How to Analyze Texts that Were Burned, Lost, Fragmented, or Never Written

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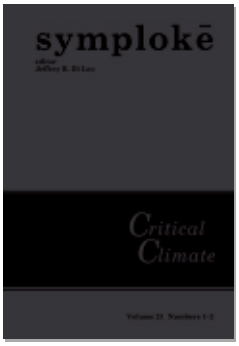

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> *Fragment: beyond fracturing, or bursting, the patience of pure impatience, little by little suddenly.*
>
> —Maurice Blanchot (1995, 34)

> *These fragments I have shored against my ruins*
>
> —T.S. Eliot (2002, 69)

Works which were written and were burned, like ghosts, leave something of their trace behind; that is to say, the potential of a lone title belonging to either an imaginary or destroyed work contains within it the ability to conjure an entire literary world that signifies as one of the potential books in Borges' Library of Babel. The title of an imaginary and/or destroyed work acts like an aphorism, a fragmentary piece of text that contains within it several layers of significations and potential significations.

I will return more fully at the end of this essay to the theoretical implications of a hermeneutics of the fragment, even if the theoretical case to be made will, of necessity, be less "full" and rather, as partial and fragmented as its object. For now, I wish to approach these theoretical matters by way of analyses of a number of literary texts, namely Eco, Borges, Lovecraft, Sade, Nabokov, and Joyce.

Traditional thinking of the fragment would site the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers as the exemplars of a theory of the fragment. In many cases, the only remnants of many Greek philosophers' oeuvres are via fragments of their writings recorded by subsequent philosophers (Socrates in the case of Plato) or doxographers (such as Diogenes Laertius).

Therefore, there is no original text to cite or analyze in its entirety when considering the philosophical writings of say, Empedocles or Heraclitus. The philosophical fragments of Hellenic philosophers will not be my focus; instead, I am interested in the implications of the fragment/supplement in relation to poetics or literary criticism, especially considering the recent publication of Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* (2009) and the translated notes of the Marquis de Sade's *The Days at Florbelle* (2003). By using the theoretical concepts of the *fragment* and the *supplement* as a guide, I will briefly sketch out a history of such a hermeneutics through three different categories of absent or partially-absent texts: 1) *imaginary fragments* will be highlighted in the works of Umberto Eco, Jorge Luis Borges, H.P. Lovecraft, and Luigi Serafini in order to demonstrate that the "imaginary" and non-existent texts created by these writers and artists manifest as supplemental textualities; 2) *biblioclasmic or destroyed texts* will be epitomized in the work of the Marquis de Sade whose self-declared "magnum opus" was burned after his death by his son, who was seeking to save the world from his father's depravity; and 3) *saved fragments* will be focused on, primarily in the work of James Joyce and Vladimir Nabokov. Both of these examples (Joyce and Nabokov) highlight the benefit and textual complexity of scholarly engagement with fragmented texts, demonstrating how in the case of Joyce, fragmentation illustrates his theoretical concerns with the "epiphany," and in Nabokov, his final work becomes a collaborative product with his son, Dmitri.

Unfortunately, given the terrain that I will cover, this essay will itself feature a somewhat fragmented style; this is, I feel, unavoidable given the breadth of such a history of textual fragmentation. It may be possible, in another context, to focus on one or two texts and delve deeply into their fragmentation in a methodical and linear way. My intention in this essay is, rather, to begin to think through a literary criticism of fragmented, lost, or imaginary texts—to offer a hermeneutics of absent textuality—in order to better understand a metaphysical arche-writing that can only ever remain as "virtual" or potential textual-production. Blanchot suggests that fragmented texts inevitably lead to rupture and what he calls a "writing of the disaster": "*When all is said, what remains to be said is the disaster. Ruin of words, demise writing, faintness faintly murmuring: what remains without remains* (the fragmentary)" (1995, 33, original emphasis).

The fragment is that which remains after either the biblioclasmic event (as in the case of manuscript burning), or the title that suggests the totality of an imaginary work (as in the case of texts that do not exist), while the supplement can be considered the potential space that is occupied by the text that no longer exists (or never did).

The Imaginary Fragment: The Manuscript in Absentia

Umberto Eco conjures an imaginary textual goose chase in *The Name of the Rose*. In Eco's fictional preface, he writes: "I was handed a book written by a certain Abbé Vallet, *Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d'après l'édition de Dom J. Mabillon* (Aux Presses de l'Abbaye de la Source, Paris, 1842)" (1994, 1). As Eco describes his "intellectual excitement" (1) over the discovery, he recounts his secondary discovery of Adso's story, "as I was browsing among the shelves of a little antiquarian bookseller on Corrientes, not far from the more illustrious Patio del Tango of that great street, I came upon the Castilian version of a little work by Milo Temesvar, *On the Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess*. It was an Italian translation of the original, which, now impossible to find, was in Georgian (Tbilisi, 1934)" (3), in which he finds a similar description from the Vallet manuscript. Eco mentions that: "there are also visions of books as yet unwritten" (3), and indeed, as he describes the academic sleuthing he went through to recount Adso's story we learn of the various layers of bibliophilic encasement. Eco explains in the postscript that in order to feel "free" to write about the sleuthing of a Franciscan monk in the Middle Ages he had to mask his historical distance from the topic by hiding his authorial voice behind "four levels of encasement": "My story, then, could only begin with the discovered manuscript, and even this would be (naturally) a quotation. So I wrote the introduction immediately, setting my narrative on a fourth level of encasement, inside three other narratives: I am saying what Vallet said that Mabillon said that Adso said…." (512). It is a shame that Eco admits in the postscript that the preface was a fabrication because by inventing the trail of the text through various imaginary manuscripts—Mabillon, Vallet and then Temesvar—Eco is enriching the text by constructing a broader text or paratext that the novel is added to. Eco traces Adso's narrative to the Abbaye de la Source, but discovers there that the abbey's presses had not published the Vallet book: "French scholars are notoriously careless about furnishing reliable bibliographical information, but this case went beyond all reasonably pessimism. I began to think I had encountered a forgery" (3). This entertaining fictional confabulation can best be conceptualized in Eco's own declamation that "there are also visions of books as yet unwritten" (3); a claim that I adopt as one of the theses of the present essay. The intellectual vision of an imaginary text suggests an imaginary hermeneutics and criticism that speaks to both the agency of the reader and also the agency of the critic in a way that a text that exists in its totality resists. Despite Barthes and New Criticism, the author remains on the title page and in the text's creation whether we want to acknowledge her/him or not. However, by considering texts that are lost, burned, or imaginary, a new agentic force is adoptable by both the reader and literary critic in that both reading and literary criticism become a conceptual writing that creates a metatext by extending beyond the physical object of the book/text. Another

way to put this would be to say that I am considering the phenomenology of imaginary and/or lost texts/manuscripts.

Obviously, it is impossible to discuss Eco's *The Name of the Rose* without addressing Jorge Luis Borges. Beyond the fact that the murderer in the *The Name of the Rose* is a blind monk named "Jorge," Eco's fictional preface conjures up the similarly sleuthing scholarly stories of Borges. In "Pierre Menard, Author of Don Quixote" Borges lists the so-called "visible works" of Pierre Menard in eulogistic fashion, and then discusses at length what can only be called Menard's "invisible work": "This work, possibly the most significant of our time, consists of the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of Part One of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of the twenty-second chapter" (1962, 48). Menard's intention—a dirty word for Barthes and New Critics—is described as follows: "It is unnecessary to add that his [Menard's] aim was never to produce a mechanical transcription of the original; he did not propose to copy it. His admirable ambition was to produce pages which would coincide—word for word and line for line—with those of Miguel de Cervantes" (49). The primary axiom of the Pierre Menard story is that by re-writing Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, word for word and line by line in a different historical context than the "original," the text becomes phenomenologically and hermeneutically "new" because of this difference. It becomes possible to use contemporary philosophies of language to approach the "new" *Don Quixote* that were unavailable to the "old" version and render incisive readings that deny anachronistic fallacy; this is how "[t]he text of Cervantes and that of Menard are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer" (52).

The narrator writes: "I have thought it is legitimate to consider the 'final' *Don Quixote* as a kind of palimpsest, in which should appear traces—tenuous but not undecipherable—of the 'previous' handwriting of our friend" (54). To follow the logic of Borges, if the story itself were re-written by say, myself in the present historical context, then the potential interpretations of the earlier quote would look nearly synonymous to a theoretical apparatus of Derrida.[1] This is what is allowed by considering a literary criticism of imaginary texts: a conceptual hermeneutics that would otherwise remain out of bounds for the scholar.

Another example from Borges' oeuvre is "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" in which the narrator finds the "*Anglo-American Cyclopaedia*" in a mirror and learns that Bioy Casares' copy has an extra four pages in it and an article on an imaginary world called "Uqbar." This is the narrator's first exposure to the land of Uqbar, but then he finds the following book:

[1]Because Derrida was not alive during the time of Cervantes, then what Borges proposes is that the philosophical advancements of any given time influence the potential interpretive readings of texts. Therefore, if I re-wrote the *Don Quixote* that Menard re-wrote from Cervantes, a Derridean reading could be applied to my re-writing by tracing the lineage through the various iterations of *Don Quixote* (Derrida is, of course, only one possible theorist to apply to this line of reasoning).

> The book was written in English, and had 1001 pages. On the yellow leather spine, and again on the title page, I read these words: *A First Encyclopedia of Tlön*. Volume XI. Hlaer to Jangr. There was nothing to indicate either date or place of origin…. It was two years since I had discovered, in a volume of a pirated encyclopedia, a brief description of a false country; now, chance was showing me something much more valuable…. Now, I had in my hands a substantial fragment of the complete history of an unknown planet. (1962, 21)

The number of false appendices, analecta, and scholarly forgeries in Borges are countless; however, the rendering of both Tlön and the "invisible works" of Pierre Menard, when contrasted to the abject fiction of Lovecraft, can be seen as a preliminary bricolage or "canon" of imaginary literature.

Lovecraft's writing is, like Borges', filled with references to imaginary manuscripts, the most popular of which is likely the *Necronomicon*. In the "Call of Cthulhu," Lovecraft writes:

> No book had ever really hinted of it, though the deathless Chinamen said that there were double meanings in the *Necronomicon* of the mad Arab Abdul Alhazred which the initiated might read as they chose, especially the much-discussed couplet:
>
> 'That is not dead which can eternal lie,
>
> And with strange aeons even death may die' (1997, 65)

Lovecraft utilizes the rhetorically persuasive force of the citation to amplify the binary in his work between real/unreal, or real/surreal. The power of references, appendices and citations, work to legitimize an argument or logical progression of propositions. Therefore, it is used to great effect in horror literature by promoting fear of the unknown, lost, or mysterious. Lovecraft forces the reader to engage in an activity similar to the one experienced by viewers of *The Blair Witch Project* where it was believed (at least initially) that the footage was in fact the remaining footage of a failed excursion in the woods. Lovecraft cites text from a book that does not exist; however, by citing textual fragments, Lovecraft is essentially writing the extant text into an imaginary topological space of hypertextual potential. Consider the following passage from "The Dunwich Horror":

> At first the syllables defied all correlation with any speech of earth, but towards the last there came some disjointed fragments evidently taken from the *Necronomicon*, that monstrous blasphemy in quest of which the thing had perished. These fragments, as Armitage recalls them, ran something like '*N'gai, n'gha'ghaa, bugg-shoggog, y'hah; Yog-Sothoth, Yog-Sothoth*….' They trailed off into nothingness. (1997, 117)

Lovecraft finds in books, especially arcane manuscripts and antiquated volumes, the whiff of something alluring and mysterious, a detective story as yet untold (which is how Eco approaches it). Where Borges uses arcane manuscripts to create a sort of surrealist textual space within which to explore the relationship between writer and reader, Lovecraft uses imaginary texts to incite fear. For Lovecraft, older texts become repositories of hidden, unknown or prohibited knowledge; for example, in "Hunter in the Dark," when Blake finds the pile of forbidden books, Blake notes that:

> They were the black, forbidden things which most sane people have never even heard of, or have heard of only in furtive, timorous whispers; the banned and dreaded repositories of equivocal secrets and immemorial formulae which have trickled down the stream of time from the days of man's youth, and the dim, fabulous days before man was. He had himself read many of them—a Latin version of the abhorred *Necronomicon*, the sinister *Liber Ivonis*, the infamous *Cultes des Goules* of Comte d'Erlette, the *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* of von Junzt, and old Ludvig Prinn's hellish *De Vermis Mysteriis*. But there were others he had known merely by reputation or not at all—the Pnakotic Manuscripts, the *Book of Dzyan*, and a crumbling volume in wholly unidentifiable characters yet with certain symbols and diagrams shudderingly recognisable to the occult student. (2005, 792)

The effect of a word—"necronomicon"—has inspired others, notably the mononymous editor Simon, to write a version of the *Necronomicon*. Simon's manuscript indicates in the preface that: "[t]he present manuscript was delivered into the hands of the Editor by a priest who had managed to get ordained through uncanonical methods" (1980, xxxi). Simon's *Necronomicon* includes "The Testimony of the Mad Arab" which literalizes the merely whispered of fragmental aspects of Lovecraft's mythos. I will not discuss Simon's text in detail because I feel that it denies my focus on the fragment; however, I will say that it is quite telling that the fragment of a title can inspire an entire subsequent text to be written that purports to be the original.

A First Encyclopedia of Tlön, like the *Necronomicon* (Lovecraft's not Simon's), suggests a world that exists only in the imagination, but for that very reason, it renders agency to the experience of the reader and critic in the production of a hypertextual world/text that cannot be cited in traditional academic ways. The world of "Tlön may be a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth plotted by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men" (Borges 1962, 34). One possible hypertextual adaptation of Tlön is Luigi Serafini's *Codex Seraphinianus,* which depicts, in beautifully drawn images and asemic typology, the encyclopedic description of an imaginary world of alien/mythical beings, written in an untranslatable script. Even though Serafini's project is not an encyclopedic manifestation of the world of Tlön, I would argue that the contents of Serafini's *Codex* describe a world that may as well be Tlön, while also being an excellent example of conceptual literature. Unlike

A First Encyclopedia of Tlön (which Borges specifies is written in English), Serafini's *Codex* is written in an unknown language, akin to that used in the *Voynich Manuscript*—that old mystery of cryptography which has yet to be deciphered. These two manuscripts—Serafini's *Codex* and the *Voynich Manuscript*—can be considered exemplums of the supplement because, even though they are not fragmentary, they construct or depict an entire world exterior to the text, a world that cannot be accessed because the symbology of the writing hides its truth from the cryptographer.

Biblioclasmic Fragments: Lost/Destroyed Manuscripts

The remaining notes for Sade's monumental work *The Days at Florbelle*, contained in the so-called "Charenton Journals" mobilize the fragment/supplement relation because the work manifests as a hypertext in relation to Sade's oeuvre as a whole. Unfortunately, as John Phillips points out: "Sade's notes on *The Days At Florbelle* have drawn little more than passing comment from even the most assiduous of Sade scholars" (Sade 2003, 5-6). I intend to preliminarily address this problem. My approach of fragmental engagement runs counter to traditional ways of attending to notes and scribbles; however, it is my contention that Sade lived in such a manner that he made his life (as well as his writing) a part of his literary output. Much like Alfred Jarry, in adopting the persona of Pa Ubu, the Marquis de Sade can be said to adopt the mantle of one of his sadist protagonists. The back cover of *The Ghosts of Sodom* contains a description of *The Days at Florbelle* that adequately captures the imaginary potential of such a lost work: "'The Days At Florbelle'—a huge work deemed so pornographic that the only manuscript was burned by the police at the behest of Sade's own son." The imaginative experience of the reader and critic writes *The Days at Florbelle*, forging a final product necessarily far more frightening than Sade's own manuscript because the text itself is never completed. One pictures a massive work, well over 1000 pages, filling some 72 notebooks, the self-declared magnum opus of the Marquis. And one writes in those nonexistent pages, an endless reverie of debauchery, despair and the typical philosophical interludes that act as trademarks of Sade's style. The work becomes uncanny and morally unsettling because of its length, which is like one of Sade's immensely endowed libertines, hovering erect in the imagination of the potential reader and critic, more dangerous and perverse than anything that could be discovered in the "original" text. *The Days at Florbelle* may well be Sade's most extreme work, if only because it was destroyed, existing as a supplemental meme based on a title that reconstructs its narrative in relation to individual imaginations, perversions, desires, and fantasies. The excess of the work is infinite because there is no "real text" to be read or analyzed.

The title of the collection that contains the "Florbelle Notes" is titled *The Ghosts of Sodom* suggesting that *The Days at Florbelle* was Sade's attempt to re-write *The 120 Days of Sodom* which he believed had been destroyed or lost in the raiding of the Bastille (Sade 2003, 7-8).[2] *The 120 Days of Sodom* was written on a scroll over twelve meters long, which Sade hastily composed from October 22 to November 28, 1785; his attempted re-writing (*Florbelle*) was destroyed by his son, whereas the "original" of the *120 Days* was recovered.

All that remains of *The Days at Florbelle* exists as a fragment; that is to say, in Sade's own listing of the plot in his journal. Sade the man is as fragmented as his text in that his image resides in the fragmental and imaginary: only one real portrait exists of him and this portrait is ambiguous, giving us only a nondescript youth in profile. However, there have been countless imaginary portraits drawn of the Marquis, particularly during the surrealist period, and these seem to exemplify the status of Sade as the imaginary supplement, as if his name alone (in relation to the iconicity of his imaginary image) can exemplify the uncatalogued encyclopedia of unconscious perversions residing in the collective imagination of humanity. The description of the events of *The Days at Florbelle* can be considered a conceptual writing that elucidates the overview of a text that no longer exists: "The fifth volume contains eleven chapters of the same history and finishes with the twenty-fifth and the eighth day. From this point, the name of Adèle is changed to Amélie. Eudoxie is seriously molested, she feels the effects on her breasts and buttocks. There are no dialogues" (2003, 83). These details, the ones that Sade decides are imperative to the story he is telling seem humorous in their brevity and specificity. Sade's well-documented numerical obsession[3] is emphasized in his compiling of the story arc as is his obsession with personal names and histories. Take this plot fragment as an example; Sade describes how he has "rendered" King Louis: "I have given Louis a big cock and much apathy, and Soubise more talent. The Cardinal de Fleury is present—he only fucks in the mouth" (92), with the following note in the margins: "They dine and after dinner, the executions take place" (92). If this fragmentary synopsis were taken out the context of his journal and published, it could be considered a work of conceptual writing driven by an experimental utilization of the fragment as idea or concept. Sade's writing is repeatedly about contrasts, typically extreme contrasts, such as the contrast of Louis' "big cock" with "after dinner executions." Considering Sade's counting and listing mania—his listing of the various male names of characters in *The Days at Florbelle* beginning: "*Men*.—Octave; Théodore; Anastase…" (108) and so on, can be considered, in relation to the rest of the listing contained in the Charenton Journals, an anticipatory precursor of the list poem popularized by Kenneth Goldsmith in say, *6799* where he lists his entire musical collection of LPs and CDs in alphabetical order. The trope of listing in Sade is essential in that the

[2]Sade claimed that the loss of the *120 Days* caused him to shed "tears of blood" (1994, 184).
[3]See: Gray (1999), especially pages 189 and 239.

Sadean sexual encounter manifests as a listed breakdown of stage directions or crude instructions, which list with limited emotiveness the theatricalization of sexual intercourse. Each sexual encounter becomes fragmentary and, at its base, ephemeral for the Sadean character. As well, body parts take on the motif of the list and the fragment as anatomical parts seem to separate from the rest of the body and take on a significance of their own. Even though *The 120 Days* was never completed (it was originally meant to be double or triple the length of the existing work [Gray 1999, 266]), the listing of the various debauches towards the draft's end mimic the listing Sade utilizes to describe *The Days at Florbelle*. One can pick any point in the third and fourth part of the *120 Days* and see such prosaic similarity. I pick the following passage at random:

> THE 3RD. 11. *He used to like to slap the whore's face; as a mature man, he twists her head around until it faces backward. When so adjusted, one may simultaneously look at her face and at her buttocks.*
>
> 12. *Addicted to bestiality as a youngster, he now likes to have a girl depucelated by a stallion while he looks on. She ordinarily dies.*
>
> 13. *Once an ass-fucker, he now buries the girl up to her waist and maintains her thus till the lower half of her body rots.*
>
> 14. *Previously, he was wont to frig her clitoris, and he still does so, but more vigorously, employing one of his servants to keep at the work until the girl expires.* (1994, 630, original emphasis)

Of course, the numerical listing of such fragmentary debauches continues; consider the above passage from *120 Days* with this breakdown of *Florbelle* found in Sade's journal:

> Convent of young boarders where there is whipping. Meeting with the executioner's cart taking women to the guillotine. They publicly execute seven, including one who is pregnant. They whip little boys in a boarding-house. Farm where they fuck animals. They cut the throats of new-born children in their mothers' arms. Farm where stallions, horses and bulls fuck women. Four pregnant and naked whores being birched. The men amuse themselves with the soldiers who execute them…. Delicious force. Joséphine or the unhappy wife, a comedy. (2003, 110-111)

Beyond the obvious shock value associated with such a listing, it can also be said that what is so unsettling about these scenes (besides their content) is the use of the list as the primary narrative mode.

Sade's lists are broken into dissimilar singularities and each singularity metonymically stands-in for an event: the event itself is frightening and

exists only as a supplement to the terse brevity of the listed debauch. Sade's use of the list is essentially the implementation of the fragment within his prose-style, and it anticipates the list poem of conceptual writing. Also, the destroyed magnum opus of *The Days at Florbelle* exists within an imaginary state of the narrative supplement, which is simultaneously activated by the earlier draft of *Florbelle* found in the *120 Days*.

The fragment itself is a remaining trace of a larger writing that exists as an imaginary supplement; as a potential writing once written and now lost, only existing as pure potential in a sort of libidinous energy catalyzing in the mind of the reader and critic. Steve McCaffery writes of fragmentary traces in the following way: "the trace is the mark of an absence previously present. Like the print of Empedocles' sandal at the rim of Aetna, it is a derivative presence in our world" (2001, 207). The fragment or the trace is also indelibly etched into a Barthesian erotics of reading where intermittence (either the hint of a presence not present, or a fragment that lures to a supplement) acts as the foci of desire (both sexual and textual): "Is not the most erotic portion of a body *where the garment gapes*? In perversion (which is the realm of textual pleasure) there are no 'erogenous zones'…it is intermittence, as psychoanalysis has so rightly stated, which is erotic: the intermittence of skin flashing between two articles of clothing…it is this flash itself which seduces, or rather: the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" (Barthes 1975, 9-10). The collision between the sexual and the textual—which could be playfully termed *sextual*—is part of my interest in the trace of textual fragments, both real and imaginary. What Barthes suggests is that "intermittence" is of the utmost importance to the formation of desire: sexual desire is constructed on the basis of a fragmentary glimpse of skin. This fragmentary glimpse exists as what Baudrillard calls a "totality" so that the fragment becomes, surprisingly, a totality almost individuated from the larger totality of the body. To put this another way: the intermittent glimpse of skin becomes, like a fragmented text, both a particularity of a whole and *also* the singularity itself—in this sense then the glimpsed flash of skin, or the remaining fragment of a text becomes a fetish object that motivates desire, or a "filling in" of the missing information. The intermittent flash of skin becomes the icon of an overall sexuality, but remains constituted by a lack; a lack that must be filled in by a surrounding textuality that remains absent. What I call the "sextual" is precisely this glimpse, trace, or intermittent remainder of a larger and yet absent whole: an erotics of reading that initiates the relationship between the reader and the text during an experience in which the desire to "fill-in" missing information is itself fetishistic. I am using the term "fill-in" in a glib manner, but it is not meant to connote normative sexuality in any way, but rather to theorize an erotics of reading where what is "sextual" is motivated by an absence that the reader supplies, suturing herself/himself to the text in a way that the remaining fragment focalizes the libidinal energy of the text, making what is formally absent or fragmented, whole and coherent. For Sade, such *sextuality* is made more perverse by the increasing fragmentation in the *120 Days*

where the brevity of the listed debauch operates as a "garment that gapes," welcoming the reader into an experience of intermittence that is filled with the reader's own fantasmatic complicity (be it disgust, or enjoyment). The fragment then is a theoretical co-reader that supplies a hypertext *in absentia*.

Saved Fragments

Nabokovian scholars have been waiting decades for either the publication of Nabokov's final work, or its destruction. Because the last novel was never finished, it is a collection of 138 cue cards (or the equivalent of 30 printed pages). The book itself is beautifully designed: the cover is stark black with the author's name and the work's title fading into darkness at the far right. Below the title one can make out the dissipating wisp of "A novel in fragments." This "subtitle" (if it could be called that) adequately describes the state of Nabokov's "final novel" because it is assuredly not a novel, but a longish short story. Whatever the status of the story itself, and I leave it to other Nabokovians to argue over the merits of the text, I feel that the importance of the publication of *The Original of Laura* resides in the fact that it once again, now posthumously, confirms that Nabokov is a visionary of the literary postmodern. Insofar as Nabokov senior wrote out the text on his famous cue cards, the credit must be given to Nabokov junior who decided (along with Chip Kidd) to publish the cue cards intact within the binding. What is wonderful about the text is that it fully utilizes the fragment as the foundation of the published product: the text becomes an interactive and hypertextual experience for the reader, and this is how the work can be seen through the theory of the fragment. The reader has the option of removing each cue card along the perforated edges, and re-ordering the cue cards in any way, thus changing the progression of the story as Nabokov himself would have done (2009, xxi). Of course, such a novel would never have been published if it weren't for Nabokov's celebrity: Nabokov's name (as a signifier) is what initially lures the prospective reader, followed by a knowledge of Nabokov's own compositional practices (that of the cue card) that incites engagement with the facsimile reproductions of each card and the potential re-ordering of them. *The Original of Laura* is an experiment in reading where the reading is never finished because the text has countless permutations depending on the order of the cards. It is fitting that so many years after *Pale Fire*, which still can be considered one of the best examples of the postmodern novel, Nabokov's publishing career is capped-off with *The Original of Laura*, a book that befits the design merits of late postmodernism and the trend of conceptual writing.

Evoking Burroughs' own thematic experiments with the cut-up in *The Soft Machine*, *Nova Express*, and *The Ticket that Exploded*, Nabokov's *The Original of Laura* features a permutational design that acts as an exemplum of the Burroughs/Gysin cut-up. After each card is removed, the re-ordering can

have numerous numerical possibilities, echoing Raymond Queneau's own combinatoric experiment, *Cent mille milliard de poèmes*. Even though Nabokov senior did not intend for *The Original of Laura* to be published, he engages in a sort of communal experiment with his son, where Dmitri takes his father's unfinished product and creates an aesthetic experiment with it that exemplifies the legacy of his father's postmodern compositional techniques. I consider *The Original of Laura* to be a work that is "created" by both Vladimir and Dmitri Nabokov, providing an actualization of Lautréamont's dictum that, "Poetry" or writing, "should be made by all. Not by one" (qtd. in McCaffery 2001, 218).

Critical reviews of *Laura* have focused on the pitiful quality of the writing;[4] however, Nabokov's prose features interesting decisions that can be considered a conceptual writing of the fragment: "This is Flora of the close-set dark-blue eyes and cruel mouth recollecting in her midtwenties fragments of her past, with details lost or put back in the wrong order, TAIL betwe[e]n DELTA and SLIT, on dusty dim shelves, this is she. Everything about her is bound to remain blurry, even her name which seems to have been made expressly to have another one modelled upon it by a fantastically lucky artist" (2009, 85). Nabokov constructs Flora in relation to the fragment of the cue card: it is as if he knows that the work will remain unfinished with Flora remaining a character with a "fragmented past" who will "remain blurry." The capitalizations that occur as well as the misspellings throughout the text can be considered loci of the fragment where the larger words bring attention to an unaccustomed reading process in that reading a story off cue cards is a radically altered experience. The narrator describes the reception of *My Laura* (sometimes called *Laura*), which becomes an imaginary text within *The Original of Laura*: "The novel My *Laura* was begun very soon after the end of the love affair it depicts, was completed in one year, published three months later[,] and promptly torn apart by a book reviewer in a leading newspaper. It grimly survived and to the accompaniment of muffled grunts on the part of the librarious fates, its invisible hoisters, it wriggled up to the top of the bestsellers' list then started to slip, but stopped at a midway step in the vertical ice" (117). This use of *mise en abyme* within a fragment combines two interests in this essay: the potential of an imaginary title and the potential of an unfinished fragment.

The Original of Laura was saved from the fire by Nabokov's son (as was *Lolita* by his wife, Vera), as was Virgil's *The Aeneid* by Augustus Caesar as was Kafka's oeuvre by Max Brod. Another work saved from its biblioclasmic fate was James Joyce's *Stephen Hero*, rescued from the fire by his wife, Nora. *Stephen Hero* is an earlier draft of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and was a massive work at nearly 1000 pages, the remaining fragment of which begins at page 519 and ends at page 902. Other fragments of earlier sections have also been recovered. It is a strange experience to begin

[4]See: Amis (2009), Theroux (2009), and Walsh (2009).

reading a manuscript at page 519 because the reader is quite literally thrown *in medias res*, a compositional tactic that Joyce will employ throughout *Dubliners*. However, whereas in *Dubliners* the stories begin in the narrative middle of things, *Stephen Hero* begins in the middle due to an unintentional biblioclasmic purge. Part of my interest in the fragment is that it illustrates a direct collision between the real, material object of the book (fire, destruction) and the imaginary (the narrative itself).

Stephen Hero begins with "anyone spoke to him mingled a too polite disbelief with its expectancy" (1963, 23), a sentence fragment that anticipates the experimental textual dissonance of the beginning of *Finnegans Wake*: "riverrun, past Eve and Adam's from swerve of shore to bend of bay" (2000, 3). Reading *Stephen Hero* is an experience that suggests the lick of the flames on each page and the revisions, excisions, and alterations by Joyce. The corrections that Joyce incorporates were typically in red or blue crayon; hence, the editor introduces a code so that the reader can know that text inbetween << and >> was excised by Joyce. Words that were changed are incorporated within brackets. Another intriguing temporal shift in the reading process occurs at points like the following: "He had a plausible manner with everyone and was particularly—[*Two pages missing*] of verse are the first conditions which the words must submit to" (1963, 25). This progression, though unintentional, exemplifies modernist techniques of readerly unbalancing. Textual fragmentation is a useful compositional experiment: if a writer/poet takes a combinant text and burns it, giving the text over to the chance creation/destruction of the fire, then the fire is itself an author; in the example of *Stephen Hero*, the fire competes with Joyce for the author's name on the title page. In the instance of the burned manuscript, the fire creates a conceptual writing dependant on chance composition.

Stephen Hero is notable in Joyce's oeuvre because it is the only instance where Joyce describes his theory of the epiphany. Stephen is walking with Cranly when they overhear the following fractured conversation: "The Young Lady—(drawling discreetly)…O, yes…I was…at the…cha…pel… The Young Gentleman—(inaudibly)…I…(again inaudibly)…I…The Young Lady—(softly)…O…but you're…ve…ry…wick…ed …" (211). Stephen describes this moment as the epitome of "epiphany": "This triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments" (211). By separating life into heterogeneous moments that exist in their own singular particularity (or what Baudrillard would call the "fragment"), Joyce emphasizes the singular in the particular, a dawning awareness in a moment that is only a fragment of a larger moment, or one instant in a series of moments. The experience of such peripeteia acts as an example of "epiphany" where events change, perceptions alter, or reality

becomes highlighted as "real." Following from Joyce's aesthetic theory of the epiphany, and using his term as another loci in a theory of the fragment, then every epiphany can be said to reveal a supplemental externality, exteriority or radical alterity underwriting all writing, or undergirding all discourse. The epiphany is, in essence, a fragmented experience, a moment that is entropic in its brevity but timeless and total in its after effects. Therefore, it is easy to see that epiphanies act as architectural (or architextual) moments of sculptural (or scriptural) reinforcement in either life itself or the various texts that one encounters during life.

Derrida suggests, in his work on aphorisms, that "[a] thesis poses something in the place of nothing or of the lack" (2008, 123), and in this way I must acknowledge the anxiety of this essay that proposes a seemingly impossible hermeneutical theory where even the possibility of the thesis itself is under erasure and dissolution. What texts can be used to support such an argument? The texts I use, if they exist at all, manifest as fragments, which Derrida sees through an aphoristic mode, claiming that "[d]espite their fragmentary appearance, they [aphorisms] signal toward the memory of a totality, at the same time ruin and monument" (2008, 125). My use of "fragment" and "supplement" derives from a collision between Derrida and Baudrillard, two thinkers who are, admittedly, very different. However, both philosophers are interested in spaces of paradoxical absence: Derrida in relation to writing and Baudrillard in his late work embraces the image of the fragment. Baudrillard writes about aphorisms that: "[e]tymologically, *aphorizein* contains the idea of separating, isolating. It's a fragment, but a fragment that creates a whole symbolic space around it, a gap, a blank" (2004, 26). An aphorism exists as both a *fragment* and also as a *totality*, existing in a problematic space of undecidable textuality. Derrida asserts that "[a]n authentic aphorism must never refer to another. It is sufficient unto itself, a world or monad" (1997, 121). An aphorism is both whole and fragmented, and any fragment is also a totality. Baudrillard, however, is against the perceived totality provided by an intact text: "Against wholes…, against the integrist imagination, we have to move over, strategically, to the fragment, restoring its singularity to it" (2004, 27). Much like the fragment, the supplement also retains its singularity insofar as it exists inbetween presence/absence, residing in an ambiguous space of imaginary plenitude: "The sign is always the supplement of the thing itself" (Derrida 1997, 145). Derrida situates the supplement in relation to a potential semiotics, a semiotics that announces the crisis of grammatology, while also providing the unique possibility of a new writing if considered in relation to the fragment. Derrida asserts that, "the supplement is *exterior*, outside of the positivity to which it is super-added" (1997, 145), while Baudrillard writes that "[t]he fragmentary is the product of a resolve to destroy a totality and the will to confront emptiness and disappearance" (2004, 28). There is a slight difference (*différance*) here that I would like to emphasize: I define the fragment as the result of an unsuccessful disappearance (as in the burned manuscript), whereas the

supplement is exterior to the remaining fragment insofar as the supplement refers to that grammatological space that existed when the original text also existed. The supplement can be theorized as the imaginary product of the fragment. Derrida himself defines the "supplement" as: "the concept of the supplement—which here determines that of the representative image—harbors within itself two significations.… The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude enriching another plenitude, the *fullest measure* of presence" (1997, 144), but later, he modifies this definition by adding: "the supplement occupies the middle point between total absence and total presence" (157). The supplement is the excess—either imaginary or symbolic—that is constructed in relation to the fragment's potentiality: the fragment offers a conceptual writing of plenitude in that it is a textuality that has been authored by destructive forces, offering seemingly infinite possible texts that may theoretically ascribe "completion" to any fragment. I define the supplement as the theoretical number of possible "completing texts" that may fill in any fragment. However, perhaps more radically, I see these "virtual texts" as being operative—literally a present-absence—within and around any fragment.

The dialectic between fragments and supplements is undecidable because a fragment necessarily invokes supplemental virtual texts that exist only as possibility, while still being a fragmentary remainder. The supplement similarly invokes the fragmentary in that it never achieves firm purchase or coherency at any point, being both a singularity and fragment. Derrida writes that "[t]he aphorism decides, but as much by its substance as by its form, it determines by a play of words" (2008, 117), words that remain as obscure marks (burned remnants) of a literary purge.

This essay can be considered a preliminary hermeneutic theory that attempts to respond to Borges' "Library of Babel" in which: "The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, perhaps an infinite, number of hexagonal galleries" (1962, 79). Borges asserts that "The Library exists *ab aeterno*" (80) and that, "the library comprised all books" (83). Therefore, the library is a supplement to the entire canon of literature. Borges emphasizes that, "it is enough that a book be possible for it to exist. Only the impossible is excluded" (85). The possible books that are assembled in this library are supplements to the canon, but also supplements to only partially finished, lost, or burned texts. The fragment/supplement folds in on itself, becoming an undecidable difference that points to the same irreducible problem—the problem of writing and arche-writing itself. For Derrida, writing exists alongside all potential writing (or arche-writing), so that all writing is not only actual, but also, virtual. Blanchot writes regarding the fragmentary:

> The passive need not take place. Rather, implicated in the turn which deviates from the ever-turning, circuitous path and becomes in this way—with respect to the longest tour—a detour, the passive is the torment of the time which has always already passed and

> which comes thus as a return without any present. It comes without arriving in the patience of the unrecountable era. This is the era destined to the intermittence of a language unburdened of words and dispossessed, the silent halt of that to which without obligation one must nonetheless answer. And such is the responsibility of writing—writing which distinguishes itself by deleting from itself all distinguishing marks, which is to say perhaps, ultimately, by effacing itself (right away *and* at length: this takes all of time), for it seems to leave indelible or indiscernable traces. (1995, 33-34)

The virtual assemblage of arche-writing (which can also be called "The Library of Babel"), similarly leaves "indelible or indiscernable traces" of itself in the world as actualized fragments. The fragment *is* fragmentary, but it is also an undecidable totality, providing all the evidence, while simultaneously pointing to the absence of *all* evidence. The fragment, in this sense, resists being counted: it is both singular and multiple, existing in a strange space of the supplemental—opening up the heretofore chained doors of Borges' imaginary library.

I have attempted to peruse the shelves of this Borgesian library, searching for books that have been destroyed (Sade's *The Days at Florbelle*) and other books that are nothing but titular potential (Eco's *The Use of Mirrors in the Game of Chess*, *A First Encyclopedia of Tlön*, Abbé Vallet's *Le Manuscrit de Dom Adson de Melk, traduit en français d'après l'édition de Dom J. Mabillon*, and Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*). No doubt the shelves of Borges' imaginary library also contain the entire text of *Stephen Hero* and the completed version of *The Original of Laura*, but perhaps, like the supplement itself, the library only exists *ab aeterno* in the imagination.

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