most important part of his argument is that the relationship to these two sides is arbitrary (ibid: 67). He labels the two sides as the *signifiant* (the term which signifies, the signifier, or the sound image) and the *signifié*. The *signifié* is the thing signified, or the concept. In Figure 1.5 the meaning is thought about as A. The significant word, about this thought, is B ‘word’. According to Saussure, all associations have a dual nature—the word and the

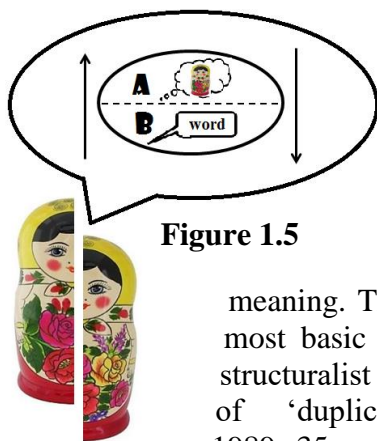
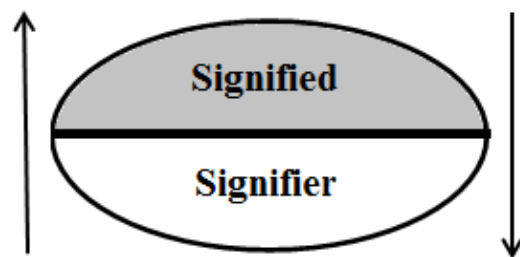


Figure 1.5

meaning. This relationship of the signifier and signified is called the sign. The most basic unit of communication in any human community is the sign. For structuralist thinkers, Gide’s idea was chiefly treated as a ‘sign’: one of a variety of ‘duplications’ (Dällenbach, 1989: 35 and 156). In some sense,

the character signified the signifying medium of the narrative subject in which the characters were placed. The third part of Gide’s idea, about the transposition between the signified character and signifying subject, was however not fully investigated; partially due to the double nature of the sign model, little accommodation to the role of interpretation, or the recognised causal relationship between the two parts was ever fully highlighted. The French New Novel’s experiments with ambiguous representation were



The signifying term and the signified meaning

Figure 1.6

<sup>1</sup> Unlike English varieties, a very French structuralism is put forward by Jean Piaget in his eponymously named book *Structuralism* (1968). In this work, we read of a three-fold language model. For Piaget, the entire theory, like that of Saussure, is predicated on a determined system generally called language. In literary criticism, like so many areas of scholarship, language is used in varied ways. However, Piaget outlines *his* language ‘system’ as first inherently ‘complete’ by virtue of its status as a non-aggregated whole or system. This unified system can be transformed by intervention or reflexively, by *itself*. This second trait of his structuralism is called ‘the idea of transformation’. Noam Chomsky’s ideas about transformations followed Piaget’s second principle. Predictably, this second step in the system is the active and passive duality of the system ‘always simultaneously involving the *structuring* and *structured*’ bipolar laws. The third and most enigmatic of Piaget’s attributes of structuralism generally is ‘the idea of self-regulation’ which ‘entails maintenance and closure’. (ibid: 14) Piaget’s book was helpful for French critics to develop close analytical readings based on his triplicate claims of language structure.

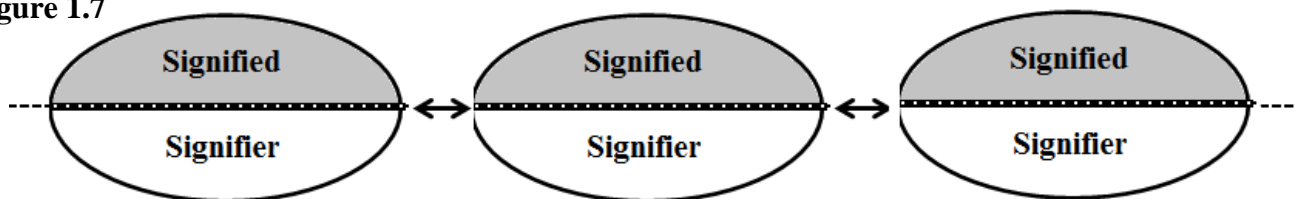
thus limited by a model, one that lacked greater pragmatism because the foundational unit of language stresses oppositions rather than the causal alliances between oppositions, and the role of the referent is side-lined. (Figure 1.6)<sup>1</sup>

**Value in Language.** The relation of the signs, in the language system, is a relation Saussure referred to as ‘value’. For his theory, no sign had any absolute value, except in relation to the rest of the sign-system. Uttering a word evoked many associations. These determined the value of any particular word. As the leading theorist on Gide’s idea noted, using Saussure’s idea of value for analysing a story ‘can always evoke everything that in one way or another can be associated with it’ (Dällenbach, 206, n2). Value is therefore of ‘prime importance’ in Saussure’s work but can lead to boundless values if taken too far. Whilst the sign had two parts, the signifier and signified, the value of this sign was derived from the relationship of this sign with other signs in the system. And the system as a whole determines the ultimate value:

The notion of value...shows us that it is a great mistake to consider a sign as nothing more than the combination of a certain sound and a certain concept. To think of a sign as nothing more would be to isolate it from the system to which it belongs. It would be to suppose that a start could be made with individual signs, and a system constructed by putting them together. On the contrary, the system as a united whole is the starting point, from which it becomes possible, by a process of analysis, to identify its constituent elements. (Saussure, 1983: 112)

Saussure recognised a differential quality between signs in a system. There are functional

Figure 1.7



differences that help us understand the meaning of any sign. Saussure indeed states that ‘[i]n a language, as in every other semiological system, what distinguishes a sign is what constitutes it’. (ibid: 119) In Figure 1.7, Saussure shows that value was constituted by means of negative, oppositional differences between signs in the system. The value was found in a relationship between the signs. ‘What characterises each [value] most exactly is being whatever the others [in the value chain] are not’ (ibid: 115) Negative differentiation is therefore of prime importance because it demystifies the multiple possible meanings for any one sign. Meaning is most effectively determined in opposition to the many ways the meaning can manifest. For example, it is best to point out an example of a fat person from a range of non-fat people in order to understand the meaning of fatness. Saussure’s attributed idea of determined meaning was that the ‘entire mechanism of language’ was based upon the negative oppositions involved in comparing signs with each other. (ibid: 119) This negative differentiation is called value. For Gide’s idea, Magny’s ‘cipher’ (as a code for infinity or zero) drew on Saussure’s ideas about value, to assert that one part of a narrative was like an ‘analogue’ of another part of the same narrative. Since ‘entire’ and

<sup>1</sup> Saussure’s double model is about the term and the meaning. He says that ‘[b]etween them [the term and meaning] there is only *opposition*. The entire mechanism of language...is based on oppositions of this kind and on the phonic and conceptual differences that they imply...When isolated, neither *Nacht* nor [its plural] *Nächte* is anything: thus everything is in opposition... Language, in a manner of speaking, is a type of algebra...Some of its oppositions are more significant than others; but units and grammatical facts are only different names for designating diverse aspects of the same general fact: the functioning of linguistic oppositions’. (ibid, [1916] 1959: 121-2)

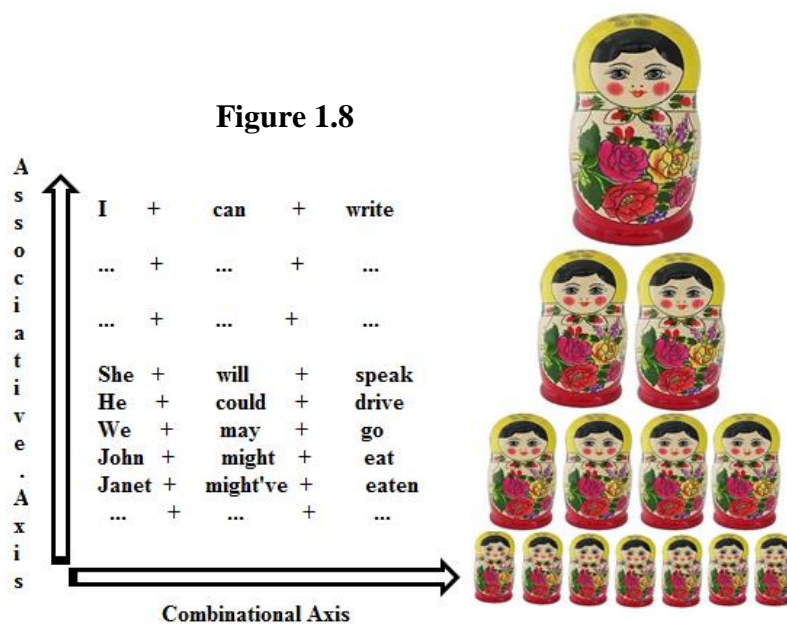
‘everything’ permits so very much, any contingent segment built upon another was something ‘other’ by virtue of what it was not. (Dällenbach, *ibid*: 56) So a comparison between narrative portions, for example, could, via such highly sophisticated supporting models, be routed back to Gide’s idea due to its all-encompassing notion that value can be determined by evocation of anything and everything .

**Combinations and associations.** This is the third general idea of Saussure which came to influence French readings of Gide’s idea. Dällenbach recognised that this concern applied to the *mise en abyme* in terms of sliding narratives. (*ibid*: 156). Any sentence is a *relation of signs*. The meaning of the whole sentence depends on the contribution from each of the individual signs in the sentence.

When we view the signs in the sentence as a linear sequence, the combinational relationship between the signs is called syntagmatic, as in: *I + can + write*. But when a sign in the sentence is seen as contrasting with other signs in the language, the association is seen as a substitution, for example: *I* versus *He*, *can* versus *will*, *write* versus *go* in the above syntagmatic sentence. The latter (*She + will + speak*) creates an alternative association that parallels the original linear sentence (*I + can + write*). This alternative, similar sentence is called a paradigmatic relation.

This indefinite replication shows that language is a vast web of signs that mutually define the constituent entities, or what Saussure would call a linguistic *system*.

Language from these two theoretical axes has a relative sense. ‘[E]verything that changes the system in any way is internal’ (Saussure, *ibid*: 23) to the system, the change of language as a system is determined by itself. Dällenbach recognises that such reflexivity affords ‘projecting a metaphorical equivalent’ between combinations and associations in language. (*ibid*: 56) It seems that Gide’s idea could be reduced to associations. Indeed, so many subsequent theorists, drawing on Saussure, found recourse to comparisons for elucidation (albeit with contradictions and inconsistencies in the commentary). Nevertheless, Saussure’s perspective is based on the linear combinations of the system’s language laws, or grammars.<sup>1</sup> (Figure 1.8) It was the change of the



<sup>1</sup> Saussure’s view of language is to do with difference and exchange: it rehearses the problem of idealism. Words have meanings. Meaning in this way is determined by the differences of value and the exchange of value determines the meaning in the language system. Saussure recognises that the structures vary according to social and cultural convention. The convention creates codes. And his conclusion is that the relationship between the two poles, in a code, are ultimately arbitrary. The assignation of meaning to a sign is found by random accident or social fortuity even though the origins of word meaning were not accidental. If we deign some meaning as *completely* arbitrary, radically random, negligibly stochastic, then the meaning is open to dismissal. The superfluity of the meaning of a word is thus an ideal. Any term can be argued to hold no meaning, or be, meaningless. The basic units of language are for Saussure, arbitrary and differential in this way. But in fairness, Saussure felt that there were ‘degrees of arbitrariness’. (*ibid*: 131) The diagram above (Figure 1.7) represents this arbitrary difference against which we can say the indeterminacy of meaning proliferates *in degrees of arbitrariness*. The difference between the signifier and the signified is this dashed line. The relationship is problematised by the idea that the relationship between parts is ambiguous because so many names can be used against designated meanings. ‘Ambiguity would disappear’ between a signifier and signified, Saussure avers ‘if the three notions involved here were designated by three names, each [singularly] suggesting and opposing the others’ (*ibid*: 67). But because we do not have exact words for each concept, we see a slippage for precise meaning and the only solution is to differentiate the meanings from other similar meanings, ‘difference makes the character [and] value’ in the language system possible (*ibid*: 121) says Saussure. Saussure popularises the view that the words conveying meaning and the meaning *itself* is ‘intimately united’. Language communities of critics may take this ‘relation’ to mean what they wish but that is another issue. Saussure problematises the ancient notion of *Hamlet* ‘to hold. As ‘twere, the mirror up to nature’. The arbitrary nature of signifying meaning is thus a very compelling theory. The model is open to the charge that meaning can be pushed towards radical indeterminacy by virtue of the conflict of candidates for meaning. But Saussure held that language was like a piece of paper: if we cut the *recto* side (representation, words) then we also severed the *verso* side (meaning, signified convention). The outcome is thus doubly determined by the motivations of the language using subject. Language grips us in infinite potential because the meaning is always



system over time which was legitimated the study of the French New Novel and its preoccupations, Gide's idea became viewed as "dynamic and organic", argued as "indefinitely repeatable". In this way, Dällenbach proclaims the *mise en abyme* is a distinctive element of The French New Novel regardless of the historical contradictions involved. As he asserts: 'from the start of the *nouveau roman*, the *mise en abyme* was associated with it, and immediately became one of its distinctive elements' (Dällenbach, 1989: 118) This faulty argument is revealed in a footnote where Dällenbach proclaims that Jean Paul Sartre's preface to Natalie Sarraute's *Portrait of an Unknown Person* (1948), "is referring primarily to the *mise en abyme* in this novel" (Dällenbach, 1989: 226, fn. 5). Yet despite any retrospective insights and unjustified anachronisms in this assertion, Sartre wrote this preface two years *before* Edouard Maguy coined the term '*mise en abyme*' in her essay about what Gide putatively meant. So, through such tenuous links, historical proof undermines the reality of the *mise en abyme*—even though structuralist theory affirms such eccentric thinking. The disjunction raises some troubling charges about either the historical inception of the *mise en abyme*—or indeed the place of the theory which fortifies the *mise en abyme* itself.

**Temporal and a-temporal views.** Saussure makes a distinction between the development of elements in language at any one point in time (synchronic) and the development of these elements as time passes (diachronic). The distinction is an analysis at any single time versus analysis between many points in time. Diachronic change considers language as a continually changing medium while synchronic change sees language as a living being that exists in a 'state' at any one, particular moment in time. His diagram of two linear co-ordinates has an AB axis and a CD axis;

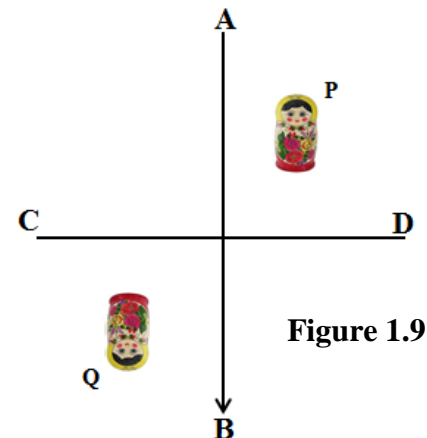


Figure 1.9

(Figure 1.9) the CD represents the synchronic 'axis of simultaneities' (a simultaneous domain of language that can exist at some point in time) and the AB is an 'axis of successions' (a historical range along which language has progressed). Using this idea in the philosophical analysis of language, it is judicious to undertake at least some synchronic analysis before embarking on a diachronic study: before establishing how anything based in language has changed from P to Q, one needs to know something about P *and* Q. So, a synchronic analysis can be made without referring to history. The French writer Lucien Dällenbach made especial use of this idea of language change in the second half of his study of the *mise en abyme*.

Saussure uses a vivid analogy of chess to illustrate this point: if we walk into a room, halfway through a game of chess, it is possible to evaluate the state of the game by studying the positions on the chess board. These positions on the chess board show the state of play for that moment. In understanding the state of play, it is now possible to speculate the development of the language games from the past and into the future. Diachronic analysis is often criticised on the grounds of being too speculative and theoretical, synchronic analysis is objected to on the grounds that it disregards historicity and is too preoccupied with description and extrapolation.<sup>1</sup>

related to other meanings. (ibid: 131) Meaning for Saussure is never absolute without a context. Meaning is arbitrary in degrees and meaning is bound by conventional decree. A way beyond this stricture was to find an intervening medium that could disentangle us from the model of *Course in General Linguistics* (1916). The sequel to this early model was post-structuralism. There is a strand of this thinking especially helpful to our advanced understanding of the *mise en abyme*. Post-structuralism came to see texts as incapable of mirroring a clear meaning, its project sought to clarify the original model of Saussure.

<sup>1</sup> Post-structuralism codified the disbelief in absolute and authoritative meaning. This philosophy took Saussure's diachronic idea in a different direction whilst rehearsing the idealism and realism debate. Representation was according to its practitioners, rarely, if ever transparent. Interpretation using the Saussurean model recognised the shortcomings of structuralism. Post-structuralism noticed that there is no realistic meaning. Meaning 'has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one'. (Barthes, 1975: 6) The multiple, possible meanings, all claiming authority are ultimately 'indeterminable'. (ibid) After a free acceptance of innumerable candidates for meaning as equally valid, the sequel to structuralism reached an impasse. 'The claim that a literary form reflects the world is simply tautological. If by 'the world' we understand the world we experience, the world differentiated by language, then the claim that realism reflects the world means that realism reflects the world in language. This is a tautology. If discourses articulate concepts through a system of signs which signify by means of their relationship to each other rather than to entities in the world, and if literature is a signifying practice, all it can reflect is the order

## Postmodernism

Despite its increasingly clearer meaning, postmodernism in literature, like the *mise en abyme*, remains a difficult idea. Nevertheless, most critical-term handbooks have an entry under 'postmodernism' and the term carries its own 'canonised texts, its anthologies, primers and readers, its dictionaries and its histories'. (Hutcheon, 2002: 165) Yet, because of its controversial attributes, few dare formulate any single meaning for postmodernism. The remark of Terry Eagleton is thus how postmodernism involves:

... the contemporary movement of thought which rejects totalities, universal values, grand historical narratives, solid foundations to human existence and the possibility of objective knowledge. Postmodernism is sceptical of truth, unity and progress, opposes what it sees as elitism in culture, tends towards cultural relativism, and celebrates pluralism, discontinuity and heterogeneity. (2004: 13, fn. 1)

With good reasoning about the connotations of the abyss and of the *mise en abyme*, M.H. Abrams also contends that:

...an undertaking in some postmodernist writings is to subvert the foundations of our accepted modes of thought and experience so as to reveal the 'meaninglessness' of existence and the underlying 'abyss', or 'void', or 'nothingness' on which any supposed security is conceived to be precariously suspended. Postmodernism in literature and the arts has parallels with the movement known as poststructuralism in linguistic and literary theory; poststructuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to show that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous enquirer, into a play of conflicting indeterminacies. (Abrams, 1993: 120)

Abrams' view culminates from his attack on certain reading 'procedures': he sustains his argument against the increasing trend, against postmodern reading, where critics derived textual meaning as a reduction, or as a 'vertiginous *mise en abyme*' (1977: 210). Yet despite the controversies to do with the *mise en abyme*, postmodernism equates broadly with the experimental trends and also the politics of art since the end of the Second World War: the movement seems a later variant of Enlightenment thought, which culminated with modernism. Postmodernism is broadly a later variant of modernism, surpassing the knowledge paradigms of reformed scepticism (Lyotard, 1979) late-market capitalism (Jameson, 1984), and technological mediation (Baudrillard, 1983). Postmodernism may really be a type of *late-modern thinking*<sup>1</sup>.

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inscribed in particular discourses, not the nature of the world'. (Belsey, 1980: 46) The analysis of the *mise en abyme* through structuralism and its sequels, holds to the very basic view that the device will engender multiple meanings—none of the meanings can be declared the final authority because of the equality sanctioned for *all* candidates of meaning (as the work *S/Z* by Roland Barthes suggests). There was a shift in the development of English types of structuralism as we see in Catherine Belsey's account, especially with the work of Roland Barthes writing in French continental style philosophy. Due to the strangely conservative atmosphere in French thought, Roland Barthes disentangles the language *about* language. His idea was to establish a kind of meta-language experimentation with ideological overtones. But his seminal work *Image-Music-Text* published in 1966 lays a rather delayed reaction to the work in the Anglo-American world about the authority of the author and their intentions. (see Wimsatt and Beardsley, 1948) His arguments in this work aim to outline a wholeness of one, single deep structural device determined by the reader and not the author. Any meaning is the outcome of the reader who might appreciate some unity in the diversity of the many candidates of meaning. The combination of codes in a structural sense, make for Barthes's argument, a 'text'. This word, 'text' in its nuanced formulation, is indebted to the work of Barthes and the French post-structuralists. In short, the poststructuralist view attempted to disentangle itself from structuralism and did so through an evolved scholastic nominalism.

<sup>1</sup> After the concern with feedback systems and cybernetics, cultural theory had reached a new phase and Hayden White's ground-breaking *Metahistory* (1973) raised the problem of reflexivity in the arts. Later, Jean Francois Lyotard (1977) in *The Postmodern Condition* qualified his socio-cultural, late, historical phase of modernity as merely a time reaching a stage of 'slackening' (ibid: 71). Postmodernity extended, like the crest of a

As Patricia Waugh suggests:

There can be no transcendental ‘view from nowhere’, no position from outside culture from which to offer a criticism of it. Implication is all. We live in a pluralised culture surrounded by a multiplicity of styles, knowledges, stories we tell ourselves about the world. To impose an overarching narrative on such experience is to perpetuate the violences of modernity with their exclusions and terrors. (Waugh, 1998: 290)<sup>1</sup>

Besides its own newly perpetrated ‘exclusions and terrors’, the thinkers defining the movement contend that ‘postmodernity’ has no form, has no meaning or is ‘amorphous by nature’ (Cuddon, 1999: 689). Like the theory surrounding the *mise en abyme*, this alleged era favours ‘an eclectic approach’. (ibid: 690) Although ‘sometimes controversial’, postmodernism in literature ‘has parallels’ with post-structuralism in theory. (Abrams, ibid) Poststructuralism seems a critical relative of structuralism. The one does not follow straight from the other movement but both movements are similar as critics have come to position the two movements. ‘[P]oststructuralism and postmodernism are more like cousins than parent and child’. (McHale, 2006 in Nicol, 2009: 6) Furthermore, the view is held that because of French theory and its influence:

Poststructuralism is primarily a discourse of and about modernism... we must begin to entertain the notion that rather than offering a *theory of postmodernity* and developing an analysis of contemporary culture, French theory provides us primarily with an *archaeology of modernity*, a theory of modernism at the stage of exhaustion. (Huysen, 1984: 39) *italics in original*

To make sense of the *mise en abyme* in history thus involves disentangling it from some of the doctrines of French structuralism. After Gide’s idea was studied under the theories of semiology, its designation as the ‘*mise en abyme*’ was scrutinised through post-structuralist criticism. Poststructuralist criticism relies on the view that the signifier ‘slips’ between meanings. For Jacques Lacan, language ‘is constituted by a set of signifiers’ involving what he calls ‘the Other’ (1970: 193) A chain of signifiers in any sequence, of self-reference, therefore results in ‘otherness’, perhaps it means the sinister estrangement between the text and its meaning:

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wave, reflexively, the same traits of the modern. Postmodernity as predicated on modernity is popularised by Frederic Jameson as a modernity of sorts. Much of its theory was, at base, still modern, affirming or decrying, being incredulous to, post-Enlightenment secularised scientism. It is however not a monolithic idea. A lot has been written about postmodernism and its associated movements. Thus, though I situate my readings as those of late-modernity, I would nevertheless, point out a helpful idea in Lyotard’s original thesis on late-modernity. He illustrates of modernity, postmodernity, as disbelief towards prevailing philosophies. Contemporary prevailing philosophies are readily identifiable and contemporary. But beside the meta-politics, postmodernism is an aesthetic in Lyotard’s researches. His signature dictum is that post-modernity ‘presents the unrepresentable’ (ibid: 81). Surely this is the ‘conquest’ and triumph of nihilism. (Weber, 1948) Later, Lyotard’s ‘underground aesthetics’ (Rajchman, 1998) came to query the ‘high-minded negation’ (ibid: 12) of nihilism (Heidegger, 1971). Lyotard countered Walter Benjamin and The Frankfurt School as lacking the ‘pagan instruction’ to create an authentic apology for ‘the beautiful’. (1980, cf Rajchman, ibid:12) So, postmodernism, or late-modernism, is an underground traditional appreciation for aesthetics in some senses but not in other ways. Gilles Lipovetsky’s *Hypermodern Times* (2005) has a line of enquiry indebted to Lyotard. Hypermodern culture, for Lipovetsky, is experienced as ‘...no degree zero of temporality, of a ‘self-referential’ present consisting of radical indifference [incredulity] to what happened before and what will happen afterwards: the second kind of presentism that now rules our lives is no longer either postmodern or self-sufficient: it never ceases to open out on something other than itself’. (2005: 41) Therefore a reflexive reference on to the roots of modernity is undeniable. Interred in the rubble of 9/11 we have a sense of ‘degree zero’ and what this might mean to the prevailing normative values in ethics and aesthetics. Whatever term we ultimately use for this cultural shift of postmodernity, it is not an ‘after’ (*post*-modernity) but a mere late, low-point, the texture of contemporary aesthetics is merely a later variant, recycled from the same old stuff of the modern worldview.

<sup>1</sup> It is indeed true that there is no ‘view from nowhere’; humans are all subjective (but not by default solipsists). However, that does not imply that universals have no objective place outside our minds. Science, failing to acknowledge the epistemic boundary between knower and known, in fact, proceeds with a view as though there were universals: for example, principles of scientific secular humanism as they are now, does assert many ethical codes in universals. But the view—in which the denial of universals as it opposes Aristotelian realism—had long dominated medieval thought through the philosophy of Thomas Aquinas and William of Occam and proceeded (on the basis of monotheism) that there is no transcendental view. Also with the added assumption that because of this strange-gnostic scepticism, universal ideals could not be recognised objectively, a novel outlook took shape. The most immediate strand of postmodernism, via medieval scholastics, is thus heir to a long history of anti-realism.

All that is language is lent from this otherness and this why the subject is always a fading thing that runs under the chain of signifiers. For the definition of a signifier is that it represents a subject not for another subject but for another signifier. This is the only definition possible of the signifier as different from the sign. The sign is something that represents something for somebody, but the signifier is something that represents a subject of another signifier. The consequence is that the subject disappears... (ibid: 194)

Similarly adapting value theory of Saussure, Jacques Derrida draws a moral comparison of 'evil that links in an indefinite chain' which he likens to an 'abyss'. (1998: 179) His view follows his original notion that 'sign will always lead to sign, one substituting the other...as signifier and signified in turn'. Additionally, his own position is that 'language is about infinite substitution' in some ludic 'freeplay' (ibid: xix) in which the underlying metaphysical absence—the abyss—is erased, no doubt, through sheer differences. The displacement of one signifier with another newly, implicit signifier, takes place on the capricious conception of self-referential, differentiating mirrors. Critics of deconstruction have frequently remarked how the *mise en abyme* sets the tone for Derrida's original adaptations of poststructuralist philosophy: '*mises en abyme* in the nice French coinage: writing plunging down for ever and ever in black holes of retreating signification'. (Cunningham, 2002: 18)

In the Anglosphere, two critics Robert Scholes (1967) and William Gass (1970) first identified how the sequels of structuralism, in relation to signifying, engender a new style of representation. This style was quite objective in the sense that these types of novels referred back to their own narratives, by means of various unusual devices (Ward, 2003: 31). The style was labelled 'meta-fiction': an 'excessive or deceptively naïve style of writing' (Waugh, 1984: 2). This hyper-natural literature, a fiction about *itself* flaunts its fictionality, it seemingly makes a show of its artificial nature, its more-real-than-real revelations expose the conventions about its status as a fiction, a fictional set of constructed codes. Patricia Waugh outlines its main characteristics:

*Metafiction* is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. (ibid)...Metafictional novels tend to be constructed on the principle of a fundamental and sustained opposition: the construction of a fictional illusion (as in traditional realism) and the laying bare of that illusion. In other words, the lowest common denominator of metafiction is simultaneously to create a fiction and to make a statement about the creation of that fiction. The two processes are held together in a formal tension which breaks down the distinctions between 'creation' and 'criticism' and merges them into the concepts of 'interpretation' and 'deconstruction'. (ibid: 6)

Meta-fiction appeared both an innovative and original idea, a genre occupied with the way that laws of composition are discussed *in* the story. Yet metafiction seems most relevant whenever it sanctions the theory of post-structuralism and its factitious examinations of semiology. Since its principles, assertively 'metafictional', remain as old as antiquity, metafiction is a second-order advancement—although claiming a practical unity, it carries little theoretical unity. Metafiction, therefore, promotes the *mise en abyme* because its incoherent meaning is not *res ipsum loquitur* but *res alia loquitur*: a fabricated semblance, a perspectival, psychological game of otherness which cannot speak for itself but demands the elucidating intervention of the specialised critic. Linda Hutcheon's *mise en abyme* suggests that the device elicits an artifice and self-conscious theme as it parodies the work of itself, the view carries much weight for metafictionality, a situation which might best be summarised as follows:

- 1) a self-reflexive acknowledgement of a text's own status as a constructed aesthetic artefact
- 2) an implicit (or sometimes explicit) critique of realist approaches both to narrative and to representing a fictional 'world'
- 3) a tendency to draw the reader's attention to his or her own process of interpretation as s/he reads the text (Nicol, 2009; xvi)

The first point on reflexive-composition and late-modern realism was debated between Patricia Waugh (1984) and Linda Hutcheon (1989). After Patricia Waugh concludes that metafiction 'does not abandon 'the real world' for the narcissistic pleasures of the imagination', she adds that metafiction 're-examine[s] the conventions of realism in order to discover—through its own self-reflection—a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers'. (Waugh, 1984: 18) The countervailing conclusion to the politics of metafiction is Hutcheon's stance where:

Metafiction does not inevitably lead to cultural relevance any more than self-demystifying theory is inherently radical. It is perhaps liberal to believe that any subversion or undermining of a system of thought is healthy and good, but it would also be naïve to ignore that art can just as easily confirm as trouble received codes, no matter how radical its surface transgressions (Hutcheon, 1989: 183)

These many preoccupations—with reflexivity—in so-called 'self-conscious writing' are concerns with the 'self' and subjective selves. The concern provoked Mark Currie to challenge the starting point for metafiction. The uncountenanced assumption, in the researches of Waugh and Hutcheon, raise charges about any attribution of vital agency in a text and Currie thus contends: 'there is a vertiginous illogicality about self-consciousness': that something which is defined by its self-consciousness must surely be conscious of its own definitive characteristic'. (1995: 1) Currie invokes the common conceptions of regressive *mise en abyme* when he speaks challengingly about metafiction. He argues 'it is not enough that metafiction knows that it is fiction; it must also know that it is metafiction if its self-knowledge is adequate, and so on in an infinite regress. Can it then be meaningful to say that metafiction is conscious of itself?' (ibid) For this trenchant insight, Currie must be consulted for any study of the metafiction genre because he succinctly addresses the issue of the ends of cognition in 'self-aware' writing styles. If, as Linda Hutcheon and Brian McHale speculate, following Dällenbach, there exists some conceivable infinite regression in texts, or as they called it, an 'infinite *mise en abyme*', then to what extent does its self-consciousness mean that its inert form is knowledgeable and thus infinitely animate?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Infinity can be evoked, as Brian McHale says, in 'upward and downward jumps' between narrating agents. In the episode 'Life Story' in Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse* there is an author who is writing about an author and that the latter is a character in another text written about some other author is under the same compositional fate. The listener of the text (the narratee) in the episode receives a message from an objective narrator who discusses the conventions of writing a tale in a tale. The narrator thus evokes a bracketing 'frame', a notional conversational marker to the world and it is subjectively perceived by the narratee. Barth evokes the 'multiple realities' inhabited by the narratee to account for the ambiguity in causalities between the actions of either agent narrator-narratee. (Schutz, 1972) Barth calls the endless possibilities imagined by such a composition relationship, a 'vehicle situation' (evoking I.A Richards) as opposed to the 'ground situation' of the story as it is conceived *prima facie*. Barth's explanation also accounts for the transposed relationship between the narrator and the narratee. Disturbingly similar to Gide in terms of *The Counterfeiters*' Edouard's journal, Barth calls *his own* proliferating effect 'dramatic resonance'. The conventions of stories-in-stories, with reference to Scheherazade, is therefore best captured by Barth as follows: "...narrative plots may be imagined as consisting of a "ground-situation" (Scheherazade desires not to die) focused and dramatised by a "vehicle-situation" (Scheherazade beguiles the King with endless stories), the several incidents of which have their final value in terms of their bearing upon the "ground-situation". In our author's case it was the "vehicle" that had vouchsafed itself, first as a germinal proposition in his commonplace book—D [character] comes to suspect that the world is a novel, himself a fictional personage—subsequently as an articulated conceit explored over several pages of the workbook [narrative in the novel] in which he elaborated more systematically his causal inspirations: since D is writing a fictional existence in his account, replicating what he suspects to be his own situation. Moreover E, hero of D's account, is said to be writing a similar account, and so the replication is in both ontological directions, et cetera. But the "ground-situation"—some state of affairs on D's part which would give dramatic resonance to his attempts to prove himself factual, assuming he made such attempts—obstinately withheld itself from his imagination. As is commonly the case the question reduced to one of stakes: what were to be the consequences of D's—and finally E's—disproving of verifying his suspicions, and why should a reader be interested?' (Barth, 1988 [1963]: 116-7)

## Semiotics

This background language game to the *mise en abyme*, like semiology, is about communicating meaning. Semiotics, largely indebted to the enormous output of American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, offers a radically different way of conceiving what the French called *mise en abyme*. This type of sign-study, for the *mise en abyme*, affords a theoretical route beyond the limits of structuralism and its sequels. The semiotic models of the *mise en abyme*, differ from the Saussurean semiological toolkit because semiotic applications demonstrate broader applicability:

Semiotics is a comprehensive discipline, in that almost anything can be a sign: clothes, hairstyles, type of house or car owned, accent and body language. All send messages about such things as age, class, and politics...In semiotics, the term *code* refers loosely to any set of signs and their conventions of meaning. Language represents a rich set of such codes...Literature is seen as a particularly rich semiotic field with such sub-disciplines as literary and *narrative semiotics*. (Katie Wales, in McArthur, 1992: 917)<sup>1</sup>

Such versatility is thanks to the freer notions in which semiotics signifies meaning. Semiotics is

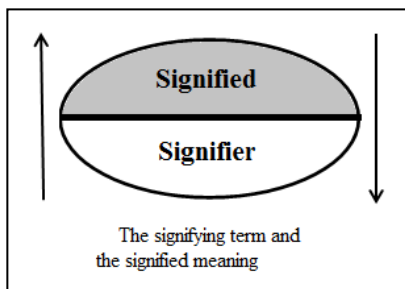


Figure 3.4

based on a sophisticated philosophical framework. Such a framework includes, amongst other things, a taxonomical classification of natural phenomena based on three elements—firstness, secondness and thirdness

(Cobley, 1996: 27). These categories are a recurring aspect in Peirce's sign theory,

and since they helped Peirce to identify sign-types, or trichotomies of signs, Peirce's system of signs can take into account *gradations* of quality such as signs of signs, where, for example, a 'qualisign' is endowed with firstness, a 'sinsign' with secondness and a 'legisign' with thirdness. In short, therefore, a sign is not just a sign (as it is in Saussurean semiology). The way in which these Peircian categories emerged as useful in understanding the French *mise en abyme*, is outlined below. For now, it suffices to say that before identifying the 'trichotomies of signs', Peirce identified the sign itself as made of three interrelated, and irreducible, components. As famously elucidated in 'Logic as Semiotics', Peirce's theory explains that:

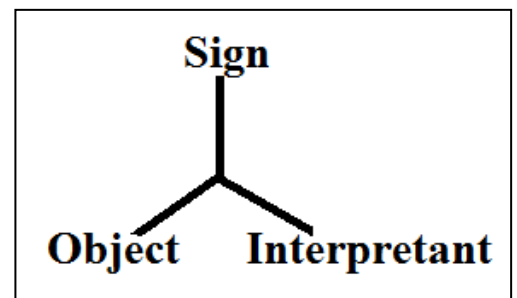
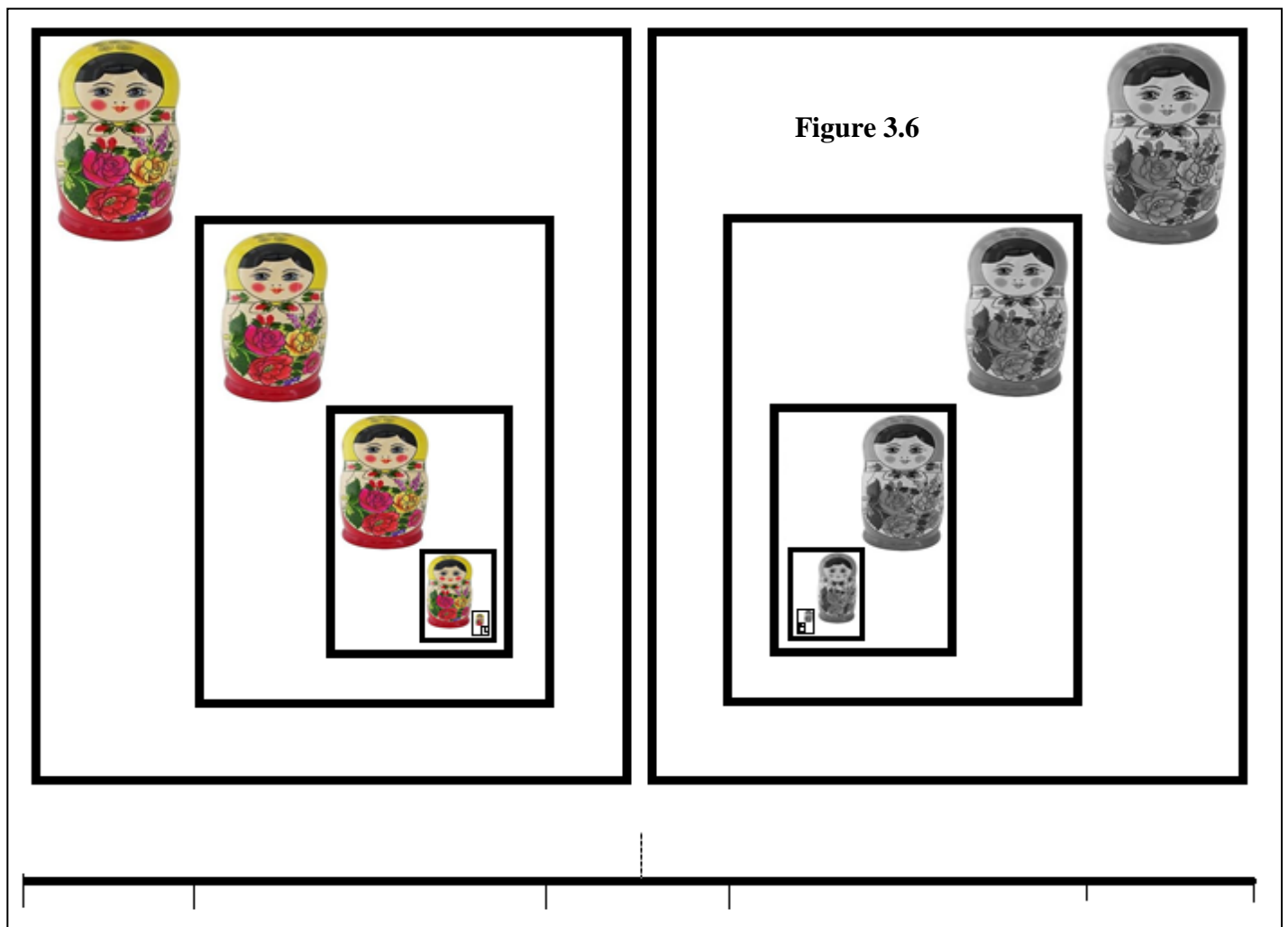


Figure 3.5

<sup>1</sup> A recent distinction between Saussurean semiology, structuralism and Peircean semiotics is that of Robert Barsky: 'When I turn to structuralism, I identify it as the broader movement that led to narratology, and I situate it in relation to both formalism and semiotics. Structuralism and semiotics are based on similar underlying (formalist) assumptions, and they use the kinds of analytic tools favoured by the formalists. Both movements are dedicated to the study of signs, but they position language differently within that broader study. Structuralism [semiology] regards language as the paradigm [instance] of all sign systems, whereas [Peircean] semiotics regards it [language] as one of many possible sign systems'. (Barsky, 2010: 38) For an introductory outline to these 'many possible' semiotics applications see John Deely (1990) and the edited volume *Semiotics* (2010a) by Paul Cobley Throughout this chapter, I am indebted to John Sheriff's guide to Peircean semiotic literary criticism called *The Fate of Meaning* (1989: 67) which shows how some Peircian ideas can be applied to literary criticism.

A sign, or *representamen* is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. The sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. (Peirce, [1897-1903]. 1955: 99)

In other words, Peirce’s notion of the sign conceives a signed representamen. This representamen, whenever witnessed or perceived by an agent, is a phenomenological relation with an object; this perceptive agent<sup>1</sup> is then involved as an interpretant to the object perceived. The interpretant can be usefully considered as the ‘effect’ of the sign upon a perceiver, or ‘the more developed sign’ that is created in the mind of the perceiver upon witnessing the sign. A good example by Cobley (1997: 23) involves pointing a finger at the sky, in front of the person; the pointing finger becomes a sign-representamen, the sky becomes an object, and the turning of the person’s head at the sky as a result of seeing the finger, is the interpretant, or the *further*-developed sign that is produced during the signification process. Importantly, no sign (the pointing finger) enters in relation with any object (the sky) unless an interpretant is produced (the responsive head-turning).



<sup>1</sup> The Peircean idea is also, not necessarily human. The outlined possibility in the triad can be a perceiving subject either: human, animal, plant or even inanimate physical object. The interpretant, or sense given by the sign, can be a sense denoted by any life forms. For example, the physiognomic, pan-psychic, hylo-zoic, sense can be associated with all life since all entities—even so called materially reduced matter—can communicate meaning for a perceptive interpretant.

If we compare the Saussurean dyad (Figure 3.4) and the Peircean triad (Figure 3.5) of signification, or sign-relation, then from the start, it is evident that the latter proposes a more versatile model, versatile because it accommodates the *interpretant* linking both an object and its meaning. Insofar as French-based ideas on the *mise en abyme* go, Peirce's definition of the sign as 'something by knowing which we know something more', (CP, 8.332) may indeed invoke an unbounded process of Faustian recursion—calling back endless reflexive instances to know more and more. Yet, such radical cognitive interpretations, *implying* limitlessness of potential forms, can rarely be supported beyond texts that are validated by arguments from Saussurean structuralism and its sequels (Merrell, 1995). Indeed, an innocent reading, without awareness to the twentieth century lore of deconstruction, for example, will not be able to justify such a position convincingly. For example, the dyadic Saussurean model, can only logically produce dyads *or* dyads-of-dyads.

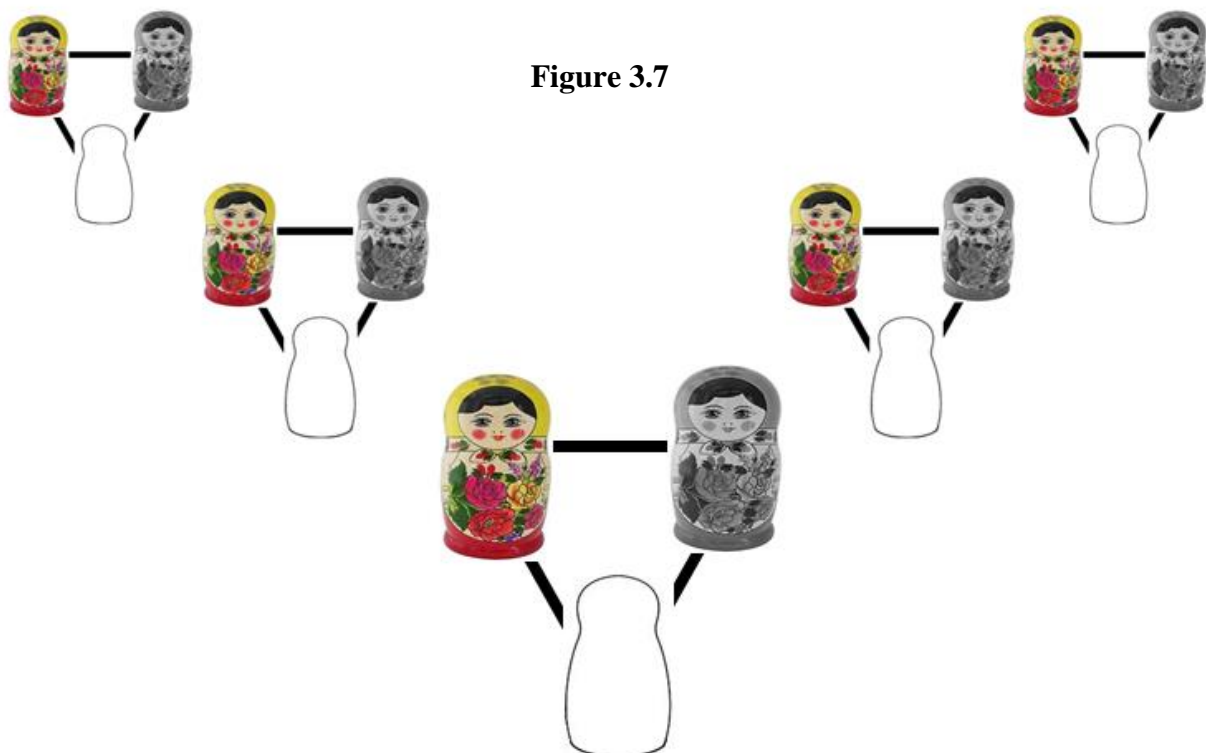


Figure 3.7

These dyads, proven by visual cascading mind-pictures, annihilate, become void of content, at a point of spectral convergence (in which we imagine the pattern to continue). Falling asunder, like an *asymptote*, as any real value approaches infinity, it also becomes zero. So outrageous is the concern with asymptotes in geometrics, that extending its application raises uncanny axioms or 'The Devil's Invention' (Boyd, 1999). Visually, (Figure 3.1) infinitely terminal convergence is tantamount to dividing the base-case ( $a$ ) by infinity ( $\infty$ ), resulting in meaninglessness (infinity excludes differential limits which tend to nothing). In pictures, like mirror analogies, the dyadic model results in a diminishing convergence where sensory verification collapses at a point that is not perceivable (an *aporia*, or blind-spot). Though mentally conceivable, the limit-point is moreover tethered to an immediate, conflicting relation of signifier and signified where linear doubles allegedly lead to further doubles. (Figure 3.6) Thus the fiendish outcome is a final, inscrutable blind-spot—infinity erasing totally diminished singularity—or the abyss. The abyss carries the same real identity as the first case from which its non-reality is mirrored. Since 'nothing is real' in the abyss, pro-portioning an equivalence between reality (base case) and the final case (blind-spot) is a problem: the proportion advocates the non-reality of the first reflection. The series of repeatable regularities, *axiomata*, can either hold geometric or lesser, arithmetic, operations. But even when the base, starting, case equals infinity, then sequencing beyond it, through trans-finite



induction series, *still* draws direct equivalence between ontologically contrasting identities—namely something *or* nothing.<sup>1</sup> And Saussurean dyads merely compound the dichotomy. As Cornelis de Waal attests ‘adding dyads to dyads only gives dyads...no matter how many dyadic figures we combine, the result will always be a dyadic figure. No combination of dyadic relations’ can thus ever amount to anything than ‘a mere dyad’ (2014: 68). The Peircian model on the other hand, offers both a linear reiterative and a non-linear recursive possibility. The model can produce triads of triads but these do not result in triads but, what de Waal calls, many-sided units or ‘polyads’. (ibid) The branching triadic relations prove that if an object is repeated, there is always an immediate sense and a dynamic potential. The Peircian model takes into account the third possibility; regardless of one’s starting point, the branching does not annihilate into a blind spot. It is therefore more versatile because it starts at particulars whilst it does not discount the universal outcome. It recognises meaning more broadly: absolute *and* relative, immediate *and* dynamic.<sup>2</sup> (Figure 3.7) However, Dällenbach ends his study with a severe plea to deconstructionist ideas, limning the shortcomings of Saussurean theory and his *mise en abyme*: ‘any attempt to reverse mimetologism or to escape it in one fell swoop by leaping out of it *with both feet* would only amount to an inevitable and immediate fall back into its system: in suppressing the double or making it dialectic, one is back in the perception of the thing itself, the production of its presence, its truth, as an idea, form or matter’. (Dällenbach, 1989: 166 *cf* Derrida, 1981: 207)

Now, the sub-discipline of narrative semiotics is indebted to the Peircean outline because literature too is an object relating its significance to an interpreter. For the French *mise en abyme*, the dyadic Saussurean model is comparably static since the polyvalent nature of literature cannot ultimately be reduced to mere differences: for example, the Peircean triad, once applied to the mirror association of the *mise en abyme* idea, helps move beyond the tendentious dogma that two conflicting narrative frames, imaginatively, evoke a proliferation of indeterminate, unaccountable meanings through infinite accounts of differences. Peircean signification takes into account the importance of the dynamic range of interpretations between the hypothetical limits of textual meaning and Peirce’s model gives a workable set of descriptions for these ranges. A Peircean understanding of narrative is as follows:

A narrative is a complex triadic sign, and to understand its structure requires taking into consideration three distinct frames of reference: 1. the events the story tells about; 2. the narrating (i.e., telling the story of these events); 3. the audience, whose frame of reference may again be very different from the previous two. Narratology, the study of narratives, has not always clearly distinguished between these three frames of reference. The essence of the narrative has often been reduced either to the logic of the events related in the story or to the dyadic constellation of a story and the telling of a story. (Nöth, 2007: 175)

All three points of the triadic sign of narrative, return to Peirce’s basic model (Figure 3.5). In Peirce, signifying meaning is not only arbitrary. Peirce’s triadic model accounts for narrative relations by a taxonomy which does not discount Saussurean arbitrariness, but shows that the

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<sup>1</sup> The identity of the signifier and signified—whether mutually exclusive or jointly exclusive—still upholds dyadic logic. When the infinite recursive structure is technologically self-stabilised, then, concludes Dough Hofstadter, its patterns ‘are nearly impenetrable because the loop is cycled through [itself] so many times’. The optical ‘black hole’, caused by reflexive computer screens result in a ‘feedback loop’ and is ‘locked-in’ itself. Hofstadter accounts for this ‘new level of reality’ as demanding a ‘new level of description’ perhaps because it is a ‘higher-level visual phenomenon’ (2007: 70-1). The ‘black hole’ is a synonym for what I call the abyss. This subjective intervention in the objective system, I formulate as the sinister aesthetic.

<sup>2</sup> The Saussurian model of the sign (signifier/signified) implies or encourages the idea of an endless proliferation of possible meanings or interpretations, whereas the more complex Peircean model, so to speak, heads off this threat because it contains more than a dyad. Here, the phrase ‘the excluded middle’ is appropriate but not devoid of a certain ambivalence due to its misuse and overuse. With the idea of dual signs, comes the principle of absolute values and its necessitated inversion, sometimes distorted with logical relativity. The Peircian triadic model can entertain a relative position (and also an absolutist position) because of its strength in triads which can accommodate the dyad. Thus can there hardly be relative value structures *only* in Peirce, or axiologies in aesthetics when using these models. There exists also the strange world of conflicting opposites that suggest a synthesis—should such Manichean thinking be preferred. The outcome with Peirce is not so much ‘this *or* that’ than it is ‘this *and* that’.

degree of arbitrariness can be schematised as types, or classes of signs (Table 3.3). These three types are Peirce's three signs and are summarised in Table 3.2:

Table 3.2 (From Cobley, 1997: 31)	Quality (Firstness)	Brute Facts (Secondness)	Law (Thirdness)
Representamen (Firstness)	Qualisign	Sinsign	Legisign
Object (Secondness)	Icon	Index	Symbol
Interpretant (Thirdness)	Rheme	Dicent	Argument

In the narrative semiotics, derived from the logico-semiotic framework just outlined, 'signs' are triadic rather than dyadic (Table 3.2). However, the workings of such a framework have been received differently by different commentators. For example, Chandler (2004: 37) argues that the signifying power of Peirce's 'types of signs' depend on a range of logically inferred meanings, or what he calls, 'conventions'. Yet against such reductive positions, by foregrounding Peirce's semiotic framework in its realist philosophy, Cornelis de Waal points out that only when the natural evolution of signified meaning is taken into account, which only the knowledge of Peircean



Figure 3.8



Figure 3.9



Figure 3.10



philosophy can grant, then the premises of sign meanings can become self-evident or 'taken for granted' (ibid, 2013: 90), in other words, conventional. As mentioned, Peircian signs are not necessarily arbitrary but instead have degrees of arbitrariness: making for signs in a dynamic process of meaning between the object and its interpretant, hence such signs are less associable with degrees of mere 'convention'. The following is a thumbnail sketch, albeit the workings, of three kinds of signs (CP, 2.275) and the varying meaning of the interpretant. In semiotics, the interpretant is not necessarily a mental meaning: it can also be an action. For example, chicken pox might be interpreted by an uninformed teenager as acne, a seasoned mother as some general illness, a physician as a diagnosable condition or by a witch-doctor as a misalignment of the spiritual and mundane worlds. Each interpretant shows that the object (pox) of the sign evoke mobile interpretants and that interpretant and meaning are capable of occupying different places in the triadic sign relation. Of importance is that these immediate (teenager), dynamic (mother) or final (witch-doctor) contexts show that knowledge is possible for all humans and cannot simply be reduced to a single convention but a workable range of meanings. It is possible for these interpretants to change their interpretation in the way that some animals model their sense of danger. But, following their self-consciousness, humans demonstrate mobile conventions of interpretation to a relatively greater extent. Peirce therefore outlined his typology for how the interpretant offers a range of meanings in relation to the perceived object. There were three such relations:

In Figure 3.8, the first sign is the index and is a rather straightforward sign. There is a direct existential connection

between the object and its meaning, either in properties or by cause. This link can be seen in examples like smoke and fire. The indexical link between the sign (smoke) and the object (fire) is often clear for animals as in the interpretant of ‘danger’ but for a pyromaniac, the indexical link may produce the reaction (interpretant) of glee. Similarly, a regular pulse-rate (sign) and its object (life) is another very strong indication between sign and objective vitality to either physician or necrophile. The relationship is thus reckoned by an actual link between the interpretant and the object. In Figure 3.8 meaning (A) and its object (B) indicates the existence of the object with a ‘direct physical connection’ to the meaning (CP, 1.372) because B is directly attributable to A, in pictorial texture. For example, both images are brutally alike in pixelated quality. The attribution is often very matter of fact and the relation of A to B is direct (though the directness is not always clear because of the varying interpretant) and their preoccupation about size inequalities. Now, unlike the index, the icon sign is to do with resemblance between A and B, either by imitation or copy as an important variable. (Figure 3.9) This secondary type of sign can include a scaled-model of a real thing, an image of a god, or metaphors in communication (in all life-forms). If an entire *mise en abyme* can be theorised as a sign, it is thought of as an iconic sign of the whole story because there is a level of similarity between one part and another.<sup>1</sup> But interpretants can also discern the *mise en abyme* as a symbol which is the third type of sign. The symbol relies on a high degree of convention because it makes associations between A and B. An established rule or habit can be used to discern the connection between A and B in Figure 3.10. There is a purely conventional agreement about the relationship between the one part (A) and the other part (B). The opaque representation (A) would have no meaning if the referent (B) were unknown; the symbolic craft of representing is therefore a learned, perhaps initiated, habit. It is symbol because it shows a vestigial connection and this connection is through a convention we may have in determining, here, shapes and textures for example. Peircean symbol signs can include numbers, musical notation, national flags and even colour, like diabolical red-black, associations. We learn these associations. A symbol is a sign relation established by habit because it relies on the symbol making capacity of the minds of perceivers who establish the symbolic connections between A and B. We learn therefore the things that make up a symbol. Contrary to logic therefore, the symbol is often more self-evident than the index because conventions are resorted to, to find its meaning. In sum, the Peircean framework allows for an understanding that a part-to-whole relation is not as brutally immediate as Saussurean dyads because semiotic theorists take the French *mise en abyme* to be a sophisticated variety of the icon and even the symbol.

Suffice to summarise that a Peircean sign is not the same as a dyadic, Saussurean, signifier-signified sign. The Peircean sign is part of a threefold model which takes the importance of the interpretant, or ‘proper significate effect’ of a sign, into account. The whole triadic model of the sign is a unit of meaning but the meaning can be dynamic—though not unconstrained—because it varies in accordance with the context of the interpretant. The *mise en abyme* is asserted to be closest to the traits of the icon because of its traits of resemblance transposed, perhaps, between part-to-whole (Bal, 1978). If we can accept this view based on the icon: ‘a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object has no existence’, then we may argue, among many other things about the icon that the (object) *mise en abyme* also ‘has no existence’. (CP, 2.

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<sup>1</sup> Peirce’s clearest definition of an icon is ‘a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object has no existence’. (Peirce, 1931, 2: 304) The connection of the sign and significant smaller part is made by Mieke Bal when she links the idea of mirror metaphors to iconicity: ‘[a] a mirror reflects the reflected image of the object. The reflection looks like the object reflected. This notion of resemblance is also in the borderline sign, or concept of icon’. (1978: 124) The criteria to what constitutes an icon is best captured by Charles Morris that ‘a sign is *iconic* to the extent to which it itself has the properties of its denotata’ or what it denotes. (1946: 98) The icon is an unusual case of semiotic activity, or semiosis. The resemblance between the thing and its representation evokes, with Morris, an allusion to the ancient trope of *ekphrasis* ‘[a] portrait of a person is to a considerable extent iconic, but it is not completely so since the painted canvas does not have the texture of the skin, or the capacities for speech and motion, which the person portrayed has. The motion picture is more iconic, but again not completely so. A completely iconic sign would always denote since it would itself be a denotatum’. (ibid; 99) John White has pointed out that Peirce in 1903 ‘offers a by now familiar illustration of iconic embedding’. (2001: 41) The place where Peirce evoked the *mise en abyme* is when he speaks about maps and boundaries, where ‘there will be within the map, a map of the map, and within that, a map of the map of the map, and so on *ad infinitum*. (White, 2001: 41 cf Peirce [1903] CP, 5. 71) I would like to add here that Peirce took advantage of the earliest research in recursive mathematical phenomena of his day. See Matthew E. Moore (ed.), *New Essays on Peirce’s Mathematical Philosophy*, Open Court, 2010.

304) If the *mise en abyme* is predicated on the value of a literary text—and there *is* meaning outside this text—then, there is no such objective quality as the *mise en abyme*. Like iconic objects taken as signs, the *mise en abyme* is therefore an abstraction and may not have any physical predicate. Perhaps the focus on the *mise en abyme*, using Saussurean models, may be the culmination of semiological abstraction during the late-twentieth century. In conclusion, the Peircean model affords an original view to the extents of the arbitrariness claimed by the interpretants as unlimited chains of creative interpretations. Called ‘semiosis’ these chains are, perceptive in any pictographic representations, beyond dry cognitive abstraction, *pro-nihilio*, into an abyss of conceivable voidness. And following Peirce, the icon (as a *mise en abyme*) may not have a primary, immediate material existence but it has a non-material existence as an idea. So, in summary, the *mise en abyme* is a sign but this sign is nuanced in the model of Peirce which acknowledges the dynamic range of conventions from most conventional symbol signs to the least arbitrary mode called index signs. Via the Peircian tradition then, one workable candidate behind the name *mise en abyme* is *ekphrasis*. The *mise en abyme* is, under cases of mirroring reflection, a concern with the perceivable and conceivable—the sensed and the imagined. And since literary compositions prohibit any verifiable perception of the infinitely cascading phenomenon—as mirror images allow—the *mise en abyme*, in literature, is an imagined species of non-reality—an amorphous coinage under the darkness of heavy verbiage. The ‘*text* is a finite, structured whole composed of signs’ for this study of the *mise en abyme*. (Bal, 2009: 5) Through it, the method permits one to ‘explore the relevance of narratological concepts for the study of genres and media outside the traditional object domain of text-based literary narrative’. (Meister, 2009: 340) And beyond its many specialised terms, which can appear flat or ‘superficial’, (Currie, 2011: 41), the semiotic method of studying the *mise en abyme* uncovers both the shortcomings whilst confirming the place of the *mise en abyme* as a classically relevant idea.

## Appendix C

### Formalism

Formalism is a broad aesthetic enquiry which finds the meaning of a work of art in its form or structure. In literature, formalism aims to abstract the elements, concerns and patterns against the inevitably semantic flux of the literary text under examination. Literary formalism developed from pre-Bolshevik Russia, and as a rebellion against the philological tradition. Through ambitious revolutionary aims of creating a science of criticism, formalism admitted to the linguistic foundations of literature but sought rather to define literature as a special kind of communication, estranged from the verbal, spoken variety of socially sanctioned language. The chief aim was the politically doctrinaire motivations of universalistic socialism. For this, it freed its aims from the contemporaneous bourgeois-based preoccupations of literary subject-matter and petty monotheistic morality. Russian formalism helpfully uncovered the ideal of the written artefact and the extremely important status of the creative act of composition. Vladimir Propp (1928) is a key name here for his proposal of limited story-plots as is Mikhail Bakhtin (1975 [1937-41]) a key name for his argument about the dialogue that a novel creates between a writer and its reader. Today, quite revived, workable varieties of formalism, similar to Russian formalism, detach values from conventions of inherited strictures of language and so formalists prioritise the linguistic dimension of a text. Such post-theory formalism, in literature, sidesteps agendas to propagandise social-political concerns of the text under literary judgement. Instead, through subverted arguments of representational contents, as derived from alleged materialist dialectics and class-based collective, any alternative formalist approach, draws on the insights of the Russian formalists without the politics. Most recently, Mark O’Connell remarks on the slippery purpose of the formal principle: ‘the *mise en abyme* device inevitably forces the reader to reflect upon the way fiction and reality

might be thought of as relative rather than absolute'. (2013: 171) Whence, the *mise en abyme* is an excellent concept to study when adapting some of the advantages of formalism to pragmatic, humanist ends. Formalism, today, is not merely the reportage of arrangements in literature of space and time, but the relations of the various parts of the work which unite as a single work of art. The unity of the composition, by various criteria, should always be the starting point for any seriously minded, sustainable method in criticising literature beyond second-order preoccupations, dull socio-politics, which have hijacked the study of formalism and turned it into a derivative discipline of aesthetic study closest to race-anthropology, biography studies, psychology, gender and ethnic studies and a myriad of reductive, pastel, social sciences. (Ellis, 1997)

## The Hebrew University

Moshe Ron, like his student Viveca Füredy, present two papers with some relevance to the *mise en abyme*. These papers are very speculative; the problems that they raise are also hopelessly cavilling, overly-abstract and thematically rarefied. The Hebrew University scholars do, however, provide some universalised, original, though derivative, insights on the foundations set by French thinkers. Ron formulates problems surrounding French scholarship and Füredy explores rhetorical *metalepsis* in relation to mathematical recursion in her paper. These Hebrew University papers, must, despite their shortcomings, be included in any study of the *mise en abyme* for the sake of thoroughness. Ron's '*The Restricted Abyss: Nine Problems of the Theory of mise en abyme*' (1987) offers a critique of the *mise en abyme*; it is a 'figure' as some pure phenomenon rather than as a structural device. Ron's basic definition for the *mise en abyme* follows as '[a]ny diegetic [narrative] segment which resembles the work where it occurs, is said to be placed *en abyme*'. (ibid: 436) Immediately, there is some implication to what French scholars said about the *mise en abyme* as 'work within a work' (Dällenbach, 1977: 8) or a part of the narrative that blends and constitutes, becomes part of, the main narration. (Morrissette, 1972: 51) The paper merely speculates and does 'not offer very extensive illustration by concrete examples' as Ron admits. (ibid: 417) This is a specialised account about nine problems concerning *the idea* of the *mise en abyme*: 'six concern the definitions of the figure and the other three [problems] deal with its mode of literary functioning'. (ibid: 422) This essay offers the problems as questions. So great is the speculation of each problem, that little or nothing is offered for solution. The method, like the nine problems, settles for 'concepts that are distinctly soft-edged'. (ibid: 437) Yet despite its imprecise character, the nine problems of theorising the *mise en abyme*, do interrogate and explore this difficult idea further.

Viveca Füredy's work (1989) offers similarly cryptic definitions about what she refines as 'related phenomena' of the *mise en abyme*. In her examination, Füredy includes both 'Russian dolls' and '*mise en abyme* (in some usages of the term)' under her rubric of embedded phenomena. (1989: 745) Her purpose is 'to account for all possible forms of such phenomena, literary as well as non-literary, and for their possible relation to each other'. (ibid: 746) With its ambitious aims, this paper does indeed make a significant contribution to phenomena of embedding and the implication of the French conception of the *mise en abyme*. The aim of the paper can be generalised in its focus, to offer a new universalism about associations of the *mise en abyme*. Füredy's paper abstracts three sub-subtypes of embedding, glossed from *Figures 3* (Genette, 1972, 236-245) These, rather substitution-levels Füredy bases on Genette's principle of *metalepsis* and are 'achieved...by the narrating, the act that consists precisely of introducing into one situation, by means of a discourse, the knowledge of another situation'. (ibid, 1972) These three types of *metalepsis* are inner-directed, outer-directed and temporal varieties of narrative action. Füredy thus inflects *metalepsis* as the basis of embedding. Her last elusive subdivision 'involves the transposition onto the embedded logical level of something which 'really' belongs on the embedding one, as based on her reading of Genette. (ibid: 760-1) Her three niche varieties of transgressive *metalepsis* are founded on an invisible

substrate or ‘continuum’ which is never defined. Nevertheless, her model asserts 1) self-reference, 2) self-engulfing and 3) pseudo transgression. (ibid: 759) ‘Self-reference is what would occur ‘if the title of a book were included in the book’s own bibliography or, if, in the index, one found references not only to those pages where a name or a notion occurs in its actual usage, but also to the page of the index entry’. (ibid: 761, cf Breuer, 1976: 229) ‘The self-engulfing structures...remind us of the oscillating structures created by the reified boundary [in a text] both in that we keep returning to the same place’. This second sub-variety can be illustrated in Maurits Cornelius Escher’s engravings which depict ambiguous gaps around which the subject matter resolves and foreshortens. The last of Füredy’s qualifications on transgressive *metalepsis* include her proposal for something called ‘pseudotransgression’. (ibid: 746) It ‘is created in verbal texts when attention is drawn to the normally invisible intact boundary, which is then foregrounded and ‘made strange’’ (ibid: 746) Füredy illustrates this last point with the ironic lines of Fabian in *Twelfth Night* ‘[i]f this were played upon a stage now, I could condemn it as an improbable fiction’. ([3, 4: 128-9] ibid)

## Heraldry

Gide clearly aligns the literary dimension of his idea to heraldic shields. Unfortunately, no ‘device’ of the type, Gide mentions, exists in heraldry—although it does in furniture production. Nevertheless, it is likely, following his views on the intensely visual associations of his idea, that Gide may have been intimating a classical trope. The term *en abyme*, from medieval guild furniture manufacture, could simply refer to placing surfaces one-on-another without a fixative, supporting base. The reference to furniture, although Gide conflates it with ‘the device of heraldry’ suggest that Gide imported the device from furniture production whilst talking about heraldry. Indeed, his

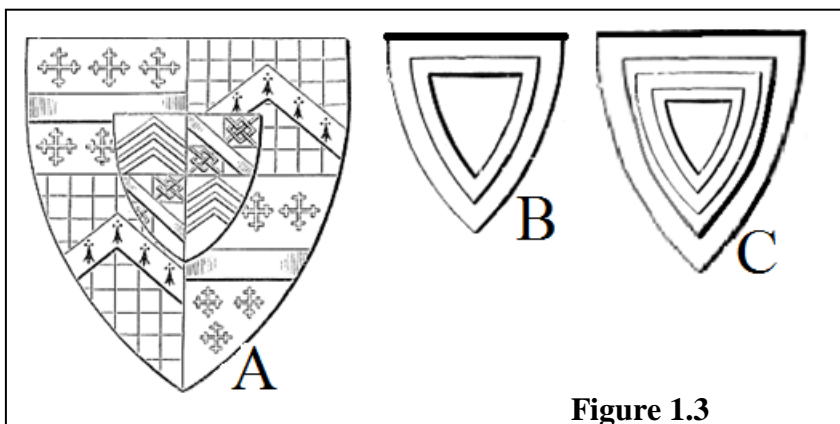


Figure 1.3

original French wording could, more accurately read: ‘...I draw a comparison with a technique of affixing, on the primary surface, a second [surface] without a [supporting] base’<sup>1</sup>. As his short story, *An Attempt at Love* proves, Gide was not conceiving infinite regress or mirror halls.

So, ‘en abyme’ must be taken to mean superimposing onto the heart of a shield, further imposed shields—not an infinitely implied converging (as in Figure 1.3c). Heraldry is the historical practise of bearing an arm, originally for protection and defence. In medieval war, opposing armies would elect an officer to communicate between the sides. This officer was called a herald. But gradually, the herald became associated with the noble names he represented. He adopted devices, such as shields, to carry the patterned symbols he wished to communicate. (Figure 1.3a) Each portion of the shield represented a family name. These shields served as a means to show, broadly, the dynasty or the house that the herald served. In time, the symbolism of family relations developed in its sophistication. But the shield remained the chief vehicle for identifying and communicating complex meaning between combatants on the battle field for the families involved. In terms of heraldry, any arrangement is *en abyme*-patterned when it emblazons other shields on itself as a converging ‘heart pattern’ (Figure 1.3b).

<sup>1</sup> Gide’s original French diary is as follows ‘J’aime assez qu’en une oeuvre d’art on retrouve ainsi transpose, à l’échelle des personnages, le sujet même de cette oeuvre par comparaison avec ce procédé du blazon qui consiste, dans le premier, à mettre second en abyme’. (from Huctehon, 1984)

The designated term, *mise en abyme* is not strictly heraldic but only borrows from this shield metaphor. There is, however, no immediate historical example for an indefinitely layered sequence of receding shields (like imaginary Figure 1.3c). It appears therefore that Gide was perhaps evoking a modest version of the common double-shield Figure 1.3a and Figure 1.3b. The *mise en abyme*, if predicated on heraldry, is also predicated on a ‘false metaphor’. (Morissette, 1971: 128) The bordered shield (*bordure*) in Figure 1.3a is a closest design for what Gide *may* have imagined. A closer possibility to Gide’s imaginings is the double *escutcheon*. The French term for a shield-on-a-shield is *inescutcheon*. But neither do any examples from history suggest that the superimposition on the shield-face, *fess*, continued more than at least twice. Gide’s principle of heraldic shields placed *en abyme* is possibly the lesser-known heraldic ‘marshalling’, calling forth, of the *inescutcheon* to suggest a false smaller-shield or *faux-inescutcheon*. (Figure 1.3b) In English heraldry, the closest cognate for this *en abyme* type of shield was the *claim* to heritage of property as symbolised in the shield by male lineage. For example, this *inescutcheon* charge was associated with women: if an only-child woman had no male heirs to represent her, she needed to be recorded on her husband’s shield through her father’s name. In some cases, because she had a deceased father and no brothers, then her husband would place his wife’s *father’s* arms on their marriage shield. Culturally, the husband would have used her living brother’s shield to represent her. The only shield would thus fall to her dead father. This second-order remove, showed a *claim* to her lineage or ‘pretense’. In the next generation, the son of the couple, if they had one, would quarter the arms of the shield further still. In short, this representation, or charge, was a placeholder of the male head of the wife’s family who was extinct because he had no male successors. This ‘splicing’ by each generation, rendered a sense of a receding shield surface (Figure 1.3a from the Earl of Beauchamp Shield, Fox-Davies: 171). We could perhaps surmise, therefore, that Gide had the example of the *escutcheon of pretense* in mind, when he was writing his memoir entry in 1893 of the heraldic placing *en abyme*. In short, the notion of *en abyme* in heraldry is historically absent—no tangible examples exist because ‘a bordure should not be wide enough to fill up the field left by an *inescutcheon* large enough to occupy the field by a bordure’. (Fox-Davies, *ibid*: 138) Of interest is how Gide, during the late-nineteenth century may have felt an anxiety about the ways in which language was understood to fall short of representing names. The common allusion of surnames in heraldry by two associative ideograms may have also prompted Gide to think placing of shields upon each other rather than seeing the semiotic slippage between signs. In heraldry, this placing is known as ‘canting arms’ in which a pictographic pun is used to represent two family names: for example the crest ‘Bowes-Lyon’ in which two shields holding lions and bows suggest a shield-by-shield face. (Fox-Davies, *ibid*: 54-55)

Gide was prompted by the art of heraldry to identify what he was trying to achieve in *An Attempt at Love*, to characterise the feature of the story where the narrator’s will is imposed on that of the character’s will. It is thus necessary to find the context of Gide’s inspiration to appeal to shields. One such context is Gide’s earlier exploration, in 1891, of a classical trope. The earliest instance of what Gide, in 1893, called a work ‘transposed, on the scale of the characters, the very subject of that work’ is probably from Homer’s epic *Iliad*. In book 18, lines 478-608, Homer records a very long, verbal account of, Achilles’s, the hero’s, shield. Hephaestus, the metal-smith, makes this shield.

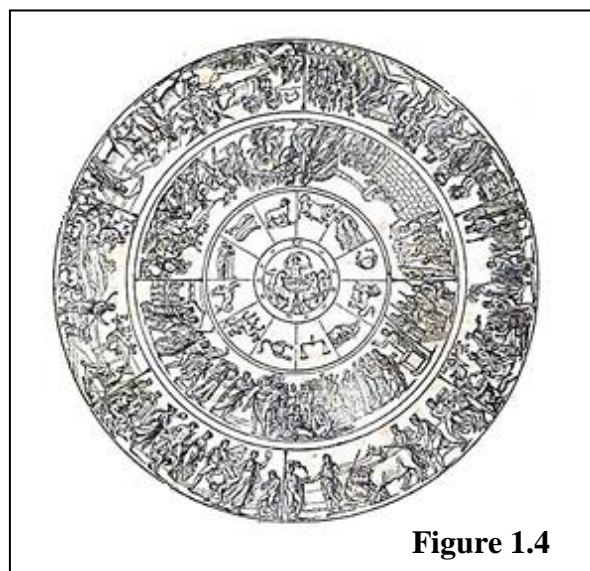


Figure 1.4

This decorated ‘shield so great’ contains many motifs: constellations, fields, estates, even shepherds and young people dancing in circles all ending in a great sea storm (Figure 1.4). A mere two years before Gide’s celebrated memoir, we read about his reading Homer. Gide also alludes, in his *Journal* about *The Attempt at Love* (1893), to *The Notebooks of André Walter* (1891). The latter was his own history in thinly veiled autobiography, which tells, in some places, about Homer’s verse. Gide’s father read his young son passages from Homer so ‘it is not hard to imagine the impact such readings made on Gide’ and how its influence remained, as Watson-Williams points out. (1967: 6-7) It is this common enthusiasm for Homer between his persona Walter and his own interest captured as follows in his notebooks:

The great thrill both moral and physical, that shakes you to the sight of the sublime, and that each of us believed only to have, so that he was not speaking about it to the other,—what a joy when we discovered our [Walter’s and Gide’s] common interest: this was a great emotion. What sources of joy, after reading, to experience it together, it seemed to unite us in such an enthusiasm. And this thrill, soon, we felt it one through each other, into each other; hand in hand and very close, we were merging madly. And when we read, through my voice, sometimes performing, sometimes intoxicating, I knew the accents, to the beloved passages that we would shudder together. (Gide [1891] in Watson-Williams, 1967: 7)

Gide’s identification with Homer’s work was marked. The above was published on the 1<sup>st</sup> January 1891. Gide commented that during that time when he was writing *The Notebooks of André Walter*, ‘I was trying to bend the language to my will’. (Sheridan, 1998: 62-4) The classical style of this work shows his lifelong aim to write with a tersely classical style. But Gide’s interests were many and varied. On the 15<sup>th</sup> November the same year in 1891, Gide remarked in a letter to Paul Valéry that he was ‘studying heraldry’. (*Correspondance 1890-1942*, (1955) in Dällenbach: 189, fn.5) Now since the best known (heraldic) shield example in the classical world is from Homer’s ‘Shield of Achilles’, a passage of which Gide was undoubtedly aware, we might suggest that when Gide wrote about heraldry in 1893, he may have had the classical image in mind to imagine this heraldic motif. Not only is the episode of Achilles’ shield true to a subject-character relation, indeed the whole of the *Iliad* contains such complex similes. The Shield of Achilles is a good example of the likeness to Gide’s analogy even though Gide’s idea is incomplete much like the similes in the *Iliad*. In Homer, similar things relate scenes to character temperaments, for example the arming scenes of Achilles with a gleaming shield reflecting his status as a shining hero. (Meuller, 1986: 96-7) We have thus something vividly pictorial in the form of words.<sup>1</sup> The shield is best seen as a ‘fragmented panorama of the world in which stories unfold, glimpsed parenthetically (as it were) in similes and ornamental epithets and recurrent descriptions of events recurrent in life itself’. (Camps, 1983: 60)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The technical term designated to the shield is that of both metaphor and metonym. The former suggests an arguable un-relatedness between Achilles and the shield. A metonymic figure means that the shield stands, directly related, to the person Achilles. Both metaphor and metonym are imputed connections of part-to-whole. Both figures have parts (shield and Achilles) that are near-by each other: the two parts are adjacent in the text or, are contiguous. (Wilden, 1987: 198) There is a substitution of things that are close to each other in the story. The part- to-whole correspondence takes on a different name wherever a special variety of metonymy exists, called synecdoche. A synecdoche is where a simulated impression of reality is conveyed standing as a part to the whole of the reality, for example a news broadcast. (Jakobson and Halle, 1956: 92) In synecdoche, one part is arguably imaginary to the other part that represents it. Synecdoche remains a contested figure. To argue for the essential relatedness of the terms, see Lakoff and Johnson (1980). For the un-relatedness of the terms, see Eco (1984). For an updated and wide ranging survey, see the edited edition by Dirven and Pöring (2010).

<sup>2</sup> Classicist Mark Edwards captures the similarity well. ‘Like an enormous simile, the scenes on the shield hold the narrative still for a while as we gaze at them; and the content is like that of a simile, too—it is the ordinary life of mankind that we observe not that of heroes or gods’. (1987; 276-86) For detailed account of The Shield in archaeology see Klaus Fittschen (1973), a literary study by Malcolm Wilcock (1976: 209-14) and the relationship of the Achilles’s Shield to the Odyssey in Oliver Taplin (1980: 1-21). Recent work by Irene de Jong (2009) on Homeric *metalepsis* is also helpful.



Achilles shield and its storyline is a classic precursor to Gide's memoir on the *en abyme* principle. Gide's idea does evoke Homer's use and is therefore classical. Gide revisited Homer in his diary with conspicuous familiarity.<sup>1</sup> So, Gide's diary entry might very well be intimating the idea of Homer's description. In rhetoric the effect of Homer is associated with *ekphrasis*:

**Ekphrasis (s.v)** (Greek 'description') The intense pictorial description of an object. This very broad term has been limited by some to the description of art-objects, and even to the self-description of 'speaking' art-objects (objects whose visual details are significant. A more generous account would define *ekphrasis* of virtuosic description of physical reality (objects, scenes, persons) in order to evoke an image in the mind's eye as intense as if the described object were actually before the reader. (Cuddon, 1999: 252)

Alongside the visual examples in Gide's diary entry there is also the English examples of *Hamlet* and Edgar Allan Poe's tale *The Fall of the House of Usher*. Indeed, Gide's reference to *Usher*, shows ample evidence that his idea is a case of *ekphrasis* in the short story. By describing its essential traits and form, the Classical and celebrated example of Homer's *Iliad* (Book 18) is often cited as a prototypical instance of the principle. (Heffernan, 1993: 9-22) Homer describes the Shield of Achilles—a visual artefact—in his verbal literary epic, the *Iliad*. But *ekphrasis* means, from the Greek 'to speak out in full' and has been extended today. Defined variously as 'a self-contained description, often on a commonplace subject, which could be inserted at a fitting place in a discourse', (Lanham, 1991 [1962]: 62)

## Hysterical Realism

A very apposite and topical concern of late-modern writing is raised by James Wood (2004) in what he calls 'hysterical realism'. It certainly relates to *TCL49*. Briefly, hysterical realism is a description of the detailed narrative accounts in contemporary novels. Wood has some rather harsh words to say about the large excesses of novelistic form in Zadie Smith's celebrated *White Teeth* (2000) or the encyclopaedic *Infinite Jest* (1996) by David Foster Wallace. Wood's thesis about humour describes this extreme realism as 'cartoonish...caricature...all shiny externality' (ibid: 172). His compelling argument is that there is a hysterical insistence on extreme detail in recent novelistic realisms. His idea is about the 'glamorous congestion' as he calls it of hysterically real novels because 'The big contemporary novel is a perpetual motion machine that appears to have been embarrassed into velocity. It seems to want to abolish stillness, as if ashamed of silence. Stories and sub-stories sprout on every page, and these novels continually flourish their glamorous congestion. Inseparable from this culture of permanent storytelling is the pursuit of vitality at all costs'. (2004: 167). In regards to *TCL49*, 'the perpetual motion machine' is The Maxwell Demon. It is a metaphor for the unrestrained movement of creative entropy. Pynchon's novel simply hides this unrestrained sense in an overly hesitant character and a barrage of narrative details. It suppresses fabulation, traditional

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<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, later in life, Gide remarked that 'the *Iliad* was perhaps more boring' than the French epic *Song of Roland*. (*Journal*, 1978 [1938]: 663) His remark on Homer is anecdotal enough to be conspicuous—and conspicuous enough to suggest, at the very least, that he was well acquainted with Homer's *Iliad*. Gide was aware of the neo-classical German study on Homer's 'Shield of Achilles'. This polemical study is by art critic, Gotthold Lessing. Translated to English as *The Lacoön* in 1850 it was originally titled *Laokoon: oder über Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie*. [1766] Chapters 16-19 enlarge on Horace's implied idea of *ut pictura poesis*. (1965: 91) The study on Homer's Shield of Achilles made Gide remark that '*The Lacoön* of Lessing is a word that is good to restate or to contradict every thirty years'. (Gide, 1947: 36) Some of the passages from Lessing about the Shield of Achilles read remarkably similar to 20<sup>th</sup> century theorists who propose metaphors for Gide's diary musings. Lessing writes '[Homer] disperses the image of his object [Achilles' Shield] over a kind of history of it; he does this also where his sole object is to show us the picture, in order that its parts which in narrative we find side by side may follow one another in his description just as naturally, and keep pace, as it were with the progress of the narrative'. (Lessing [1766], Sprague Becker's trans. (1995): 15) According to Lessing, the net effect of Homer's device is to intensify the richness of the narrative 'what Homer could not describe in all its various parts he makes us recognise by its effect. Paint for us, you poets, the pleasure, the affection, the love and delight which beauty brings, and you have painted beauty itself'. (ibid; 20)

story-telling in favour of exaggerated emotionality—a much favoured strategy of late-modern writing.

## **Intentionality**

The problem of authorial intent in literary studies is commonly called intentionality (what the author had in mind or did not have in mind). It refers to the concern of finding or uncovering any of the ‘private mental acts’ that inspired or engendered a written aesthetic work. (Gibbs, [1999] 2007: 247) Looking for the intent behind a piece of writing helps to fortify the reading. It goes without saying that theory-based reading *may* enter great lengths to highlight the biography and even the extrinsic psychology of the author. Theory is a champion of intention in order to legitimate speculative, general reading. For anti-intentionalists, judging the aesthetic value, or determining the merits of any literary form, is potentially impractical and misguided since any design of authorial intention is simply not fully possible. Further, any single or group substantiations of what the author hoped to really achieve presupposes that the creative process of production is stable. And all creative acts are in a state of flux and radical transience. The author as a subject has varying and changeable mental states throughout the creation of any objective written work—this is simply the human condition. For better or worse, the other ‘affective’ position is also ultimately, one of likely or probable intentions of the author. So we cannot ignore the plausible motives of the author if verifiable evidence can support it. The problem of finding alternatives to preoccupations of authorial intent is captured by New Critic Cleanth Brooks, who argues that critics must try ‘to try to mitigate the effects of an overshadowing generalisation—not to offer further generalisations in an effort to justify the essays that follow. I would be happy if the reader came to them without special preconceptions and read them with as much openness and innocence as he could manage. For unless they can say something to him at this level it will hardly be worth his trouble to try to establish the point of view from which they derive or the body of literary theory that they may be thought to support’. (Brooks, 1970: xix) There is, of course, a weaker intentionalism. This type is very ambiguous. William Empson illustrates this ambiguous middle-ground in his test case of Gerald Manley Hopkins’ poem. (1961: 226) Empson is not advocating psychologism or biography but a reasonable hypothesis based on the poem. He is, in a way, providing a hypothetical intentionalism, contextually informed, by him, as the ideal reader who imagines both intentions and the concrete outcomes. (Levinson, 1992) Nothing divides more politically, in literary aesthetics, between the above concerns of intentionalism and anti-intentionalism: ‘which side you are on makes a difference when it comes to course registration, sponsorship of dissertations, and control of appointments; as a result the opposing parties tend to get locked into their respective lines’ as Mary Mothersill’s realist treatise on aesthetics *Beauty Restored* points out. (Mothersill, 1983: 16-21)

## **Metaphysics**

The strictly visual *mise en abyme* cascade-idea where mirrors annihilate the deferred reflections into a blind-spot, is a wonderful idea. If we wish to locate and mentally quarantine this placeholder, presumably final, notional empty instance, then we have a void value for a purpose and we can work around it. If we make a presence of this absence, we will have to admit that the blind-spot mirrored correspondence is a radically simplified instance of the starting frame: we then affirm the first instance by logical extension. Now because the first instance is present and the last instance is absent, we have no way of reconciling the correspondence since the two states contradict the Aristotelian principle of correspondence. Aristotle inherited Heraclitean tradition of thought known today as correspondence theory ‘to say of what is that it is not, or of what it is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and what is not that it is not, is true...’ (*Metaphysics* 1011b26, 141: 749, cf Crosby: 175). The immediate existential fear is a void of presence, as if, ‘there is something rather than nothing’ as our starting point. The partially honest admission is that that the presence of

the first frame is only held to have a solipsistic existent currency and is not the same in value to the erased void of the final frame. The radically honest, unsettling admission is that the first frame never existed, in any verifiable sense, in the first place: the troubling abstention of the origin is proven by its annihilated equivalent in a *sina qua non aporia*. This infinite deferral or absurd reduction is a metaphor of a semblance of total absence—the abyss.

## Metareference

Meta-reference is a type of reflexive, intra-medial link. Metareference occurs when texts cite music or lyrics accompany tunes, for example. Meta-reference is a way one art-form signifies itself through another art-form. The discursive principle has eclipsed the general concerns once tenuously associated with the *mise en abyme* in literary studies. Indeed, very recent allusions to the *mise en abyme* still strain under its French name. Terry Eagleton analogises the ‘complex structures’ in *Wuthering Heights* to be ‘like Chinese Boxes’. (2013: 4) He seems to be alluding to the *mise en abyme* but refrains from using this name. The, by now, problematic nature of the term has led narratologists, Karin Kukkonen and Sonja Klimek, to assert the obsolescence of the term *mise en abyme*. The *mise en abyme* is, they contend a “clumsy term”, ‘difficult to spell and difficult to pronounce, but for some time unavoidable even in many languages beside the original French, [it] can easily be transferred into the more international terminology *metareference*’. (2011: 256-7)

## Narratology

Narratology is a highly influential area of ‘study of the logic, principles and practices of narrative representation’. (Meister, 2009: 329) Narratology, though of Greek Classical heritage, originated in its contemporary guise during the 1960s as inheritors of the formalist approach to reading. (Todorov, 1969) Its very recent studies aim to find ‘a theory of narrative’; narratology is fundamentally universalistic and theoretical in its scope and applications. Narratology aims to define its project as ‘the set of general statements on narrative genres, on the systematics of narrating (telling a story) and on the structure of plot’ (ibid: cf Ryan and von Alphen, 1993: 110) Recent calls to interdisciplinary co-operation of non-text based fields of enquiry have popularised the helpfulness of narratology as for example in relation to digital media studies. (Ryan, 2002, 2006; Cobley: 2013) Narratology promotes a good deal of systematic analysis of texts of a kind which articulates our ‘skill in cutting out implications that are not wanted in reading...one does not want merely irrelevant ambiguities’ (Empson, 1961: xii).

## Nihilism

Nihilism could be thought about as the belief in nothing rather than the absence of belief. It is a very difficult idea, extremely protean, highly fragmentary, and radically volatile in social and cultural debate. Nihilism in literature and art is not merely a concern with abyssal things. It is a misnomer for some ‘metaphysics of absence’. Ian Gregson’s succinct view is that at the heart of late-modernity, today, is ‘disbelief’ or a belief in nothing (2004: 1). This generic type of disbelief in the objective existence of *any* kind of meaning adds metaphorical grist to the semantic mill of meaningless as a peripheral concern of nihilism. A problem with defining nihilism is *so* difficult because there is a complete lack of any self-asserted identities of ‘nihilists’. The notion is suggestively a heavily misused slur or term of denigration against non-monotheistic atheists, for example. Indeed, the slippery concept has its first written citation as a personal rebuke in 1799 concerning the Judeo-Christian God. As repudiation of reductive arguments, Johann Fichte is accused by Friedrich Jacobi of engaging in nihilism in which Fichte ‘reduces everything’ to the activity of self and solipsism. (Gillespie, 1995: 65) One of the earliest studies of nihilism in

literature is by Charles Glicksberg (1975). In it, he pensively argues, as later critics would, that nihilism, in literature, is a movement that rebels against the progressive values of Enlightenment humanism. Shane Weller (2006) and William Slocombe (2010) offer two of the most insightful recent investigations of nihilism in literature. Weller accounts for the social, materialist traits of nihilism in modernity whilst Slocombe considers the more transcendental, aesthetic explanations. Still more broadly, Michael Gillespie (1996) offers an historical account and the theologian Karen Carr (1992) tilts against advocating an unqualified view of *any* nihilistic targets before careful consideration of its risks. For Carr, the opposite of nihilism is the backlash reaction of fundamentalism. Carr's thesis highlights the social popularisation and trivialisation of nihilism: she dubs the profane ubiquity of this apparent nihilism as some crisis. But whether we accept either the ironic or earnest claims that nihilism is a valid concern, one always returns to foundational spats originating with the Enlightenment. The contemporary turning point for nihilism study was really in the 1984, by Gillian Rose. In her essay, Rose pioneers an overdue argument. Her moderate, view is about the long-term idealistic rebellion of progress thinkers. She criticises those who oppose the metaphysical climax brought about by the Enlightenment. Against Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida in particular, Rose opens fire with a legalistic (*logical*) discourse, so as to marshal a full-scale assault against structuralism and its sequels. She concludes that the irrationality, the unreason of nihilist proponents in late-modernity, amounts to a radical refusal to engage in the inherited patterns of the Enlightenment: progress, science and legality. Her fair argument for the *dual* nature of nihilism and theory has far-reaching meta-political and ideological ramifications for anyone seeking to subvert the inherited idea that nihilism has *any* legitimate meaning—or indeed is mere intellectual propaganda. Nihilism, as a protean term, still seems most convincingly a socio-cultural collective depression rather than some sinister mind-game and psychological entrapment by invisible media and infrequent church-going. A more agreeable argument for nihilism is thus one presented by Donald Crosby (1988) in which nihilism is exemplified through candid examples in culture and society. It is Crosby's contention that nihilism is a 'mood' or temper of late-modern society. In superficial social politics today, nihilistic slurs are still shunted about to include ultra-individualistic-libertarian anarchies, sitting close to suicide-cults or at the other charge, ultra-nationalistic tribal socialisms that hide under the shade of the super-natural and the occult. So, calling anything or anyone 'nihilistic' suggests that nihilism might hold greater traction as a mere nominal game or demonisation of the 'other', rather than being a genuine metaphysics of total absence, or as Samuel Coleridge says, 'a sort of negative belief'. (Abrams, 1960: 324)

## Recursion

Recursion, as first raised during the late-nineteenth century world of mathematics, is a very small and highly specialised discipline that seeks to find correspondences between different varieties of numbers (like natural and artificial, negative numbers for example). Recursion became a concern due to calculation inconsistencies in repeatable regularities (*axiomata*), and today it plays a considerable role in computer science. Calculus is a branch of mathematics that defines all its formulae in terms of limits. It can either do this through differentiating values against each other or by integrating these values to a limit for recursive sequences. Its success has allowed us to get beyond the once 'false' paradoxes which for centuries were thought unsolvable, like Zeno of Elea's paradox of the runner and the tortoise. Number recursion similarly is a branch of mathematics that stresses mainly the importance of defining through limitations. By analogy, propositions of blurred boundaries, for example, are often resolved by proposing different ways of limiting the boundary in narrative levels, as Füredy does in her paper (1989), and Ryan (1991) develops a similar analogy through speech act theory. McHale sees arithmetic recursions as a way to describe the *mise en abyme*. Recursion *as* infinite regress can be both limited and unlimited. Recursive infinite regress in higher mathematics is not terribly interesting if it cannot be expressed in formulae. It is useful in mortgage calculations for example but is nonsensical if it cannot be expressed as a formula. A way of formulating this numerical concern is through a function of a particular target or limit. The

problem is that there is no guarantee that an infinite regressive sequence can be expressed in a formula for the ends of making it a function both reliant on inputs or sets of inputs (often these inputs are not numbers but just abstract values). This is probably why McHale proposes paradox here for his allusions to infinite regress in mathematics. Infinite regress in recursion relies on functions and functions are highly abstract propositions but are inherently uncertain because they rely on values (or value conglomerations) of inputs that can change. Functions are a serious sticking point in higher mathematics, perhaps, because of the overlap with epistemic nihilism in philosophy. Recursion, especially in its applications with calculus allows us to solve problems once deemed irresolvable 'paradoxes'. Zeno's paradox stated that regardless of timing, it is impossible to see whether a fast runner could beat a slow tortoise over the finishing line, or indeed whether that tortoise could beat the runner. Modern mathematics has disproved this claim. If we programme the distance and time (rate) between the runner and tortoise, in notionally smaller and smaller increments of value, we can, through limiting the rate and generalising its decrease, calculate the place along the linear distance at which a slow creature can beat even a champion sprinter. This is the differentiated place at which the one trajectory crosses the path of the other.

## Simulations

Simulations, a seductive reproducible equivalent which reflexively legitimates the real object, and their legitimated equivalents of an ideal, simulacra, are both central concerns in late-modern, techno-cultural aesthetics. Either case is a staple for the politics of reality and media. French sociologist, Jean Baudrillard in a long career of researches into media and reality, was a self-styled 'nihilist' according to his own definitions, in the famous work *Simulations and Simulacra* (1983: 160). The degeneration of the ideal is mirrored, for Baudrillard, in the three stages of simulated representation. The age-old, quasi-Hebraic injunction against idolatry, where the idea of divinity is subversively confused with the object, is Baudrillard's starting point for the doctrine of simulations. He suggests that late-modern aesthetics inverts its metaphors. It confuses 'the abstract map with the physical territory'. Another negative idea is that late-modern techno-cultural aesthetics is some cretinous inversion of reading a fake simulation as a good value and a real-ideal object without the legitimation of technological mediation as a bad or evil value. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihaly (2002) extends the debate about TV that it is still 'the dominant ingredient shaping our consciousness of reality'. He means that that human reflexive awareness, or flow of optimal awareness, is disrupted and frustrated in reaching any creative or productive expression, as in *Flow* (1998). In *The Art of Seeing* (2008) Csikszentmihaly extends the success of his thesis in *Flow* and speaks of the deleterious ways simulated realities can socially-engineer the viewer's aesthetic faculty of axiological discernment. Examples of this screened, telematic *en abyme* composition famously include the TV novel *White Noise* (1985). Today, we also have the embedding of multiple layers in the narrative using screened technologies. Mark Danielewski's *avant garde* novels including *House of Leaves* (2000) is a ghost story about 'camcorder' scenes *in* a haunted house. The use of the internet now relays electronic copies of stories connected to other versions *of itself*. The reflexivity of late-modern *metafiction* has therefore evolved. Recent criticism is thus in a state of flux. There is a concern with mediations-of-mediations or 're-mediations' and the use of 'techno-texts' featuring alternative realities and lived experience set as a mediated narrative to a great work of storytelling: a narrative rendered real by an inscrutable counter-reality. (Hayles, 2002)

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