

THE THIRD STATE: ETHICS AND AGENCY WITHIN HYBRID NARRATIVES

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by

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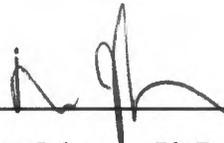
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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

I certify that I have read *The Third State: Ethics and Agency Within Hybrid Narratives* by Scott Joseph Campbell, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Comparative and World Literature at San Francisco State University.



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THE THIRD STATE: ETHICS AND AGENCY WITHIN HYBRID NARRATIVES

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San Francisco, California
2018

The Third State is an exploration of the consequences to individual agency in the process of inadvertent hybridization when competing narrative systems come into contact. This work takes as its beginning point the example of Don Quijote who in the course of his adventures becomes entangled in a narrative of hybrid and contradictory expectations that subvert his individual agency. Applying this basic framework to *Lord Jim* by Conrad and *La cena* by Aira, I will analyze how each author represents the disconnect between the protagonist's internal narrative and his experience in a social environment, and then continue on to consider what the consequences of the incorporation of such a rupture into the consequent entangled narrative systems are shown to be in each case. This work will focus on each author's approach to the question, along with considerations of consequences to individual agency with respect to the pursuit and achievement of the experience of happiness, the success and degree of authenticity in questions of interpersonal relationships, and of the doubtful possibility of authentic subjectivity in narrative contexts.

I certify that the abstract is a correct representation of the content of this thesis.



Chair, Thesis Committee

12/20/18

Date

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Introduction

In its most basic formulation, “narrative” is properly to be understood as “A spoken or written account of connected events; a story” (OED Online). This investigation will begin with a focus on the word ‘connected.’ At the outset this seems the loosest definition possible of the concept; how much flexibility does the story have if the events are obligated merely to be ‘connected’? Nearly infinite. But it is precisely in its one essential commandment that many of the latent dangers of narrative originate. The requirement that the events be connected has the effect of setting up an expectation in the reader, and this process of expectation and the satisfaction of it is the dynamic that rewards the reader for participating in the narratological process. But this expectation does not merely inform the communication, it permeates it. This system of expectation results in the problem that all information contained within the narrative falls broadly into one of two categories; fulfilled promises or red herrings. This text-reader relationship is expertly summarized by the special case of Chekhov’s gun; like the definition of narrative, this dramatic principle at first appears relatively simple: “If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there” (Gurlyand 521). If this gun does not go off, then it is unconnected to the rest of the text, violating not only artistic principles, as Chekhov is here asserting, but also the nature of narrative itself. If the gun does not go off, it undermines the ingrained culture of expectation/reward encoded in the concept of narrative. Chekhov regarded the presence of the unfired gun as an unfulfilled promise, and in his view “It's wrong to make promises

you don't mean to keep" (Goldberg 163). Chekhov was here addressing the economy of action, and in a wider view it is permissible, perhaps, that a gun hang on a wall that does not go off. But its inclusion in a narrative must nevertheless remain faithful to its connectedness. That is, it must impart something of meaning to the narrative. Its presence would in that case represent something of a mystery to unravel; for example, is the gun there to impart a sense of violence and rupture to an otherwise banal dialogue between spouses? In that case the gun functions symbolically to communicate meaning to the text, and is once again found to be integral. In short, narrative has no ability to reconcile the adventitious. And this understanding of a totally integrated world, where everything is necessary, every element is load bearing, is seductive.

The seductiveness of a totally integrated world is pervasive, and the desire for the system of patterns that underpins such an integrated world has been shown to be consistent with human psychology. Humans as a species are exceptional in their predisposition towards systems; an average individual will find patterns where there are none, and will develop systems to exploit those patterns. In a famous example of this, researchers devised an experiment in which a green light flashed 75% of the time and a red light 25%, but critically the lights changed at random. Rats participating in this experiment were rewarded with sugar water when they anticipated the color correctly, and quickly understood that if they chose green every time, they would be rewarded 75% of the time. Humans, on the other hand,

won't do what the rat does. They've seen that it's 75% green and they'll guess a pattern.... They'll start spewing out these red and greens in some weird pattern that's tailored to be 75% green and 25% red, thinking that they can...beat the system... And when you do that, you end up about... 60% of the time you get it right, instead of 75%. And so the humans are out performed by a rat.

Yes.

That's because we see patterns where there aren't any. That's just the way our minds work. (Dawkins)

This example expresses something of central importance to the question of narrative, and shows just how seductive patterns and systems are to humans, even when exercised to their own detriment. Narrative is precisely one of these forms that is so seductive. And where, in an example like the experiment with the lights, the truth value of the system can be ascertained and evaluated, the commensurate value encoded within a narrative text is usually impossibly complex and much more difficult to extrapolate. This is central to the work that follows. But even this understanding is not the end in itself, nor is it where the authors end their investigations of this principle. Rather, this work targets the consequences that follow from employing systems of narrative in interpersonal relations.

In all the texts examined in this work, the reader will find codifications of conventions in the form of narrative structure, which are then shown to have taken on a life of their own. While I believe that my findings might apply to conventions of the novel more generally, for the sake of expediency I will focus in these texts on how

conventions of the representation of self and others simultaneously encode other unseen literary conventions; in particular that they take for granted certain literary traditions such as singular narrative authority, and internally coherent ethical norms, and processes of interpersonal relationships. These silent riders to the systemization are so pervasive as to threaten to have total determining power over what is real and what is not to the participant in these systems. A total investigation of this is beyond the scope of this thesis, and I will limit my investigation to how these accidents of codification disrupt interpersonal interaction. More succinctly, in these texts I will review how the customs of self expression, codified in narrative form, limit and distort the ability to authentically engage others, and how this finally leads to a reciprocal disempowering of the individual to fully express himself through the tradition upon which he relies.

Little detective work is required to force any literature into revealing its secret associations, assumptions, and prejudices. Similarly in this work these deep structures are easy to comprehend. But it is the latter aspect where the bulk of this work's effort will be marshaled. The primary effort of the present work will be first to reveal these hidden structures in order to then demonstrate how these associations, assumptions and prejudices, when packaged into a single inflexible narrative, affect an individual's attempt at social engagement. All these texts demonstrate that when individuals are seduced into relying on these narrative structures by the promises encoded in the original conventions and the narrative structure's internally coherent form, and subsequently when this is done in the act of interpersonal engagement, there is subsequent process of distortion wherein either the conventions or the narrative structure must be warped. In all cases this process

is shown that not only are the subsequent narrative manifestations unreliable, but they are finally a hybrid form, neither exclusively the original structure or its associated conventions, nor that of the external element with which it has become engaged. In this point is where these works deserve special scholarly attention, but there is one step that all three works take that raises them above other representative texts and make them central to this investigation. In each work , these authors postulate a resultant narrative structure that is beyond the absolute control of the individual, and that by demanding the closure of the structures with which the individual has begun, the individual becomes trapped and powerless by the narrative that they themselves have employed: individual agency is subverted when relying on these structures. Yet in all cases it will be clear that the authors are placing the locus of critique on the proper use of these structures, rather than the structures themselves. And at this point all three texts gain value to the astute reader, in that in the process of relating these moments of encounter to the reader, each author positions the narrative in such a way that the reader himself is forced to go through a very similar - if not identical - process to those experienced by the characters in the texts. That is to say that each text leaves the reader in a position that is equally ensnared, disempowered, and indecipherable.

The impact of this sophisticated demonstration of disempowering entanglement is particularly salient to the devoted reader of fictions, and is undoubtedly part of what makes them all great works of art despite that each text takes as one of its main governing influences a narrative system that is generally considered in low esteem; tales of chivalry, sea adventure, and even zombie apocalypse. This is not an accident. These unbelievable

and perhaps ridiculous structures are the ones that are made to commingle with those narrative codes that dominate the perspectives of other characters within the text, and finally with those of the reader outside the text, creating a scenario wherein the characters are made ridiculous before the reader's eyes through this process of entanglement with ridiculous controlling codes. At the conclusion of each text, the authors intend that the reader discovers that he too has been infected with those same fabrications and illusions encoded into the genre in operation and are acceptable within the confines of the genre, but make no sense outside of them. The sorcerers of chivalry, for example, are hardly believable outside of those fictions; nor is, for example, the reanimation of the dead one would be willing to take for granted in a zombie film. But these unrealities extend beyond simple genre, and are perhaps encoded into the requirements of coherent narrative itself; the seductive promise of coherence at the heart of the narrative structure. Borges honed in on this point expertly in "Death and the Compass," when he had his detective comment on a hypothesis to how a murder occurred: "You will reply that reality hasn't the slightest need to be of interest. And I'll answer you that reality may avoid that obligation to be interesting, but that hypotheses may not. In the hypothesis you have postulated, chance intervenes largely. Here lies a dead rabbi; I should prefer a purely rabbinical explanation; not the imaginary mischance of an imaginary robber." (Borges, 130). Here Borges is speaking to the construction of a story, a hypothesis, which differs from reality in that it must be interesting, coherent, and can admit no random, extraneous elements. This is the narrative impulse in a nutshell, and, to pursue Borges' wisdom further, when the reader discovers that the murderer has laid a fatal trap for the detective by anticipating the

detective's desire for a coherent narrative, the reader is also made to understand that the narrative impulse is seductive, commodifiable, and can be used as a weapon. This amazing insight could be considered the starting point of this investigation. All the texts are permeated with this sensibility, but the authors of the three texts this work will explore also demonstrate the genesis of 'hybrid realities' that emerge when multiple genres engage. The hybrids found in these texts not only decenter any individual from authorial control but finally demand that the reader, disempowered in the same way, make evaluations based on unreliable and shifting criteria.

When, at the end of each narrative, the demands of the text require that the reader make certain assessments that are difficult if not impossible in the new hybrid context, the undecidability of each text becomes clear. But so too should the web of consequence winding out from the text to the reader, and on through the reader's own interpersonal engagements which are equally dominated by narrative expectations that cannot be fulfilled in a polyvocal authorial context. That there appears to be a persuasive assumption of truth content in the narrative form itself, and that combined with the already suggested notion that humans desire patterns on the one hand, potentially even over practical outcomes, as with the rat experiment and on the other hand the idea that, as suggested by Borges, artificial systems are preferable to an unstructured reality - even if that structure is constructed of fantasy - the trap in which all of these authors ensnare the readers becomes deeply troubling. These conditions become unavoidable, and, in the hands of these authors, the reader's own place in the midst of this disempowering morass of inextricable narrative entanglement becomes disturbing. The text first demonstrates

that these genre codes are ridiculous, but then makes them requisite in any proper evaluation of the text itself - requiring as it were, the reader to rely on the ridiculous code. But unlike the characters, the reader must commit this act knowing that the codes he must employ are unreliable. Narrative systems, in the hands of these authors, damn the reader to disempowerment of self determination in bringing about a conclusive reading based on his own autonomous codes of narrative evaluation, the consequent undecidability that erupts from being forced to evaluate according to the expectations of multiple narrative codes with divergent expectations and demands, and - the silver lining in all of this if the scholar will squint to look for it - the suggestion that there is still meaningful interpersonal engagement to be had if one can be content in such a quagmire of meaning and without the satisfaction of a uncomplicated and final conclusion. And so, the beginning:

Chapter 1: Hybridity and The Cervantean Metafictional Trap and Escape Plan

It is hard to read *Don Quijote* without reading it intertwined with the four hundred years of response that text has generated. Among the more influential in the modern context is that brief aside by Michel Foucault in *The Order of Things* when he discusses “Don Quijote as Hero of the Same.” In this text Foucault brilliantly perceives a semiotic allegory in which his adventures “mark the end of the old interplay between resemblance and signs and contain the beginning of new relations” (Foucault 792). His case is compelling and persuasive. Briefly said, Don Quijote is a sign, wandering the world seeking similitude with the chivalric texts whence he sprang to verify as it were, his own verisimilitude: “If he is to resemble the texts of which he is a witness, the representation, the real analogue, Don Quixote must also furnish proof and provide the indubitable sign that they are telling the truth, that they really are the language of the world. It is incumbent upon him to fulfill the promise of the books” (Foucault 793). Foucault says two things regarding Don Quijote’s adventures: firstly that he is seeking similitudes between the text and the representations all around him, and second and this is the more important - that he makes himself responsible for being the reality of the books in the world in order that those books be authenticated. His job is to enforce a direct correspondence between representation and being. The first aspect - that Quijote seeks similitude - is essentially more of a mechanism by which the second may operate: he looks for similarities over which he may lay the narrative structure that orders the world and authenticates his identity and agency according to his sensibilities. He wants, in

essence, to prove himself true, and in so doing, to totally determine reality according to a finite number of integrated, comprehensible terms.

Seeing Quijote's struggle in this way makes for a compelling reading. Quijote after all is obeying that very human need to know himself, his nature and his value, and to be a necessary piece of a complex system of order. But where he is not fashioning a pattern out of red and green lights, he is importing his from the pages of a book, and will discover that his book operates on different terms than those employed by the other elements he tried to incorporate. Foucault certainly understands the text in these terms - where signs and signifiers are at loggerheads, and where "lodged in the yellowed pages of books, the signs of language no longer have any value apart from the slender fiction which they represent. The written word and things no longer resemble one another. And between them, Don Quixote wanders off on his own" (Foucault 794). Specifically Foucault focuses on the relationship between the sign and signifier, and little else. But the text encodes much more than these static correspondences. Where Foucault wanted to reflect on a sign encountering its fundamental emptiness - which I believe to be the point of Cervantes' text in the more general sense of literature and genre- I believe that his assessment gets only partway to the understanding of the complications of agency as it is tied to the regulating codes of an internalized genre. Foucault's allegory could be expressed in a single adventure. Cervantes' lengthy volume, however, expresses more than merely the simple failure of correspondence between a representation of a thing and the thing itself. It presents the complex process in which first the notion of original semiotic emptiness is encountered, and then the entire narrative code - with all its

assumptions about the nature of relations between signs, all values and ethics - nothing less than an operating system as well as worldview for a character - is taken into a context in which it encounters other narrative codes and becomes modified as a result. That is, Quijote ends up acting as much like the merchants and prisoners he encounters as they end up acting like him.

Cervantes suggests that encounters between competing narrative systems diminish the authority of the subject employing the original narrative system, and trap him in a hybrid regulatory system that is beyond the authority of any individual. So where Foucault concludes with a Quijote unable to forge a correspondence between the representations contained in the text and the representations of the world all around him, Cervantes' text uses this as a starting point to show that the narrative code of a social individual is necessarily hybrid, and that, conversely, depending on an unmixed narrative code and demanding the satisfaction of that code's expectations leads to failure and ruin. But it will serve this effort to begin where Foucault begins and investigate the nature of Quijote's metafictional quest - whether as semiotic allegory, or with the consequent imposition of a narrative code dependent upon Foucault's failed signs.

The first great indication of Cervantes' mechanisms of hybrid narrative is with the identity of his protagonist: the text invents the central identity before the readers' eyes yet accepts it as a central fact of the narrative. One may doubt that Don Quijote is a true knight errant, but the reader is seduced by the narration and through endless repetition into forgetting that Quijote was anyone other than Don Quijote. The text is explicit that our main character's identity is indeterminate, unclear:

Quieren decir que tenía el sobrenombre de Quijada, o Quesada, que en esto hay alguna diferencia en los autores que deste caso escriben, aunque por conjeturas verosímiles se deja entender que se llamaba Quejana. Pero esto importa poco a nuestro cuento; basta que en la narración dél no se salga un punto de la verdad. (22; vol 1, ch 1)

It's said his family name was Quijada, or maybe Quesada: there's some disagreement among the writers who've discussed the matter. But more than likely his name was really Quejana. Not that this makes much difference in our story; it's just important to tell things as faithfully as you can. (Raffel 13)

Although the narrator tells the reader that the name isn't important, inserting the ambiguity here opens up a gap in the protagonist's identity that hovers over text that is specifically concerned with the process of naming. E.C. Riley very astutely places the protagonist of the first pages in context with the protagonist of the rest of the novel: "the confusion (of his historical name) corresponds to the indeterminate nature of Don Quixote's character before he went mad and became Don Quixote; it corresponds to his almost total lack of 'prehistory'" (Riley 117). The effect of this on the text is manifold: on the one hand it encodes a duality on the text where the reader technically knows that Quijada/Quesada becomes Quijote - and that like it or not, that first character is a rider within everything that is to follow. On the other hand, this is the first of innumerable

narrative tricks to prioritize the ostensible reality of Quijote - Don Quijote is much easier to imagine if we don't have to imagine an old hidalgo at the same time. That he has his first signifier further diminished by having it divided and ultimately questioned does the work of strategically positioning it so that it is all but invisible. Yet it is never gone. Cervantes positions the entirety of his text between the parentheses of the protagonist's shifting and indeterminate identity. It is not a trivial distinction; this ambiguity is never intended to be fully erased, and the course of the novel can be considered a progression to recomplicate an identity that here is so easily invented through an act of linguistic gestalt.

The progression of Quijote's recomplication is represented in his various attempts to implement his narrative system in the world with increasing complexity as he moves deeper into what I will label as a social dialectic. Throughout each adventure, Quijote experiments with one or another kind of mechanism for demanding conformity to his narrative system on those around him. In the most obvious episode, the reader finds Quijote attacking the windmills - an inanimate object - and having to narrate his way free. But Cervantes is careful to ensure that the narrative act adds complication to the narrative, rather than offering a solution. When Quijote invokes Frestón's antagonistic magic to explain his failure with the windmills, so too does he fall into the trap of an increasingly complicated narrative arc that puts more demands on him as the protagonist. A knight can hardly escape the expectation that he will confront and overcome his enemy; these relationships are the very material out of which the genre is fabricated.

Tests like these - in which Quijote exercises various mechanisms to enforce conformity to, and thereby bring into being, the expected relationship between all things -

form the bulk of the adventures of the first volume. First one thing, then another is tried, and each attempt complicates and dilutes Quijote's authority. Among the more visible of Quijote's early mechanisms deserves special attention: violence. But just as Quijote's attempt to narrate his way out of a contradiction in an earlier adventure merely complicated his situation, so too does the author end Quijote's experiment with violence by turning it back upon Quijote as the galley slaves attack him despite his 'rescuing' them. Having been persuaded to rescue them by their stories, Cervantes poses a negotiation between Quijote's narrative structure and the insuperable agency of the narrative systems of others. This is precisely Cervantes' purpose, for it is necessary to demonstrate through repeated failure the insufficiency of Quijote's mechanisms in order to finally exhaust the rigidity of his assumptions. Literary chivalry is smashed and cracked, and to continue, these cracks must be puttied with elements from external sources. From this point on, Quijote's narrative moves are tempered, incorporating various and increasing elements of other agent's narrative requirements into his own. Structurally, Quijote begins to move farther and farther from a storyline that he can ultimately complete. By the time the reader reaches the second volume, Quijote has failed in so many different and increasingly complicated ways, that the stage is set for Cervantes to bring his attention more fully to his hybrid hypothesis.

The increasingly sorrowful tone of the novel both develops in tandem with and serves as a marker for Quijote slowly backing away from his more genre appropriate mechanisms of bringing about his requisite narrative development. In their place the reader finds Quijote is incorporating tools adapted from his experience interacting with

other characters in his journey, which, while practical, distance him from the narrative he is desperately trying to engender.

Quijote reveals both the exhaustion the mechanisms of his imposing his narrative authority have suffered and how far his behavioral code has become composite in chapter 29 of the second volume, where the reader finds Quijote entering into an adventure by stepping onto what he takes to be an enchanted boat. This boat moves toward a mill, which Quijote believes imprisons someone he is destined to rescue. This predictably does not happen, and instead the boat is crushed by the mill wheel. Quijote makes the surprising move to relinquish his responsibility and leave the adventure for some other knight. If Cervantes' purpose were to demonstrate a simple failure of Quijote to impose a narrative system, he could very well end his investigation here. For nearly seven hundred pages Don Quijote has tried and failed to be the knight errant, and to form the world around his narrative drive; if it were Cervantes' purpose to say only this, Quijote's abrogation of knightly responsibility should mark the last act. But precisely here Cervantes makes his most surprising move; one that determines the nature of the trajectory of the rest of the novel, and indeed the nature of the novel as a whole. For it is here that Don Quijote encounters the Duke and Duchess, two characters who have read the first volume of Quijote's adventures avidly and are eager to meet him. And so at just this moment when Don Quijote's mechanisms for imposing his world view have come to a complete and quiet failure, the text introduces characters who have encountered Don Quijote's worldview and have been changed by them. What's more, they are eager to reform the world around them to align with Don Quijote's expectations. In other words,

at the point of nadir comes the realization that Don Quijote has succeeded in his quest to bring knight errantry into the world. And it is a horrible, horrible success. In what Cervantes realizes his most significant theoretical accomplishments: throughout the rest of the novel, Quijote is drawn into a web of competing narrative codes. Just as with the mill, he has contaminated his own narrative with that of the unnamed other knight, in his exchanges with the Duke and Duchess, he is forced to incorporate their narrative expectations into his own, while they are informed by Quijote's own, as represented in the first volume.

After the disappointing performance at the mill wheel, it would almost seem that the story could be summed up as an anachronistic identity engaging in the social dialectic, which, even if that identity is incapable of changing in the face of the new social reality, is nevertheless changed by its relationship to the other entities that populate the social space. Don Quijote is low spirited and pragmatic. He has admitted into his narrative elements that are difficult to rectify with his intended outcome. It does not look good for the hero. But almost immediately the world changes enormously as he comes upon the Duke and Duchess. Their introduction does a number of things simultaneously. First, it elevates the adventures from being played out among inn keepers and galley slaves and involves actual representatives of the nobility class. This fact lends verisimilitude to the knightly narrative as a whole and certainly to the events they orchestrate. It is among the nobility that chivalric tales typically take place, and in his quest for similitudes, this encounter is among the very first, very good proofs that what

exists in the yellowed pages are in fact true. Second, these nobles treat Don Quijote exactly as he expects to be treated. At their first sight of him, everything falls into place for Don Quijote:

Don Quijote se gallardeó en la silla. Púsose bien en los estribos, acomodóse la visera, arremetió a Rocinante y con gentil denuedo fue a besar las manos a la duquesa, la cual, haciendo llamar al duke, su marido, le contó, en tanto que don Quijote llegaba, toda la embajada suya, y los dos, por haber leído la primera parta desta historia y haber entendido por ella el disparatado humor de don Quijote, con grandísimo gusto y con deseo de conocerle, le atendían, con prosupuesto de seguirle el humor y conceder con él en cuanto les dijese, tratándole como a caballero andante los días que con ellos se detuviese, con todas las ceremonias acostumbradas en los libros de caballerías que ellos habían leído, y aun les eran muy aficionados. (681: vol 2, ch 1)

Don Quijote drew himself up in the saddle, settled his feet firmly in the stirrups, arranged his visor to perfection, set Rocinante in motion, and with his spirits high came forward to kiss the duchess' hands, while she, having called the duke, her husband, to her side, explained to him, as Don Quijote drew near, what our knight's message had been, and the two of them, having read the first volume of this history and having learned from that book exactly what form of lunacy afflicted Don Quijote, awaited their introduction to him with the greatest pleasure,

determined to indulge his madness and go along with whatever he said, dealing with him as a full-fledged knight errant for however long he might stay with them, with all the formalities set forth in the books of chivalry, which both of them had read and were extremely fond of. (Raffel 519)

This passage sets up a fascinating dynamic: the nobles know of Don Quijote and resolve to treat him as has expected to be treated, yet their familiarity with him comes through the accounts of his adventures as related in the first volume. That is, they know the version of Don Quijote that was framed by the overlapping texts and multiple narrators, and that has not existed after the close of the first volume. This means, of course, that they could not be familiar with the melancholy he exhibited in the adventure at the mill wheel, nor his eagerness to drop the fight, nor his willingness to use money as a unit of exchange instead of his otherwise consistently knightly mode of interaction as he does with the boat owner. Neither can it take into account Quijote's willingness to abandon an adventure to another hero. This takes on enormous significance later, as we will see. The Duke and Duchess have no idea that Quijote has already begun to exist in the context of a double narrative, or suspect the consequences of these changes. In what will follow, there will be a tangle of narrative impulses - Quijote, for his part, is still trying to find a way to complete his narrative. The Duke and Duchess provide the context in which Quijote can have the adventures he needs to bring about the completion of his narrative which requires above all that he free his lady Dulcinea from her enchantment - itself a complication brought about Quijote falling deeper into the narrative trap he began by

invoking Frestón. It would seem to be a partnership made in Heaven. But with the introduction of multiple authors introducing new narrative contexts, the reader discovers that multiple narrative codes come into contact in this exchange, and they are forced to coexist in a hybrid form that disempowers all represented authors from achieving their aims.

At first, this treatment gives Don Quijote what he has always sought: “...aquél fue el primer día que de todo en todo conoció y creyó ser caballero andante verdadero, y no fantástico, viéndose tratar del mismo modo que él había leído se trataban los tales caballeros en los pasados siglos” (683, vol 2, 31). (Finding himself treated exactly as he had always read that knights were treated, in ancient times, it was the first time he was ever convinced that he was a real rather than, somehow, an imaginary knight errant (Raffel 521). However, what begins as the culmination of all that Don Quijote has attempted to bring about – the ‘restoration’ of knight errantry into the world – turns into a theatre of sadism from which Don Quijote is unable to extricate himself and into which he does not ultimately fit. While it would appear that they are operating according to the same narrative code - chivalry - they are taking up authority and authorship and engaging Quijote with a narrative that has very, very different aims. Where Quijote is a hero-knight, and attempts to situate all forms around him according to the ethos inscribed within the genre, the Duke and Duchess are *readers* of chivalry, and the narrative they design, while based on the very same genre norms, are governed by the narrative requirement to be entertaining to the audience. This becomes the central narrative promise in the events that they author, and in which Don Quijote participates and then

becomes hopelessly trapped, for the two narrative codes have divergent expectations. In the negotiation between the two, Quijote becomes trapped in what is essentially a hybrid narrative and cannot resolve the contradiction. And this is where Cervantes offers insight as to the purpose of his novel. Cervantes introduces the Duke and Duchess to create the conditions where this problem can be explored.

As the adventures unfold, the narratives become intertwined, hybrid. They are so hybrid, in fact, that all agents eventually lose the ability to claim authorship, and the narrative slips out of their hands; in this case, the Duke and Duchess are as disempowered as Quijote himself. As will be seen, the Duke and Duchess will not be satisfied, for, operating under the narrative code that demands Quijote as central protagonist and especially as knight errant, Quijote has no internal motivation to perform his knightly duty before an appreciative audience for them to be entertained. Quijote himself cannot be satisfied because the Duke and Duchess ultimately author elements into the narrative that decenter him from his role as Dulcinea's liberator and ultimately the hero of his own tale. In the contact between both narrative impulses, they have become intermingled, and neither agent has the power to bring about the end that their narrative requires. While on the side of the Duke and Duchess this loss is little more than the loss of a temporary entertainment, for Quijote, it is the complete destruction of his character. More than any opponent, imagined or otherwise, it is this simple narrative entanglement that defeats el ingenioso hidalgo Don Quijote de la Mancha.

With this understanding of how Cervantes has encoded the problem of hybrid narrative systems before the readers' eyes, it is now possible to move more closely

through the stages and specifics. In the most important change to Don Quijote's character can be seen toward the end of the novel when the cure for Dulcinea's enchantment has been prescribed, yet Don Quijote demonstrates remarkable patience for Sancho's execution of the rite. In chapter 35 of the second volume, the Duke and Duchess perform an elaborate play in which it revealed that Dulcinea will be released from her enchantment if Sancho will whip himself three thousand times. Yet with his long awaited answer, Don Quijote seems strangely unmotivated by it. Although he does try to persuade Sancho to follow through with the ritual on numerous occasions, this act, which would seem to be the most important possible to Don Quijote, and in effect, the most pressing issue at the center of their entire enterprise, is nevertheless neglected for many chapters. In fact, it takes Don Quijote 38 more chapters - in chapter 73 - to finally get Sancho to follow through. This procrastination cannot easily be explained without taking Quijote's desperation for narrative conformity into account.

The reason that Quijote stalls in his quest is precisely because of an accidental inversion that has taken place with the narrative input from the Duke and Duchess. Through their involvement, Quijote's companion Sancho has become Quijote's adversary in the liberation of Dulcinea, and as such, Quijote cannot use any of the genre-appropriate mechanisms to work for Dulcinea's salvation. He cannot threaten his friend at the tip of a sword as might other characters for example and instead dithers; a hero of nagging and begging. While earlier Quijote might have narrated his way out, perhaps inventing another intrusion of Frestón, *anything* to shift the narrative requirement from Sancho back to himself, here he cannot because this experience comes after the failure of his

previous attempts. None of the earlier mechanisms succeeded, and he is much worse off for their exercise. But he cannot for another reason as well: this is a narrative innovation of a secondary party - the Duke and Duchess. He must operate within their terms precisely because they represent the only correspondence between his literary narrative and the world; to attempt to author them out of the experience they shared together would be to sever him from the only similitude he has found in his quest, and he would thereby lose all verification that the literary chivalry is a fact in the reality.

This period of powerlessness and undetermined action spans an extremely large stretch of the novel. Yet even toward the end of this long interval, Don Quijote has seemingly not developed a sense of urgency in the project - might even demonstrate less urgency, or perhaps expressing a sense of futility at his powerlessness. When in chapter 71 the knight finally does convince Sancho to whip himself (which Sancho of course does not do, but whips a tree instead), he performs the act with such vigor and theatrical screaming that Don Quijote was moved and,

Tierna la de don Quijote, temeroso de que no se le acabase la vida y no consiguiese su deseo por la imprudencia de Sancho le dijo: “Por tu vida, amigo, que se quede en este punto este negocio. Que me parece muy áspera esta medicina, y será bien dar tiempo al tiempo.” (928; vol 2, ch 71)

...afraid that Sancho might actually kill himself, and through such negligence keep his master from attaining the goal he so longed for, he said:

“For your own sake, my friend, let’s stop this business for the time being, because this medicine seems to me somewhat too severe, and it would be better to accomplish things one step at a time.” (Raffel 732)

The narrator’s characterization of Don Quijote’s motive here echoes the advice Quijote had given Sancho and is telling in itself; our knight has so internalized worldly pragmatism that it doesn’t even strike the smallest note of violation that the knight no longer expresses himself in the same monomaniacal terms. Our hero has so backed off the static chivalric identity of volume I that he is able to bear not only a great delay in Dulcinea’s release, but also a practical magic ritual on the installment plan path for her release. Don Quijote supports this only moments later when, after Sancho continues despite Quijote’s protests, Quijote runs to Sancho and literally seizes the rope he was using as a whip, saying:

No permita la suerte, Sancho amigo, que por el gusto mío pierdas tú la vida, que ha de servir para sustentar a tu mujer, y a tus hijos. Espere Dulcinea mejor coyuntura. Que yo me contendré en los límites de la esperanza propinqua, y esperaré que cobres fuerzas nuevas, para que se concluya este negocio a gusto de todos. (929; vol 2, ch 71)

Sancho, my friend, Fate will not let you give up your life, just to please me, for you are your wife’s and your children’s support. Dulcinea can wait for a better

opportunity, and I will keep myself within the bounds of hope soon to be satisfied, and wait till you have recuperated and recovered your strength, and then we can find a way to finish this business to everyone's satisfaction. (Raffel 732)

Whether intended or not, Don Quijote has said a lot with his use of the word "negocio" (business), for at this point in the tale, it is more in accordance with the laws of business than chivalry that the adventure is playing out. Don Quijote even cites economic concerns for Sancho's children should he die. If the reader had not accompanied Quijote from the first sally, this lackadaisical attitude toward Dulcinea's liberation would be shocking. How can the hero merely content himself to "me contendré en los limites de la esperanza propincua"? ("keep myself within the bounds of hope soon to be satisfied") (732) The answer is that Don Quijote has allowed this delay because the mechanisms he has employed and the system that he so rigidly enforced in the first volume have, by virtue of being written, published, and read, been incorporated into the world in which Don Quijote of the second volume inhabits. Rather than a world incongruous and hostile to Don Quijote, the world is responding according to the rules of the system that he had set out to renew. But in that world, the logic of enchantment and ritual, of chivalric duties have been internalized by others - specifically the Duke and Duchess - and turned against Don Quijote with different narrative expectations. They are now directed at him rather by him, and he is powerless to extricate himself.

Don Quijote fell into a trap of his own making. This Quijote, near the end of volume 2, is in many respects similar to Quijote's vanquished foes of Volume 1, forced to

perform in bizarre, empty theatrical performances in accordance with a system that is no longer under their control. It can easily be argued that Don Quijote is dragging his heels in the effort to liberate Dulcinea because he is unhappy with others' performances in the narrative that he had, up until that point, exclusively controlled. That he falls into hybrid social dialectic wherein he is treated as a knight at exactly the point when he demonstrates himself most willing to abandon his chivalric obligations and exercise the mechanisms of economic exchange points to Cervantes' attempt to highlight how originally exclusive systems of expectation and mechanisms of enforcement become entangled in the social dialectic and hybridized. By situating all of that within this context of an exchange between divergent authorial narrative expectations, Cervantes shows the reader that what seem like easily understood narrative codes become complicated by internal contradiction as this hybridization occurs.

As Quijote becomes more disenfranchised from the possibility of success, the need to bring about the proper narrative conclusion that motivates him becomes a torment he is powerless to extirpate. Success is a part of the definition of his character as inscribed by the chivalric tales that engendered him; without success, he is nothing. In this context Quijote's continued attempts to liberate Dulcinea comes across as odd; just as her ultimate salvation is in Sancho's hands not his, and it is not loyalty or chivalric obligation that encourages him to release his master's love; it is money: they pause and negotiate a per lash rate that, once agreed to, continues the narrative. This deal is quickly renegotiated when Sancho has tasted the sting of the first whips:

... deteniéndose un poco, dijo a su amo que se llamaba a engaño, porque merecía cada azote de aquellos ser pagado a medio real, no que a cuartillo.

“Prosigue, Sancho amigo, y no desmayes,” le dijo don Quijote, “que yo doblo la parada del precio.” (928, vol 2, ch 71)

...he stopped for a moment and told his master that he'd made a bad mistake, because lashes like these deserved to be paid for at the rate of a whole dollar apiece, not just a quarter of a dollar.

“Go on, Sancho, and don't give up,” Don Quijote told him, “because I'll double my bid.” (Raffel 732)

Apart from the comedy of the scene, the content of the scene is almost exclusively the negotiation between the two and the subject of monetary exchange. The subject of money's role in the novel is an enormous one, and perhaps the question most worth asking in a novel ostensibly about chivalry. But for our purposes here the importance of this passage is that it represents an enormously complicated tangle of intermingling systems of reality. Don Quijote's system of chivalry has been at the forefront of course, but in having been partially adopted and performed by the Duke and Duchess, Don Quijote's chivalric obligations have been appropriated and turned into an object of entertainment.

Quijote has been decentered from his traditional role of hero by the new use to which his narrative has been put by the new participants - the Duke and Duchess, who

prefer to see Sancho humiliated than the hero triumphant. He is powerless and despondent, and it is not with any aspect of the vast, static world of chivalry from books that he is ultimately able to employ to pursue the object of his quest, rather, it is once again using the transactional power of money. That Sancho is concerned with improving his station and acquiring a modicum of wealth is not surprising at all, but where in the beginning he sought wealth in the process of assisting his master pursue his role as hero, it is Sancho himself who is here required to be the rescuing hero; Don Quijote for his part, is obligated to pay his squire in order for Sancho to assume his former role. This rupture in the middle of these two inseparable characters, and specifically his willingness to perform a fiction that accords with the requirements of the system his master enacts for money, points to the degree to which the original world system has become contaminated by external influences and hybridized.

To punctuate the importance of this hybrid experience to the purpose of the novel, Cervantes does an extraordinary thing; after establishing the hybrid reality of the Duke and Duchess that has so disabled Don Quijote, he introduces another character to ultimately defeat Don Quijote, and end his days and knight errant. This character, Samson Carrasco is a scholar who dons armor and tries to unseat Quijote in a challenge, hoping to inspire him to retire from his knightly madness. But Carrasco fails and vows vengeance, and in the process incorporates much of the chivalric defiance and heroic valor that he has come to rebuke. In a sense, he internalizes the hybridity in which Don Quijote himself begins to become captured in this second volume. This culminates with another challenge in which Carrasco once again dons armor and challenges Don Quijote to

combat. Here, rather than making up lies, he skillfully forms his declarations in what could be considered more or less truthful statements, though they are formed in the high-blown format of chivalry. They joust, and Quijote is defeated. As the result, he swears not to touch arms for the period of one year. The knightly quest is over.

Cervantes intensifies the hybrid nature of the exchange by placing this chivalric contest before the governor and Don Antonio, among others, who try to ascertain whether the trial is real or a joke. Ultimately they are unable to decide, and the governor allows the contest to take place, because he “no pudiéndose persuadir a que fuese sino burla” (895; vol 2, ch 64). (finding it hard to believe that this could be anything but a joke” (Raffel 704). He is of course wrong. Carrasco is truly motivated, and it is a true moment of combat. That the question existed in the minds of the spectators demonstrates that the possibility of knights engaging in personal combat over the beauty of their ladies might has become a reality for the world at large. It is fitting, in the classic Cervantean way, that Don Quijote here achieves his greatest success, in precisely the same moment while falling victim to and being defeated by it. Don Quijote defeated is in reality Don Quijote triumphant. Don Quijote’s stated goal of bringing chivalry back into the world is also one that requires that he successfully complete his quest as the hero of his own adventure, and this narrative requirement is, as this late stage in the novel, so problematized by the competing needs encoded in the hybrid narrative structure in which Quijote has become entangled that he is unable to find any path to success.

There are a number of incredibly meaningful events that occur after Quijote's loss to Samson Carrasco that shed light on Cervantes' representation of hybrid narrative systems. The first is that Dulcinea receives her long-awaited liberation from enchantment, but Cervantes does this in such a way as to make it almost insignificant, almost possible to miss. Second, Quijote, now disallowed from continuing as a knight errant as a result of the consequence of his failure to Carrasco, considers adopting a new genre-inspired identity. In this, Cervantes does a kind of symbolic mini-review of his understanding of narrative. Third, Quijote dies - but he dies in such a curious state of tension between the demands of various narrative systems that his death is a crystallization of the narrative hybridity that Cervantes has developed throughout the long novel, and as such, is impossible to read simply.

At this point, Don Quijote has been wandering through the various misadventures, with absolutely no power to bring about the single most important and necessary conclusion to his narrative: the liberation of Dulcinea. We have already seen how the hybridization of his narrative structure has disempowered him from achieving his conclusion on the necessary terms: he cannot save Dulcinea, Sancho must. This has been shown to be symbolized by Quijote's literal unseating by Carrasco, a hybrid character himself. As a result of this, Quijote is no longer allowed to be a knight - not merely in the sense that he lost central authority in narrating his own tale, as we have seen with the Duke and Duchess, but as the specific demands of a vow he has taken in consequence of his failure to overcome his opponent as a knight in the event of his joust with Carrasco. Where before a hybrid narrative system had disempowered him from completing his

quest, now he is disempowered in fact, as he is not allowed to keep being a knight. It is here, at this moment in the novel that the long awaited quest is completed and Dulcinea is finally freed of her enchantment. After such travail, it is stunningly undramatic: Sancho goes into a grove of trees:

por dar lugar a Sancho de cumplir su penitencia, que la cumplió del mismo modo que la pasada noche, a costa de las cortezas de las hayas, harto más que de sus espaldas, que las guardó tango, que no pudieran quitar los azotes una mosca, aunque la tuviera encima.

No perdió el engañado don Quijote un solo golpe de la cuenta, y halló que con los de la noche pasada eran tres mil y veinte y nueve. Parece que había madrugado el sol a ver el sacrificio, con cuya luz volvieron a proseguir su camino, tratando entre los dos del engaño de don Álvaro, y de cuán bien acordado había sido tomar su declaración ante la justicia, y tan auténticamente.

Aquel día y aquella noche caminaron sin sucederles cosa digna de contarse, si no fue que en ella acabó Sancho su tarea, de que quedó don Quijote contento sobre modo, y esperaba el día, por ver si en el camino topaba ya desencantada a Dulcinea su señora. Y siguiendo su camino, no topaba mujer ninguna que no iba a reconocer si era Dulcinea del Toboso, teniendo por infalible no poder mentir las promesas de Merlín.

Con estos pensamientos y deseos, subieron una cuesta arriba, desde la cual descubrieron su aldea... (934; vol 2, ch 72)

so Sancho could complete his penance, which he did in the same fashion he'd begun the night before, and for which birch-tree bark rather than his shoulders paid... Completely taken in, Don Quijote kept careful count of every stroke, making the grand total for both nights three thousand and twenty-nine. Then the sun appeared, apparently to witness Sancho's great sacrifice, and by his light they went on their way, discussing how Don Alvaro had been deceived and what a wonderful stroke it had been to have that gentleman make his statement before both a magistrate and a notary.

That day, and the night that followed, they journeyed on without anything worth telling about, unless it might be that, during this time, Sancho finally completed his task, to Don Quijote's vast delight: he could not wait for daylight, in case he might meet his now disenchanting lady Dulcinea del Toboso (for how could the infallible promises of a magician like Merlin possibly be a lie?).

Their minds and hearts thus occupied, they suddenly rode up a slope and, from where they were, could see their own village.... (Raffel 737)

This brief passage is ostensibly the culmination of the Quijote's 900 page quest however the tone in which it is communicated represents the state of affairs in which it occurs: Don Quijote's quest was that Don Quijote should complete a quest; Dulcinea was, and continues to be, nothing more than a necessary trope of the chivalric tale. Cervantes, by positioning the representation in this way is able to communicate the equivocal nature of

the success; on the one hand he is able to express that Don Quijote is happy at the state of affairs, yet on the other he is able to demonstrate to the reader how insignificant the event actually is to Cervantes' overall project of constructing and demonstrating the nature of his elaborate hybrid narrative.

The ephemeral nature of this happiness is expressed soon after when Don Quijote begins fantasizing about adopting a brand new identity, this time an identity ripped from an altogether different genre: that of a shepherd. In it he includes places for all the characters that surround him and even starts estimating the costs involved. This fantasy does not survive long, and at last Quijote makes the only move that can work given the complex hybrid narrative demands that hang over him - perhaps the only move that could possibly bring his narrative to its desired conclusion: Don Quijote must die.

In the death scene, there is something at work that compels a hybrid reading: that the death is the final act of the character Don Quijote de la Mancha. This reading is set up by the explicit foreshadowing when, in the inquisition of Quijote's library in the first volume, the priest finds a copy of *The History of that Famous Knight, Tirante the White* and says:

por su estilo es éste el mejor libro del mundo. Aquí comen los caballeros, y duermen y mueren en sus camas, y hacen testamento antes de su muerte, con otras cosas, de que todos los demás libros deste género carecen. (59; vol 1, ch 6)

for its style this is the best book in the world: knights take regular meals, in these pages, and they sleep in their beds, and die in them, and make wills before they die, plus all sorts of other things that don't happen in other tales of this sort.

(Raffel 37)

That the protagonist here confesses and dies in his bed after making a will exactly as the priest says occurs in the best of chivalric romances during the inquisition cannot be ignored. Supporting this reading is the fact that where in Volume 1 the identity that precedes Quijote is left obscure, and quickly left behind, here Cervantes continues using the signifier 'Don Quijote' throughout, suggesting that there is perhaps something dubious about the transformation that is to follow, and that it is Don Quijote performing these acts, and not Quijano the Good at all. At first glance, it appears that the fiction he spins is not of the same nature as the fictions he spins anywhere else; there are no obviously chivalric elements, and the details are not culled from the vast corpus of literary sources. Instead, they echo the single example offered to the reader in the inquisition of Quijote's library. With this specific knowledge offered by the priest, it is possible to see that this final scene does indeed have its source in chivalric literature, and that rather than being cured from his madness, Don Quijote is emulating one last scene - one that is permissible, I might add, according to the obligations he has taken on after his defeat by Samson Carrasco, in which he was obligated to "recojas y retires a tu lugar... donde has de vivir sin echar mano a la espada, en paz tranquila y en provechoso sosiego, porque así conviene al aumento de tu hacienda y a la salvación de tu alma" (894; vol 2,

ch 64) (Collect your things and retire to your home... where you have to live without putting your hand on your sword, in tranquil peace and and profitable repose, because this is the way to increase your estate and to the salvation of your soul (Raffel 703).

Here, like Carrasco did in their combat scene, Don Quijote has found a way to perform a knightly act while completely obeying the letter of his obligation. In doing so, he is able to steal one more victory out from under Carrasco and all those who have seemingly vanquished him. But where this reading fits all the details, the turn away from the obviously chivalric and the adoption of the new name, Don Quijote is using his knowledge of a certain genre and performing a fiction for the audience there assembled. This, if anything, is a mechanism he learned from the Duke and Duchess. If Don Quijote was, at the outset, employing the modes of a fictional reality, it was done in innocence or madness; it is from the Duke and Duchess that Don Quijote learned deception and performance.

Employed in this way, with an authorized writer documenting his words and intentions, Don Quijote is able to not only record this final act as a knight errant but also to reify that identity and commit it all to legal protection. In this sense, Alonso the Good is the fictional identity Don Quijote performs in order to force the world around him to do his bidding. Without knowing it, the whole assembled cast attends and assists his final act of chivalry. This then, is the ultimate vision of Don Quijote's system after it has entered the social dialectic and become intermingled and hybridized. This final act of knightly madness is so quiet that it is almost invisible underneath even the readers' expectations.

So strong is the familiarity and expectations of the “real” world of mortality, the state of our souls, and perhaps more importantly, how we are obligated to settle our worldly estates, that the genre that motivates the novel is almost entirely obscured.

The death of Don Quijote is the ultimate mechanism of implementing and enforcing a totalizing system, but it is not in the same way that he has been struggling to impose throughout the rest of the novel. Rather than imposing a top down system, he is attempting to fix the knight Don Quijote’s place within that system so that it becomes as immobile as the other identities that make up the architecture of the chivalric universe. By allowing himself to die in such a way, Quijote does not merely abandon his knightly identity as it would at first seem; rather he transforms it into part of the system chivalric system itself. Weary, mixed, hybridized, the identity has outlived its usefulness in the top down attempt to impose chivalric reality on the world, and Don Quijote would not have the identity further adulterated. In dying, he ensures that there will be no further Quijotes acting out of turn or becoming contaminated by worldly concerns.

The attempt to impose a single narrative structure on the world has consequences, but they are difficult to quantify. Don Quijote has become beloved and pitied, has injured and been injured, and he has imposed his reality on the world around him but (potentially) lost faith in it himself. The intersection between Don Quijote and his dubious double, he of the illegitimate sequel of Don Quijote written by Avellaneda, is an interesting case in point. Quijote, in the course of the novel, struggles for authority over his own character and acts in defiance of the false Quijote. It is telling that even at the end of the novel

concerns over self-authorship are still so strong with Don Quijote. If the reader is to believe that Quijote has given up his identity as knight and is now completely Alonso Quijano the good, then it comes as a surprise that the question of authorship of the Quijote character looms over his own death - a ne plus totalizing structure that disempowers every other source of influence from affecting the nature of the character.

This concern over narrative authority is revealed in Quijote's dictation of his will when he asks of his executors

"...si la buena suerte les trujere a conocer al autor que dicen que compuso una historia que anda por ahí con el título de *Segunda parte de las hazañas de don Quijote de la Mancha*, de mi parte le pidan, cuan encarecidamente ser pueda, perdone la ocasión que sin yo pensarlo le di de haber escrito tantos y tan grandes disparates como en ella escribe, porque parto desta vida con escrúpulo de haberle dado motivo para escribirlos." (942; vol 2, ch 74)

"...that should they ever have the good fortune to know the writer responsible for that history known by the title of *The Second Part of the Exploits of Don Quijote de La Mancha*, to beg him to forgive me, as earnestly as he can, for having been responsible as I suspect I am for his having written such highflown nonsense, because I leave this life sadly conscious that it was indeed I who gave him cause to write at all." (Raffel 744)

More than merely being the content of Don Quijote's last words, his death is bookended by this illegitimate authorship concern, and directly after dying, the priest

pidió al escribano le diese por testimonio como Alonso Quijano el Bueno, llamado comúnmente don Quijote de la Mancha, había pasado desta presente vida y muerto naturalmente. Y que el tal testimonio pedía para quitar la ocasión de que algún otro autor que Cide Hamete Benegeli le resucitase falsamente, y hiciese inacabables historias de sus hazañas. (943; vol 2, ch 74)

asked the scribe to witness that Alonso Quijano the Good, commonly known as Don Quijote de la Mancha, had departed from this life, dying of natural causes, and that he, the priest, was asking the scribe to bear this witness in order to prevent any writer other than Sidi Hamid Benegeli from falsely resurrecting Don Quijote and turning out endless tales of his exploits. (Raffel 745)

The concern for authorship is clear, and if we are to believe Don Quijote that he is sorry he has inspired others to write about him, and inflict the world with more tales of chivalry, then these final acts might be construed as attempts to keep other authors from doing more harm to the world by writing more, but implicit in this reading is that he has in fact harmed the world. Interestingly Cide Hamete Benegeli is given a pass for his writings by the priest in the last moment, giving rise to the idea that through Don Quijote's efforts and adventures, the priest is willing to authorize, as one of the executors,

at least one more legitimate chivalric romance in the world. But in the context of Don Quijote's long, slow change as a character, it is something else, too: it is a way to reify the character of Don Quijote, to lock him into a permanent static condition that can no longer suffer the incremental accumulation of failures and fractures as the character Don Quijote tries to complete his impotent narrative. Don Quijote is dead; he cannot experience anymore; he cannot be undermined or change. But it is a very interesting turn that in order to enact this change, Don Quijote must be hybridized yet again; for it is only being written about yet again by an unauthorized writer that names Don Quijote as an alter ego to Alonso Quijano el Bueno in this formal legal document that Don Quijote can be protected from the same. The irony is of course beautiful, but the act of doing this conflates the two identities, which contradicts Alonso Quijano el Bueno when he said "*Fui don Quijote de la Mancha, y soy agora, como he dicho, Alonso Quijano el Bueno*" (942; vol 2, ch 74) ("I was Don Quijote de La Mancha, and now, as I have said, I am Alonso Quijano the Good" (Raffel 744) (emphasis mine). The differences between these two characterizations is stunning. Don Quijote has said he wanted a complete separation between the two, two unmixed identities, completely distinct; the priest's characterization has the two identities overlap. This act by the priest fictionalizes Don Quijote's identity forward into these last moments of Alonso the Good, (a notion that is supported by Cervantes' use of the signifier 'Don Quijote' throughout). But importantly the priest's act also writes the identity of Alonso the Good all throughout the already written history of Don Quijote, suggesting that Alonso was there with Quijote all along.

These metafictional turns are rarely straightforward, of course, and if the astute reader traces the line of influence out as far as it will go it would seem that following the distinction that was made between Don Quijote/Alonso and mad/sane, it would also be implied that Quijote's madness is now in some sense contaminated by Alonso's supposed sanity, an idea that Alonso clearly tried to avoid in his strict delineation of the two identities. This then is the ultimate contamination; Don Quijote de La Mancha is now, here, at the very last, not the knight he made of himself, but a modern man outlining his property in his final legal document. Here at last the hybridity is complete. Cervantes, as great a writer as he is, perhaps stumbles a bit artistically as all of this remains slightly obscured over the more dramatic components of the scene; that is, they are overshadowed by Quijote's death and the weeping and gnashing of teeth. Nevertheless it is precisely here that Cervantes culminates his hybrid narrative and allows the smallest hope to Quijote and the reader, for here it is that Quijote at last succeeds in his quest. His final victory over Carrasco, and indeed over the world, in implementing his chivalric structure and bringing it into the world through his knowledge of specific antecedents that are useful in his attempt to navigate the world, and through his hard learned new mechanism imported into his system, modified, and reappropriated to his purposes is undercut by the priest's unwitting move. This is problematic, and a bit confusing. But it is in that confusion that Cervantes makes his underlying purpose visible: there is hope in the hybrid.

The key component to Quijote's death scene is that his invention of a new identity, and taking advantage of its legal and social power within the context of his

community of peers, while at the same time continuing to act in deference to the laws of chivalry, reveals what Cervantes has designed all throughout: living according to the demands of a single narrative - authored by one, unchanged by contact with other narrative structures - is impossible. While it is confusing, and perhaps distressing, to operate within a hybrid system that functions according to a tangle of contradictory narrative expectations that are beyond the possibility of individual mastery, it is nevertheless within that hybrid narrative that characters of a multivocal text must operate. Cervantes here suggests something compelling: Quijote was miserable all throughout the text; the further he got from authorial control and became more ensconced within the hybrid narrative, the more miserable he became. But his misery was based on a unilateral drive toward the completion of his chivalric narrative. As we have seen, the details, or at least the real correspondence between the representations within his experience and the objects as they are throughout the text, is somewhat arbitrary. What is not is the story arc programmed into the expectations of his narrative. It is, and has been essential from the first. As a knight, however, Quijote was utterly unable to bring about his conclusion - even in his knightly obligation to liberate Dulcinea he found himself utterly powerless. Yet here, in the final act of the man who was Quijote, he embraces a kind of hybrid identity; on the one hand he is Alonso the Good, a legal citizen making a legal document in the presence of his friend. On the other, he is making decisions for, and acting within the context of the narrative desires of Don Quijote: he uses the first identity to legally protect the literary identity of the second by naming Benegeli the sole authorized writer of the history. Having done that, the character, who is both Don Quijote and Alonso the

Good, dies in accordance with Quijote's same narrative impulse. It is this hybrid character, working in the context of a hybrid narrative, that is able to bring about the ultimate conclusion to the knight's story. Cervantes is suggesting that a rigid attempt to adhere to a single narrative through to its conclusion outside the yellowed pages of books is a project doomed to failure: an individual comes into contact with multiple narratives, all with divergent expectations and needs. The result is a mixing and hybridization of the narrative that is so mixed and contradictory that any individual is ultimately unable to bring about a desired conclusion to their original narrative on the terms of the original narrative. Cervantes has shown Quijote miserable in his attempt to do so. But here, in the last moment, Quijote achieves his desires by bending to the realities of the hybrid situation and adapting to function within it.

In terms of reader response, this makes for somewhat of a confusing conclusion. It remains an open question whether Quijote was mad or not and what exactly he was getting at by transforming into a paper-pushing burgher. But these questions are resolved when considering how Quijote's desire from the beginning was to bring into existence chivalric knights, and only by conforming to the narrative structure that contains them could he do so. For then the identity shift and the new conditions make sense: Don Quijote can bring about the conclusion to his knightly tale by dying in a way that conforms to the narrative expectation. The way to do it: embrace hybridity.

Many readings are possible at the conclusion, to be sure, but it is Cervantes' genius that nearly all of the readings toward which a reader is naturally inclined are problematized by the existence of extraneous, contradictory information. The trouble in

reconciling the novel's disparate parts at the end is central Cervantes' purpose as a whole. Considering that Quijote has suffered while trying to impose a single narrative order, and is able to achieve his own end by embracing hybridity, the reader is compelled to consider his own system of expectations in reading the novel as a whole. The novel's narrative is carefully positioned to enhance the comic, and to promote sympathy for Quijote; yet it is significant that details of violence, abuse, even gore are all included for the reader to unavoidably consider. Throughout, Cervantes has encouraged reading the tale as a chivalric romance; this is what lends such sympathy to Quijote and creates an ally of the reader in the pursuit of his cause. The reader is seduced into rooting for the hero. Yet Cervantes has been forcing the reader to slowly incorporate more and more contradictory information into their reading practice until, at the end, the reader is unable to read fully in the chivalric mode; Quijote might only be a madman committing violence on the countryside. On the other hand the reader is expected to read knowing that Quijote is mad, and that this violence is happening, yet the reader is somehow manipulated into rooting for the character anyway.

These calls to divergent reading practices are problematized throughout, and it is in the final scene where Cervantes finally gives his payoff. Just as Quijote cannot bring about his desired conclusion while still operating within the context of a single narrative impulse, so too is the reader disempowered by the desire to read according to the expectations encoded within a single narrative. Quijote's death is confusing because the reader expects him to be a knight who dies, or perhaps to fully retreat from knighthood, and have the name of Quijote be buried - but these things do not happen. Instead, the

reader encounters a third thing - Quijote/Quijano in one. This conclusion does not provide the easy, predictable ending that the reader can file away with all the others of the chivalric tales. And that is precisely the point. Cervantes has developed this elaborate metafictional trap in order to put the readers in exactly the same position they see the principal character of the novel in, and like that character, if they press on with their demand to see a conclusion brought about in perfect correspondence to the promised encoded within the genre, they would be miserable. The reader, just as Quijote, is powerless to exert any force upon the hybrid narrative that will straighten it out or untangle it. Persisting in the desire for the simple ending will cause nothing but despair. But Cervantes offers another option: the path of the third thing. Just as Quijote achieves his ultimate goal by playing according to the new rules implicit in a context of hybrid expectations, so too is the reader encouraged by Cervantes to evaluate the novel not by the expectations of chivalric tales, nor by those of histories, nor even those by picaresque, or any of the other genres that the novel incorporates. Rather the reader is encouraged to evaluate by a third thing - a context of hybrid narrative expectations in which all internal tensions give vitality to the novel's impactful conclusion.

By his skillful infolding of these concerns into the final scene Cervantes makes these literary achievements visible, but compared to the vividness of the characters he created, the impact of his insight is potentially overwhelmed by the death of his protagonist on the one hand, and what feels like a hurried shuffling of feet on the other - the necessary summing up of loose ends. But the message is there: Cervantes has developed a lengthy ordeal for his character and his readers to experience together in

order to question the validity of living according to an inflexible narrative code in the presence of many others. His novel not only questions the strength of genre and an individual's fealty to it, but discovers within genre the seeds of its own contamination, its own self contradiction. In the end Cervantes has only shown, but also caused the reader to experience the powerlessness and despair that results in an attempt to bring about the expected conclusion in the face of the altered circumstances. In the end, Cervantes offers a last insight: that there is a conclusion to reach, a kind of peace to be found by adapting to the new, more complicated hybrid scenario. If one allows oneself to be instructed and guided by the impulses encoded in a given genre, but not dogmatic and intransigent in one's demands that the expectation be fulfilled fully, completely, and down to the letter, then one might find there is room enough to wiggle out something approximate.

Cervantes suggests that this kind of conclusion, one of vague resemblance, is possible if one can let go of their need for unilateral narrative authority and work within the multiple expectations of a hybrid narrative structure. If one is willing to do that, this vague resemblance to the hoped for conclusion can be a happy ending - if you squint just a little.

Chapter 2: Aira and the Illusion of the Autonomy of Isolation

Don Quijote knew his genre too well and set out to impose its structures on an incongruous world. As a result of this interaction, the world as it is and the fictional world of Don Quijote came to merge, forcing others to incorporate fantasy into their real world behaviors and vice-versa. Don Quijote's misreading stems from his inability to differentiate story from history, which in Spanish share the same word (*historia*) and which, in the tales of chivalry share the same meaning - at least insofar as the stories are told under the conceit of them being real world events. Don Quijote's effect on the world is one of influence, making both history and story, whether from his use of violence or persuasion. Ultimately Cervantes's investigation of the subject remains limited to this dynamic: how the world changed him, and how he changed the world. But in the novel *La cena (Dinner)* by César Aira we find an entirely different representation of the dynamic between an individual attempting to impose a narrative structure on the world around him and that world's interaction with the authoring impulse. Like *Don Quijote*, the text traces the permutations that take place when narratives engage. Rather than begin the story where the protagonist has already made his critical error of interpretation and has decided to pursue his new fantastic course, in Aira's novel the reader follows the protagonist through a great number of encounters with narrative forms, addresses the character's understanding of the elements of narrative, and ultimately brings the character to and through his moment of error, even demonstrating consequences of the character's misreading. In the process he lays bare problems in the

relationship between the details included in narrative and larger narrative forms, and indicates dangers that lurk in the seductions of the familiar larger structures that guide narrative from anecdote to story. More critically, this text stages the degree to which modification of the facts is required to maintain narrative causality when placed in the context of narrative engagement, which to say, when the narrative comes into contact with a second.

In the novel, an unnamed protagonist attends dinner at a friend's house with his mother. The narrator is a failed business man, now living with his mother, and his friend is a successful business man in the field of construction and real estate, and their conversation meanders from topic to topic, offering incidents and anecdotes that the narrator analyzes according to his understanding of narrative form. When the dinner is over, the narrator and his mother return home, and after his mother goes to bed, the narrator stays up watching TV. As he channel surfs, he finds what he understands to be a public access show where a young woman goes around to local spots to show off the night life in their small town. In the course of this program the woman is called out to a local graveyard to investigate the report of the dead rising from the grave. The zombies do in fact emerge and lay waste to half the town before being stopped by the curious method of calling them by their proper names. The next morning the narrator rises, half curious to see the devastation in town, but more concerned with calling up his friend from the previous night to see if the man will back him in a business venture. In the course of the phone call, it is revealed that the show was not in fact a live broadcast, but a low budget local movie about a zombie apocalypse; what's more, it was a rerun from last

summer. In the final passage, the business friend criticizes a worldview that is almost a perfect description of the narrative logic operating throughout the novel on the part of the unnamed narrator, condemning him to not only to not receive the business partnership, but precluding the possibility that he ever will. The ultimate consequence of this is that the unnamed narrator is condemned by his unilateral narrative impulse to be a permanent failure in business and in life. While this summary appears rather simple, the slow accumulation of episodes makes the short novel into a stunning critique of people's use of narrative structure to guide their thinking, and ultimately their lives. This novel also hints at and cautions against the degree to which details must be distorted in order to preserve a seductive central narrative logic.

The novel introduces the narrator authoring a narrative straight away in a way that not only sets up the question of narrative ability at the center of the reader's attention, but also entangles it with the other major themes that dominate the novel: the social use of narrative.

Mi amigo estaba solo en su casa, y aun así nos invitó a cenar; era un hombre muy sociable, le gustaba hablar y contar historias, aunque no lo hacía bien, se le mezclaban los episodios, dejaba efectos sin causa, causas sin efecto, se salteaba partes importantes, dejaba un cuento por la mitad. (Aira 5)

My friend was home alone, but he invited us over for dinner anyway; he was a very sociable man - liked to talk and tell stories, though he wasn't any good at it;

he'd get the episodes mixed up, leave effects without causes and causes without effects, skip over important parts, and drop anecdotes right in the middle.

(Dinner 3)

This passage does several things at once. Functionally, it introduces the character of his friend - we find him evaluated as "very sociable," and a poor storyteller. At the same time it links the topics of narrative and social engagement on the one hand, and of social engagement and critique on the other hand. Here storytelling is a specifically social act; the friend likes to tell stories but is not good at it. The evaluation of the friend's narrative ability by the narrator notably does not address what is presumably the stories' primary function; that is, their ability to entertain and to draw people together. Rather, the criticism of the friend's ability is purely structural: an assessment of narrative structure outside of its context. The criticism then, rather than being physical and social, is purely in the realm of the intellectual and the abstract. This evaluation speaks to the nature of the narrator: he is the one who does the critical evaluation of the friend's stories. Here, at the outset, the narrator identifies himself as someone who is willing to criticize narrative, to negatively characterize a friend to a reading audience as one who is blind to the concept of use in the question of narrative, and one who prefers the abstract over the local. He also reveals himself to be someone who is somewhat blind to some questions of context but not others. That is, although he does not acknowledge a story's ability to entertain or to encourage personal interaction, he is quick to point out the man's social oddity, audacity, if not faux pas, in inviting dinner guests while being home alone. Lastly, in his

denigration of unclassically structured stories and misplaced anecdotes, the narrator reveals his prejudice for orderly, complete narrative structures.

Addressing the question of narrative form immediately and explicitly in the text invites the reader to do the same. This is critical because it is Aira's intention that the reader engage the text at this level, struggling in a morass of fledgling notions of the nature and mechanics of narrative, in order that the reader become lost in the engagement. Aira surrounds the reader with trees, and proceeds to obscure even the question of the existence of the forest. Aira begins this process by having his narrator offer up a seemingly endless details that contribute to an intricate picture of this narrator's abilities a close reading of which, as we will see, shows that this narrator in particular is dominated by the rigid, skeletal structures that give a narrative its form, but also its destiny - these structures are so rigid that the details out of which a narrative is constructed invariably warps to fit its function, which in turn warps reality. Rather, reality is sacrificed at the alter of a coherent story. This tug of war between details and overarching structures begins almost immediately when at the dinner table the narrator's mother and his friend discuss the people of the town and the details of their lives. But the narrator does not follow the stories because he has a curious inability to remember names: "Yo oía caer los nombres como quien oye la lluvia, mientras que para ella eran tesoros de significados y recuerdos" (Aira 6). ("I listened to the names drop, as one listens to the falling rain, whereas for her, each was a treasure full of meanings and memories" (Dinner 3).) His mother in having a connection to these names is able to operate on this second narrative level of implicit connections and meanings. This grasp of

names and occult meanings facilitates the one point of true interconnectedness between the character of the mother and the friend, who are otherwise dissimilar and even at odds:

...en ese aspecto, y sólo en ése, se sintonizaba a la perfección con mi amigo: él era constructor, y llevaba muchas décadas haciendo casas en Pringles, por lo que conocía la conformación y las genealogías de todas sus familias. Un nombre traía otro, conducido por una práctica de toda la vida ya que la gente pueblerina efectuaba toda su educación intelectual y afectiva hablando unos de otros, y sin los nombres habría sido difícil hacerlo. (Aira 6)

...in that respect, and in that one alone, she and my friend were perfectly in sync...knew the configurations and genealogies of all the town's families - one name conjured another, driven by the townspeople's lifelong practice of pursuing their entire intellectual and emotional education by talking about one another. It would have been very difficult to do without names. (Dinner 4)

The specifics of the names, containing an entire web of interconnected stories and histories stands as a kind of secondary language - a language within a language - that the narrator does not speak. Although this second unknown language is easily understandable, perhaps a better way to approach it is to say he cannot see the trees for the forest - he sees only the concept forest, one giant entity without individual distinction. He cannot understand the interrelatedness of the individual trees and mushrooms, cannot

see how they operate together. He is left with the vague notions like 'town' as one might say 'forest', and this lack of individuation is consequential. Aira develops this further with the narrator's inability with names:

Las historias se disgregaban en un granizado de nombres, y quedaban sin resolver, como habían quedado sin resolver los viejos crímenes o estafas o traiciones o escándalos de familias de los que trataban las historias. Para mí los nombres no significaban nada, nunca habían significado nada, pero no por eso me eran desconocidos. Al contrario, me sonaban intensamente conocidos, lo más conocido del mundo podría decir, porque los venía oyendo todos los días desde mi primera infancia, desde antes de saber hablar. Por algún motivo, nunca había podido, o querido, asociar los nombres a caras o casas, quizás por un rechazo a la vida del pueblo, en el que, no obstante, había transcurrido toda mi vida, y ahora que con la edad empezaba a perder los nombres, se daba la curiosa paradoja de que perdía lo que nunca había tenido. (Aira 7-8)

The stories crumbled into a hailstorm of names and were left unsolved, like old crimes, swindles, betrayals, or scandals involving these families had also been left unsolved. To me, the names meant nothing, they had never meant anything, but that wasn't why they didn't sound familiar; I would say they were the most familiar things in the world, because I'd been hearing them since my earliest childhood, from before I could talk. For some reason though, I had never been

able, or had never wanted, to associate those names with faces or houses; perhaps this was my way of rejecting the life of the town where I had, nonetheless, spent my entire life, and now, age and the loss of names, had the curious paradox of losing what I had never had. (Dinner 4)

Aira works wonders here while at the same time evacuating the narrator's facility with the specifics of detail within a social context, he also mixes his metaphors, showing a lack of facility even in general principles that form the context of his existence. If the narrator lacks ability in social narrative, he also lacks ability in keeping his static natural images from taking on human characteristics: hailstorms are natural phenomena, not human mysteries, and as such, they cannot be "solved." One by one the elements of narrative out of which one might create a meaningful reality are shown to be faulty tools in the narrator's hands. This criticism is not petty because on the one hand it demonstrates a failure of narrative ability on the part of the speaker, one of a great many to come, and alerts the reader to the disconnect between not merely the narrator's estimation of his abilities versus those he actually has, but more than that, it begins to define exactly where the narrator's narrative abilities are, and where they are not. This mixed metaphor is among the first to demonstrate the narrator's inability to concretely distinguish at the level of detail, and its consequent conflation of dissimilar things. The narrator's relationship to detail is important to the reader, because it is precisely out of these details that he will construct his narratives. The slippery nature of the specifics represented in this passage is an early announcement to the reader of the complications

that Aira will address through the character of his narrator. In this specific instance, Aira has offered the reader a view of the narrator's use of a mixed metaphor that blurs the line between man and nature, and consequently between a sphere of involuntary processes and a sphere of intention. This very simple mixing however, indicates a profoundly murky and irrational understanding of existence. The gaps of logic that yawn wide when these two incongruous elements are tortured together into a single unit allow countless unintentional riders to slip into the worldview unnoticed. Which, as the novel progresses, will prove to be Aira's purpose - to reveal how a fealty to larger narrative forms compels - at least to a degree - a slipperiness of detail which in turn allows for fallacy and fantasy to slip in.

To stay with the metaphor a bit longer, the reader should also note that in using this metaphor, however mixed, this passage makes a highly significant claim: the reality of the town and its people are more accurately reflected by the fragmentary interconnections of names than by the "good story" preferred by the narrator. It is easy to apply this characterization to reality at large, but without making that move, it is suggested to the reader that the reality that surrounds the narrator is described in a code that he does not understand and to which he has little, if any, access. The narrator first ascribes his ignorance of names to a defect of his natural ability, but then quickly offers a hypothesis that puts his will at the center of the gap in his understanding. His claim to never have wanted to make the associations asserts his agency over that gap or hole that disallows him from communicating and consequently interacting with the people not only of his town, but of his own mother. He remains ignorant by choice.

The last part of this passage reveals qualities of the character that are deeply telling. The narrator is happy to retrieve the semblance of agency, but at the cost of the reader's notion of his sociability. That is, he claims to remain ignorant of names and bizarrely disconnected from the world around him as a kind of revenge against his town, because of his disapproval of them. He would rather turn his back on the town than bother to learn their names. His confession that in spite of this, he has spent his "entire life" there in this maze of nameless entities becomes nearly inexplicable. The narrator's antisocial behavior and its connection to the question of his agency will be addressed in greater detail, but for the time being it is important to take note that while he had a number of options on how to live his life in relationship with the town, he neither left the town and went out into the greater world pursuing a happier situation, nor did he engage the town in which he found himself ensconced. Rather, the narrator has withdrawn from the town as a willful act of rejecting them. Where Quijote took his narrative out into the specifics of the world, this narrator is engaged in a contrary trajectory, insulating himself within a hazy notion of a town evacuated of specifics that might threaten his narrative impulse. He is, in some sense, a Quijote who stayed home, and played out his drama on his living room rug.

This willful and self-imposed social isolation and rejection of the town and all its details, when considered in the context of his specific narrative impulses, suggests a definite link between the two. If we consider how, without the details like names and histories that he would have to learn through town gossip and remember but doesn't, the town must remain vague, an abstract sign, with nothing but the most basic fundamental

outlines to give it shape. The narrator's worldview, as it has been seen so far, seems to follow a similar pattern. He requires more simple narratives and that no specialized knowledge or information be included; specifically the names that contain so much information forming the language in which the townspeople are fluent and he is not.

The vagueness implied in the narrator's lack of facility with names is further addressed when he states: "Y no era que yo estuviera desprovisto de recuerdos de verdad, recuerdos plenos" (Aira 8) ("It wasn't as if I were devoid of real memories, full-fledged memories," (Dinner 5)), but when he does relate one it sheds even more light on his narrative concerns. After recounting two almost surreal memories that stretch the notion of reality even for him, one of seamstresses sitting around an enormous pit in a floor with crumbling and rocks and continuing to work and laugh, and second one in which the street where he lived as a child was excavated in an enormous grid of rectangles that looked like graves, he evaluates them according to aesthetics and metaphors of direct correspondence:

Esta recurrencia de los recuerdos de pozos, muy primitivos y quizás fantásticos, quizás venía a simbolizar "huecos" de memoria, o mejor huecos en las historias, que no sólo no se dan en las historias que cuento yo, sino que siempre estoy rellenando en las que me cuentan. A todo el mundo le encuentro fallas en el arte de narrar, casi siempre con razón. Mi madre y mi amigo eran especialmente deficientes en ese aspecto quizás por esa pasión por los nombres, que impedían un desarrollo normal de las historias (Aira 10-11)

These recurrent memories of pits, so primitive and maybe purely fantastical, had maybe come to symbolize “holes” in memory, or rather holes in stories, ones that not only don’t exist in the stories I tell but that I am always filling up in stories others tell me. I find fault in everybody else’s narrative art, almost always with good reason. My mother and my friend were particularly deficient in this respect, perhaps because of their passion for names, which prevented the stories’ normal development. (Dinner 6-7)

This memory represents the narrator’s first attempt at a simple narrative (other than the one that forms the body of the novel), and it is no accident that the narrative is bound inextricably to intention. That is, narrative is employed as an agent of asserting his will. In this case, the narrator attempts to prove to himself that he has real memories by citing a dubious and potentially “purely fantastical” image, without context, and unverifiable by anybody else. Despite the dubious nature of the events related, the fact that the narrator relates it as something he has defined as both “real” and “full-fledged” screams to the unreliability of the narrative objects he constructs, not to mention the veracity of the world represented.

The doubtful nature of the reality represented however, is in some ways masked by a quick narrative turn at the end of the end. Here, by pairing the pairs the workshop story with the road story, he has created an alternate core of meaning that unites the two anecdotes in a coherent single explanation, in other words, he has created a central

narrative before the eyes of the reader. The story of the memories was not about the memories per se, but rather the “gaps” in narrative that he does not allow in his stories and compensates for by inventing details and inserting them into the stories of others. In making this move, he assembles a rather pleasing symmetrical structure; gaps in memory leads to memories of gaps, and the presence of these holes compels him to fill them in, as he has done by relating these memories in order to explain his desire to correct the narratives of others. This links everything together in a meaningful form: his childhood is now in perfect harmony with his criticism of his friend’s stories. But this move also demonstrates three more very important things about the narrative logic at work. First, the narrator demonstrates once again his urge to have structures in place that order and explain reality. While it would be perfectly acceptable to want to critique narrative for any reason or no reason at all, he must explain it. And rather than merely explain it, he is compelled to lean on rather clumsy, or at least obvious, symbolism. Second, the logic he employs is more aesthetic than rational, like the laws operating in rituals of sympathetic magic. It is persuasive, but not convincing. This stands as a good example of the kind of artistically constructed reasoning he relies on. Lastly, the narrator again attacks the use of names; here he makes the startling claim that names “impedían un desarrollo normal de las historias” (Aira 11) (“prevent the stories’ normal development” (Dinner 7)). These three things added together - the desire to order through narrative, the reliance on aesthetic rather than rational mechanisms or create structure, and the aversion to the use of complex, infinitely interconnected detail in narratological development - all combine

to elucidate the concerns that will govern the narrator's narrative, and what will be sacrificed in order to maintain that preferred order.

As a counterpoint to the narrator's stories, the friend's stories are represented as mechanisms of social engagement, both in their content, and in their employment in order to highlight the differences between the narrative aims of the two men, as well as the success with which their narratives meet:

Además, había viajado. No en viajes culturales o de aprendizaje, pero algo se le debía de haber pegado de su recurrencia al Viejo Mundo. Como tantos inmigrantes italianos, había regresado a visitar a la familia no bien sus medios se lo habían permitido. Sus padres, que lo trajeron a la Argentina cuando él era un párvulo, habían dejado numerosos parientes en Nápoles. Él había hecho su primer viaje muy joven, no bien murieron los padres, y volvió muchas veces, acumulando una vasta experiencia europea de la que no cesaba de extraer datos y cuentos con los que sazonar su conversación. Durante la cena, sin ir más lejos, nos había regalado algunas anécdotas curiosas. (Aira 19)

Also, he traveled. Not on cultural trips or to study, but something must have stuck from his visits to the Old World. Like so many Italian immigrants, he had returned to visit his family as soon as he had the means to do so. His parents, who'd brought him to Argentina when he was an infant, had left a lot of relatives behind in Naples. He first went back when he was quite young, shortly after his parents

died, and then he returned many times, accumulating vast European experience, from which he never stopped extracting facts and stories to spice up his conversation. During our dinner - not to go too far afield - he regaled us with several odd anecdotes. (Dinner 12)

Here the narrator addresses the social aspect of narrative explicitly - the friend has gone out into life in order to gain stories that he uses to connect with people. He learns and becomes interesting and is armed with stories all because of his attempt to reach out to connect. Compare this to the narrator, who has lived his whole life in Pringles. His friend has an outwardness that connects him to everything, and is the avenue by which everything gets inside him. The narrator is turned inward and is almost mute. He doesn't know people and consequently fails in business: he has never traveled... he has rejected the town and become insular. He has no stories - something upon which he has already commented. Aira takes special effort to demonstrate the parallel between these failings and the increased unreality of the stories with which the narrator populates his life.

As the novel progresses, it is ultimately his separation from the community that will cause his destruction. In withdrawing he remains, unlike Don Quijote, unmixed and unchanged. He also remains uncorrected, and his variations on the theme of reality are increasingly demonstrated to be if not entirely taken out of whole cloth, at least relying on as little verifiable information as possible in order to construct a narrative. The ability to interject fallacy or fantasy into the narrative format encoded in these mechanisms in

order to construct his internally coherent worldview is exposed at one point in the novel when the narrator relates a tale from his childhood in which he planted a tree:

A mí, como mejor alumno del grado, me tocó plantar uno, supongo que me pusieron, quizás junto a unos compañeritos, frente al hoyo ya cavado, y yo metí el arbolito... Lo tengo muy desdibujado, pero un detalle del episodio lo tengo muy claro, tan claro que me pregunto se no será lo único que pasó, y lo demás lo inventé para completarlo. Nos hicieron aprender un poema para recitar en el acto, y el poema estaba en un libro, y recuerdo perfectamente (más que recordarlo puedo verlo, y ver la altura de la página donde estaba)...Cincuenta años después, los eucaliptus del camino al Cementerio eran enormes y viejos, y yo nunca sabría cuál era el 'mío', si es que era alguno. (Aira 30-31)

As the top student in my class, I got to plant one, and I assume they placed me, maybe with a couple of classmates, in front of a hole that had already been dug, and I stuck in the little tree...It's all blurry, but there is one detail that is very clear, so clear that I wonder if it was the only thing that really happened and that I invented the rest to fill out the story. They made us learn a poem by heart to recite during the event. The poem was in a book, and I remember a two-line passage from that poem perfectly (More than remember, I can see it, see how high it was on the page.... Fifty years later, the eucalyptus trees on the road to the Cemetery

were enormous and old, and I would never know which, if any, was “mine”.

(Dinner 20-21)

Here the detail suggests the existence of a story; once that story is suggested, the narrator's tendency for internally coherent narrative means that he must iron out its structure, even if it requires the naked invention of supplementary details. In this small example, however, we see a difference between the previous: here the single detail demands the fabrication of others to construct a meaningful order, in accordance to the required narrative structure, which is a difference by orders of magnitude from the previous distortions of his memories. But even more significant than that, this act injects the false into the real; reality is now hybridized between the detail he knows is real and those he invented to give the detail context. Injecting falsehood into reality is made permanent - it is associated with the trees that line the street. Where the narrator is unable to remember names of the townspeople, and consequently loses the tapestry of their overlapping narratives, here we see that the town is instead reconstructed by the narrator in obedience to his systematizing urge; reality can be warped in his narrative representations, even if they purport to represent reality, and these distorted representations are offered to the reader to sustain the narrative structure.

To all of these narrative tendencies is added another that has potentially grave consequences for the narrator. Throughout, the narrator moves away from detail and toward a conventional notion of story development. This has surprising consequences for the notion of reality. In the course of their dinner conversation, the friend recounts the

anecdote of how his own sage had been ruined. The narrator characterizes it in an interesting way; where the friend talks about it with specific details, the narrator abstracts it, and in doing so, commits the act that he accuses his friend of committing; of obeying “a las causalidades más rutinarias de la historia cotidiana” (Aira 27) (“an average story’s most humdrum causality” (Dinner 18) and of converting everything to fable. The narrator says that his friend recounts the anecdote without nuances but then characterizes the anecdote as “un enanito de ochenta y ocho años se había caído encima del cantero desde una gran altura y había aplastado las frágiles plantitas (Aira 27) “an eighty-eight-year-old dwarf fell on the planting bed from a great height and crushed his delicate herbs” (Dinner 18). This is really a much more astonishing version of the anecdote that the friend actually tells. When the story is given its details, the narrative is fleshed out, and becomes remarkably less remarkable - the man was a friend of the friend, they had worked together a long time, he was short, but not really a dwarf, he fell off a ladder, etc. This last detail alone - “fell from a great height” vs ‘fell off a ladder’ demonstrates concisely how the narrator refigures the friend’s more prosaic story and turning it into fable. This makes things more general, simpler, and in doing so introduces elements of mystery and ambiguity into the story. He turns it into a kind of monument - fewer details, pointing to an unaccountable and unretrievable reality. The narrator’s characterization of the events makes for a truly remarkable and truly strange narrative, but in order to be so, is required to be utterly unconnected to the world around him. In fact, the narrator’s retelling and refiguring of the anecdote pulls it out of the world of names and interpersonal connections, creating a startling fable instead. This is a perfect example of how the

narrator lives in an ambiguous world without any connections to it. The consequence of his act is clear; in retelling the story in this way, reality obeys the requirements of narrative more, but resembles reality less. In this less real reality is suddenly permitted near magical elements that nevertheless do not exist.

The narrator's use of the phrase 'humdrum causality' serves as a clarion call to one of the key philosophical trajectories that Aira encodes into the narrative permutations of the narrator, and it is imperative to the careful reader that it not pass unnoticed. One sense of causality the narrator might mean is a teleological causality, one in which the chain of events must lead to the necessary, or required, conclusion. In the "average story", the expectation is generally that causality will obey the basic tenet of Chekhov's gun: "If in the first act you have hung a pistol on the wall, then in the following one it should be fired. Otherwise don't put it there" (Gurlyand 521). And here we see the narrator obeying this general principle almost to the exclusion to all other considerations. In this case, we have seen how the narrator's preference for narrative continuity combined with his lack of facility with complex systems of layered and overlapping meanings has caused him to inject reality with an element of the unreal. The ambiguity admitted into the narrative process, and the pliability of detail under those larger forms represents one facet of the dangers that lurk within the process of organizing according to narrative forms without the correctives of interpersonal engagement. All of the desires the narrator has expressed have moved him inexorably toward the same state of social isolation and failure; whether it be his inability to permit the adventitious elements in the narratives of others and to exert narrative conquest in the correcting and retelling of

narratives not his own, or in the narrator's inability to tolerate the wandering narrative structures of others despite them fulfilling their social function, all his tendencies put him at odds with his community and meaningful interactions with those around him.

After demonstrating the narrator's narrative preferences and abilities - that is, simple forms that obey causality, and the lack of exactitude with respect to the details that exist within those simple structures - the novel has the narrator engaged in consuming fiction almost perfectly designed for him; a banal, genre-driven zombie story. While I said at the outset that the zombie broadcast is a fiction, and that the narrator misunderstands it as reality, it is precisely in the way that he misunderstands it that his error becomes significant and potentially useful to the reader as a kind of cautionary example. It is not likely that the reader him or herself will be seduced into believing the reality of a zombie apocalypse, but it is precisely by using a banal and predictable narrative like a zombie apocalypse, in which every detail is already familiar and the entire story arc can be assumed, that Aira is able to demonstrate how the narrator's inability to read deeply and interpret with intellectual rigor, poses dangers that are, if not globally, at least personally catastrophic. After establishing not only the story's concern for narrative by the emphasis put on the subject, and then establishing the not only the narrator's deficiencies with respect to his ability to utilize concrete details, to remember names, to comprehend complex and overlapping narratives, and ultimately prefer simple narrative structures that admit uncertainty and magic, but also in presenting the narrator's belief that he, despite all these things, is vastly superior to others in his narrative ability,

the stage is set for the narrator to be persuaded by just such a simple narrative that makes him look ridiculous to the reader.

The way the error occurs does two things at once; on the one hand it shows how a narrative logic so dependent on simple structures is able to be easily fooled, and at the same time it exerts this pressure, now that it is identified, directly upon the reader. In the story, the narrator sits at home after the dinner at his friend's house, channel surfing alone. He flips past what appears to be a live broadcast of a local showcase where the host and the cameraman went around from restaurant to nightclub, showcasing the local businesses of their small town. As he describes it, there were long breaks when the host went from one place to another, and he often gets bored by them. The lapses are particularly long, and he becomes annoyed until he finally ascertains that:

Todas mis suposiciones resultaron erróneas, menos una: la cámara nocturna realmente iba tras una noticia imprevista, de la que se había enterado en medio de su recorrida por los boliches. Pero no era un accidente de ruta, ni un incendio ni un crimen, sino algo mucho más extraño, tanto que nadie en su sano juicio podía creer que estuviera sucediendo de verdad. De modo que iban (no podían dejar de ir) para desmentir la patraña o desenmascarar a los bromistas. La broma podía estar en la llamada, en la información que los había puesto en marcha, y si era así no encontrarían nada. En fin. Iban al Cementerio, porque les habían dicho que los muertos estaban saliendo por sus propios medios de las sepulturas. El dato era tan improbable como una fantasía adolescente. Y sin embargo, era cierto. El guardián

que dio la alarma fue advertido por murmullos que se multiplicaban en toda la extensión del camposanto. Salió de su casilla a ver, y no había terminado de cruzar el patio embaldosado en el que desembocaba la primera avenida de cipreses cuando a los susurros inquietantes empezaron a sumarse ruidos fuertes de piedras y metales, que en segundos se generalizaron y sumaron en un estruendo ensordecedor, que resonaba cerca y lejos, desde las alas frontales de nichos y los profundos caminos de sepulturas a casi un kilómetro de distancia. Pensó en un temblor de tierra, lo que habría sido algo nunca visto en la quieta llanura pringlense. Pero tuvo que descartarlo porque las baldosas bajo sus pies no podían estar más quietas. Ya estaba viendo, a la luz de la Luna, qué era lo que producía los ruidos. Las lápidas de mármol se desplazaban, levantadas por un costado, y se volcaban rompiéndose. Dentro de las bóvedas se quebraban cajones y herrajes, y las puertas mismas se sacudían movidas desde adentro, estallaban los candados y se rompían los vidrios. Las tapas de los nichos se desprendían y caían al suelo con estrépito. Cruces de cemento y ángeles de estuco volaban por el aire, impulsados por la violencia de la abertura de las criptas. El trueno de esta demolición no había cesado cuando se alzó de los escombros, y se diría que de la tierra misma, un coro de suspiros y gemidos que tenía una resonancia electrónica, no humana. Entonces el guardián vio a los primeros muertos, que salían caminando de las bóvedas más cercanas. (Aira 53-56)

All of my supposition turned out to be wrong, the nocturnal camera really was going in pursuit of a startling news item that it had heard about while making the rounds of the nightclubs. Though it was neither a traffic accident nor a fire nor a crime, but something much stranger, so strange that nobody in their right mind could believe that it was really happening. So they were going (they couldn't not go) to expose the lie and unmask the pranksters. The prank might have been the phone call, or the information that had made them go, and if so, they wouldn't find anything.

Anyway. They were on their way to the Cemetery because they'd been told that the dead were rising from their graves of their own accord. This was as improbable as an adolescent fantasy. It was, however, true. The guard who sounded the alarm first heard some rustling sounds that kept getting louder and spreading across the graveyard. He came out of the lodge to take a look and hadn't even made it across the tiled courtyard to where the first lane of cypresses ended when, in addition to the worrisome rustlings, he began to hear the loud banging of stone and metal, which seconds later spread and combined into a deafening roar that reverberated near and far from the first wing of the wall of niches to the rows of graves that extending for more than a mile. He thought of an earthquake, something never before seen on the serene plains of Pringles. But he had to dismiss this idea because the paving under his feet could not have been more still. Then he managed so see, by the light of the moon, what was making the noise. The marble gravestones were moving, rising from one side and

breaking as they came hurtling down. Inside the crypts, coffins and iron fittings were splitting open, and the doors themselves were being shaken from inside, the padlocks were bursting open, and the windows were shattering. The covers of the niches were being forced off and were crashing loudly to the ground. Concrete crosses and stucco angels flew through the air, hurled from the crypts as they violently flung open.

The thunderous roar of this demolition had still not ceased when there rose from the wreckage - one could say from the earth itself - a chorus of sighs and groans that had an electronic rather than human timbre. That's when the guard saw the first dead walking out of the nearest vaults. (34-37)

This zombie apocalypse continues for the bulk of the rest of the novel, where the undead wash over the town, devouring all the living in their wake. There is a last stand, and when the destruction of the living is nearly complete, a coincidence saves the day: an old woman recognizes the zombie attacking her and says his name. The zombie is immediately neutralized, and soon everyone everywhere is naming the zombies and sending them harmlessly back to the cemetery. Symbolically it is apparent that it is social interaction that saves the living, and precisely in the form of names, the great failure of the narrator, that the zombies are defeated. This of course is a condemnation of the narrator. But while this gives a serious overtone of doom to the narrator, the great damage is done not by zombies, but by a narrative turn that throws him for a loop. The program he has been watching was not, as he suspected, a local live television program, but a

zombie movie in the form of local live television. The reader might perhaps be expected to be familiar with the narrative format of fake documentary, and might be able to see through the genre's mechanism to deceive the viewer in its effort impart the sense of reality to the viewer. In order to make the narrative more persuasive, Aira has, in this last passage, fundamentally altered the nature of the novel's narrative. This passage begins with the narrative controlled by the unnamed narrator, describing the experience of what he was watching on the television. But by degrees the narrative turns away from this dynamic, until the zombie narrative has entirely taken over, and the narrating structures become ambiguous and invisible. The language at the beginning of the passage clearly locates the narrative in the narrator: "All of my suppositions turned out to be wrong." But in following the film's storyline, the telling becomes more ambiguous. By the time the text says the duo was searching not for an accident but for "something much stranger, so strange that nobody in their right mind could believe that it was really happening. So they were going (they couldn't not go) to expose the lie and unmask the pranksters." At this point it is somewhat unclear if it is the narrator who is editorializing or if it is a summary of an element of plot, reported directly from the screen. Directly following this is information that comes to the reader without any obvious source: "The guard who sounded the alarm first heard some rustling sounds that kept getting louder and spreading across the graveyard..." This line functions as a transition from a level of specificity that endorses the idea that this is the report that the duo received, to something that is impossibly specific. The guard, "thought of an earthquake," which is something that is still conceivably possible in the context of reported information. But the description

continues to become more specific and dense, until the security guard, still all alone in the cemetery, is devoured by the undead, completely precluding the possibility that these details, and most especially his private thoughts, could be reported to anyone at all, let alone the host and the cameraman. By the time the reader has reached this point in the narrative, the narrative itself has taken over, everything swept up in the rapidly developing story of the zombie apocalypse. One horror scene follows another, desperate moments are chronicled, and the town is overrun until the town is able to save itself and the dead rest once more. Throughout the rest of this section, the narrative never returns to the narrator's control.

The details of the zombie attack are presented with third person authority, and, excepting the curious way the zombies are pacified, the story never deviates from more or less acceptable variations of the genre's norms. The reader of the novel has started reading on certain terms, those of a first-person narrated novel of discourse, following literary conventions, but has ended up reading a breakneck genre tale about the undead. Aira turns the narrative by degrees to push the reader into the same kind of experience as the narrator. The introduction of the genre projects certain expectations that, when they are fulfilled, distract the narrator from what ultimately amounts to his intellectual autonomy. The narrator is seduced into misreading the film as reality because it perfectly matches his own particular preferences of narrative - it is highly structured, obeys the causality with no gaps, everything is integral and explained. It is a totalized world system, complete with symmetry and symbolism, and as such, it does not provoke his criticism. Consequently his skepticism is pacified, or rather, not initiated at all. The

reader is both drawn into the narrative by Aira's clever narrative turns, and, with the combination of the narrative switch and locating the story in the narrator's town, with all its details, the reader never knows if he or she is reading about a narrator watching a zombie film, or reading a novel that posits the in-text reality of a zombie apocalypse.

Aira could easily have ended the novel at the conclusion of the zombie narrative, but he does not. Instead, he brings the text back to the original first person narration presented at the outset of the novel. Unlike the smooth transition into the zombie narrative however, this transition is abrupt and jarring. The zombie tale ends section 2 of the novel, and upon turning to section 3, the reader is again presented with the narrator's voice:

A la mañana siguiente me desperté deprimido, aun antes de saber que estaba deprimido. Después recordé que era domingo, el día más difícil de sobrellevar para mí. La depresión del domingo es un clásico, y no podía no serlo en alguien sin trabajo, sin familia, sin perspectivas. (Aira 124)

The following morning I woke up depressed, even before I realized that I was depressed. Then I remembered that it was Sunday, the most difficult day for me to endure. Sunday depression is a classic, and how could it not be for someone without a job, without a family, and without prospects. (Dinner, 85)

Moving from the over the top drama of zombie attacks, horror, and death, to the first person complaining about very real world disappointments is startlingly incongruous. As the narrator continues lamenting about his failures and ruminating on the topic of luck, the zombie narrative begins to fade; it seemed to come from nowhere, and disappear into nothing. When the narrator mentions the zombies again it comes as a shock:

“Al fin me levanté y me vestí. Habría querido salir, para ver cómo se reponía la gente de la ordalía de la noche, pero al fin no salí” (Aira 126-7) “Finally, I got up and got dressed. I would have liked to go out, to see how the people were recovering from the night’s ordeal, but in the end I didn’t” (Dinner 86-87). Referencing the zombie story in this way strikes a chord of unreality; but strangely it is no longer the zombie apocalypse that seems most improbable; rather, it is the strange, lackadaisical way the narrator is encountering the possibility that something so completely unbelievable has occurred. The person, then, has become the object of unreality. He is so persuaded by a simple, linear narrative form that when one is offered to him, he is willing to accept the most improbable things as true. Aira’s repeated insistence on the social dynamic of narrative adds another nuance to this troubling notion. The narrator is more or less socially isolated and, without the interaction and conflict between the narrator’s narrative and competing narratives in a social dialectic, the narrator is left alone to believe the most horrifying things. Aira does not, however, leave the narrator in possession of such beliefs; instead he takes the opportunity to reinstate the narrator in a social context, and the phone call that closes the novel stands as a condemnation of and encodes the final failure of the narrator.

The narrator's antisocial tendencies have had the very notable exception of the relationship with the friend, but in this last chapter it is revealed that while "he was the only friend I had left" (96), the narrator nevertheless is only using the dinner as a pretext for asking the friend to back a business venture in his last shot at being a successful business man. His plan to persuade his friend is described in characteristic broad strokes, in which the details are flexible:

Hay cosas que es imposible no comprender si uno las vive, o al menos si respira su atmósfera, porque entonces, aunque no las comprenda con el entendimiento las capta con todo su ser y le quedan bien registradas, que era lo que yo quería que hiciera mi amigo, de modo de irlo preparando para cuando llegara mi pedido de auxilio....Yo me venía preparando para una larga y compleja tarea de persuasión. Compleja, porque no bastaba con decirlo; todos lo decían, y las palabras ya no servían. Tendría que recurrir a una combinación funcional de imagen y discurso, y en el discurso una mezcla bien dosificada de realidad y ficción. (Aira 141-144)

There are things that are impossible not to understand if you experience them, or at least if you inhale their atmosphere, because then, even if you don't grasp them with your understanding, you grasp them with your being, and you register them deeply, which is what I wanted my friend to do, to prepare him for my request for help....I was prepared for the long and complex task of persuasion. Complex, because just saying it wouldn't work; everybody said it, and the words no longer meant anything. I would have to resort to a practical combination of image and

discourse, and in the discourse to a well-rationed mixture of reality and fiction.

(Dinner, 96-98)

This then is about as accurate a description of the narrative structures that guide his thinking as found anywhere else. The big picture is rigid, the materials used to build that metastructure on the other hand are fluid, negotiable. In the process of this persuasion, however, the narrator makes use of the current events, and mentions the destruction of the town by the zombies. This is ultimately a misstep as it initiates multiple level conversation in which the narrator is talking about what he believes to be actual events, and the friend knows is just a movie. The revealing moment comes when the friend says,

Nosotros lo vimos en el verano. Los chicos se desternillaron de risa.

Quedé bastante descolocado. ¿Cómo? ¿Ya había pasado antes? ¿Cómo era posible que yo no me hubiera enterado?

No te preocupes, que no te perdiste nada, dijo, y repitió: qué desastre.

Me di cuenta de que esta última palabra la estábamos usando en sentidos diferentes, yo en referencia a los hechos, él como calificación estética....

Aparentemente, uno estaba hablando de la cosa, el otro de su representación. En este punto, debería haberle pedido que me explicara, pero me dio pudor porque sospechaba que habría equivalido a confesar una ignorancia o una ingenuidad descalificatorias. (Aira 144-145)

We saw it this summer. The kids laughed their heads off.

This threw me for a loop. What? Had they shown up before? How's it possible I hadn't heard about it?

Don't worry, you didn't miss a thing, he said, and repeated: What a disaster.

I realized that we were using that last word to mean two different things: I was referring to facts and he to an aesthetic judgement... Apparently, one was talking about the event, the other about its representation. At that point, I should have asked him to explain, but I was embarrassed because I suspected it would have been the equivalent of confessing to a disqualifying lack of knowledge or a surplus of naïveté. (99).

Here begins the condemnation and last failure of the narrator: he realizes that he does not have enough real-world knowledge to correctly situate the zombie narrative in its proper place in the world. The reason for this is made clear in how Aira frames the program: where the friend watches the show with his family, the narrator watches it alone.

Moreover, he directly says:

La televisión se había vuelto mi única ocupación real. Y ni siquiera me gustaba. En mi juventud no existía (en Pringles), y cuando viví solo no tuve televisor, así que no me hice el hábito, no le tomé el gusto. Pero desde que me mudé al departamento de mamá no tenía otra cosa. (Aira 45-46)

Television had become my only real occupation. And I didn't even like it. When I was young, it didn't exist (in Pringles), and when I lived alone I didn't have a TV, so I never got into the habit and never learned to like it. But ever since I'd moved into my mother's apartment, it was all I had. (Dinner, 31)

The very fact of watching television was foreign to the narrator, and the result of the unwilling social interaction the narrator has in living with his mother out of financial necessity. Just as with all the other examples, the friend moves outward, and his engagement with narrative greater social interaction. The narrator, on the other hand, has no social desires, and consequently narrative exists exclusively in its abstract terms.

Because the narrator's inexperience in narrating in the context of a social dialectic, the narrator loses control of the conversation that he thought he would so skillfully dominate using his manipulative combinations; instead the friend picks up the line of conversation and begins to rail against the local television network, whose programming is banal at best, and at worst, completely cut off from any potential market base, and consequently the possibility of success:

Si los negocios fracasan es por culpa de los pringlenses, que quieren ganar plata imitando a los empresarios en serio pero sin poner nada de lo que hace falta para que una empresa prospere. Nunca oyeron hablar de reinversión, de estudios de mercado, de crecimiento. Son unos bolicheros sin visión, que ni siquiera tienen

sentido común. ¡Pero decime un poco...! ¿A vos te parece que se puede llevar adelante un canal de televisión sin ideas, sin creatividad, sin talento? ¿Creerán que se hace solo? ¿Que la gente es idiota? ¡Por favor! El secreto del éxito es el empeño inteligente, el trabajo acompañado por el pensamiento, la autocrítica, la evaluación realista del medio, y sobre todo la exigencia. No la exigencia mezquina de la ganancia sino la de los sueños juveniles a los que no es necesario renunciar, todo lo contrario. Hay que saber mirar más allá de los intereses de la supervivencia y proponerse darle algo al mundo, porque sólo los que den van a recibir. Y para eso se precisa imaginación. La prosa de los negocios tiene que expresarse en la poesía de la vida. (Aira 146-8)

If businesses fail, the Pringlesians are the only ones to blame; they want to make money by imitating real businessmen but without doing what's necessary to make a business prosper. They've never heard of reinvestment, market research, growth. They're just shopkeepers, with no vision, and they don't even have common sense. Tell me the truth...! You think they can run a television station without any ideas, without creativity, without talent? Do they think it will run itself? Do you think people are idiots? Ple-e-ase! The secret of success is intelligent effort, work accompanied by thought, self-criticism, a realistic assessment of the environment, and above all, demand. Not the paltry demand of profit but on the contrary, of youthful dreams that should never be abandoned. You have to know how to see beyond the interests of survival and make the decision to give something to the

world, because only those who give, receive. And for that, you need imagination.

The prose of business must express itself in the poetry of life. (Dinner 100-101)

While ostensibly directed at the network as an example of the failure of local business, this passage is also a summary judgment against the narrator. The narrator has none of the requisite abilities to be a successful businessman; in fact he fails at every single point of the friend's rant. The narrator's idea for his business venture is as amorphous as those of the station: "Me había propuesto renovar nuestra amistad, profundizarla, darle una vuelta de tuerca, de modo de preparar el camino para lograr que me financiara algún proyecto (todavía no sabía cuál) con el que levantar cabeza" (Aira 140). "I was planning to rekindle our friendship, turn it up a notch, set the stage for him to finance a project (I still didn't know which) I could use to get back on my feet" (Dinner 96). This "project" is left undefined, a notion rather than a plan, and functions in the same aesthetic way that we have seen in his reasoning earlier; the signifier "project" is structurally pleasing in his rudimentary narrative, but without details it lacks reality, and in this case, lacks all possibility of success. The narrator is so disconnected from the community that he certainly cannot assess the environment; in his own words he had "una aceptación general del mundo, cercana a la indiferencia" (Aira 139). "an acceptance of the world that approached indifference" (Dinner 95). He is so disinterested in everything that there are no youthful dreams whatsoever and his rejection of the town certainly precludes the motivation to give something. The requisite quality that one needs imagination bookends the narrator's own characterization of himself at the beginning of the chapter, where he

says that he “Nunca fui bueno con el fantaseo” (Aira 125). “was never any good at fantasizing” (Dinner 85). So the novel finally arrives at its last line, when it becomes obvious that the narrator has ultimately failed; he will not succeed in business, and he will not get this last chance from his friend. His failure is finally complete.

It is in the tone of this final rant, and the judgment implied in the final line, that the intent of Aira’s narrative can be partially gleaned. If the narrator is to be judged, then it becomes possible to read the novel as something of a cautionary tale. While it is easy to read it predominantly as a tale about social connection, the narrator’s fixation on the narrative impulse, and Aira’s reinforcement of the theme in his skillful misdirection at the opening of the zombie tale, makes the novel more about the dangers that exist in certain narrative tendencies. Specifically Aira locates narrative tendencies that operate outside of a social context; that exist only to preserve their own simple aesthetic forms. But while we have seen how the narrator uses these narrative tendencies as a method of antisocial behavior, in that he prefers the simple structures to one more reflective of reality, and that he withdraws from the social dialectic to preserve his own structures, this is not the worst of the effects that Aira presents. Rather, Aira cautions that by preferring simple narrative structures, such as those pleasing forms contained in jejune genre fiction, combined with an inattention to detail that is commensurate to their relatively unimportant role in larger structures such as those found in genre fictions, it becomes relatively easy to be manipulated and tricked. The structures can be constructed out of elements that are either skewed, as we have seen the narrator do, or are simply wrong. Aira’s textual manipulation of the reader thematizes the manipulative force encoded within the

seductive forms of pleasing narrative coherency, and by adapting this trick to a genre that is so completely based on fantasy, he is able to demonstrate just how wide-ranging is the harmful potential of this narrative turn. His ultimate judgment of the narrator demonstrates that one may be manipulated by narrative form, and that incorporating falseness in this way can have powerful if not determining power over the success and happiness of an individual's life.

This insight provides an illuminating comparison to Don Quijote. Don Quijote is created as a surprising character; his anachronistic nature is a central point of the novel, and the obedience to the norms of the genre in whose image he has created himself is of course designed to be problematic. But Aira's novel operates in a different direction; he begins with a character who is more or less average - he does not reinvent himself, or make any startling moves. In fact he even characterizes himself as someone who knows that "En la etapa de mi vida en la que me encontraba, yo había llegado a la conclusión de que nunca sería protagonista de ninguna historia. Todo lo que podía esperar era asomarme a la realidad de una ajena" (Aira 47). "At this stage of my life, I had reached the conclusion that I would never be the protagonist of any story. The only thing I could hope for was to make an appearance in somebody else's" (Dinner 32). That being said it is through slow narrative turns that Aira has the character become stranger and stranger before the reader's eyes. By the time the novel has reached its conclusion, the narrator has become just as hybridized as Don Quijote. But where Don Quijote is visible and surprising, Aira's narrator has incorporated his strangeness into himself invisibly, and the fictional nature of his reality is disguised beneath his otherwise ordinary appearance.

Here the narrator's attempt for narrative control is thwarted by precisely his lack of narrative understanding and correction he would have gained through the social dialectic. So just as Don Quijote ends his novel in a moment of both his ultimate success and his failure, so too does narrator find an experience of reality that has a pleasing simple structure without gaps, but is also brought to destruction because of it. It is this that led Don Quijote to the miserable state in which he was obligated to bring about a conclusion that he was not empowered to author. All of Quijote's misery results from this same destructive urge for simplicity. If not for Quijote's final move toward a hybridized narrative format, which offered a glimmer of hope for personal happiness and success in a new format, but none of the pleasures of the completion of a simple narrative. Don Quijote forced others to incorporate elements of fiction within their own experience of reality; here the narrator has incorporated fiction into his reality to force it into a pleasing order. Where Don Quijote's social engagement sees others participating according to the rules of his worldview, in doing so, he is left despondent and ultimately ruined. Aira's narrator lacks social engagement and because of it is ultimately ruined. Don Quijote is hybridized by his experiences in the world, and the world is hybridized in return; with Aira the narrator is hybridized on accident and lives in a wildly distorted world.

Chapter 3: Conrad and the Ethical Trap of Narrative Completion

In the previous chapters we have seen that *Don Quijote* portrays how narrative systems become hybridized through prolonged social interaction, and how narrative authority, in being dictated by genre norms, is ultimately beyond individual control. In *La cena* we have seen how the affinity for certain kinds of simple, continuous narrative forms can restructure one's perception of the nature of reality, and in doing so, inject elements of falsity into the human experience, resulting in serious consequences. Conrad's *Lord Jim* represents the next step in the progression of this argument and attempts to construct a narrative continuity out of the hybrid fragments of the protagonist's experience. But unlike *Don Quijote*, this narrative manipulation is not directed at other characters; rather it crosses a diegetic level and is aimed at the reader. *Lord Jim* attempts to use the narrative continuity and the logic of genre fiction in order to seduce the reader into being complicit in a questionable ethical judgment. It identifies such machinations by embedding a dissembling narrative within a context that allows the reader protection against it. In making both moves, the novel becomes a vivid warning against the dangers latent in the satisfying continuity of narrative, and an example of the nature of a reality that is transformed by being restructured according to genre norms.

In terms of story content, *Lord Jim* is more or less straightforward: it follows Jim through his life at sea, beginning with his officer training, through his failure to perform his duty on the steamer *Patna*, which, owing to a dangerous situation, he abandons,

leaving behind 800 passengers. Jim is put on trial and subsequently moves from place to place to escape his shame until he finally comes to the island of Patusan, where he becomes a kind of chieftain. Jim dies when, after giving his word that a group of desperate sailors who had come to the island would not harm the natives, the sailors betray Jim and slaughter the natives, Jim submits to the tribal chief and is executed. But the effort of the novel has, in some respects, very little to do with Jim, and much more to do with the use to which Jim is put by Charles Marlow, a captain who narrates the bulk of the story. Marlow is sympathetic to Jim, and tries to help him numerous times and in multiple ways. Ultimately Marlow attempts to redeem Jim by converting the details of his life into a story, governed by the same kind of simple narrative system that governs the genre fictions of sea romances. By creating a narrative in this way, and setting up the seductive pattern of expectation and satisfaction, the anonymous hearer of Marlow's tale, and consequently the reader, are seduced into accepting the conclusion.

Conrad frames this process of seduction by situating Marlow's narrative after Jim's youth is described by another, omniscient narrator. This juxtaposition allows the careful reader to see that Marlow's structure is suspect, and that consequently the conclusion he compels the reader to accept is dubious. The novel encodes this process so subtly that it merits some teasing out to see how the dynamics interact in order to see how, on the one hand, the careful reader is to be sure that Marlow is manipulating the reader, and on the other, just how it is that he does so. The former requires a look at both how the reader can see Marlow's distortions, and also what his motivations are for

doing so. In analyzing his motivations, it will become clear that Marlow himself is dominated by the same unspoken reliance on the structures of sea romance as Jim and, in defending Jim, Marlow is defending these structures. The latter requires that we consider the trajectory of Marlow's "argument" in favor of Jim; specifically how it begins with an "impressionistic" method of relating events, and then moves into a less realistic narrative, driven, in the end, almost exclusively by its participation in the structures of romantic fiction. In the end we will see how by exploiting the internalized system of reward resulting from the process of expectation/satisfaction encoded in sea romance Marlow compels the reader to accept his conclusion that Jim is redeemed. What Marlow offers is ultimately a closed system whereby the ethic encoded in the structure uses the structure to support the ethic. Conrad packages all of this within a framework that provides just enough external information and narrative space for the reader to reach conclusions not entirely contrived by Marlow. But we must earn our way to the general; let us begin with the facts.

It is no coincidence that among the first pieces of information the omniscient narrator gives the reader at the open of the novel is that Jim himself was motivated by fiction. The information provided is not shaded by a confessed sympathy or sense of identification as Marlow's later narrative will be. Instead, it rather piteously characterizes Jim's motivations: "when, after a course of light holiday literature his vocation for the sea had declared itself, he was sent at once to a "raining-ship for officers of the mercantile marine"' (Conrad 8). The narrator highlights the romantic fictional aspect of Jim's

motivations by emphasizing the role Jim's imagination has in his interest of life at sea: "he would forget himself, and beforehand live in his mind the sea-life of light literature. He saw himself saving people from sinking ships, cutting away masts in a hurricane...He confronted savages on the tropical shores, quelled mutinies on the high seas, and in a small boat upon the ocean kept up the hearts of despairing men - always an example of devotion to duty, and as unflinching as a hero in a book" (Conrad 9). These impulses are in both examples associated with "light" literature, with its simple narrative structure, and in which there is no extraneous detail or gap. But these lines are significant for other reasons as well; it is precisely according to these models that Marlow will construct the "Jim narrative" when he has taken over the narrative. More locally, these lines frame Jim's nature because they come before Jim's first failure is related in the text, where in a moment of emergency Jim fails to react and remains in paralyzed imagination until it is too late. Jim's inner turmoil over his failure is visceral: "He felt angry with the brutal tumult of earth and sky for taking him unawares and checking unfairly a generous readiness for narrow escapes" (Conrad 10). This last demonstrates that Jim's motivations are aesthetic, rather than ethical. He is concerned with narrow escapes, rather than failing his fellow sailors in need. Yet the link is clear- if Jim is motivated by the aesthetic, it is still in the form of the ethical that these heroisms and adventures are expressed. These details, offered to the reader in a rather offhand manner here, become enormously important in understanding Marlow's motivations and mechanisms.

Before ceding the narrative to Marlow, however, the omniscient narrator adds a few more pieces of significant information that reinforce the oppositional nature of Jim's romantic longings on the one hand and of the banalities of the reality in which he actually finds himself. The most important of these by far is that Jim never grows to truly love the sea life: "entering the regions so well known in his imagination, found them to be strangely barren of adventure.... He knew the magic monotony of existence between sky and water...whose only reward is in the perfect love of the work. This reward eluded him" (Conrad 11). After years and many voyages, Jim's motivation is still a sense of adventure culled from light fiction. Just before the narrative breaks and Marlow takes over, the omniscient narrator has Jim aboard the *Patna*, which will shortly be crippled by an accident, and which Jim will abandon, giving in to habitual flights of imagination: "his thoughts would be full of valorous deeds: he loved these dreams and the success of his imaginary achievements. They were the best parts of life, its secret truth, its hidden reality" (Conrad 17). It is important that the omniscient narrator establish these tendencies firmly before Marlow takes over the narrative because Marlow's characterization of events is biased by his sense of identification, and ultimately we will see that he is similarly motivated.

When Marlow takes over the narrative, it is in the middle of Jim's inquiry, still recounting the events of the night on the *Patna*. Marlow is struck by Jim, and his bias toward Jim is in part based on identification: "I watched the youngster there. I liked his appearance; I knew his appearance: he came from the right place; he was one of

us” (Conrad 30). This last phrase is repeated at various times throughout the Marlow narrative and could convincingly be thought to compose the core of his motivation for helping Jim. But there is something else operating in that phrase that remains latent: Marlow has a great deal of trouble dealing with appearances that are irreconcilable with reality; he wants things to be as they seem. He expresses this concern repeatedly through the text: “I was angry... He had no business to look so sound. I thought to myself - well, if this sort can go wrong like that... and I felt as though I could fling down my hat and dance on it from sheer mortification” (Conrad 29). The implication in this statement is clear: it can happen to anyone, which would presumably include Marlow himself. He intensifies this association when he states, “I tell you I ought to know the right kind of looks. I would have trusted the deck to that youngster on the strength of a single glance, and gone to sleep with both eyes - and by Jove! it wouldn’t have been safe” (Conrad 31). Here Marlow expresses the more superficial justifications for his identification with Jim. There is a deeper consequence implied by Jim’s difficulty: Jim embodies the romantic worldview encoded within the sea tales, complete with the ethical structures that are defined exclusively by the action of the heroic tales. These romantic ethical structures and worldview are what Marlow himself subscribes to, and what is worse than the notion that someone could fail to live up to those obligations is that in such a failure the whole system could be invalidated. Marlow admits as much:

I hoped for the impossible—for the laying of what is the most obstinate ghost of man's creation, of the uneasy doubt uprising like a mist, secret and gnawing like a worm, and more chilling than the certitude of death—the doubt of the sovereign power enthroned in a fixed standard of conduct. (Conrad 34-35)

It is not Jim that he feels the need to justify, it is the system of engaging life that he has relied on his whole life. This characterization of what Marlow feels the need to defend as a “system of conduct” at first appears somewhat narrower than it actually is. If we believe Marlow in his argument, the system of conduct is what is left after experience has winnowed down the vast, ambiguous notions that drove him to sea. Marlow spends a significant amount of time explaining this process of disillusionment and characterizes it as operating not only for him but for all sailors. His description of it contains much of the aesthetic process of reasoning operating on all sailors, including himself: “There is such magnificent vagueness in the expectations that had driven each of us to sea, such a glorious indefiniteness, such a beautiful greed of adventures that are their own and only reward...In no other kind of life is the illusion more wide of reality - in no other is the beginning *all* illusion - the disenchantment more swift - the subjugation more complete. Hadn't we all commenced with the same desire, ended with the same knowledge, carried the memory of the same cherished glamour through the sordid days of imprecation?” (Conrad 79). But while here Marlow is judging the entire motivation for men to go to sea to be an imaginative one, his description of the imaginative object as

specifically vague is in line with his confessed aesthetic order - he is no man for details. He would seem to be making a distinction between Jim and himself by pointing out the disillusionment that he must have experienced himself in order to know. He does this many times throughout the novel, leading readers to frequently characterize Marlow as world-weary. But this is again Marlow's situating himself so as to straddle these two positions. He remembers those ambiguous expectations, yet experience has worn them all away. This, however, is not an accurate portrayal of Marlow's nature. Over the course of his narration, small insights as to Marlow's true nature are revealed, as when he admits of Jim: "I was aggrieved against him, as though he had cheated me - me! - of a splendid opportunity to keep up the illusion of my beginnings, as though he had robbed our common life of the last spark of glamour" (Conrad 81). Despite his protests to the contrary, Marlow is still persuaded by those vague, aesthetic structures of expectation. And ultimately in making the connection between illusion and the fixed standard of behavior, the implication is clear that Marlow's value system is just as much a product of light fiction as Jim's, right down to his description of Jim's desire to be "always an example of devotion to duty." Marlow believes in the ethics encoded deep in the core structures of romantic sea tales.

With Marlow's motivation understood in this way, it is not surprising that he will come to rely on the vague romantic notions and jejune narrative structures in order to redeem Jim, nor is it surprising, given his own characterization of a sailor's disillusionment, that an open use of the structures of light fiction is impermissible.

Nevertheless it is important to note that Marlow is almost immediately identified as a “big picture” kind of narrator, and details can remain ambiguous, or altogether deceitful:

He wanted an ally, a helper, an accomplice.... He appealed to all sides at once—to the side turned perpetually to the light of day, and to that side of us which, like the other hemisphere of the moon, exists stealthily in perpetual darkness, with only a fearful ashy light falling at times on the edge. He swayed me. I own to it, I own up. (Conrad 59)

This passage does several things at once - first, it identifies Marlow as a partisan on the behalf of Jim. From this point on, there is no good reason to trust Marlow as a narrator: he is biased and has made clear to what end. But a startling detail is added into the argument that might pass as a superfluous point of poetic description but, when combined with his confession that he has agreed to be Jim’s accomplice, is actually an announcement about just what kind of accomplice he is to be: Marlow is a liar. There is no hemisphere of the moon that remains in perpetual darkness, ‘the dark side of the moon’ is a metaphor. He takes a linguistic construction as a literal reality and uses it to persuade the hearer/reader. It is impossible that a sailor would not have this basic understanding of celestial mechanics, especially given the years long monotony of life at sea that he has so firmly fixed in the reader’s mind. In using this metaphor in the construction of his “argument” he has demonstrated his willingness to abandon reason

and rely on aesthetics in his attempt to persuade. It is only a few lines later that he admits “[m]y weakness consists in not having a discriminating eye for the incidental—for the externals—no eye for the hod of the rag-picker or the fine linen of the next man” (Conrad 59). This certainly describes why he might lean on aesthetic reasoning, but in this confession he setting himself up to do something else as well: to rely on the larger narrative structures in order to help Jim. And indeed what follows is an impressionistic whirlwind of details and perspectives that dazzle, inform, and obscure all at once; but it must be stressed that in all that follows, Marlow never releases his control on the narrative.

Understanding Marlow’s motivations and methods up to this point lays the framework for the mechanism of manipulation he employs to ensnare the reader. He, like Jim, is deeply persuaded by the structures of romantic fiction, so much so that he has internalized the encoded ethics and uses them as the basis of his entire community of personal and professional association. “Stick to the ship” is as much a romantic notion as Jim’s mental heroics. If we can see how these values are encoded in and indeed *reliant upon* these narrative structures, then we can understand how by employing the narrative structure before the eyes of the reader, these values will be reinforced and defended. And of course, more superficially, Jim will be redeemed. Once this is understood, the reader finds that it is precisely this effort that Marlow has been engaged in from the moment he appears in the novel. In fact, one need no further than the epigram to understand that this is precisely the theme of the novel. Read again with the insight added from our

investigation, it takes on surprising meaning: “It is certain my Conviction gains infinitely, the moment another soul will believe in it - Novalis” (Conrad 3). Knowing Marlow is struggling to regain his conviction not only of Jim’s rectitude, but also of the entire ethical- aesthetic narrative system which guides both men’s behavior, this quote unlocks meanings that have remained latent in the text until the point that Marlow takes control.

The messiness of a complicated human life is going to be simplified into “a tale” and Marlow is the man to orchestrate that tale. But it is important to note that this tale is one being told in the modern era and takes a specifically modernist tone. In fact, the architecture of the novel might be considered an attempt to write a simple sea romance in an era when such models have become intellectually suspect. But whatever Conrad’s motivations, these are certainly Marlow’s; Jim has failed in his obligations as a seaman, and Marlow’s identification with him threatens his entire worldview. With this in mind, it is important to consider how the omniscient narrator functions within the context of the novel as a whole.

As has already been touched upon, the first thing the omniscient narrator does is allow the introduction of certain unsympathetic information; specifically that Jim is motivated by light literature. But the abrupt change from one narrator to the other does something else entirely. Admitting that Jim is motivated by light literature makes him seem juvenile rather than romantic, and more than a bit ridiculous. It makes his self-imposed penance as he moves place to place fleeing his great failure seem more silly than honorable. Just as Don Quijote is made ridiculous in trying to become a genre trope,

mistaking the imaginary for the real, and then trying to impose it on the world, so too with Jim trying to be the sailor-adventurer. Structurally, the idea of light literature is important to the reader but is not permissible according to the structures required in Marlow's genre; the text cannot admit its juvenile romantic basis without contradicting the seriousness of high blown ethical drama at the core of the melodrama. The first narrator and ruptured narrative serve this purpose for the reader. After evaluating Marlow's motivations, the reader can see that categorizing the genre as 'light' would be impossible for a man like Marlow, who is similarly motivated, and employing such structures to such important ends. It is also enormously important that this beginning narrator also tells of Jim's first failure as a seaman. This failure is the second thing that cannot exist within the Marlow narrative, as it would, in a way similar to the previous example of the idea of light fiction, threaten the simple narrative which structurally links Jim's failure at the *Patna* to a parallel success on the island of Patusan. It is specifically by preceding Marlow's narrative - and not as an interpolated voice, or a correcting voice - that this information and perspective can be presented to the reader in a way that allows it to be brushed aside and, by the end of the novel, entirely forgotten. In consequence the information introduced by this other narrator suffers from a kind of liminality - by crossing the threshold into Marlow's narrative, the previous is cut off, contained, and concealed. By the end of the novel the narrative is entirely Marlow's; many readers even forget that there had been another narrator at all, let alone recall the seemingly insignificant failure of Jim's earliest days. In the same way that the shift in narrators

makes the first, less personable narrator fade, so too does Jim's dereliction of duty at the *Patna* and his abandonment of 800 pilgrims obscure his youthful failure. But all these things are of enormous importance in the effort to correctly evaluate Jim, as we as readers are ultimately obliged to do; indeed it is the whole point of the novel.

From the moment Marlow takes over, the narrative is very different. Rather than form a linear relation of facts, Marlow is engaged in storytelling and obeys the conventions. The single most important effect of his handling of the story is that he reforms it into something with structure, and this structure is present from the moment Marlow appears. He begins with the failure of the *Patna*, as though there had never been anything before it. In Marlow's narrative it is not just the single most important fact of Jim's life, it is very nearly the only fact; as indeed it may seem to Jim himself. But in placing the *Patna* at the head of the story rather than the details offered by omniscient narrator, Marlow begins the process of refiguring the failure of the *Patna* into a precursor, a Chekhov's gun, that finds its completion in the final scenes on the island. In doing so, he develops the basic narrative structure seen to be so seductive and potentially destructive in the case of Aira and his unnamed narrator in *La cena*. In the previous chapter on Aira this simple structure has been shown to compel belief alone. Here, in Conrad's hands, the reader sees that this structure is so important to Marlow that he takes about engineering it from the outset, setting up the expectations that accord with sea romance narratives in the reader in order to satisfy them in the final chapters and using

the structural momentum to convince the reader that something has happened when it hasn't; to persuade the reader to a conclusion when none is possible, let alone obvious.

The overarching romantic structure will be seen to develop along with the novel, but throughout it is clear that Marlow will use discourse initially, and later narrative, as his principle means of helping Jim. The first example comes after Jim is found guilty and Marlow writes a letter of recommendation for him which persuades a friend as to Jim's good qualities, and securing him a job. This is properly considered discourse, as, rather than attempt to connect events, it is an attempt to extricate him from them. This attempt is evaluated six months later when the friend writes Marlow back, happy with Jim's presence, but pointing out that he found out

Of course I guess there is something—some awful little scrape—which you know all about—but if I am sure that it is terribly heinous, I fancy one could manage to forgive it. For my part, I declare I am unable to imagine him guilty of anything much worse than robbing an orchard. Is it much worse? Perhaps you ought to have told me; but it is such a long time since we both turned saints that you may have forgotten we, too, had sinned in our time? It may be that some day I shall have to ask you, and then I shall expect to be told. I don't care to question him myself till I have some idea what it is. (Conrad 113)

This omission proves too much. For a time the friend is willing to postpone discovery, and this arrangement initially works out well. But soon an officer from the *Patna* arrives and uses their mutual shame to extort Jim into long-term employment. Jim cannot bear the shame and runs away. This becomes his method: Jim runs eastward, residing somewhere until his shame catches up to him, whereupon he runs away again. But in the same moment that Marlow discovers Jim's departure, he receives a letter from Jim, saying that he had new employment "For reference I gave them your name, which they know of course, and if you could write a word in my favour it would be a permanent employment.' I was utterly crushed under the ruins of my castle, but of course I wrote as desired" (Conrad 114). These letters of recommendation are important because they attempt to characterize Jim to a particular end. But ultimately both of these fail, since they do not take into account the social dynamic of the story; that is, that what is told exists within the context of the real world, which may inject its own information; specifically that of the *Patna* disgrace.

And so Jim continues to run. It is then that Marlow does the most significant thing in his narrative restructuring. After conferring with a friend named Stein, they decide rather than trying to simply save Jim, and run the risk that his new life will again be reauthored by the emergence of his past, they would instead build a narrative that not only takes the *Patna* into account, but relies on it for its narrative force. Stein talks about Jim in specifically literary terms, declaring "I understand very well. He is romantic... There is only one remedy... the question is not how to get cured, but how to

live.” (Conrad 128). His prescription is “The way is to the destructive element submit yourself” (129) “That was the way. To follow the dream, and again to follow the dream - and - ewig - usque ad finem...” (Conrad 130). Rather than finding a way for Jim to live in the world, they conspire to send him deep into the dream of sea romances in particular, but also of more simplistic narrative structures in general. They contrive to send him to a remote tropical island, mysterious and unknown to most of the world, an island with three rival tribes complete with a despotic fanatic; i.e., they send him to precisely the kind of romantic location that he had dreamed about in the first chapters of the novel. It will come as no surprise if on this tropical island to which they send him Jim ‘confronts savages’ described in the first chapter, and of course this is exactly what he does - complete with an infolding of the racist marginalization of the natives as mere backdrop to his story. This move by Marlow is significant because it demonstrates Marlow manipulating reality instead of merely words, and his manipulation has a specifically narrative concern: here he sets up a structure of parallelism in which the *Patna* disgrace does not merely exist as a fact in the world, but is the motivating event that prefigures the success to come. Each of these events gives the other meaning; overthrowing the fanatic and living as a respected Tuan is rather an empty story if it does not encode his redemption from his previous failure. Marlow sets this into motion understanding that Jim is so dominated by the romantic impulse that providing the right environment for him will allow Jim to follow through with his necessary acts. All that is left is for Marlow to tell the story when it is all over.

Conrad lets Marlow's narrative unfold throughout the rest of the pages of the novel, but the purpose of this novel is not to tell a simple story, despite the title page's attempt to deceive, and Conrad ensures that Marlow's simple narrative is beset by problems. In order to account for the contradictory pieces of information, Marlow must wrangle and manipulate, and in doing so, a hermeneutical gap is forced into the narrative, and this is part of what Conrad wants to put on display, and so too is infolding possible ethical consequences for the hearer of Marlow's tale and later of the reader himself, of allowing the forms and structures of narrative to dominate over details. The first and most obvious of these incongruous elements is Jim's character itself. Throughout the entirety of the novel, he is shown to be passive, and his passivity has enormous consequences. His failure at the *Patna* is the most obvious example, and even his abandonment of the ship is couched in terms of passivity: "I am forced to believe he had preserved through it all a strange illusion of passiveness, as though he had not acted but had suffered himself to be handled by the infernal powers who had selected him for the victim of their practical joke" (Conrad 68). He didn't jump, but he didn't not jump. He didn't help the officers free the boat. He didn't remain on board. All through the crisis he just sort of stands there, looking at everything. This runs parallel to his indecision in the maritime crisis of the first chapter in which he stands and thinks until it's too late, a damning parallel omitted from Marlow's telling. But this passivity is not exclusive to dangerous situations, and therefore not the exclusive effect of cowardice. Instead it is his one dominating characteristic. In chapter after chapter Jim is barely able to speak; his dialogue is fragmented and

unformed, often devolving into ellipses. In the letter Marlow receives his friend describes Jim as “good-tempered, had not much to say for himself, was not clever by any means, thank goodness” (Conrad 113). Jim’s experience on Patusan would seem to be of a different order: he leads an attack against and defeats Sherif Ali, who menaced the natives. In this instance, Jim is very energetic. He runs around convincing everyone to join his cause, and then, when hauling the guns to their place on the mountain top: “He himself on that night had kept on rushing down and climbing up like a squirrel, directing, encouraging, watching all along the line” (Conrad 158). And this Jim, the one of energy and success, is the last that Marlow sees alive. After this attack, we will learn that Jim is the de facto ruler of the island and lives happily. But in the final events of Jim’s life, there emerges the implication of the same passivity that has dominated Jim’s character from the outset. However, this passivity is masked, as it were, by a final shift in narrative mode.

Marlow has been directing the narrative for so long at this point that the original omniscient narrator is all but forgotten. In the shift from the omniscient to the late night yarn of Captain Marlow as he tells the patchwork tale of Jim’s exploits the text introduces bias and allows for a kind of ambiguity that Marlow uses to his advantage, allowing Jim to appear sympathetic by a careful handling of the details, despite Jim’s lack of actual personal improvement. It also initiates the structures of a romantic tale that reformats the messy incidents of Jim’s life into a comprehensible aesthetic structure, beginning with the *Patna* and ending with his death on Patusan. Marlow’s manipulations have been commented on before; Albert Guerard’s assessment is “Marlow has repeatedly taken us

in. He is a considerably more lenient witness than his austere moralizing tone suggests. On various occasions he brings in the damaging evidence (he is, after all, obliged to bring it in) very casually and digressively, as though inviting us to overlook it. So too, when we are inclined to judge harshly, Marlow diverts our attention" (Guerrard 408). He says too that "the unfavorable evidence that Marlow had half-concealed through deceptive casualness of manner grows upon us at a second or third reading, and becomes more difficult to discount" (Guerrard 409). I agree with Guerrard as to Marlow's manipulations, but I disagree with his assessment of Marlow's motivation. Guerrard suggests that "Marlow's task is also the reader's: to achieve a right human relationship with this questionable younger brother. Marlow must resist an excessive identification (which would mean abandoning his traditional ethic); he must maintain a satisfactory balance of sympathy and judgement" (Guerrard 407). After considering Marlow's motivations, the situation would appear to be somewhat different: Marlow, in order to defend his traditional ethic, is manipulating the audience into an excessive identification (which of course also mirrors his own identification) that is aesthetically tempered by the appearance of a satisfactory balance of sympathy and judgment. Part of that process of identification is the restructuring of the facts into a familiar format that flatters the audience by setting up expectations and then satisfying them. The consequence of this is that the very simple 'tale' that Marlow must tell is one that must have not only the unfavorable evidence manipulated, but also the architecture of the narrative itself, which follows the suspect and intellectually impermissible form of sea romances, already

condemned as light fiction and excoriated by Marlow's description in the seaman's process of disillusionment. Where Guerard focusses on the way Marlow conceals and massages the information he gives, he overlooks entirely the architecture of that narrative. But the architecture itself forms a good deal of the persuasiveness of Marlow's case.

There is a two-part shift in tone that happens after Jim arrives in Patusan. Rather than the complex layering of individual perspective complicating and nuancing Jim's case, the narrative becomes much simpler. Guerard finds the chapters 21-22 to be unconvincing: "physical perils are emphasized, not the perils of the soul. Marlow now and again again steps in to remind us that all this fed Jim's romantic egoism, these successes and physical dangers overcome. But for pages on end the reader is allowed to forget this moral problem and theme" (Guerard 419). More explicitly, "[t]he impressionistic method is one real source of our irritation with Chapters 25-27, since it has no intrinsic justification. For the method is designed to evoke complex, wavering, suspended responses to infinitely debatable psycho-moral questions.... But there is little in the three chapters to warrant such reader involvement." For his part, he specifically blames Conrad as a novelist for this: "In a novel of great and subtle artistry this structural flaw is one of the few aesthetic facts easy to detect and isolate" (420). But Guerard is wrong to ascribe the flaw to Conrad; the narrative is Marlow's, and at this point Marlow begins a second great argument in favor of Jim's redemption. The "impressionistic" chapters that allow the introduction of other perspectives, making the picture complex

and nuanced, have essentially been Marlow introducing information in a way that serves his ends; here Marlow is transitioning to the romantic narrative structure that is to serve to persuade the audience according to a more aesthetic, genre-driven logic. It is for this reason that Marlow, not Conrad, begins to build upon the system of expectation and satisfaction that will drive the rest of the novel, and ultimately the mechanism that makes the end the end, and compels the reader of the novel into an essentially unjustified sympathy for Jim.

The next step in Marlow's process comes when, at the very last part of the novel, he forces another narrative turn on the reader; rather than telling the story to a general audience, he has written it, and delivered it to only one of the original hearers, a "privileged man" who alone had "showed an interest in him that survived the telling of his story, though I remember well you would not admit he mastered his fate" (Conrad 201). Where before Marlow was speaking to a veranda full of listeners, here we see that he has carefully selected the most interested to be the recipient of these final events. What's more, Marlow has chosen to give them a very peculiar treatment:

The story of the last events you will find in the few pages enclosed here. You must admit that it is romantic beyond the wildest dreams of his boyhood, and yet there is to my mind a sort of profound and terrifying logic in it, as if it were our imagination alone that could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny. The imprudence of our thoughts recoils upon our heads; who toys with

the sword shall perish by the sword. This astounding adventure, of which the most astounding part is that it is true, comes on as an unavoidable consequence.

Something of the sort had to happen. You repeat this to yourself while you marvel that such a thing could happen in the year of grace before last. But it has happened—and there is no disputing its logic.

I put it down here for you as though I had been an eyewitness. My information was fragmentary, but I've fitted the pieces together, and there is enough of them to make an intelligible picture. I wonder how he would have related it himself. (Conrad 203)

To someone who is awake to Marlow's manipulations, this passage reveals a number of things. First, that Marlow is taking absolute control of the story. This change is so striking that it forces Guerard to consider

...whether the novel and its reader are violated in a serious way: either because the material of the second half contradicts the material of the first and devalues it, or because Conrad imagined this material less well, or because it is intrinsically less interesting, or because it demands from us an entirely different kind of attention. Is there, that is, any damaging change in the delicate relationship of author-material-reader? (Geurard 419)

Once again Guerard is mistaking Marlow's shift for Conrad's; it is here that Marlow more perfectly dominates the elements of the narrative. In the former context, his narrative was in the social dialectic, that is, it was dependent upon the smiles, frowns, looks of confusion, and unavoidable interaction between his audience and him. Even when that interaction has been minimized the greatest extent possible: his audience

...in the deep dusk speckled by fiery cigar-ends. The elongated bulk of each cane-chair harboured a silent listener. Now and then a small red glow would move abruptly, and expanding light up the fingers of a languid hand, part of a face in profound repose, or flash a crimson gleam into a pair of pensive eyes. (Conrad 24)

Barely there, to be sure, but there. And Marlow interacts with them. In reporting the fragments "as though he had been an eyewitness" he eliminates all the contradictions of overlapping discourse, as when he is obligated to relate the French Lieutenant's conversation. Unfavorable evidence may be further masked in this way. Instead, he is guided only by his understanding of the concerns of that specific individual to whom he has delivered the final pages. Second, and perhaps more important, it defines the narrative as explicitly romantic. In trying to defend Jim, he is obligated to use the same ethical-aesthetic construct that he admits is suspect and wide of the mark. The rigid code of behavior that Jim fails to live up to at the *Patna* is compensated for not by any kind of

right code of conduct or devotion to duty, as one might expect, but in Marlow's laborious construction of and the subsequent completion of the romantic tale.

In naming the final chapter as romantic ahead of time, he sets up the expectations in the reader that the narrative will then try to satisfy. In setting up this economy of promise / fulfillment, the narrative form itself takes on the bulk of the power of persuasion. The relative weight and power of the detail lessen, which answer Guerard's charges that the final section is less well imagined or contradictory. He is perhaps right however, in saying that this section is less intrinsically interesting, in that Marlow is allowing the narrative to come to its logical conclusion, and there is nothing of the layering of previous chapters. Armed with an awareness of the persuasiveness of narrative structures en sui, this is the moment when the narrative is represented doing the heavy lifting of its persuasive obligation. The conclusion seems like a destiny, completely preordained, the progress a passage through the ruthless mechanics of narrative against which there is no appeal. This is where, finally, the infinitely rich and varied elements of Jim's human life are reduced to only those which feed the romantic narrative.

Jim's death looms enormously over the final sections of the novel, and brings with it a whole host of unexplored assumptions that are equally rigid codifications of custom. This links it closely to *Don Quijote*, in that the character, who has struggled with his ability to live up to a romantic ideal, must die in order to remove him from a hostile social dialectic - a dialectic that has challenged the reality of the romantic ideal, and one that has been modified by it. Don Quijote had forced others to engage him according to

the norms that he demanded, and they had to a greater or lesser degree complied, Jim's case represents a similar turn. Jim, failing more completely his ideal, and unable to reconcile himself with that failure, has his reality narrated by those who are sympathetic to his ideal. Just as Don Quijote, at the point of nadir, encounters the Duke and Duchess, who take up the narrative in the same genre (if in a different style), so too Jim encounters Marlow, who is just as guided by the ethical aesthetic systems encoded tales of romance, this time of life at sea, rather than chivalry.

Marlow orchestrates Jim's escape from the dialectic in which he is unable to author his own silent penance because news of the *Patna* disaster interjects itself in Jim's world through the very real world, a world that is guided by commerce and chance, rather than narrative structure. Patusan, being virtually unknown, separates Jim from the world, which gives Jim's romantic story a chance to develop - in the way that the unnamed narrator of *La cenerentola* is better able to satisfy his desire for simplistic narrative structures by estranging himself from the corrective interference of social interaction. This is explicitly part of Marlow's motivation: "He left his earthly failings behind him and what sort of reputation he had, and there was a totally new set of conditions for his imaginative faculty to work upon. Entirely new, entirely remarkable" (Conrad 132). Marlow understands the separation from the world to be a necessary condition for the realization of a tale that is like those found in the suspect forms of light fiction. So it is not surprising when, in the letter to the final privileged man Marlow speaks of the 'terrifying logic' of the events, and that 'something of the sort had to happen' and most of all when he claims

that “our imagination alone that could set loose upon us the might of an overwhelming destiny.” This last, placed next to the previous passage in which Marlow admits that he helped place Jim in a context in which that imagination could be exercised uninterrupted, is to ultimately be judged partially responsible for orchestrating this remarkable and wildly romantic end. Marlow made the romantic tale play out in the real world, orchestrating events so that Jim may live a life that has the basic structure of a romantic tale, so it is utterly unsurprising that he would take control of the portrayal of these final events; or that in doing so he is taking another step away from the interventions of a hostile and contradictory dialectic. He has been moving this tale toward the basic structures of the romantic for quite some time, and it is in this final chapter that he is able to attempt to persuade the most sympathetic audience he has been able to encounter.

Conrad has not set this enormous narrative apparatus into motion just to engage and persuade one unnamed tertiary character in his own novel. Rather, this drawn-out process is a steady process of engagement with the reader, whom he hopes to seduce and draw into the final feeling that Jim has been redeemed in his sacrifice for his failure in the *Patna*; more, that he has achieved his lifelong romantic ideal. The same rhetorical movements that Marlow takes to persuade first his listeners and then the privileged man, also operate on the reader. The reader, too, is swept up in the story arc and is perhaps forgiven for wanting the hero to overcome his disgrace and have the great adventure he dreamed of. Conrad allows Marlow latitude to spin his yarn in a way that allows the reader to be persuaded almost as effectively as the privileged man. By the end of the

novel, the polyphonic vision of Jim has reduced to a simple function of a simple tale, and the redemption the listener was promised is finally satisfied.

Conrad's move in letting Marlow finish in the romantic tale mode is tactical, in order to make the reader complicit in the judgment of Jim. If Marlow has been effective, the privileged man, and the reader along with him, will be persuaded by the format and accept the reward of set up by the genre's expectation. Conrad coerces the reader to avow Jim redeemed, despite the unnerving presence of disquieting truths that lurk in the text (Malay helmsmen who stayed at the helm of the *Patna* for example, or Jim's characteristic inability to speak or to act.) makes the reader complicit in the urge to make reality match their appearances, but does so just unsuccessfully enough to make it doubtful. It is here again that the often forgotten first narrator is of the utmost importance. Without that voice, all the evidence of Jim's sins is manipulated by Marlow - and many accusations remain against Jim: incompetence, selfishness, latent racism (of the characters on Patusan: "They are like people in a book, aren't they?" he said triumphantly", i.e. novelistic, which in the context of this very text, suggests they they are empty, fabricated, and their lives and deaths fade behind the story of Jim's sense of honor) (Conrad 156). It is only by Conrad's use of the original narrator that all of the narrative manipulations introduced by Marlow come into question. Jim's first failure at sea owing to his indecision and hesitation sets these characteristics up as a pattern of behavior, rather than one of failure. Without this detail, for example, Jim presenting himself to account for his failure to ensure the protection of the islanders seems almost

Christlike, submitting himself to an imperfect justice in pursuit of a greater triumph: “She cried “Fight!” into his ear. She could not understand. There was nothing to fight for. He was going to prove his power in another way and conquer the fatal destiny itself” (Conrad 242). But with this detail from Jim’s youth, it comes across as simply more inaction; a judgment supported by the embedded verdict spoken by Tamb’ Itam: ““He would not fight. He would not fight,” he repeated twice” (Conrad 205). This last is a perfect example of Marlow’s deceptiveness because it is offered to the reader long before the reader has a context for the information, and, just like with the original narrator, the verdict is all but forgotten by the time the information becomes useful to the reader, trying to make a correct assessment of Jim. It is important to bear in mind also that even if we forget Tamb’ Itam’s verdict, the description of Jim squaring his shoulders and going off to complete his more romantic destiny is a characterization of the events by Marlow, who was not an eyewitness at all, and is guided by an ethical aesthetic format that he is trying to defend. Moreover Marlow’s critique of the expectations of life at sea combines with the first narrator’s more objective assertion that Jim was motivated by light literature offers the reader of the novel, if not the privileged man, the context in which literature is not only an force of influencing, but that romantic fiction can compel a reader to a position that is wildly at odds with reality.

In these final moments of the novel Conrad reveals the veracity of the accusation that the final section demands a different kind of attention from us. But the attention it demands of the reader is not the attention it demands of the privileged man; that is the

trap that has been laid and is the one that the reader is expected, at first, to fall into. But the equivocating tone of the novel's last lines points out the structures of the game. Marlow begins with the judgments "Not in the wildest dreams of his boyish visions could he have seen the alluring shape of such an extraordinary success" and "is he satisfied - quite, now, I wonder? We ought to know. He is one of us - and have I not stood up once, like an evoked ghost, to answer for his eternal constancy? Was I so very wrong after all?" (Conrad 246). Here the mechanisms are all in operation. Marlow sets up the gloriousness of Jim's redemption, then allows for the appearance of his own ambivalence. Finally Marlow demands a judgment, yet to have the reader judge Jim redeemed or not is to already have lured the reader into the snare of romantic thinking - redemption is itself one of the values encoded into the romantic structures. By contrast, one has a hard time imagining characters like the chief engineer of the *Patna* struggling too much with concepts such as these; his is not a concern of redemption but obtaining bread. That the novel hinges upon this final evaluation demonstrates the degree to which the ethical and aesthetic categories of romantic sea fiction have come to dominate the narrative. Once Marlow has pulled the reader in, there is no way to extricate himself. To try to answer the question is to submit to the terms upon which Marlow has constructed narrative. Marlow's repeated statement, "He is one of us" here takes on a rather ominous tone. For the reverse is assumed to be true - the reader must be one of "us" as well. This process of identification and persuasion by the ethical-aesthetic structures of romantic literature have swallowed the privileged man and the reader whole. Well, not entirely whole. The

very last lines offer an ominous tone that shakes the reader, if not the characters, out of the reverie. Rather than finish the tale with a “big” ending, Marlow describes the quiet, inert lives of Jewel and Stein, who are quietly waiting for their lives to quietly pass away. The last spoken words break off, and the gap is filled in one last time by Marlow. Stein “says often that he is ‘preparing to leave all this; preparing to leave,...’ while he waves his hand sadly at his butterflies” (Conrad 246). This tone masterfully draws the reader into uncertainty, and one is inclined to believe here more than anywhere, Marlow’s feigned protests.

This quiet, melancholy ending is indeed romantic, but somehow unsatisfying. Marlow has failed in these final moments to produce the desired effect, and the reader is compelled to consider the story again. In this second consideration the omniscient narrator appears again, and the intransigent damning evidence he provides begins to emerge. Here it is that we again see the distinction between what Marlow is doing and what Conrad is doing. Marlow has structured the beginning of his narrative in such a way as to predict this conclusion, it is only truly in the pages of the novel - when all elements of Marlow’s narrative are placed side by side - that their structure becomes obvious and looms large. Time and shifting formats may have served to obscure the structure of Marlow’s narrative from the privileged man, and to the reader as well. But Conrad has thrown lifelines to the reader in the form of the original narrator and the inclusion of details that are contradictory to Marlow’s narrative and antithetical to the

nature of romantic sea fiction. Conrad's success in linking these formats is to elucidate how they operate together and what they are conspiring to construct in their coordination.

Conclusion: A Conclusion Illuminating the Dangers of Conclusions

Having arrived at a place of conclusions, this work may benefit from a brief survey of the ground that has been covered. The first chapter engages Cervantes' novel *Don Quijote*, in which the author shows the incompatibility of behavior modeled on chivalric romance with the world at large; a world that is motivated differently. We have also seen that Cervantes does much more than merely lampoon the genre: he shows how in an interaction between divergent modes of behavior each changes and morphs, and takes on aspects of the other. The chivalry of Don Quijote becomes deeply dependent on monetary exchange, for example. The behavior of the non-chivalry inspired characters slowly comes to resemble Quijote's, and vice versa. What is produced in their interaction becomes something of Hegelian dialectic - thesis, antithesis, synthesis. The significance of Cervantes' use of this dialectic is that the thesis in question is not only defined as fictional - chivalric romance - but that it is such a ridiculous position that the stated aim of the novel is to do away with the genre once and for all. This dialectic, in consequence of this, is nothing less than the process by which individuals become obligated to fold the ridiculous and false into their worldview and behaviors. Cervantes shows nothing less than how in the process of engagement with the absurd, the reasonable must become absurd themselves, even if only in part. Cervantes makes the product of this dialectic.

Cervantes suggests that the process of forming individual experience through the dialectic entanglement of two or more disparate elements - including elements up to and including the ridiculous if not outright insane - results in not only an experience of an

inextricable synthesis of these elements, but more significantly one that exceeds well beyond the control of either of the original parties. As soon as the interactive experience is synthesized, or hybridized, the codes that motivated either of the original elements has been so changed as to leave the participants functionally semi-illiterate to the new codes. Quijote's lassitude toward the end of the novel illuminates this vividly; the once vigorous knight commingled his hero-oriented narrative with the reader-oriented regulations of the Duke and Duchess, and as a result lost his ability to bring about the satisfactory conclusion of hero story arc. Neither party - in this example Don Quijote on the one hand and the Duke and Duchess on the other - knows how to navigate the new hybrid system. Cervantes succeeds extremely well at the first part of his stated aim - to lampoon chivalry - but his achievement in elucidating these latter aspects of genres in contact are left largely latent. This despite the fact that the consequences of them far exceed the former and extend to nothing less than shackling of individual autonomy and self determination. Cervantes succeeds in this last only in the degree to which he is able to engender the parallel experience in the reader, but his narrative techniques are so complex and the process so extended that the immediacy of the effect is dulled.

In looking at Don Quijote's death scene it is clear that Cervantes has made a Quijote of the reader, - has forced the unreality of the expectations and understanding of the nature of the representations enfolded into the character's genre to be an acceptable and necessary aspect of evaluating the text for the reader. Quijote's success or failure must be based in part on the requirements of chivalric romance. The rigidity with which these terms have taken root are demonstrated in the priest's and the narrator's inability to

relinquish the very name Quijote in reference to the character at the novel's conclusion.

Yet even while the novel makes this move, the reader must deny the genre as absurd. This state of undecidability does not liberate the reader from the compulsion to craft a conclusion, and so the reader is forced to evaluate subject to too many distinct and competing codes - in other words, leaves the reader in exactly the same position as Don Quijote himself, powerless as he is in his own new hybrid experience.

Does the reader rightly adjudge the character a madman regained his sanity in the final moments of his life, just in time to set things right? This would be a happy ending. Or is Don Quijote's death the final punctuation mark to a knight's failure to achieve his knightly aims on the terms proscribed by the expectations of the tales of chivalry? Each of these separate conclusions allows for only half of the evidence, and the third state hypothesis, wherein Cervantes intended the conclusion to be a meaningful path into the undecidable rather than to prefer facile conclusions that, while in accord with the structures and expectations of genre formulations, nevertheless are banalities, and lead to platitudes rather than authentic experience. Cervantes even argues that the desire for such facile satisfactions drives one to misery, and just as Quijote desired to complete his hero narrative arc, so to will the reader enter into lassitude and hopelessness if he endeavors to force such simple narrative conclusions.

In the second chapter Aira has a similar motivation to inject unreality into the experience of the reader, following a somewhat similar model of having a character infected with unreality become persuasive to the reader. But Aira takes a different approach. Rather than let the narrative consequences unfold through a series of events, he

instead brings narrative genesis to the foreground of the text. Rather than adopting genre traditions in their totality as Cervantes allows Quijote to do, Aira runs his unnamed narrator through the process of constructing his own narrative according to what he believes to be logical consistency, over and over again resorting to distortion, mistake, or plain invention in order to achieve his aim. Here the structural codes employed by the narrator are not the vast interconnected elements that comprise the norms of, say, the chivalric genre. Rather, they are the most basic laws of narrative causality. One thing causes another, and then another; all elements are integral and internally coherent. Aira, like Cervantes, uses narrative manipulation in order to position the reader to experience what the character experiences. As the narrative continues, the persuasiveness of the logic of the narrative takes over, and the reader is forced to evaluate the text on a suddenly different set of standards; the reader is led to accept unreality because it conforms to the most basic narrative consistency. What should appear absurd is not. In the story the narrator misunderstands a fake documentary style zombie film for real (as Quijote did with *historia/historia*). Only this time the emphasis is on the moment of the change - when reality becomes unreality.

Thematically, *La cena* strikes one as a kind of comment on *Don Quijote*, where the reader can see how one might be deceived. While both stories involve a misreading of genre (*historia / historia* in *Don Quijote* and live documentary / zombie film in *La cena*) they differ importantly in that while Cervantes ascribes Quijote's misreading to one of 'dried brains' and the confusion between *historia* and *historia*, Aira places the locus of this danger not in anything as esoteric and estranging as madness, but rather within the

humdrum, the pedestrian, the every day - a simple mistake of genre norms while watching television. For Aira, the danger lurks not in mental illness, but in the slightest distinction between narrative causality on the one hand and on the other a narrative causality that takes into account the specific conceits of certain formats of narrative, which is to say of genre. Zombies become an acceptable addition to reality because narrative causality is never violated, and the narrative arc fulfills the expectation / reward promised by the storyline. Aira puts a finer point on this by performing this act directly before the reader's eyes and through a simple transition in language. This simple shift of language may pass unnoticed, but masks a massive shift in the expectations and assumptions the reader must hold as to the makeup of reality.

This linguistic slip into an alternate reality forms the true content of Aira's purpose, for where in *Don Quijote* the protagonist continues his madness into the world, and ultimately reciprocally intertwines his own experience and expectations those of others, Aira has his narrator try to bring his distorted, hybrid reality into contact with another character and is utterly humiliated and destroyed. In a way, this would seem to parallel Don Quijote at the early stage, before he significantly incorporates external assumptions into his own. But where Quijote continues on and incorporates more and more information and assumptions into his own worldview resulting in a hybrid, undecidable experience of reality, Aira's character's sally is short and devastating. Aira's character does not engage in a protracted progress of social interaction, and as such, cannot be hybridized into a worldview that, while skewed at the outset, contains any aspect of social corrective. These illusions, in Aira, cause isolation and disaster, and there

is no move into a collaboratively authored third state. Instead the character's narrative expectations remain consistent from beginning to end and by the time he realizes the possibility of other possibilities, he is already ruined.

Where Cervantes let his reader involvement at the end of the novel to remain rather latent, Aira makes it central to the experience of his novel; the linguistic sidestep crafted to parallel the narrator's slip into confusion works subtlety on the reader so that it only some time later, when the reader is committed to the new terms that he or she is able to ask what happened. Even considering this however, Aira lets the reader off the hook far too easily, and allows him to step back, disavow the reader belief in the absurd zombie reality, and simply blame the narrator. The lasting effect on the reader is that although Aira has forced the reader to experience this same slip into unreality, the character may be judged guilty of a devastating misreading that separated him from reality and in consequence from the experience of reality shared by other characters, but the reader may simply note the experience mentally, and then close the book. The possibility of that same process of misreading leading to unreality and devastating social isolation for the reader is there for the reader to approach or not, as he or she prefers. Conrad takes as his aim at this readerly sense of exclusion and autonomy.

Conrad, like Cervantes and Aira, tells a tale that injects unreality into the narrative. Conrad manipulates the reader in a way very similar to Cervantes: slowly, through a series of events, the reader is persuaded to become comfortable with the illusions of a deluded character. Like Aira, Marlow persuades the reader by secretly engineering the narrative according to the rules of narrative consistency. This consistency,

however, is ripped from the pages of sea romance, and implicit in its construction is the urge to evaluate the character, as with Don Quijote, according to a familiar, if not believable, genre. Conrad develops his narrative in such a way that he all but compels the reader into believing something that is at odds with the evidence. But unlike Cervantes and Aïra, Conrad makes the purpose of this whole narrative architecture the obligation for the reader to decide for himself the reality of the conclusion. Marlow has so constructed the narrative that it is entirely encoded with the ethos he is trying to inscribe and invoke; to decide merely upon a judgment at Marlow's request, is to be forced into evaluating entirely on Marlow's romantic terms, either of which confirms the reality of the image of Jim that he has constructed through his careful narratological machinations. Marlow asks for a judgment, but the reader must decide a judgment of the reality, at least the version of it presented by Marlow which is the only one available anyway. That Conrad compels the reader to decide takes this whole question of interacting narrative systems and the strange hybrid realities that result and complicates it with Marlow's urge to moral judgment points to questions of enormous ethical importance. If the characters interacting with Quijote don armor and ride around acting as knights, the reader might find little significance in that. If a lonely old man does not know the difference between TV and reality, that is perhaps sad, but also of little importance, despite the reader having been equally deceived. But to have a reality created out of overlapping narratives with contradictory evidence, structured secretly by a genre in which one does not have confidence, and then being forced to decide within that construct a question at the cost of the meaning of a man's life and death - these are among the gravest consequences any

text can ask us to ponder. It is as though Conrad picks up at Don Quijote's death scene and forces the reader to make sense of it - was Quijote mad? Was he sane? Is the death a disaster? His ultimate success?

From these examples we are faced with a series of understandings that it is useful to name:

First, the Cervantes chapter showed how interpersonal interactions can distort systems by which an individual governs every aspect of himself. By bringing the question of genre into the bodily form of Quijote and giving Quijote a community of other bodies, equally guided by forms and genre, the reader is given to understand that the mental structures that an individual uses to form meaning and guide their behavior are reliant on the structures of others. In the process of having Quijote "live" a genre in the community of peers, Cervantes makes the mechanisms of persuasion and insufficiency of genre in both individual and social contexts.

Second, by reintroducing Quijote into an environment dictated by chivalric genre norms, but one that is skewed by the desire of the readers of the genre, rather than by the character inside of it, the conflicting authorship of the adventures create a tangle of narrative that no single agent has fluency with which to extricate himself. Quijote is powerless to free himself or complete his narrative; as powerless as the Duke and Duchess are to satisfy their desire to see Sancho whip himself for entertainment.

Third, that in setting up the text in this way, Cervantes intends to take the reader through the same process - participating in a genre outside of the genre. By making the "real" identity of the protagonist exist in a kind of indeterminacy, and by oscillating

between sympathetic and 'historian' modes, Cervantes invites the reader to judge Quijote by a multiple set of literary and ethical codes. The reader is made to know that Quijote does not inhabit a chivalric world, yet is distanced far enough from the critical realism that would encourage the reader to hold him accountable for any harm he would cause in a realistic sense. This positioning by Cervantes has many consequences for the reader. In the immediate sense it makes the text more enjoyable. But perhaps the most important element is that though the reader is seduced by the narrator's sympathy for Quijote, the reader is positioned in such a way to inhabit the same hybrid reality that it takes Cervantes almost a thousand pages to get Quijote to. Quijote cannot be judged; the reader is powerless to ultimately know without reasonable doubt whether Quijote is mad or sane, or sane-ish, or merely an idealist, or even to know absolutely whether Quijote is a good or destructive force. The judgment of Quijote has more to do with how the reader straddles the clashing genre expectations - but as has already been implied, these genre expectations, being forced to interact and occupy the same space become modified, and hybridized in this way, move beyond the ability for the reader to usefully use. In the end it is impossible to know if Quijote has succeeded or failed, if he is a knight or not, whether he was mad or sane. And this stems as much from the fundamental indeterminacy that underlies the text as it does that the blend of genre expectations is, well, confusing.

In the chapter focusing on *La cena*, we saw how Aira gives the reader an experience parallel to that of the character but succeeds in making this off-the-page transition more explicit than with Quijote. We saw how the reader is led to believe the

reality of the zombie narrative based on a rhetorical trick. After demonstrating through the first part of the novel how flexible details can be to the narrator in service of the larger narrative, the second part switches to a larger zombie narrative - this would seem to be in violation of the reality the reader has been led to expect, but - just as in Quijote - the reader is led to evaluate according to two sets of genre expectations; zombie is roughly equivalent to chivalry. But where in Quijote the reader sees the effects of the character bringing unrealistic assumptions about everything from the right relationship between things and people to the metaphysical makeup of the universe based as they are on the specific utility within the closed system of the genre of chivalry into the world, the conclusion for Aira is quite short: immediate and utter disaster.

Where these two have much in common Aira places the stress of the danger on the originating factors. Cervantes introduces unreality into the world in the form of Quijote, and watches how systems must come to grapple with each other and commingle. Aira shows how unreality folds in as part of the process of using even the most basic logic of narrative as a tool for self understanding. Aira succeeds in drawing the reader into the experience of the narrator perhaps better than Cervantes does and drawing attention to the reader's experience in the metafictional process at work, but in doing so the ending is more definite. The reader is tempted to write off the narrator's experience and deny that the reader has been fooled.

It is in response to this that we explored how in *Lord Jim* Marlow refigures information and secretly transforms reality into the form of a romantic sea adventure in order to persuade the reader to accept the judgment that the main character's actions and

death have been redeemed. In the process Marlow is also attempting to defend the very same genre that has been his own underlying motivation in the actions of his life.

Marlow's attempt to defend the genre is manipulative and ultimately relies on the genre itself, and all its underlying associations and ideals. In the process of doing this, however, Conrad has positioned Marlow's embedded narrative in such a way as to put the reader in the very same position over Marlow, as Marlow has put the reader over Jim; the position is ultimately undecidable, but the reader must decide.

It is in this moment of the undecidable that all three texts reach the point where they reveal their underlying aim in creating such complicated, ensnaring narratives. Each author aims in the first place to foreground the existence of divergent operational narrative codes at play among different characters. Second, these authors invite their readers to investigate the way interacting narrative codes used come to resemble each other, and how they become hybrid through the process of social interaction. Third, they show how a subject becomes ensnared in the hybridized systems. These texts do all of this at the same time as forcing the reader into a parallel circumstance by careful positioning of the narrative. These things are all immediately useful insights in themselves and suggest myriad applications in a reader's life, but though the effects of these things are multiple, perhaps most important is that this process is one that entwines the text and the reader in a way that disallows a functional separation of identities. That is, the reader, in the process of reading the text, is forced to supply a fundamental part of it (to a greater or lesser degree). This is an effect put to more direct use by Spanish novelist Unamuno in his metafictional novel *Niebla* and a comparison to our texts will

allow the reader to more clearly comprehend the degree to which each author has used this technique, but also how they have used it. In his novel Unamuno creates hermeneutical gaps wherein the reader is not supplied sufficient information as to the cause of death of the principle character, and two equally valid options are presented. The compulsion for the reader to decide forces him to commit the final act of the novel - in some sense the protagonist does not die in either way until the reader decides it to be so, a kind of Schrödinger's cat of fiction. But where Unamuno's efforts are largely aimed at reader interaction, in *Don Quijote*, *La cena*, and *Lord Jim*, the authors demand that the readers grapple with specific questions about how to achieve successful, if not authentic, interpersonal relationships. All three texts comment on the tension between the need for narrative control - specifically in demanding a sense of conclusion or completion to motivating narrative structures, and authentic and more direct interaction with others. All three texts put forward models where characters who are unwilling or unable to move past this need for narrative conclusion are ultimately trapped in a kind of purgatory of the third state, the hybrid zone in which they become ensnared. Each of these texts stages the problem of authentic interpersonal interaction in this highly structured way, and each, after all the questions of the structuring, all seem to arrive at a similar conclusion: only a character who is willing to be informed by a narrative code, yet not demand its perfect implementation in the process of interpersonal interaction is offered the opportunity of reward, to say nothing as lofty as happiness. This becomes particularly meaningful given the metafictional nature of these texts; the reader, too, must move beyond the demand for narrative completion, or these texts remain untenable and unenjoyable. Only by

relinquishing the requirement that the text be either/or can the reader salvage anything from the experience of engagement with the text. In the example of *Don Quijote* the reader might decide that the protagonist becomes and remains a knight, and dies a knightly death, and also that he does not become a knight; that he merely remains a man whose brains dried up and went mad. The contradiction does not pose the central problem; rather the crisis is produced by the requirement to decide and resolve the contradiction. These texts suggest the possibility that one might find a meaningful place within the contradiction, and this is the project that all the texts take as their central purpose. These texts elucidate the problems of judging according to a particular pattern of expectation and demanding its completion. They not only demonstrate that this pattern of interpersonal engagement leads to states of hybridity in which the individual is powerless to narrate successfully according to the aggregate narrative code. The individual is powerless to bring about the necessary conclusion, and lacking the ability to complete the narrative according to its demands, these characters are shown to be happy or successful to the degree that they are able to relinquish the demand for narrative completion. By placing the reader in the same position, the reader is to experience as well as witness this process. All of these texts - spanning 401 years of human history - compel the astute reader to the value of finding comfort within the contradiction and the promise of more successful interpersonal human interaction (and perhaps even happiness) if the reader is willing to cede partial control and let the code be, as the great pirate Captain Barbossa suggests the pirate code is, "more what you'd call 'guidelines' than actual rules" (Bruckheimer). The place of mixed narratives has no name. The demands

encountered are unclear and shifting as first one set of expectations gains in dominance, then recedes in favor of a second, the whole becoming more confusing as they blend, entangle and merge. But it might also be that the dirty secret of all narrative is that it is perpetually unstable with these tensions. Genre has no distinct lines to define it; the expectations of even a single genre are unclear and endlessly shifting as new texts continue to modify them. It might be there is neither here nor there. What is clear from the efforts of these authors is that when two systems of narrative expectation do engage, they eclipse the expectations of either. This is perhaps a kind of transcendence, for it is in these recombinations that new ideas can be born. This place explored by Cervantes, Aïza, and Conrad is neither one place nor another but a third state of narrative expectation. It is easy to get to and impossible to leave, but well worth a visit.

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