The Relevance of Irrelevance: Games and Puzzles in the Humoristic Tradition Since the Renaissance

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Summary

An encyclopedic drive and ironic self-critical consciousness have informed the humoristic tradition in Western narrative from Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen, and Sterne down to Joyce, Mann and Barth. But also copresent at every major stage in the development of humoristic fiction has been a spirit of playfulness that enables dynamic movement toward larger synthesizing vision, as well as the recognition of cultural complexity and error. The ludic principle not only accommodates, but seems to draw creative energies from "irrelevance", from childish games, human folly, and narrative digression - to name but a few manifestations. Remarkable is the extent to which, because of ludic openness, great humoristic novels have captured so many essentials of revolutions or crises in Western thought - examples range from the comic enactment of the conflict of humanist and medieval values in Rabelais, over the radical deconstruction of literary structures and languages to express the new subjectivist sense of psychological identity in Sterne, to the polyphonic modernist symposium on the possible directions for humanity in Mann and even a postmodern stock-taking in Pynchon. The ludic principle also appears to link the impressive evolutionary series of humoristic-encyclopedic works over the past five centuries insofar as these overtly "play" with their own antecedents and thereby constitute an ongoing self-adjusting textuality.

Opsomming

Die humoristiese tradisie in die Westerse verhaalkuns is vanaf Rabelais, Cervantes, Grimmelshausen en Sterne tot by Joyce, Mann en Barth deur 'n ensiklopediese dryfkrag en 'n ironiese self-kritiese bewustheid geïnformeer. Terselfdertyd was daar egter in elke hoofstadium van die ontwikkeling van humoristiese fiksie 'n gees van speelsheid teenwoordig wat dinamiese stuwing in die rigting van ruimer sintetiserende visie, sowel as die erkenning van kulturele kompleksiteit en feilbaarheid moontlik gemaak het. Die beginsel van lighartigheid akkommodeer nie bloot nie, maar put oënskynlik kreatiewe energie uit "irrelevansie", uit kinderspeletjies, uit menslike swakheid en narratiewe afdwaling - om maar 'n paar manifestasies te noem. Merkwaardig is die mate waarin beroemde humoristiese romans daarin geslaag het om, te danke aan lighartige openheid, ruimskoots die essensiële van rewolusies en krisisse in die Westerse denke vas te vang. Voorbeelde hiervan wissel van die komiese uitbeelding van die konflik tussen humanistiese en middeleeuse waardes in Rabelais, tot die radikale dekonstruksie van

literêre strukture en taal om die nuwe subjektiese sin van psigologiese identiteit in Sterne onder woorde te bring, tot die polifoniese modernistiese simposium oor die moontlike rigtings vir die mensdom tot selfs 'n postmoderne voorraadopname in Pynchon.

Dit wil ook voorkom of die beginsel van *speelsheid* die skakel vorm tussen die indrukwekkende evolusionêre reeks humoristies-ensiklopediese werke van die afgelope vyf eeue vir die mate waarin hulle openlik "speel" met hulle eie voorgangers en vervolgens 'n aaneenskakelende self-aanpassende tekstualiteit konstitueer.

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The title for this meditation on the ludic impulse so prominent in much of Western literature first occurred to me in Spanish in a multiple allusion to the novel *Don Quixote* as "La pertinencia de la sin pertinencia: jeugos y perplejidades en la tradición humorística desde el Renacimiento". The range of literary practices and concepts more evident from my initial Spanish formulation naturally had a long history of emergence before the ingenious Cervantes reconstituted their main channel down to the present. The *Quixote* is still relevant for our almost waned century as Milan Kundera has argued in his brilliant essay "The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes" (*The Art of the Novel*, Kundera 1988),[1] and in due course I shall acknowledge the cardinal role of this great novel. An expert like Carlos García Gual (1972, 1974) could, meanwhile, intervene here to inform us, first, in which respects the Renaissance habits of narrative play I am about to cite were rooted in ancestral modes, both ancient and medieval. That knowledge about the textual repertory entering the sixteenth century is an important given which I ask you to presuppose, while I turn to the Renaissance proper in order to consider a cluster of attributes especially characteristic of the humanist strain in Europe. I refer to the ludic tendencies appearing both in the nimble perspectival shifting of Erasmus's satirical treatise *Encomium Moriae* (1509) and in the sophisticated indulgence in medieval romance of Ariosto's *Orlando furioso* (1516). While the former fits principally under the ledger of "discourse" and the latter under the ledger of "narrative fiction", both works belong in a larger category of crucial Renaissance texts which evidence a serious delight in the activity of the human mind as it is engaged in positing or beholding a story. The Renaissance authors of such texts programmatically invoke that delight as a heightening experience through which human worth is affirmed.

A book from the same year that saw the start of Ariosto's romance, Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), a title that instantly became eponymous for a new genre, serves to illustrate this proposition: the appearance of a new capacity for self-scrutiny in Renaissance writing. In the twentieth century,

the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) has called the more expansive manifestation of this capacity "dialogic" and the American Harry Levin (1968) has dubbed it "critical". These terms echo the Romantic theoretician Friedrich Schlegel (1800) who saw the "ironic" principle at work in it and proposed that the novel, since Cervantes, had developed into the modern medium *par excellence*, by becoming an all-embracing and self-renewing mode that interwove vital discourse and poetic fiction.[2] More's friend, Erasmus, supervised the printing of the original Latin text of *Utopia*. It rapidly circulated among the humanist readership and was translated into French by 1530. The structural doubleness of this prose work, which confronts Europe's actual flawed "history" with a praiseworthy "fiction", qualifies it as a prototypical Renaissance "narrative" - and not merely as a philosophical essay. Book I is dominated by the first-person voice of More and by the freewheeling correspondence and conversation of named, high-ranking personages of the day. By involuting the static realm of romance within Part I through reported contacts with the fictive narrator of Part II and then taking us into that unreal place in Book II, More creates an overarching framework for clashing modes of language, including the ignored or repressed voices of reality. From this interaction springs a potent demythologising awareness of the questionable romance-like status of a decaying system. More updates Lucian's traveller, the Cynic philosopher Menippus, as the modern searcher Raphael and lets him start out on the imaginary trip from a far point recently reached during the historical voyages of Amerigo Vespucci in 1504, the narrative of which appeared in 1507. The still scarcely known New World provides a satirical foil to the Old World under the licence of fiction. The learned "foreigner" from *Utopia*, Raphael, is remarkedly well-informed about English society and politics. In Book I, in the presence of the late Primate John Morton, Archbishop of Canterbury and Lord Chancellor, he ventures protests on the cruelty of hanging thieves instead of creating needed jobs, the ruinous English penchant for war, the relentless enclosure of lands destroying rural communities, and other pernicious dislocations and abuses, and he proposes reforms of the system of justice, rehabilitation of offenders, and expansion of prosperity.

In further dialogue with More, Raphael posits hypothetical approaches to English problems of statecraft and national welfare with illustrations from the realm of Utopia, and then expatiates on the Utopian's more advanced political and economic system in Book II. The island Republic, founded some eighteen centuries earlier by a benevolent conqueror Utopos, practises a communism which in many respects suggests the orderliness of a Benedictine establishment, secularized and extended as a national way of life, rather

than a new version of Plato's commonwealth. In a standard Humanist thrust, Raphael notes that, while the Utopians have independently discovered much the same principles in the arts and sciences as the Ancients and all subsequent advances, they have failed to come up with the tortured scholasticism of the Moderns. Their ethics stress the pleasure principle at the base of reality and reject gloomy asceticism in favour of natural, true happiness on both rational and religious grounds. It comes as little surprise to learn that, under Raphael's tutelage, they have rapidly taken to studying Greek literature and philosophy in the original texts, since there is linguistic evidence of a remote Utopian tie to the Greeks and Persians, nor that they have instantly grasped and independently replicated the new bookprinting technology of Europe. Utopian national unity is guaranteed by religious tolerance, and their deep irenic sentiments are reflected in skilful avoidance of war, and in equally clever, measured conduct of any hostilities forced upon them. Such allusions to admirable guiding principles rooted in a *prisca theologia et scientia* are typical of a concomitant drive that will increasingly demand narrative space in the Renaissance novel. The act of playfully positing orders and disorders necessitates assembling lists and collections, and this leads to the contrasting of repertories, because these represent worlds. It is for this reason that, in retrospect, with hyphenation, we often speak, of the humoristic-encyclopedic tradition. In playing with and on fields of texts, the Renaissance discovers that textual labyrinths are the mind's playground.

More's *Utopia* incited readers to argue what the final meaning or teaching was, since More's other "official" writings often seemed to stand in contradiction. If scholarship has perennially debated whether More's *Utopia* was essentially Catholic or Protestant in spirit, controversy over Rabelais's position, too, has remained as variegated as his great five-part novel whose wonderfully resounding titles I shall simplify to *Gargantua and Pantagruel*. Even to outline the questions of Rabelais's beliefs exceeds the scope of this talk, and here it must suffice to concentrate on his humoristic treatment of the age's conflict of values revealed within a combined Utopian and Dystopian framework. In Books I, II, and III the territories of the Gargantuan race are vaguely congruent with those of France. There is never any disjunctive withdrawal from rough-and-tumble reality into the prophylactic safety of a fictive island, although large stretches of the novel are exuberantly fantastic and replete with allegories. The grandiose island-by-island search for the temple of the Dive Bouteille in Books IV and V, an entertaining voyage of discovery in remotest waters, ultimately symbolizes the Renaissance quest for experience and knowledge on one's home grounds.

Toward the end of Book II (1532), actually the first published, the bene-

volent statecraft of the young Prince Pantagruel completes the fusion of the Utopian and Dipsodic realms - that is, subsumes and potentializes the legacies of More and Erasmus. Rabelais uses the "lie" convention of folklore and fabulous tales to full advantage, representing Renaissance vitality through the pristine vigour and lusty appetites of the Gargantuan race, whom the opening chapters trace from the Flood in a jocoserious addition to myth and Scripture. The account of Pantagruel's prodigious childhood soon leads to the contest between the Renaissance and Middle Ages in Paris and his crossing the divide between them, guided by his humanist tutor Epistemon. By representing a plethora of vocabularies from the decaying and vital sectors of sixteenth-century Europe, Rabelais creates an explosive intellectual complexity that is Pantagruel's playworld. Pantagruel's education includes the stimulus provided by his friend Panurge, who incarnates the big-city schemer and trickster. It is Panurge who helps Pantagruel consult the whole range of European experts on the question whether Panurge should marry in Book III and thus he becomes an *alter ego* and co-searcher of the noble Renaissance hero in Books IV and V.

Taking up the experience of the older generation in Book I, Rabelais expands on the central Utopian themes: proper education, and the benefits of humane, peaceful cultivation. Every detail of Gargantua's childhood behaviour and upbringing has symbolic value and connects him with the rebirth of a Bacchic Christianity. For example, his love of wine exhibits his "complexion divine"; the clinking of drinking cups excites him to ecstasy, "comme s'il goustoit les joyes de paradis", and he responds with earthy body noises and movements in innocent harmony with the higher music of the spheres (chapter 7). Gargantua's tireless riding of his hobby-horses (chapter 12) demonstrates spontaneous imaginative involvement in life as play, as do his romping in the dirt and adolescent sexual games with his nurses (chapter 11). Father Grandgousier, far from being upset, interprets Gargantua's scatological experiments (chapter 13) as a sign of genius. When the reactionary preceptors of the Sorbonne, epitomized by Janotus, decry reason and threaten to make the young man into a dolt and slouch (chapters 20, 21), his newer-style tutors Eudemon and Ponocrates intervene to implement, step by step, Rabelais's humanist philosophy and encyclopedic plan for education. Gargantua's penchant for playing games (chapter 22) is exploited both mentally and physically. No hour is wasted, but the routine is pleasurable and varied by athletics and perfecting of artistic skills such as a Baldassare Castiglione more selectively recommends four years earlier in *Il Cortegiano* (1528). Gargantua also makes excursions to learn the nature of trades and occupations or witness public events and performances, engages in scientific observations and visits to learned experts and travellers,

and goes on well-timed vacation outings. All along, as our exemplary Renaissance man plays life's games, the reader bathes in the therewith connected, shifting streams of vocabulary.

The Utopian-Dipsodic house acquires a valuable ally in the tough-minded Friar John whom the Humanists find congenial for his heartiness, large appetites, and valour (chapters 39 et seq.). Book I concludes with the collaboration of Gargantua and Friar John in founding the Abbey of Thélème ("free will"), an institution of revolutionary character built in the heartland of Utopia, not only to replace the corrupt, outmoded monastic system, but to serve as a model for the formation of a secular élite (chapters 52 et seq.). In contrast to other visionary establishments of the Renaissance era, Rabelais advocates an open society governed by the imperative of self-perfection. Taste, tact, spontaneity and good sense determine the daily round, and the men usually defer to the women. Like the monastic vows of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the separation of the sexes is abolished. The students have the right to marry, get rich and be free. Thélème selects the shapely, natural and gifted and graduation ordinarily occurs when a compatible couple decides it is time to embark, in marriage, upon the adventure of reality in Europe. While acquiring the whole range of courtly graces, the Thelemites can repair to the core of the institution, its libraries in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, French, Italian and Spanish. The enigmatic poem uncovered in digging in the foundations of the old abbey - the import of which Gargantua tersely characterizes as "le decours et maintien de verité divine" - hints guardedly at the collapse of the old order, a fusion of the codes of Nature and Scripture, and the rebirth of human glory (chapter 58). Clearly, Rabelais expects his best readers to enjoy the parallel between their ruminating on his polytropic fabulation and the Renaissance activities of excavating within the historical maze. The task is to dig beneath the surface to foundational strata of the Western text. By interpolating the already double form of More's *Utopia* within a yet grander framework of comic and ironic juxtapositions, contrasts and exhibits, Rabelais both endorses the vivacious spirit of Humanist discourse, and lends it such momentum as it requires to become unstoppable. Among other means, he achieves this by what Herman Meyer (1968) has called "the art of quotation". The humoristic game becomes encyclopedic out of an inner logic. Just as Pantagruelism, Rabelais's comic doctrine, pretends to universality, so it must co-opt and not merely displace what it supersedes.

Rabelais's jocoserious pseudo-romance capturing all discourses takes up in Book III the problem of the uncertainty of our judgments and the need for Erasmian faith. The problem is posited more acutely as the collapse of cultural authority in Henricus Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine et*

vanitate scientiarum (1530). Starting in 1580, Michel de Montaigne's *Essaies* recognize that the imagination influences and is influenced by unreliable cultural models and wishdreams. Awareness of inconsistencies - which we gain from the comparative study of customs in different nations and ages or from observation of the alternations in our own personal "identity" - militates for suspending judgment; yet, so Montaigne observes, the perplexities of judgment do not abolish the longer-range consistency of Nature. The humoristic approach of Cervantes's anti-romance *Don Quixote* has its humourless counterpart in the radical disillusionism of Francis Bacon toward the mind's foibles in *The Great Instauration and New Organon* (1620). The seminal relationship of Cervantes's work to picaresque narration consists not in the superficial resemblance of episodic progression, but in the replacement of conscious criminal deviation and masquerade by intellectual folly and the association of folly with the strange textual creativity of the imagination. Beyond the prologue and the joke dedicatory poems (very much in the jocoserious spirit of those prefacing More's *Utopia* or that found in the foundations of Rabelais's Thélème), the provocation of the novel *Don Quixote* starts with the famous arbitrary rupture of illusion in the very first subordinate clause of the story proper: "En un lugar de la Mancha, de cuyo nombre no quiero acordarme". From this opening onward, by means of deliberate authorial digressions and play with generic expectations and the status of the narrating voice, Cervantes problematizes his own role as writer and that of the reader *vis-à-vis* the work in progress.

The challenge deepens with the dizzying excursions into favourite genres of Renaissance fiction in Part I. Among these is the long novella of the "Curioso impertinente" that implicity challenges our curiosity as to its pertinence. The story (chapters 33-35), told while Quixote sleeps, relates how Anselmo asks his best friend Lotario to play-act and attempt the seduction of his apparently happy and loyal wife Camila, while Anselmo spies on the proceedings. In the course of this testing, Lothar and Camila actually fall in love, Lothar secretly discloses the frame plot to her, and Camila agrees to play along with a henceforth pretended part of innocence, deceiving Anselmo. But the tragic dénouement of this social theatre cannot be forever forestalled; disgrace, madness, and death are the final real-world price. In the background, as the catastrophe is narrated, Quixote bestirs himself from his dream and in his nightshirt wreaks havoc with the wineskins he thinks are enemies. By this time we have almost forgotten that Quixote, or Quijada or Quesada or Quejana, who has been so moved by such literary expressions as "la razón de la sinrazón", is himself a fictional character. But it behoves us to remember that Quixote is ever busy inventing a new identity out of pieces of high and low romance, constructing his

text within the text. While with Anselmo we slip back and forth over the distinction between art and life, and as readers sense how art sometimes seems to release or enact deeper life impulses, and life at time imitates art, we almost get irritated with Quixote momentarily for not paying due attention to the inserted story as we are striving to.

When in Book II Quixote increasingly relapses into sanity because traumatic beatings and disappointments force him to retreat, his circling around his fictive-quotational ideal identity restates in a new and important way the elliptical pattern of human erring. Narrating protagonist and readers digress, looping away from, but also round about and reapproaching the core of truth and reality. The novel, in testing Quixote's waking dream against life, in its demonstration of fictions as projections of the mind, ultimately follows its own logic and gathers its own Parts I and II into itself as a grand subject-matter. Hence we may regard the "outer" author's farewell at the close of Part II as a "return" to normalcy from the sustained mega-digression of the totalizing work of art, from the strange dream or vision we are fortunate to have shared. The coda of this novel replete with puzzles is a dying or disillusionment of reconciliation in artistic terms, quite parallel to the good squire Alonso Quijana's resignation, a bowing to the laws of human existence after testing and tasting the puzzling inner realm in each of us.

To Cervantes's involution of our knowledge of fiction within the fiction corresponds Shakespeare's, Lope's, Calderón's, and Rotrou's obsessive Baroque involution of the play in the play as an instrument for analyzing role-playing and identity.[3] Part II's dazzling set of early chapters show the would-be knight-errant quite stirred by the fact that a wise Arab historian has been writing about him, since this corroborates his mission, but he is miffed by the disproportionate attention devoted to his squire Sancho, and sufficiently outraged by the spurious continuation of the story as to set forth anew to establish the continuation of the legitimate text. This is a generative moment that seems to arise out of a deep inner necessity to pursue the rules of the game in search of an outcome. Clearly, among the novel's several dozen internal interpreter figures, master and servant are our chief reciprocal models of reader and writer. Thus the ever more evident Quixotization of Sancho, leading to his celebrated enchantment of Dulcinea in chapter 10 of Part II, acquires its narrative shadow, the Sanchification of Quixote. It is a measure of the severity of the trauma caused by Dulcinea's enchantment that Quixote understands, in chapter 11, the explanation by the director of the troupe of wandering actors who are dressed for their roles and en route to perform the auto *Las Cortes de la Muerte* and recalls his own youthful pleasure in masks and plays. Even when the company's fool pulls a discourteous prank, Quixote rationalizes that he must not deviate from his higher

mission of freeing Dulcinea and concedes to Sancho the honour of an ordinary fight. The next chapters turn the tables doubly, because Quixote regains his sense of mission and gratifies us readers, by besting the spurious Knight of the Mirrors, that is, the masked Samson Carrasco, the overweening university graduate from his village who has become obsessed with defeating Quixote and forcing him to return home.

If Quixote and Sancho are reciprocal shadows, so does the book itself as the composite shadow of the hidden psychic energies of their day, project a virtually infinite set of shadows which we find in the readerly imagination internal to the novel. But this revealed readerly imagination is also henceforth external insofar as the entire book has been registered in readers of it down through time to our own moment in literary history. In the great wandering symposium with which Part I ends, we watch a by now swollen crowd of sophisticated Spaniards and village notables involved in a colossal game, trying to conduct the caged knight-errant home under the pretext that he is enchanted and thus *hors de combat*, while Sancho, like them, affected by Quixote's quest, stalwartly misconstrues the ringleaders' behaviour as wicked obstruction and deception. By virtue of their own story-telling and/or personal parts in stories told earlier in Part I, many in this crowd are personally linked to genres which have been subordinated to the larger structures of the novel. As they begin to share their aesthetic views from chapter 47 onward, Renaissance neoclassical tenets of harmony, order and verisimilitude in the imitation of nature are competently espoused, as against monstrosity, inconsistency, lack of truth, the unbalanced and immoral. But judging the status of repertories by comparing them, has grown more difficult since the work of Rabelais. All the carefully reasoned arguments against the romances pale when Quixote's imagination is fired by the debate and he summons their glorious attributes and contents, the pleasure and wonderment of reading. Over time, European readers have become like the two gentlemen at the inn in chapter 49 of Part II, who Quixote discovers are avidly reading the spurious continuation. He introduces himself and Sancho, elegantly repudiates the false account, delights these literati and firmly convinces them of his identity. Cervantes has shifted the thematics of apocryphal versus proven scripture so that we momentarily cross the tenuous boundary-line to the side of madness and vision. We feel the desire to believe in the fiction and to be in it. The mystery of Quixote's idealism seizes us, in spite or perhaps because of the self-critical stance of the narration.

2

I agree with Rawdon Wilson's argument in *In Palamedes' Shadow* (1990) that Rabelais, Cervantes and Shakespeare so expanded the scope of our readerly ludism that it swallows such notions as Bakhtinian dialogism and carnivalesque transgression. The mind's absorption into the immateriality of literary games does not appear to be dependent on any specific level of awareness of conventions. Thus, "If literary texts are games, they are paradoxical ones, to be accounted for in terms the inverse of those normally apposite to games"; for "The text-specific assumptions of literature cannot be adequately formulated" (Wilson 1990: 99-101). Renaissance writers like Rabelais in *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* and Cervantes in *Don Quixote* play with collections, catalogues and repertories and have us wander through labyrinths in such a way as to suggest a totality beyond any single fiction. Their play with a vast intertextuality intimates a god-game in which narrow definitions of rules will never capture the sense behind our witnessing the exemplary "victim" experiencer of illusion, such as Quixote so densely incarnates; nor can our formulation of some rules prevent our thinking of ourselves as being so entrapped by analogy. Labyrinths image the twists, ambiguities, choices and decisions we encounter in actual history and the conceptual mind-mazes produced by our groping for the hidden rules as life flows on. As Wilson (1990: 245) says, "The entrapping power of worldhood can be seen most clearly in the godgame", perhaps because, although it takes little to ground the experience of fiction and although the reader entering the maze may face a joyless or funless situation, "text-space, like game-space, is experience as self-enclosed and full".

Experimentation with the fullness, self-enclosure, and labyrinthine mystery of a god-game attains a grand Baroque climax in Johann Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen's novel *Der abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch*.[4] Appearing in layers of editorial and authorial masks between 1668 and 1669, *Simplicissimus* bears a more direct indebtedness to the admirer of Rabelais and translator of Cervantes into French, Charles Sorel. Grimmelshausen found preshaped in Sorel's then anonymous *Histoire comique de Francion*, published from 1623 to 1633, not only the techniques of satirical exposure, but as a serviceable binding thread the sentimentalized anti-hero who by his experiences connects all spheres of social life and yet preserves some innate goodness. The ground-pattern of Mateo Alemán's *Guzmán de Alfarache* may have had a contributing influence on the structure of the five original books of *Simplicissimus*. These suggest a vast, emblematic and encyclopedic drama which, in conducting us to the revelation of

Simplex's actual noble parentage, underscores the hero's falling away from and regaining of a higher nature. Among a host of internal puzzles and games is the frontispiece emblem which Grimmelshausen himself probably designed. It depicts Simplex as a most unsimple, complex monster who treads on the mask-strewn stage of the world and challenges us by pointing at the plethora of emblems in the opened emblem book he holds in his hands. Modern French criticism would speak of a *mise en abyme*, a dizzying infinite self-reflection of the system of a work of art. We are missing the point if in the case of Simplex we look for some unity of character in an educational protagonist, according to Enlightenment or Romantic organicist conceptions of personality. The vagaries of Simplex's journey and the often grim naturalism of the disorders of his age he witnesses, constitute materials for meditation and moral analysis. Grimmelshausen strips away costume, mask, pretence, unabashedly coming to terms with the criminal waywardness of Europe after its orgy of the Thirty Years' War. Simultaneously, he playfully draws us into Simplex's labyrinth.

As Thomas Mann recognized centuries later with admiration, Simplex incarnates the hermetic principle of literary play, one that necessitates the ever deeper discovery of the game in the course of playing.[5] This linkage between the mystery of fiction and a reciprocal authorial and readerly role is supported by an ingenious act of continual literary quotation or cooptation worthy of those practised by Rabelais and Cervantes. Grimmelshausen re-appropriates the entire evolution of the picaresque first-person voice which, as Francisco López de Úbeda's *La pícara Justina* (1605) exhibits, already offered rich possibilities of literary self-reflection at the time Cervantes took up pen to write the *Quixote*. The narrative double consciousness and complex perspectivism of the matured Spanish picaresque tradition inhere in Simplex's witty first-person voice from the opening paragraph, as he conjures up the malady at the heart of things modern and comes to life with biographical immediacy as the actor who will sin in the world theatre of seventeenth-century Europe. This same voice already resonates with the accrued wisdom of one who has graduated to the rank of wise spectator and interpreter of temporality. From the elegant classical references so glaringly in contrast to his rude childhood circumstances, we have a foretaste of the speaker's unannounced encyclopedic knowledge which slowly will be inventoried in succeeding hundreds of pages. Likewise, the list of low-life types in paragraph one - straight from the urban squalor known to Lazarillo and El Buscón - effectively anticipates a host of parvenu roles and encounters just over the horizon in the camps and cities. We are enticed into the beckoning universe of literary genres, figures, and tropes which the novel will explore as our labyrinth. Before retiring into a

hermitage at the close of Book V, Simplex openly revels in satyric fantasy and dishes up with relish increasingly transparent paradigms of universal exploration. In this novel, the converted pícaro has been lifted up, in congruence with his arrival at anagnorisis, to a new status as a Christian humorist.

The Baroque novelist's drive to attain universality unites the emblematic principle of the world grasped as the *mundus pictus*, the encyclopedic inclusivity from the Rabelaisian humoristic tradition, and the disillusionism of *Siglo de oro* and Elizabethan world theatre. Grimmelshausen's discourse admits diverse literary genres within his comic framework, and idio- and sociolects, regional dialects, the specialized vocabularies of religion, politics, warfare, the arts and other realms jostle one another as elements incorporated in Simplex's multilayered authorial voice. Moreover, Grimmelshausen reconfirms the connection between closure of a repertory and death - a linkage which Cervantes hit upon, but was already implicit in epical terms in Rabelais. Squaring accounts as medieval culture disintegrates, Rabelais's five books of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* establish a new comic doctrine that redemptively opens into a future anywhere and everywhere we imbibe the refreshing Pantagrueline sacraments of good wine or good books. Laurence Sterne will attempt to reconstitute this ongoing, never finished discourse as Shandyism in the second half of the eighteenth century. Midway between these comic geniuses, Grimmelshausen fashions out of the original five-part novel *Simplicissimus* a never-closing narration he calls the "Simplician Scriptures" - a series of books that expand the game. The essentials of this re-overture can be grasped by looking at the *Continuatio* or attached Book VI. How firm the resolution of Book V sounds; Simplex literally intones in German the Spaniard Guevara's stern farewell to the vile world and nestles down in the woods at sunset with his heart and mind focused on his end, the necessary end of all things including his work, to which he sets the word "End" as the last word of the last sentence. Nonetheless, there follows the book titled, if I may translate here, "Continuation of the Adventurous Simplicissimus or the Close of the Same". To take this literally, continuation necessitates reclosure, or closure is always tentative. The salvational message of the novel yields a narrational parallel to rebirth: the true paradigmatic story is eternally reborn. In *Forms of Time and of the Chronotrope in the Novel* (1981), Bakhtin argued that Rabelais's programmatic act of telling us there had been a Middle Ages permanently ruptured the resistance to history by the time-space of the romance.[6] But clearly the ludic impulse unleashed in Rabelais's joyful play with perceived alternate contents, system, and forces of culture in their guises as vocabularies and fictional constructs never halted in respectful satisfaction with having

produced a medium, the novel, to assert the real world over the romance and the human imagination.

3

In order to appreciate the narrative revolution that occurs in *Tristram Shandy*, we should keep in mind all those varieties of the romance and novel which Sterne chose not to follow after mid-century, but only to co-opt selectively. Besides the novel of education, prominent would be several story types which seek to suggest the sentimental reality of individual lives, in distinction to public roles, and test the possibilities and limits of subjective expression and intersubjective communication. The frequent focus on sentimental portraiture and on the diary and epistolary forms after Madeleine de Lafayette and Samuel Richardson reveals a deep epochal urge to lift individual experience out of older Baroque complexity as the thematic core. It is thus instructive to consider how Henry Fielding reorders Cervantine discourse on the nature of literature, human imagination and social repertories in *Tom Jones* in 1750 so as to affirm Enlightenment libertarian values and faith in natural law. Encouraged and cajoled by the ironic authorial voice in charge of this third-person narration, we follow a humanized rogue in his erring as he finds his way through contemporary barriers, but also responds to positive stimuli, and realizes the possibility of a decent future. The author requires us to remember it is a game in which he has engaged us, but intimates its rules, too, are grounded in human nature and the creative order of God. In a similar spirit Fielding's admirer and codisciple of Lucian, Rabelais and Cervantes, the German novelist Christoph Martin Wieland transposes all the baffling variety of repertories, which vie for our allegiances in the eighteenth century, onto the Golden Age of ancient Greece, in his great educational novel *Agathon*, the first two parts of which appeared in 1766. Wieland's encyclopedic marshalling of transparent resemblances in ancient culture distances us and suggests underlying natural principles in the human organism that account for the recurrence of conflicting imperatives. His constant framing of the third-person fictional events in an authorial discourse which playfully and often directly alludes to contemporary literature, art and philosophy challenges readers to respond to their own age as a text they are sharing imaginatively with the author.

Unbeknown to Wieland, Laurence Sterne was simultaneously embarked on a more radical experiment with first-person narration in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1760-1767). Sterne repotentiated the inherited pseudo-picaresque voice by identifying it with Cervantine

authorial-editorial consciousness, and he internalized the encyclopedia of repertories past and present in the speaking subject. Sterne subsumed all questions about the processes of the imagination and the status of cultural repertories as products of the mind - long underway since Agrippa, Montaigne, Bacon and others - and treated them as a structural attribute of the fictional creature, Tristram. It is through Tristram's sensibility and mind that the endless subtexts are filtered as recollections, quotations and generic inserts; everything flows according to the rhythms of his psyche and organism; and in effect, whether apparently a fragment, a whole, or confounded in involuted layers of discourse or story, the materials of the novel are contained in the subjective identity which is extant from the first moment as if by a Cartesian necessity. However, "je pense, donc je suis" has metamorphosed into an implicit "je souffre, donc je suis". Tristram is an awareness that is inseparable from trauma, the wounding that life inflicts as it raises us to consciousness. Gently, he addresses us readers as participant sensibilities, ordinarily in the second-person singular, occasionally in the plural. We share Tristram's intermittent acts of third-person narration as an internal example of the possibility of momentary self-distancing through the making of fictions. But we can no longer comfortably assume that third-person narration - often seemingly objective or omniscient - is or should be the dominant mode of story-telling. In fact, anything like a longer-term escape into the "as-if" of fiction is not sustainable, according to Sterne's novel, because it constantly reminds us of our acts of imagination, whether individual or collective, subjective, intersubjective or cultural. Sterne accomplishes this transformation of older literary experience by taking Cervantes seriously and pushing the Cervantine game with literature onto the territory of what we today call Romantic irony. Thus, even when Tristram disappears completely into the background, and our attention is riveted on amusing stories such as the love-affair of shy Uncle Toby and the lusty widow Wadman in Book IX, we remain aware that it is a fellow human mind, a voice enveloping voices, that is deliberately seducing us into and with the pleasures of fiction. Tristram's ostensible absence from the third-person account is a forerunner of (the as yet unnamed) Marcel's unexplained absence in the virtually Flaubertian section "Un amour de Swann" in *Du côté de chez Swann*, the opening volume of Proust's great "roman fleuve" *A la recherche du temps perdu*.

After page one of *Tristram Shandy* it is too late to turn back, because the speaking voice of our fictional narrator, Tristram, has already undermined the normal structures of literature. His superiority as the rule-setting subject is demonstrated in his playing with the old norms. Initially, the arbitrary violations surprise and capture us; we enjoy the sport of seeing parts of a

traditional book or generic traits arrive out of place, pieces disappear and digressions disrupt expected narrative progress, while crucial themes emerge steadily amidst the multiple and diverse elements of story-telling and meditation. Sterne involves us immediately in a meta-discourse that he grounds in our own addiction to literature's games and in our recognition of how we ourselves play along with the authorial-editorial consciousness called Tristram. In due course, we cease wanting the Preface to have appeared at its conventional location and prefer its mysterious arrival after we have digested several books. Some of Sterne's nuclear model texts, such as the purported treatise on "Gonopsychanthropologia, upon the origin of the human soul" (IV, chapter 10), clearly draw the sexual implications of teasing, postponement and release. Tristram says the book, racing on a "trip" that imitates the process of life, is a "machine" to fight off death (VII, chapter 1), but he acknowledges the impossibility of writing a "mimesis" of "time" (IV, chapter 13). This thorough fusion of a subjective approach to the perduring realities of bodily and societal formation on the one hand, and the playful problematization of literary and imaginative structures on the other, concretized the single greatest revolution in Western fiction between Cervantes and Joyce.

One of the most important immediate responses, Denis Diderot's novel *Jacques le fataliste et son maître* (written in the early 1770s), has enjoyed such a critical renascence over the past twenty years that I can foreshorten my remarks on its ludism to just a few illustrative points. Diderot carries forward the Sternean analogies between the organic rhythms of life, the patterns of the psyche, and the relationships linking readers and the authors who offer them imaginative statements. The sexual metaphor of speaker-listener, which Diderot introduces as the Moi and Toi consciousnesses who share and even contest directions for the main story and its inserted narratives, recurs in Joyce's Ithaca chapter when a catechismic question-and-answer process hovers as a narrative analogue over the pseudo-Homeric bed of Bloom and Molly. By virtue of being able to associate with Moi and/or Toi, as well as with characters such as Jacques, we are drawn into the basic game of wanting a story, of feeling the urge to generate a, or *the*, story.

In Sterne's extensive introduction of items from various cultural repertories, we can still recognize the alliance between humorism and encyclopedism which Rabelais established. In Diderot's particular use of erring as a central binding thread and in the juxtaposition of his own polar types Jacques and the master, we recognize the stronger pull of Cervantine example. One result is a different focus in Diderot's novel on the question: how can, and how do, separate human subjects relate? Whereas Sterne faces the issues head-on through a first-person beholder of himself as a beholder,

Diderot acts as if the novelist is the Moi trying to behold others whom he encounters as third persons. But something very strange occurs. When these third-persons such as Jacques are described, they often tell stories and treat the persons in them as third-persons, while addressing their own direct interlocutors in the second-person or Toi status. And, as in Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, narrated third-persons may suddenly turn up as presences within the fictional framework of the human caravan that wanders in the late eighteenth century. In parallel, Diderot allows narrative structures to metamorphose before our eyes into dramatic structures, with speakers listed sequentially. He reveals at a stroke how closely literary conventions, as well as ordinary grammar, model the ways we engage the world imaginatively in everyday life. While we cannot disengage our existence from language, including the deceptions enabled by language, gonopsychological forces implicitly produce this web of linguistic forms. Through language a self-reconstituting deep natural structure expresses itself. Thus, as is the case for Sterne, the game of literature can point us to the rules of life even though we see a myriad of ploys in language by which human beings try to bend life and spirit into unsustainable patterns. It is not only through the symbiotic contest between Jacques and his master that the latter's rationalist code, like that of Walter Shandy, is called into question. The very method of Diderot's novel challenges the notion that rational observers can produce discourses which are superior to the third-person objects captured in them. Instead, in the slippage back and forth among grammatical persons, as well as in the shifts of generic and narrative point of view, we now have a Romantic model of a subjective world. Its harmonies and discords are a coproduction of reciprocal author-readers. In the act of fabulation itself are intimations of ontological significance.

4

In what sense, then, is it legitimate to regard Sterne and Diderot as the intermediaries of an already preshaped understanding which, in later instances will suffuse the more decidedly hermetic encyclopedic works of Modernism such as Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924), and by the 1960s will pass down to such postmodern successors as John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*? Foregrounding the game of literature as a central thematic concern is not by itself determinative of the main generic direction.[7] For example, although *La pícara Justina* is premised on its thematic involution of the entire development of picaresque writing in the preceding century, Úbeda's book

achieves a different level of complexity from the humoristic game in the contemporary *Don Quixote*. And while remaining generically a cosmic drama, Goethe's revolutionary work *Faust*, written two centuries after the *Quixote*, actually bears closer affinity to the humoristic line of the novel, because in addition to the playful theatrical consciousness in *Faust* that rivals the vogue of Romantic irony, it engages the cultural heritage of three millennia as our aggregate and composite repertory.[8]

Crucial in the case of Sterne is that he takes over from Rabelais not just the poetological example of how to play with literary frameworks, but reconfirms the metaphysical fascination for repertories. As it has evolved down to postmodernism, humoristic writing leaves mere poetological games behind and strives to raise our acquired repertories to fuller consciousness. It is not surprising that in both *Ulysses* and *Der Zauberberg*, the tendency is toward dissolving the cultural actors into social types and mythological archetypes, rather than continuing the Enlightenment focus on the singularity and integrity of the individual person as the main subject-matter. Long before any deconstructive exercises of postmodernism, the great modernist humoristic visionaries continue the example from *Faust* where imaginatively we fluctuate between seeing the chief figure as a protagonist in a particular historical setting and recognizing his function as a vessel or channel for repertorial elements. If the patterns of the body and psyche, according to older and newer anthropological and psychological teachings, play their part as paradigms in the larger business surveyed by Joyce and Mann, they are in this respect loyal followers of the Sternean turn. Within the surrogate god-games of *Ulysses* and *Der Zauberberg*, a particular figure - Stephen and Hans - may acquire the internalized role of an observing, quasi-authorial consciousness. There is no longer a master subjective identity like Tristram speaking to us in place of the demiurgic outer narrating voice. In Joyce's and Mann's post-symbolist educational heroes the general experience of witnessing how the individual dissolves into the typological and mythological intertext, into the bigger repertory, merely gathers in epiphanic peaks (Gillespie 1992: 285-304). The mind of the reader-writer of the ongoing repertory is woven into the work's textuality; hence actively or passively the artist role confirms the hermetic nature of the game. Whether or not the poet reaches in hope and faith for some hold and embraces possibilities detected in the repertorial choices, or whether as in the case of some postmodern works the debunking and refusal of the choices is paramount, the act of representing these choices is infused with the desire for critical capacity. Without that, a saturnine death would reign in literature. As Mann shows in *Der Zauberberg*, every such attempt implicates the living writer or any human educational protagonist in recognizing the power of the dead,

of the past, of evolutionary and cultural heritages (Gillespie 1991: 362-381). Humorism enables seeing the attributes of one's own times as elements in a moving process, and facing what Rabelais long ago depicted in the epochal crisis of the Renaissance: on the one hand, the perplexities of human judgment, but on the other the need for that creative vital spirit which, on a deep level of etymology and history, links the terms humour and human. The humanistic mega- and meta-narrative is the eternal story of choosing in a puzzling game that contains us all and will transcend us.[9]

Notes

1. The original French version of the essay, "L'héritage décrié de Cervantes" is included in Kundera (1986).

2. Schlegel's main statement on narrative occurs in "Brief über den Roman", as part of his *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800). On the role of irony in narrative and other forms of expression, both Romantic and post-Romantic, consult Garber (1988).

3. On the spiritual affinity with European Baroque drama, see the chapter "Erring and Wayfaring in Baroque Fiction: The World as Labyrinth and Garden" (Gillespie 1988).

4. For a fuller treatment of this major humoristic narrative of the late Baroque, see Gillespie (1994).

5. See the chapter "Estebanillo and Simplex: Two Baroque Views of the Role-Playing Rogue in War, Crime and Art (with and Excursus on Krull's Forebears" in Gillespie 1988).

6. Included in the collection *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981).

7. In the essay "Valle-Inclán and James Joyce: From *Ulysses* to *Luces de Bohemia*" (1991), Darío Villanueva helpfully expounds a broader framework of spiritual affinities in modernist experimentation, which in his view fuses aspects of the symbolist and naturalist heritages.

8. For a comprehensive examination of the kind of consciousness informing the modernist novel across Europe, consult Villanueva (1994).

9. A similar version of this paper will be published in the *Actas del Simposio de la Sociedad Española de Literatura General y Comparada*. I am grateful to the editor Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza and to Carlos G. Gual, President of SELGyC, for permission to reuse extensive portions.

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