DRAMATIZING THE WRITTEN WORD: ALLUSIONS AND INSERTED GENRES AS HETEROGLOSSIA

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Christopher Bertucci
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ABSTRACT

DRAMATIZING THE WRITTEN WORD: ALLUSIONS AND INSERTED GENRES AS HETEROGLOSSIA

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This thesis examines the implications of two literary phenomena: (1) the ways in which allusions put works into dialogue, and (2) the insertion of letters, journals, and other types of writing within larger narratives. Both add layers of dramatic tensions in the language of literature, placing additional and diverse voices and values in conflict and dialogue. To help elucidate the nature of these tensions, I work, in the first chapter, with Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of multi-vocal discourse; in subsequent chapters, I continue with a close reading of three works of literature replete with intertextual references and examples of inserted genres: William Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus (1592-93), Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe (1719), and Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice (1813).
In Chapter II, I look at how characters implement and interpret written messages, letters, and classical allusions in *Titus Andronicus*. The characters that effectively control writing are shown as puppet-masters, whereas the characters that fail to properly interpret writing become disenfranchised puppets or victims.

In Chapter III, I use Neoplatonism as an interpretive framework for exploring Crusoe’s developing religious consciousness in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe’s evolving explanations in his journal, narration, and sequels detail his evolving views of providence. The second sequel, *Serious Reflections*, a series of essays reflecting on his island stay, has Neoplatonic characteristics. By considering the sequels, the original work becomes re-accentuated—Defoe asks the reader to reevaluate the island’s isolation, and by extension all of the events taking place on the island, in a more Neoplatonic light.

In Chapter IV, I discuss the tendency of characters to construct a fictional image of someone from gossip and letters in *Pride and Prejudice*. One must carefully interpret such discourse and experience in order to approach a better understanding of someone. Elizabeth’s growing affection toward Mr. Darcy, for example, has less to do with Mr. Darcy changing than with Elizabeth reinterpreting her image of him.

And finally, in Chapter V, I conclude with some reflections on how Bakhtin’s theories can apply to a great number of novels still being written.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Allusions and the insertion of letters, journals, and other genres—as I will investigate in this thesis—enrich a work of literature by adding layers of meaning and interaction. For instance, an allusion to the story of Diana and Actaeon superimposes that story and its associations onto the line of text. A character doesn’t have to tell the entire story; she can merely reference it, and the rest is invoked without being said, so long as the listener understands the allusion. If another character is to effectively respond, he must address both the spoken words of the first character and the additional layer of allusion. To aid in my examination, I have selected three works of literature that variously manifest these features. Moreover, Mikhail Bakhtin’s ideas of multi-vocal discourse and, more specifically, heteroglossia serve as a helpful theoretical framework for my exploration of intertextuality and inserted genres in literature.

Bakhtin sees the novel as a system of languages. He argues for a method of interpretation different from the tools used for studying poetry. In the study of novels, instead of focusing on features such as imagery, one should examine the variety and inter-illumination of languages:

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). (263)
Heteroglossia—“the social diversity of speech types”—requires more than multiple voices. The various voices must each embody a noticeably different point-of-view that is in dialogue or conflict with another. Two bourgeois intellectuals arguing about the nature of speculative investments at a cocktail party presents both dialogue and conflict but is not the type of interaction Bakhtin has in mind. A more enriching, heteroglot dialogue would ensue between the same investors and someone ignorant of the assumptions and nuances of investing. The stylistic effectiveness of the novel relies on bringing diverse voices into the same arena.

In the role of outsider, “Stupidity (incomprehension) in the novel is always polemical: it interacts dialogically with an intelligence (a lofty pseudo intelligence) with which it polemizes and whose mask it tears away” (403). The conflicting characters expose weak spots in reasoning that would otherwise go unaddressed. The outsider talking to the investors could force the investors to explain some of their terminology and methodology. Coming from a wholly unrelated perspective, the outsider can question fundamental assumptions that are taken for granted among the initiated. The novels of Dickens, for example, bring into contact different social classes that might not normally interact: the rich must confront the reality of the poor instead of rehashing preconceived ideas in a sealed-off social sphere. As Bakhtin says, “A sealed-off interest group, caste or class, existing within an internally unitary and unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as a socially productive soil for the development of the novel unless it becomes riddled with decay or shifted somehow from its state of internal balance and self-sufficiency” (368). Without diversity, the language represents a narrow, almost singular, range of voices.
Bakhtin describes the tension between centripetal forces of language—pulling towards a central, unitary language—and centrifugal forces of language stratification (heteroglossia):

Every concrete utterance of a speaking subject serves as a point where centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear. The processes of centralization and decentralization, of unification and disunification, intersect in the utterance; the utterance not only answers the requirements of its own language as an individualized embodiment of a speech act, but it answers the requirements of heteroglossia as well; it is in fact an active participant in such speech diversity. (272)

The centralizing force of language tries to impose rules and regularity on language—from Aristotelian poetics to grammar manuals to Stalinistic censorship. The centripetal pull towards a proper way of speaking or writing includes an ideological pull, whether implicitly or explicitly.

At the same time, language stratifies: different professions, generations, social groups, and so on employ different versions of language. These variants deepen and widen the overall language. The speaker resides in a particular place in the historical development of the language, enmeshed in ideologically-loaded dialogue:

As a result of the work done by all these stratifying forces in language, there are no “neutral” words and forms—words and forms that can belong to “no one”; language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. For any individual consciousness living in it, language is not an abstract system of normative forms but rather a concrete heteroglot conception of the world. All words have the “taste” of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, the day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (293)

Every word, spoken or written, carries significant baggage. One must appropriate words already full of associations and used by others in order to communicate. Language resides in the borderline between oneself and the other: “The word in language is half someone
else’s. It becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention” (293).

Julia Kristeva refers to this interplay of language, and by extension, texts, as intertextuality. Kristeva considers everything as a text. Additionally, as she says, “any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity” (66). Similarly, Roland Barthes, in “The Death of the Author,” describes writing as “that neutral, composite, oblique space where the subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.” This radically alters Bakhtin’s ideas, denying—or at least minimizing—the importance of the speaker’s intentions. William Irwin critiques Kristeva’s and Barthes’ theories of intertextuality and authorship:

> The central element of intertextual interpretation is to note and make connections between and among texts. Every text is potentially the intertext of every other text, and so reading becomes an infinite process. Whereas the traditional notions of allusion and source study direct us to the intentions of the authors under consideration, intertextual theory declares those intentions unnecessary, unavailable, and irrelevant. (236)

By attributing intentions to the author, even if the author is anonymous, one can reasonably narrow the scope of connections between texts to a manageable and meaningful level. Conversely, pure Kristevan intertextuality—with its infinite play of signifiers—is not very useful for literary criticism. In a looser sense, intertextuality becomes another name for describing the instances and implications of allusions, or the way allusions put texts into dialogue—which is more of the way I employ the term.
Likewise, Bakhtin envisions the development of the novel in contrast with more traditional genres of epic, classical drama, and poetry. Poetic genres, according to Bakhtin, resist heteroglossia. Poetic style reduces interaction with alien discourse:

In poetic genres, artistic consciousness—understood as a unity of all the author’s semantic and expressive intentions—fully realizes itself within its own language; in them alone is such consciousness fully immanent, expressing itself in it directly without mediation, without conditions and without distance. The language of the poet is his language, he is utterly immersed in it, inseparable from it, he makes use of each form, each word, each expression according to its unmediated power to assign meaning (as it were, “without quotation marks”), that is, as a pure and direct expression of his own intention. (285)

Bakhtin characteristically overstates a point and then retreats to a more defensible position: he doesn’t deny the possibility of heteroglossia in poetry, but points towards a tendency for a singular, formalized voice. Elements such as rhythm resist language stratification: “Rhythm serves to strengthen and concentrate even further the unity and hermetic quality of the surface of poetic style” (298). This doesn’t make poetry one dimensional. By offering an internally consistent worldview, the poet is able to clearly probe—unmediated—the depths of complicated thoughts and imagery.

The novel, on the other hand, embraces heteroglossia. The novelist constructs his style from speech and language diversity:

The prose writer does not purge words of intentions and tones that are alien to him, he does not destroy the seeds of social heteroglossia embedded in words, he does not eliminate those language characterizations and speech mannerisms (potential narrator-personalities) glimmering behind the words and forms, each at a different distance from the ultimate semantic nucleus of his work, that is, the center of his own personal intentions. (298)

Certain aspects of the novel’s language can directly reflect the author’s intentions, but most of the voices in the novel are refractions, to varying degrees, of the author. In these refractions, “the writer of prose does not meld completely with any of these words, but
rather acccents each of them in a particular way—humorously, ironically, parodically and so forth” (299). The overall artistic organization of heteroglossia “orchestrates the intentional theme of the author” (299). Understanding the author’s distance from common speech and other discourses allows for parody and irony, not only in conversations among characters, but in narration as well. The author, speaking in refracted ways, adds another layer to the narrator’s story, telling us about the narrator himself and putting the narrator in dialogic tension against the background of normal literary language (314).

As another means of introducing and organizing heteroglossia, the novel often incorporates other genres, such as poems, letters, diaries, and religious tracts. Some genres even affect the form of the novel: the confessional novel, the epistolary novel, and so on (323). In most novels—those stemming from, at least partially, what Bakhtin terms the Second Line of development, exemplified by Don Quixote—inserted genres serve the purpose of introducing heteroglossia into the novel, of introducing an era’s many and diverse languages. Extraliterary genres (the everyday genres, for example) are incorporated into the novel not in order to “ennoble” them, to “literarize” them, but for the sake of their very extraliterariness, for the sake of their potential for introducing nonliterary language (or even dialects) into the novel. (411)

Not only do the words of the inserted genres add to the multiplicity of the era’s languages, the nature of the inserted genres themselves adds to the heteroglossia. A contemporary novel, for example, could have an email correspondence which would add certain ideological perspectives of our era beyond the actual words of the email. Inserting these genres allows the novel to present more fully the complex dialogized heteroglossia of its time.
Although Bakhtin’s theories focus mostly on the novel, he briefly mentions the novelization of other genres:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the “novelistic” layers of literary language, they become dialogized, permeated with laughter, irony, humor, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (7)

Certain types of drama, such as Shakespeare’s plays, while missing some of the novel’s potential layers, manifest heteroglossia. As one example, Hamlet and Othello have the “surplus of humanness” that Bakhtin describes—heroes that exceed and overflow the boundaries of their role in the work (37). As another example, Shakespeare mixes and opposes the prosaic, earthy language of the Boar’s Head with the stately blank verse of the court in the Henry IV plays.

In Titus Andronicus, Shakespeare highlights the dangers of failed communication. One can perceive another’s word as either reified or dialogized. In the first, when the receiver considers the word as an object, he resists interpreting the word. Alternatively, the word can be engaged with and brought into dialogue:

even the driest and flattest positivism in these disciplines cannot treat the word neutrally, as if it were a thing, but is obliged to initiate talk not only about words but in words, in order to penetrate their ideological meanings—which can only be grasped dialogically, and which include evaluation and response. (352)

Language requires rigorous interaction for meaning to occur. When Saturninus reads the conspirators’ letter, he doesn’t engage with the language. He treats the letter, with only a single reading and without any thoughtful interpretation, as an object of proof. Similarly, Chiron and Demetrius fail to interpret the Latin message bundled with the weapons sent
by Titus. They identify the Horace quotation and treat it as an artifact, missing the point that it is part of active communication.

Images and language in novels and novelistic genres are re-accentuated over time: “In an era when the dialogue of languages has experienced great change, the language of an image begins to sound in a different way, or is bathed in a different light, or is perceived against a different dialogizing background” (420). Elizabethans perceive Ovid’s Metamorphoses differently than the original audience. When Shakespeare incorporates language from the Metamorphoses, he not only changes the Latin to English, he re-accentuates the language based on the composition of heteroglossia in Elizabethan times.

In Robinson Crusoe and its sequels, Defoe retells some of the events from different stages in Crusoe’s life. The individual’s own writing and thoughts can be re-accentuated at different moments in his life. In his journal, Robinson Crusoe describes his landing on the island, and then years later, when narrating his tale, he recasts the same event differently because of his altered ideological consciousness. Bakhtin describes an ideological and self-conscious becoming as the carving out of one’s own speech from the speech of others:

The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. (348)

But one never has a stable language. Words are always only half ours: “Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values” (346).
Crusoe develops his own relationship with providence by struggling with the language he acquires before landing on the island, such as his father’s recommendation of the middle station and religious beliefs from a Protestant upbringing.

In *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen’s wit and irony serve as prime examples of heteroglossia in narration. A hybrid construction “is an utterance that belongs, by its grammatical (syntactic) and compositional markers, to a single speaker, but that actually contains mixed within it two utterances, two speech manners, two styles, two ‘languages,’ two semantic and axiological belief systems” (304). A more specific type of hybrid construction is the character zone:

A character in a novel always has, as we have said, a zone of his own, his own sphere of influence on the authorial context surrounding him, a sphere that extends—and often quite far—beyond the boundaries of the direct discourse allotted to him. (320)

The boundaries between the narrator and a character blur. A famous example of this is the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*: “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a fortune, must be in want of a wife” (3). Although delivered as narration without quotation marks, this line could be the internal thought of Mrs. Bennet or the popular opinion of the mothers in the neighborhood.

The use of letters also adds to the heteroglossia in *Pride and Prejudice*. Whereas the Goths in *Titus* fail to interpret letters and other written objects inserted into the play, the characters in *Pride and Prejudice* fully interact with the language in letters—perhaps to the point of absurdity. The characters attempt to glean as much information about the letter writer as possible, sometimes making unfounded interpretive
leaps. Sentimental letter writing and interpretation become parodied by highlighting the disconnection between these interpretations and reality.
CHAPTER II

“LET THEM NOT SPEAK A WORD”:
WRITING DENIES SPEECH IN

TITUS ANDRONICUS

Critics repeatedly grow transfixed by the severed body parts in Shakespeare’s Titus Andronicus. One article intricately details the volitional or consensual agency of hands in “martial, marital and genealogical bonds so much at risk in the play” (Rowe 280). Another demonstrates how figurative language foreshadows literal actions: “the most profound impulse in Titus is to make the word become flesh” (Tricomi 226). A third concentrates on Lavinia’s body and its incarnation in language—especially writing (Fawcett). Yet there are more instances of prohibiting speech and consent than these moments of power-laden mayhem. Throughout, numerous references underscore the denial of speech. Moreover, the insistent role of writing in Aaron’s crafted letter, Titus’s messages, and Lavinia’s scrawling—not to mention the continuous allusions to Ovid, Horace, Seneca, and Livy—deserve substantial attention. For Lavinia, denial of speech leads to writing; for Martius and Quintus, however, writing signals a denial of speech. Shakespeare directs us to speech, writing, and action as degrees of escalating catastrophe. When speech and writing fail, only increasingly drastic measures remain available in order to secure a hearing—culminating in the crescendo of death following four and a half acts of frustrated efforts at meaningful communication. The relationship between
writing and the denial of speech in *Titus* emphasizes the indispensable exertion of language interpretation required for stable relationships among not only warring tribes and factions, but also those closest to us: sons, daughters, fathers.

Titus enters, preoccupied with duties of burial and sacrifice. He speaks stoically of burying his sons slain in battle, relying on conventionally comforting words:

“There greet in silence as the dead are wont, / And sleep in peace, slain in your country’s wars” (1.1.90-91). Death marks the permanent denial of speech; another person must speak on the dead’s behalf. Lucius, to commemorate his slain brothers, draws on rites of sacrifice, asking that a Goth prisoner die in recompense: “*Ad manes fratum* sacrifice his flesh / Before this earthly prison of their bones” (1.1.98-99). This might seem to be vengeance played out in a lawful, justified manner, but Tamora explains the discrepancy:

But must my sons be slaughtered in the streets

For valiant doings in their country’s cause?

O, if to fight for king and commonweal

Were piety in thine, it is in these. (1.1.112-115)

To Tamora this is not sacrifice but slaughter. She grasps why the vengeance is unjust, and, as a probable consequence, will lead to more violence. Roman justice, at best, works only for Romans. Almost a century later, John Locke explains how people enter into a social compact so as to defer vengeance to a more impartial third party:

that it is unreasonable for men to be judges in their own cases, that self-love will make men partial to themselves and their friends: and on the other side, that ill nature, passion and revenge will carry them too far in punishing others; and hence nothing but confusion and disorder will follow, and that therefore God hath certainly appointed government to restrain the partiality and violence of men. (12)
This reasoning may work fairly well for members of a specific social compact, but other nations fall outside its jurisdiction. Leaders of nations might as well be considered by each other as existing in a state of nature (13). The judicial system of one country isn’t necessarily effective for foreigners. Tamora’s sons fought valiantly for the Goths just as Titus’s sons fought for the Romans: hardly the same case as a Roman killing another Roman. Putting Tamora’s son to death is not judicial punishment; it is another act of war against the Goths. The Romans may be appeased, but the Goths are not. Instead of comprehending Tamora, however, Titus silences her: “Patient yourself, madam, and pardon me” (1.1.121). He leans on tradition and religion without listening, reflecting, or empathizing. Tamora laments: “O cruel irreligious piety!” (1.1.130). The scene inverts the notions of barbarism and civility. The barbaric Goth, Tamora, speaks with reason while the civilized Romans, Titus and Lucius, unthinkingly follow their own, very brutal religious rite. Chiron explicitly draws this connection: “Was never Scythia half so barbarous” (1.1.131). Reason is negated if it is silenced. Tamora and sons must adopt another language that Titus will listen to.

In response to the sacrifice, Demetrius alludes to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, adding another layer to the play’s resonant language. Where speech alone falls short, writing is referenced. Demetrius makes sense of the situation through the allusion:

Then, madam, stand resolved; but hope withal

The selfsame gods that armed the Queen of Troy

With opportunity of sharp revenge

Upon the Thracian tyrant in his tent

May favour Tamora, the Queen of Goths—
When Goths were Goths and Tamora was queen—

To quit her bloody wrongs upon her foes. (1.1.135-141)

The reference is to book 13 of the *Metamorphoses*, where Queen Hecuba avenges her son Polydorus. Demetrius not only calls for revenge but offers the model. The written work becomes literalized in the action of the play: the book is staged. Tamora and her sons become analogies to Hecuba, the Queen of Troy, and the captive women; Titus and kin become Polymestor, the Thracian tyrant; the murder of Tamora’s son becomes the murder of Hecuba’s son, Polydorus; and the mutilation of Lavinia becomes the hollowing out of Polymestor’s eye sockets. Aaron, like Demetrius, alludes to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* to explain his plan to Tamora: “Philomel must lose her tongue today” (2.3.43). The connection grows more unmistakable with the rape and mutilation of Lavinia explained in terms of Philomel later in the play (2.4.38, 4.1.42, and 5.2.193).

Additionally, Bassianus invokes the story of Actaeon and Diana, from Ovid’s book three, after catching Tamora and Aaron intimately together: “Or is it Dian, habited like her / Who hath abandoned her holy groves” (2.3.57-58). Tamora, understanding the allusion and its intended irony, fires back:

Saucy controller of my private steps,

Had I the power that some say Dian had,

Thy temples should be planted presently

With horns, as was Actaeon’s, and the hounds

Should drive upon thy new-transformed limbs,

Unmannerly intruder as thou art! (2.3.60-65)
Bassianus, like Actaeon, is then killed for his intrusion. Each invocation of an Ovidian tale becomes literalized in the play’s unfolding scenes. In a certain sense, Titus Andronicus can be seen as the frame story for a staging of myths from the Metamorphoses.

But there is also more to Titus than Shakespeare’s staging of classical literature. Issues of political voice start with the opening lines. Saturninus asks his supporters to “Plead my successive title with your swords” on terms of being the first-born son of the previous ruler of Rome (1.1.4-6). This typifies appeals to primogeniture. The call is to his “Noble patricians,” not to the broader Roman citizenry. He is demanding speech from the aristocracy while denying speech to the citizenry. Bassianus, conversely, appeals to Romans in the widest collective sense, asking them to suffer not dishonour to approach

The imperial seat, to virtue consecrate,
To justice, continence, and nobility;
But let desert in pure election shine,
And, Romans, fight for freedom in your choice. (1.1.13-17)

This approach may be much more democratic, but it does not situate Bassianus as purer or of greater merit. Since he is the younger son, this approach is one of the few nonviolent avenues for surpassing his older brother to the crown. Immediately following the sacrifice of Alarbus, Titus must deal with selecting the next Emperor of Rome. He selects Saturninus even after Saturninus has called for Romans to “draw your swords, and sheathe them not / Till Saturninus be Rome’s emperor” (1.1.204-205). This hostile action should cause Titus to hesitate and think through his decision, but it doesn’t—as if his
decision required no thought. Regardless of what might be said, Titus doesn’t listen, leaning instead on tradition, and tradition calls for the sacrifice of the enemy’s eldest son and the promotion of the previous Emperor’s eldest son. Titus, accordingly, follows this prescription unflinchingly. Titus’s reliance on this tradition is so automatic that he slays his own son, Mutius, for appearing to cross the new Emperor (1.1.287). Again his action comes immediately. Titus doesn’t wait to listen or think. Saturninus then callously responds to Titus offering to bring Lavinia back:

No, Titus, no. The Emperor needs her not,
Nor her, nor thee, nor any of thy stock
I’ll trust by leisure him that mocks me once,
Thee never, nor thy traitorous haughty sons,
Confederates all thus to dishonour me. (1.1.296-300).

Titus laments to deaf ears, as Tamora did before: “O monstrous, what reproachful words are these?” (1.1.305). By too quickly divesting power, he himself is denied meaningful speech.

When Marcus and Titus’s sons return with Mutius’s body, Titus still doesn’t see his mistake. Marcus tries to make Titus understand: “O Titus, see, O see what thou hast done— / In bad quarrel slain a virtuous son” (1.1.338-339). Titus didn’t listen before, and now he cannot see:

No, foolish Tribune, no; no son of mine
Nor thou, nor these, confederates in the deed
That hath dishonoured all our family;
Unworthy brother and unworthy sons! (1.1.340-343)
This speech echoes Saturninus’s denunciation of Titus. Titus neither thinks for himself, nor speaks for himself. In his blind devotion to duty, he denies even his own speech, parroting Saturninus’s curses of “confederates” causing “dishonour.” Titus’s son, Martius, correctly remarks that “He is not with himself” (1.1.365). Marcus and Titus’s sons kneel and plead for Titus to allow Mutius to be interred in the family tomb. Again, Titus tries to deny speech: “Speak thou no more, if all the rest will speed” (1.1.369). Silence, or I’ll kill you to silence you! Titus appears to be without reason. Only when Marcus shrewdly draws on tradition does Titus give in:

Thou art a Roman; be not barbarous.
The Greeks upon advice did bury Ajax,
That slew himself; and wise Laertes’ son
Did graciously plead for his funerals.
Let not young Mutius then, that was thy joy,
Be barred his entrance here. (1.1.375-379)

The logic arrives in language that Titus can register. In Titus’s view, Mutius’s act of dishonor warranted death, that is, his act of dishonor killed himself. This view makes apt the comparison to suicide. If the noble Greeks allowed Ajax burial after suicide, Titus can make a similar concession.

Later, upon finding Quintus and Martius in the pit with the dead Bassianus, Tamora produces a letter that silences their denials. Saturninus reads:

‘An if we miss to meet him handsomely,
Sweet huntsman—Bassianus ’tis we mean—
Do thou so much as dig the grave for him.
Thou know’st our meaning. Look for thy reward
Among the nettles at the elder tree
Which overshades the mouth of that same pit
Where we decreed to bury Bassianus.
Do this, and purchase us thy lasting friends.’ (2.3.268-275)

When Aaron then draws attention to the location of the bag of gold, Saturninus immediately jumps to the conclusion that Quintus and Martius are the murderers. This decision is fully as hasty as Titus’s earlier decisions. The evidence is circumstantial. No time goes to identifying the handwriting of the letter. No time goes to checking for bloody weapons. Nobody questions how Aaron finds the gold so quickly. Even the content of the letter is specious. If the “we” is read as two people addressing a third, then it implies at least three individuals. If the “we” is read as inclusive or as an impersonal, singular “we” addressing another conspirator, this still implies at least three individuals: it simply makes no sense that Martius would pay Quintus, or vice-versa, in gold, only then to each fall into the pit. But Saturninus never mentions looking for a third accomplice. It’s as though the presence of a letter is enough, while the actual words themselves have no significance. Titus asks for questioning, but Saturninus not only denies questioning; he denies speech altogether: “Let them not speak a word—the guilt is plain; / For by my soul, were there worse end than death / That end upon them should be executed” (2.3.301-303). Quintus and Martius are put to death on circumstantial evidence without being heard. The symbol of this injustice is the letter. In this case, writing, or at least the impression gained from the written word, negates all attempts at speech.
The misreading of the letter prefigures letters used in later plays. In *Twelfth Night* (1601), Malvolio’s own desires color his interpretation of the cryptic letter, craftily placed by Maria, so much so that he bends “M.O.A.I.” to fit his name with the reasoning that “every one of these letters are in my name” (2.5.123-124). While this device remains comical in *Twelfth Night*, consider how Brutus in *Julius Caesar* (1599) similarly reacts to the cryptic letter he receives:

> ‘Brutus, thou sleep’st. Awake, and see thyself.
> Shall Rome, et cetera? Speak, strike, redress.’—
> ‘Brutus, thou sleep’st. Awake.’
> Such instigations have been often dropped
> Where I have took them up.
> ‘Shall Rome, et cetera?’ Thus must I piece it out:
> Shall Rome stand under one man’s awe? What, Rome?
> The Tarquin drive when he was called a king.
> ‘Speak, strike, redress.’ Am I entreated
> To speak and strike? O Rome, I make thee promise,
> If the redress will follow, thou receivest
> Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus. (2.1.46-58)

Ironically, “see thyself” is exactly the phrase that Brutus fails to repeat while working through the letter. The meditation is not self-reflective. Brutus’ mind is already determined to kill Caesar before examining the letter. It is interpreted to fit Brutus’ planned course of action. Brutus’ soliloquy at the beginning of Act 2 establishes the
pattern of judgment first, reasoning later. Brutus declares, “It must be by [Caesar’s] death” (2.1.10), before launching into reasons:

Fashion it thus: that what he is, augmented,
Would run to these and these extremities;
And therefore think him as a serpent’s egg,
Which, hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell. (2.1.30-34)

What might appear as solid reasoning is tacked on as mere justification. M. W. MacCallum notes a breakdown in the soliloquy: “this line of argument is invented to support a foregone conclusion. Already that hint to his conscience, ‘Fashion it thus,’ betrays the resolve to make out a case” (246). William Bowden adds that Brutus “fails to recognize that he is rationalizing, and he fails to see that his original decision is based on suspicions rather than on facts” (58). The rhetoric is, after all, superficial. Facts have been constructed to fit desire.

René Girard draws similar connections, but from a different angle: “As a tool of mimetic ensnarement, writing can be even more effective than the spoken word, and our conspiratorial Pandarus understands this very well” (188). Writing allows for anonymous delivery. Saturninus, Malvolio and Brutus read an anonymous letter. The nature of anonymity permits the reader to assume the identity of the writer. The reader can graft his own interpretation onto the message of the letter without having to worry about the authority of its author. In more Girardean terms, the reader can attribute the message of the letter to a choice of model for mimetic desire. Malvolio can believe it is Olivia urging him on, while Brutus can believe it is the Roman citizens urging him.
Saturninus’s case is different. He isn’t left to create his own full interpretation. He’s quickly urged on by Aaron finding the planted bag of gold (2.3.280). This leaves in question whether, if given the time to ponder the implications of the letter, he might have reached a deeper reading. He’s denied time to think, and, in this sense, denied thoughtful speech.

In a more bodily denial of speech, Marcus finds Lavinia with “her hands cut off and her tongue cut out, and ravished.” With Lavinia silenced, Marcus speaks for her, evoking the story of Philomel from *Metamorphoses*:

> O that I knew thy heart, and knew the beast,
> That I might rail at him to ease my mind!
> Sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped,
> Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is.
> Fair Philomel, why she but lost her tongue
> And in tedious sampler sewed her mind.
> But, lovely niece, that mean is cut from thee.
> A craftier Tereus, cousin, hast thou met,
> And he hath cut those pretty fingers off
> That could have better sewed than Philomel. (2.4.34-43)

The very language is redolent of Ovid, especially in Golding’s translation. This can be dramatically envisioned as Shakespeare’s use of Marcus as an onstage manifestation of the written Ovid. Tricomi goes further, saying that the “craftier Tereus” is Shakespeare, attempting to outdo his source material (233). Shakespeare has upped the carnage: Lavinia is raped by two men instead of one, and she has her hands cut off in addition to
her tongue. In another contrast, Philomel is allowed speech between her rape and her
maiming. Lavinia’s mutilation, on the other hand, occurs offstage, further dramatizing the
refusal to grant her speech. Without her tongue she is voiceless; without her hands she is
figuratively powerless. Hands are linked to consent, drawing connections between
consent in marriage to the consent of the people in politics (Ray 30). Titus, representative
of the people, does not listen to their voices when selecting an Emperor, nor, as a
patriarchal representative of Lavinia, does he listen to Lavinia while arranging her
marriage. Lavinia, tongueless and handless, represents the voiceless and powerless
Roman people. While Titus appears to attempt communication with Lavinia after her
mutilation, to “learn [her] thought” (3.2.39), it’s questionable how successful he is at
understanding her. Extended to broader political practices, this raises the question of how
successful any representative can be at understanding—much less manifesting—the
views of his constituents.

While not physically mute like his daughter, Titus remains similarly unheard. He again pleads to deaf ears in his attempt to save his sons from execution: “Here me,
grade fathers; noble Tribunes, stay” (3.1.1). After the judges pass him by, he lies down
and further laments:

For these two, Tribunes, in the dust I write

My heart’s deep languor and my soul’s sad tears.

Let my tears stanch the earth’s dry appetite;

My sons’ sweet blood will make it shame and blush. (3.1.12-15)

Taken literally, Titus writes “My heart’s deep languor and my soul’s sad
tears” in the dirt. Taken figuratively, his tears falling to the dirt represent the language of
his grief. Either way, he has progressed in terms of thinking about writing. Titus is not hindered when Lucius emphasizes that “The Tribunes hear you not. No man is by, / And you recount your sorrows to a stone” (3.1.28-29). When speaking to those who do not listen, one may as well be speaking to a stone. Titus continues:

Why, ’tis no matter, man. If they did hear,
They would not mark me; if they did mark,
They would not pity me; yet plead I must.
Therefore I tell my sorrows to the stones,
Who, though they cannot answer my distress,
Yet in some sort they are better than the Tribunes
For that they will not intercept my tale. (3.1.33-39)

This is a grieving process he did not show in the death of his sons slain in battle or even Mutius slain by his own hand. The lament seems focused more on his being dishonored and silenced than on his sons. There is some comfort in telling his tale, even if it goes unheard. He fought wars on behalf of Rome with his hands, but after divesting power to Saturninus, his hands become useless. Ironically, he becomes as voiceless as the citizens of Rome whom he ignored earlier in the play. When Aaron deviously offers a trade—Titus’s hand for his sons—Titus accepts: “Lend me thy hand, and I will give thee mine” (3.1.186). Titus’s incentive for making the exchange is as much, if not more, the regaining of a voice rather than regaining his sons. Later, having lost his hand, Titus tries to commiserate with Lavinia: “Speechless complainer, I will learn thy thought” (3.2.39). Instead of speaking Lavinia’s thoughts, however, he imposes his own sufferings on her speechlessness.
Lavinia is finally able to express herself with the use of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Philomel relates her tragedy to her sister, Procne, through the art of weaving. Lavinia, without the hands to use a loom, turns to writing to relate her tragedy. Something needs to be said about the story alteration from weaving to writing for revelation. What is the difference between Marcus’s relating the story of Philomel in words and Lavinia’s pointing out the passage in a book? Here, as before with the letter, writing carries a special significance. The book offers nothing new, nothing that hasn’t already been put into words by Marcus, but somehow it comes across as more definitive. Titus acts as though it is the first time he has heard the story mentioned: “This is the tragic tale of Philomel, / And treats of Tereus’ treason and his rape, / And rape, I fear, was root of thy annoy” (4.1.47-49). Here ambiguity sets in. In *Metamorphoses*, the emphasis lies on the rape, with the severed tongue being a means to prevent Philomel from telling of the rape. In contrast, Lavinia’s mutilation is part of the intended assault—premeditated. Is rape, then, really the “root of [her] annoy”? Or is Titus imposing a reading on Lavinia’s situation? This is not to deny that Lavinia was raped, or to deny the horror of her rape. It raises instead the question whether sexual violation is Lavinia’s only concern when lined up with her husband’s murder and her premeditated mutilation. Because Titus thinks of all matters in terms of honor, it would be natural for his mind to move past the physical mutilation to the dishonoring rape. After showing Lavinia how to write with his staff, Marcus encourages her:

> Write thou, good niece, and here display at last

> What God will have discovered for revenge.
Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain,
That we may know the traitors and the truth. (4.1.72-75)

To which she writes “Stuprum—Chiron—Demetrius” (4.1.77). Stuprum, defilement, confirms that she was raped. Mutilation is visible and requires no additional confirmation, but the rape is only assumed up until this point. But how much truth can be shown in a few words appended to a story from *Metamorphoses*?

Mary Laughlin Fawcett draws attention to the juxtaposition of Latin and English (268). The characters are Roman, so that speaking Latin is legitimate. What does that make of the rest of the play, related in English? Why does Titus read Lavinia’s scrawling back in Latin, or, phrased differently, why hasn’t Shakespeare translated the character’s Latin speech into English? One answer is that the Latin is written down, and Titus is reading back what is written literally on the ground. But when Saturninus reads Aaron’s crafted letter, he reads it in English. Another answer is that the Latin preserves the quotation from its written source. It should be noted, however, that none of the Ovid allusions are left in Latin. This is because they are used as spoken rhetoric. The barbarian Goths are fluent in spoken rhetoric, but they are unable to make the transition to writing, unless one considers Aaron a Goth. I consider Aaron more of a wildcard, a catalyst to accelerate the strife in the play.

The Andronici send out a number of written messages that entail both a test of literacy and an attempt to be heard and recognized. Young Lucius delivers bundles of weapons wrapped in with verses, to which Demetrius reads:

What’s here—a scroll, and written round about?

Let’s see.
‘Integer vitae, scelerisque purus,
Non eget Mauri iaculis, nec arcu.’ (4.2.18-21)

Chiron recognizes it as a verse from Horace, but neither grasps its significance. Aaron, on the other hand, clearly sees it as indicating that Titus has found out that Chiron and Demetrius raped Lavinia (4.2.25-28). Titus has already sent his hand earlier, to no avail. Instead, he moves on to writing. The verse might be taken up as a code requiring interpretation. Aaron, who understands the power of writing, fittingly understands the message; the Goths, Demetrius and Chiron, do not. Compared to Aaron’s plot and letter earlier in the play, Titus’s writing demonstrates that he has already thought through a plot and now is implementing the plan. Titus sends his next set of written messages attached to arrows, labeled “to Jove,” “to Pallas,” “to Mercury,” and so on (4.3.54-57). Saturninus interprets these arrows as Titus “[writing] to heaven for his redress” (4.4.13). Titus appeals to a higher power: not to heaven but to writing. He sends his last written message via a clown to Saturninus, who subsequently reads the letter to himself and orders the clown messenger to be hanged immediately (4.4.44). Saturninus may not hear Titus’s words, but in the wake of these bombardments of written messages, he does read them—allowing writing to succeed where speech alone fails.

Titus’s encounter with Tamora, disguised as Revenge, is laden with language about the denial of speech and writing. The dialogue begins:

TITUS. for what I mean to do,

See here, in bloody lines I have set down,

And what is written shall be executed.

TAMORA. Titus, I am come to talk with thee.
TITUS. No, not a word. How can I grace my talk,
Wanting a hand to give it action?
Thou hast the odds of me, therefore no more.

TAMORA. If thou didst know me thou wouldst talk with me.

TITUS. I am not mad, I know thee well enough;
[…]
Is not thy coming for my other hand? (5.2.13-21 and 27)

Like Aaron invoking Philomel’s tale preceding Lavinia’s assault, Titus insinuates that he has written plans that will be enacted. In this case, however, the writing is in the scars and wrinkles of his suffering. Titus denies Tamora’s speech with references to his missing hand and, by extension, to his missing consent or political voice. What good is talking to the enemy if either party is beyond negotiation? Tamora unsuccessfully attempts to infect his thoughts and language, “to feed his brainsick humors” (5.2.71). She interprets his abstract speech as lunacy, but his plans at this point are constant and written. Sara Eaton explains that “[t]he act of writing differentiates Titus and his family from Tamora’s kind” (61). Tamora relies on Aaron for writing. When Aaron becomes preoccupied with the fate of their child, she becomes unarmed. Her words cannot overcome Titus, because his plan rests in the more permanent form of thought: writing.

Titus brings in another story, that of Virginius, to set up the dilemma of Lavinia’s fate. Before killing her, he rhetorically asks Saturninus, “Was it well done of rash Virginius / To slay his daughter with his own right hand / Because she was enforced, stained, and deflowered?” (5.3.36-38). In Livy, Appius Claudius, a decemvir of Rome, lusts after the beautiful Virginia, daughter of Lucius Virginius, a well-respected
centurion. When Virginia resists Appius’s seductions, he commissions his client, Marcus Claudius, to claim that Virginia is really his slave. Marcus Claudius tries to abduct her, but the cries of her nurse draw a crowd. In response to the objections from the crowd, Marcus Claudius perseveres with his claim and brings Virginia to court, presided over by Appius Claudius. Her supporters demand that the case be delayed until her father, Virginius, can be summoned from the field. Her fiancée, Icilius, with threats of violence, succeeds in arguing for her to remain in her father’s house until he returns, in order to keep her chastity safe. During this time, Appius sends letters to have Virginius detained in custody, but the letters arrive too late. Two days later, Virginius arrives and the court reconvenes. As Marcus Claudius begins to speak, and before Virginius has a chance, Appius silences them and awards Virginia to Marcus Claudius as a slave. When Marcus Claudius approaches to claim Virginia, Virginius asks for a moment with his daughter and her nurse. After taking them aside, he exclaims, “Thus, my daughter, in the only way I can, do I assert your freedom!” and stabs her to death. Looking back at the tribunal, he cries, “’Tis you, Appius, and your life I devote to destruction with this blood!” (142-160).

Titus’s act of murdering Lavinia Virginius-style is not revenge for her. By this point, Chiron and Demetrius are already baked into a pie, as part of a feast of horror on the scale of Seneca’s Thyestes or Ovid’s Metamorphoses. It’s not to prevent defilement. Notably, in Livy, Virginius kills Virginia, at least in part, to prevent her rape and dishonor, whereas Lavinia’s assailters rape and mutilate her before Titus kills her. Virginia, presumably, can speak, but doesn’t; it’s unclear to what extent she cooperates with her father. Silence might be interpreted as a tacit acceptance, but earlier when she is captured by Marcus Claudius, “Terror made the maiden speechless” (144). Following this
precedent, Virginia’s silence shows fear, not acceptance. Oliver Arnold argues that “Virginius’s preemptive murder of Virginia in the absence of any encouragement from her suggests that, in his mind, she is his property. The father enacts the fundamental violation he seeks to prevent: he denies Virginia’s capacity of consent” (130). Likewise, by imitating Virginius, Titus continues to relegate Lavinia to the status of property to be bartered (131).

Arnold overlooks the part where Appius silences Marcus Claudius and Virginius. Instead of a dramatic court scene between Marcus Claudius and Virginius, Appius denies them speech:

The plaintiff was actually uttering a few words of complaint, on the score of having been balked of his rights the day before through partiality, when, before he could finish his demand, or Verginius be given an opportunity to answer, Appius interrupted him. The discourse with which he led up to his decree may perhaps be truthfully represented in some one of the old accounts, but since I can nowhere discover one that is plausible, in view of the enormity of the decision, it seems my duty to set forth the naked fact, upon which all agree, that he adjudged Verginia to him who claimed her as his slave. (154-156)

Lack of speech exacerbates Virginius’s frustration. Without a voice, he becomes like a slave to Appius. Killing Virginia becomes as much an act of freeing himself as it is about freeing her. Appius allows Virginius to speak only after the decision, too late for meaningful speech. He moves on to violent action for expression; his actions register more than his words ever do. The audience views the murder not as a crime, but as Virginius’s expression of angst against unjust authority after more conventional methods of communication are suppressed. When Virginius first returns to town, before the decision, he demands the aid of the people on account of his brave service in the defense of the land. This appeal gathers support, but the people do no more than complain loudly,
wail and lament at the decision, and then quietly disperse when ordered to by Appius. At the point of being denied both speech and public support, Virginius stabs Virginia in an attempt to regain both. Icilius and Numitorius lift up her lifeless body, which inspirits the people to rise up and overthrow the decimviri in a way that transcends words. Appius might have been able to defuse the crowd’s hostility had he allowed Virginius to fully express himself before announcing his foregone decision. Instead, the injustice of denying Virginius voice magnifies the intensity of the symbolic murder.

In this light, Titus’s predicament draws several parallels to Virginius’s. Both Titus and Virginius feel themselves deserving of a certain amount of respect and authority in return for loyal military service: they should be enabled with speech, not denied voice. Although Titus conflates the denial of speech when attempting to represent his sons with the slaying of Lavinia, both Titus and Virginius sacrifice a daughter in efforts to regain voice and overthrow those who prevent their speech. During the eventful feast, Titus cannot explain his grief in his own words; he expresses it by comparison: “I am as woeful as Virginius was” (5.3.49). Even at the end, Titus is limited in his available speech. His revenge is successful: Tamora and Saturninus are killed and leadership shifts to the Andronici. Titus, however, doesn’t end with his own words. Only after his death does reflective language return to Rome. The story is finally given speech after being played out. Lucius speaks at line 95 of Act V, Scene 3, Marcus at 118, and finally Aaron at 183, “Ah, why should wrath be mute and fury dumb?” Revelatory speech is saved until after the fact. In an extreme sense, most of the play can be seen as a dumb show for the telling of the post-dinner story. Lawrence Danson describes Titus as “a play about silence, and about the inability to achieve adequate expression for overwhelming
emotional needs” (12). Silence, in this case, doesn’t mean lack of words. The characters speak plenty in their desire to be heard, resorting even to allusions, but the communication devolves largely into ineffectiveness. Speech must be heard and properly interpreted to be effective. Titus’s long speeches can be compared to the long, literary speeches of Senecan plays, although Shakespeare moves beyond set speeches to action. In simplest terms, a dumb show is action. While the tragedy is not literally a dumb show, the instances of denying speech throughout the play instigate action and, by extension, cause words to be played on stage.

Writing, likewise, must be interpreted thoughtfully to be effective, that is, unless the point is to deceive. In Shakespeare’s plays, writing and written artifacts are entwined with power, equipping someone to control or to be controlled. While the connection between writing and power may seem obvious, the effects are often obfuscated by the dizzying violence. For Saturninus, Malvolio, and Brutus, writing removes the need for further speech. In this regard, writing can be said to deny speech, to serve as a method of control; it stops further interpretations for these characters, turning them into puppets. It also causes these characters to stop listening to outside advice, denying speech to those around them. But as shown, this cap on interpretation ultimately causes doom for these characters. Success, then, calls for a more open view of writing and interpretation. Seen the other way, writing can be an empowering solution when speech is unheard—most blatantly exhibited by Lavinia writing the names of her assailters. Power of action rests with those who can work best with writing and interpretation. The device of written artifacts in Titus serves as a litmus test for discovering who is in control. Failing to interpret writing—such as Chiron’s and
Demetrius’s missing the meaning of the Horatian verse, or Tamora missing the meaning of Titus’s written scars—leaves characters vulnerable and, eventually, dead. More broadly, this draws attention to the political power of being in control of effective language. Throughout history we can see that those who control the interpretations of language control the people—from the history of religious oppression to fascism.
CHAPTER III

THAT WAS NO SOLITUDE:
NEOPLATONIC VOICES IN

ROBINSON CRUSOE

Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and its two sequels, *Farther Adventures* and *Serious Reflections*, compel the reader to reinterpret scenes that Crusoe describes more than once, such as narrating and reflecting multiple times on his landing on the island: as narrative, as journal entries, and as subsequent reflections in the sequels. As Crusoe mentions in the preface to *Serious Reflections*, he views this second sequel as a moral or interpretive key for which the first two volumes are written. Yet each sequel calls into question the purported beliefs in providence and spirituality of the proceeding books—making *Serious Reflections* more than just an interpretive key, but also an active participant within a larger dialogue. The *Robinson Crusoe* series becomes a document of Crusoe’s developing religious consciousness. In this same vein, both G. A. Starr and J. Paul Hunter trace the influence of Puritan spiritual autobiographies on Defoe. Homer Brown even compares Crusoe’s spiritual journey to St. Augustine’s in the *Confessions*.

*Serious Reflections* begins with contemplation of solitude. Commenting on his twenty-eight-year island experience, Crusoe reflects,

I must acknowledge, there was Confinement from the Enjoyments of the World, and Restraint from human Society: But all that was no *Solitude*; indeed no Part of it was so, except that which, as in my Story, I appl’d to the Contemplation of sublime
Things, and that was but a very little ... compar'd to what a Length of Years my forced Retreat lasted. (3-4, emphasis added)

What, then, does he mean by “solitude”? The island—like any other imposed isolation, such as monastic discipline—provided only bodily solitude. Such isolation removes objects of desire, but not desires themselves. True solitude, implying the existence of an interior self, comes only with transcendence of desires: “[t]he Business is to get a retired Soul, a Frame of Mind truly elevated above the World” (7). Even in the heart of London, Crusoe observes, a man can achieve solitude of soul, an equilibrium of the inner-self.

Neoplatonic philosophy offers a helpful analogue, because of its similar search for a transcendence of bodily desires. In his Confessions, St. Augustine directly acknowledges the influence of “some books of the Platonists, translated from Greek into Latin” (121), including at least part of Plotinus’ Enneads—a seminal work of what modern historians term Neoplatonism. St. Augustine reads Christianity into and through this philosophy: “By the Platonic books I was admonished to return into myself. With you as my guide I entered into my innermost citadel, and was given power to do so because you had become my helper (Ps. 29:11)” (123). Here St. Augustine echoes Plotinus’ call to “Withdraw within yourself and look” (63), to turn away from the sensible and towards the intelligible, which Ernst Cassirer identifies as the “core of English Neoplatonism” (27-28).

In a Neoplatonic view, such solitude of the soul—as described by Crusoe in Serious Reflections—arises when a person directs the self away from the demands of body and instead contemplates the One (the Good, God). For Plotinus, happiness arises from effectively possessing command of “not merely the life of sensation but also Reason
and Authentic Intellection” (43). When a man discovers happiness, he needs nothing else; hence, in this state of contemplation, a man seeks nothing else. Certainly sorrows and illnesses of the body test this contentment. The Proficient—he who looks within for the Good—does not allow personal afflictions to “pierce to the inner hold” (47). Unfortunately, such internal-external equilibrium seldom endures very long. Crusoe experiences only limited instances “appl’d to the Contemplation of sublime Things.” From this perspective, the dominant tension in Robinson Crusoe emerges when the demands of survival press against the poised contemplation of the forms and the One (which Crusoe refers to as God, or, more obliquely, as providence).

Neoplatonism affects the early eighteenth century of Defoe in numerous ways. For one, although highly altered in transmission, Neoplatonism continues via St. Augustine throughout subsequent Christian thought—even to Puritanism. Despite a preference for scriptural support and a wariness of human authority, when Puritan preachers reference other writers, they refer to St. Augustine as often as Calvin (Haller 85). Perry Miller takes the connection further: “There survive hundreds of Puritan diaries and thousands of Puritan sermons, but we can read the inward meaning of them all in the Confessions” (5). Alternatively, one could trace the reemergence of Platonic thought in Renaissance Europe more directly to the publications of Marsilio Ficino’s commentary on and translation of the complete works of Plato in 1484 and the Enneads of Plotinus in 1492 (Copenhaver 307). These works strongly influence Renaissance poetry, such as Spenser’s Faerie Queene, as well as the writings of the Cambridge Platonists of seventeenth-century England (Cassirer 8 and 112-115). The prolix tracts of the Cambridge School, such as Cudworth’s 900-page True intellectual System of the
Universe, had only a limited immediate impact; nonetheless, Shaftesbury—a contemporary of Defoe’s—revives a number of their ideas, bringing a form of Neoplatonism into eighteenth-century conversation (Cassirer 159-160). Yet while Neoplatonism certainly affects Defoe, at least indirectly, my point is not to prove a Neoplatonic presence in Robinson Crusoe; instead, I intend to use these ideas heuristically in elucidating the depths of Crusoe’s dense spiritual and psychological life.

As a moral option, even as a possible formula for happiness, Crusoe must confront his father’s advice to live in the “middle Station”: “neither Poverty nor Riches” (5). While this instruction might naturally be read primarily in terms of social class, it also surely builds implicitly on the philosophical valorization of a middle state, expressed in Aristotle’s golden mean—virtue as equilibrium between opposite extremes (courage as mediating foolhardiness and cowardice). Crusoe, like Plotinus, rejects this moral model. As R. T. Wallis notes, “[Aristotle’s] ethics made happiness dependent on external prosperity” (24). Plotinus specifically criticizes the section of Aristotle’s Nichomachean Ethics dealing with the “Miseries of Priam” (44). In reference to Priam’s misfortunes late in life, Aristotle writes, “He will be shaken from [his happiness], though, by many serious misfortunes, and from these a return to happiness will take no short time” (213). For Aristotle, happiness depends on both intentions and external factors. Happiness is ultimately a supple, mediating relationship between self and world. In contrast, Plotinus completely discounts all external forces and outcomes. Nothing less than a morality based on inner-radiance and contemplation of the Good will suffice. Crusoe’s reasoning, at least at the time of his travels, is not so developed—yet he somehow senses the shortcomings of the middle state.
Returning to England after his interim as a slave, Crusoe contemplates his father’s advice to live comfortably in the “middle Station of Life.” Given another chance to settle down, he again rejects the quiet life:

I was still to be the wilful Agent of all my own Miseries; and particularly to increase my Fault and double the Reflections upon my self, which in my future Sorrows I should have leisure to make; all these foolish Miscarriages were procured by my apparent obstinate adhering to my foolish inclination of wandering abroad and pursuing that Inclination in contradiction to the clearest Views of doing my self good in a fair and plain pursuit of those Prospects and those measures of Life, which Nature and Providence concurred to present me with, and to make my Duty. (29)

On the surface, wanderlust appears to be Crusoe’s problem; obviously he is not ready to settle. If he becomes domestic and ceases his travels, he might never enter a space conducive to deep introspection. With only the middle state as a significant model, he must develop his spiritual life by trial and error. His early failures are insufficient to promote thinking beyond the options of either middle station or wandering. He needs greater failure to “encrease [his] Fault and double the Reflections upon [him]self.” In such reflective moments, which become rich and multilayered reflections on God, he finds happiness.

The scene of Crusoe washing up on the island’s shore is narrated three times. The first comes as a reflection years later, after Crusoe leaves the island:

I was now landed, and safe on Shore, and began to look up and thank God that my Life was sav’d in a Case wherein there was some Minutes before scarce any room to hope. I believe it is impossible to express to the Life what the Extasies and Transports of the Soul are, when it is so sav’d, as I may say, out of the very Grave… I walk’d about on the Shore, lifting up my Hands, and my whole Being, as I may say, wrapt up in the Contemplation of my Deliverance, making a Thousand Gestures and Motions which I cannot describe, reflecting upon all my Comrades that were drown’d, and that there should not be one Soul sav’d but my self; for, as for them, I never say them afterwards, or any Sign of them, except three of their Hats, one Cap, and two Shoes that were not Fellows. (35)
This moment surely moves Crusoe, but not in a permanent or life-altering fashion. He seems to be thanking God perfunctorily, naming his racing heart as “Extasies and Transports of the Soul.” At the end of this outpouring of thanks, Crusoe moves back to the preciseness of description, focusing on the washed-up items indicating his lost companions. John Richetti cites this enumeration of items as “[investing] this moment with an existential pathos surrounding all of Defoe’s realism, whereby things and persons are linked and objects often enough survive their owners and dramatize the dispersal and essential fragility of being” (191). The realism most definitely emphasizes the weakness of the body, but precisely this weakness derails his potential meditation. His mind quickly returns to the concerns of his situation—particularly his lack of dry clothes, food and water, and equipment for survival. Lacking these essentials limits his reflection; he cannot remain contemplative. Ideally he could maintain his lofty thoughts while serving his physical needs, but the physical pressures quickly pull him down to a material level.

The same scene becomes much more melancholic the second time it is described. Crusoe details what he “must have said” in his journal:

Sept. the 30th. After I got to Shore and had escap’d drowning, instead of being thankful to God for my Deliverance, having first vomited with the great Quantity of salt Water which has gotten into my Stomach, and recovering my self a little, I ran about the Shore, wringing my Hands and beating my Head and Face, exclaiming at my Misery, and crying out, I was undone, undone, till tyr’d and faint I was forc’d to lye down on the Ground to repose, but durst not sleep for fear of being devour’d. (51)

Significantly, in this version he does more than just omit a reference to God; he outright denies thanking God for deliverance. The tone grows more negative. He adds details about his vomiting and crying out that he’s undone. The “Thousand Gestures and Motions which [he] cannot describe” in his first account emerge in the context as joyous
motions in thanks to God. But in the second account the same motions are explicitly interpreted as misery. Then, just a few paragraphs later, the formal journal begins:

September 30, 1659. I poor miserable Robinson Crusoe, being shipwreck’d, during a dreadful Storm, in the offing, came on Shore on this dismal unfortunate Island, which I call’d the Island of Despair, all the rest of the Ship’s Company being drown’d, and my self almost dead.

All the rest of that Day I spent in afflicting my self at the dismal Circumstances I was brought to, viz. I had neither Food, House, Clothes, Weapon, or Place to fly to, and in Despair of any Relief, saw nothing but Death before me, either that I should be devour’d by wild Beasts, murther’d by Savages, or starv’d to Death for Want of Food. At the Approach of Night, I slept in a Tree for fear of wild Creatures, but slept soundly tho’ it rain’d all Night. (52)

These entries lack the hope offered by the first account. The contradiction mostly surfaces through the mental states of the accounts; however, as Michael McKeon points out, sometimes the narrative and journal disagree even on factual information, such as the length of a storm (316). Does Crusoe forget? The journal entry would be much closer in time to the landing, allowing for more recent memory. The first account discussed here, written later, comes after Crusoe has greater opportunity to reflect on God. The optimism could be taken as reinterpreting the suffering in a positive light, from the perspective that it instigated further reflections. But, then, why the second account? Richetti suggests that “Crusoe delivers to readers an essentially dialogic world, in Bakhtin’s special terms … There is an explicit dialogue with his old self, with the self in action and in thought upon those actions, and with the new and mature self that is retrospectively thoughtful about all that” (204-5). Meaning cannot be pinned down entirely to one of these accounts. Each account, including the additional interpretations in Farther Adventures and Serious Reflections, contributes yet another voice to this polyphonic narrative. The journal, for example, is one of these voices, one of these old selves with whom he converses. In a
larger sense, *Robinson Crusoe* can be taken as a section of writing embedded within a larger narrative: his overall reflections offered through the trilogy. Each subsequent part forces reinterpretation of major events and views. The third work even breaks from the pattern of narrative. The first two are adventures unfolded in narrative time, while the third presents a series of essays—forcing a reader to look beyond the adventure aspects of the first two.

In writing his story, Crusoe enacts all his former selves and reflections, simultaneously. Like St. Augustine in his *Confessions*, Crusoe writes autobiographically from a perspective always ahead of the perspective it presents. St. Augustine, melding his Christian faith with Neoplatonism, considers God as the One or the Good. Knowing oneself ultimately entails knowing God; and, conversely, through God alone can one know oneself. On a certain level, we know our former selves through memory, but memory can be unwieldy in its variability. St. Augustine grapples with the difficulty: “This power [of memory] is that of my mind and is a natural endowment, but I myself cannot grasp the totality of what I am” (187). Memory, being endowed to us by God, remains perpetually unfinished; and we cannot fully understand either it or ourselves. Understanding ourselves, for St. Augustine, takes precedence over understanding the outside world, yet understanding based on memory alone always will be limited: remembered images must be interpreted, and repeatedly, for they continuously alter. In exploring some of the intricacies of the mind, St. Augustine considers how memory replays images but with a separation of feeling. The feeling can be remembered without being relived (191). Hence Crusoe can reflect on the misery of landing on the island without the same measure of despair. Always, St. Augustine seeks to move beyond
memory to God (195). Crusoe attempts a similar progression, albeit in a much less detailed manner, in his scattered contemplations of spiritual matters.

Crusoe tries to explain his world through the lens of fate and providence—two words not necessarily interchangeable. Fate, an impersonal force, does not link directly to God. Providence can be the predetermined fate of God or more of a divine presence. To Plotinus, “The spring of freedom is the activity of Intellectual-Principle,” whereas “the involuntary is, precisely, motion away from a good and towards the enforced” (598-9). Aspiring to the good, which rests within us, is freedom. Conversely, being under the control of fate means remaining under the control of desires. Whereas extreme notions of fate and free-will mutually exclude each other, providence and free-will may or may not exclude each other—depending on Crusoe’s usage. His view towards providence shifts throughout his adventures on the island. Six of the eleven references to the word fate occur before Crusoe becomes stranded on the island. By contrast, only three of fifty-eight references to providence happen before the island. Crusoe’s contemplations of God on the island entwine with his discussion of providence: sometimes he sees providence as a synonym for fate, and other times he sees it as a good, perhaps the Good. When he feels more at peace with God, he views providence as a positive force; when his faith falters, he describes providence as punishment. Following his references to providence maps his spiritual life.

In *Serious Reflections*, Crusoe outlines what he means by providence, but even this working definition, at least at first glance, contradicts the events in *Robinson Crusoe* and *Farther Adventures*. During his exploration of what it means to listen to the voice of providence, in *Serious Reflections*, Crusoe offers a concise definition of
providence: “that Operation of the Power, Wisdom, Justice, and Goodness of God, by which he influences, governs, and directs, not only the Means, but the Events of all things, which concern us in this World” (208). He continues to warn us against an incorrect view of providence, distinguishing between primary and secondary causes: food doesn’t fall from the sky, but God has set the laws of creation in motion (cf. Genesis 8:22). We have to remain active agents and work for food. Consequently, we must not “entitle Providence to the Efficiency of [our] own follies” (209). Crusoe thereby denies that providence involves us in evil. His next struggle, then, must define to what degree and in what way providence governs men’s lives. Crusoe accepts the presence of providence in the world, but as an elusive force; at best, we can adjust to the “secret dictates” of providence “as far as Reason directs, without an over superstitious Regard to them” (213). Essentially, live with prudence. We must trust in providence “with our Eyes open to all necessary Cautions, Warnings, and Instructions.” He considers a neglect of these “to be a practical Atheism, or at least a living in a kind of Contempt for Heaven” (221). One requires an active reason in addition to faith. This requires true religion to be continuous; one always has to be listening and interpreting. Ian Watt questions the role of religion in Crusoe’s behavior: Crusoe has “somewhat unconvincing periodical tributes to the transcendent at times when a respite from real action and practical intellectual effort is allowed or enforced” (80-1). Put simply, he thinks about God when he has time to think about God. The degree to which these contemplations are infused into his life can be questioned. In this light, he doesn’t appear to live up to his own religious requirements.
Throughout *Robinson Crusoe*, Crusoe works through various views of providence, perhaps never getting near the perspective he later develops in *Serious Reflections*, but committing acts that contribute to those reflections. After first getting settled on the island, he begins to question providence. In regard to his remote location, he ponders,

> I had great Reason to consider it as a Determination of Heaven, that in this desolate Place, and in this desolate Manner I should end my Life; the Tears would run plentifully down my Face when I made these Reflections, and sometimes I would expostulate with my self, Why Providence should thus completely ruine its Creatures. (47)

Crusoe sees his ruin as a determination of Heaven. He tries to check his despair by considering that he alone out of eleven survives, but this offers little consolation. He struggles with the dichotomy of good and evil: “All Evils are to be consider’d with the Good that is in them, and with what worse attends them.” His observation stays within the terms of his material ruin. In Neoplatonism, evil’s magnitude is proportional to its distance from the Good. Distance, though, should not be considered spatially, but as qualitative degrees of purity. The One is more perfect than the soul, which is likewise more perfect than material reality. The consequence of evil is distance from good itself. Crusoe’s desolate location remains irrelevant to his relationship to the Good. His mindset of dwelling on physical setbacks hinders happiness. He hasn’t internalized a conception of providence.

> In the episode where barley springs up unexpectedly, Crusoe begins to develop his sense of providence. Reflecting on his astonishment, he admits,

> I had hitherto acted upon no religious Foundation at all, indeed I had very few Notions of Religion in my Head, or had entertain’d any Sense of any Thing that had befallen me, otherwise than as a Chance, or, as we lightly say, what pleases God,
without so much as enquiring into the End of Providence in these things, or his Order in governing Events in the World. (58)

Despite his muddled religious ideas, these thoughts lead toward more profound self-reflection. Providence becomes more than chance, conveniently named God. Although he discovers that the corn is not a miracle, but the result of scraps from a bag, he still thanks providence, considering that it moves through natural ways. Michael Seidel questions Crusoe’s reaction to providence in this scene: “So is the sprouting accident or providence? Or is accident part of providence? The corn episode is Defoe’s way of saying that the assessments from the human perspective of providential design can never really get beyond a kind of interpretable guess” (94). Seidel mentions that this opens up two lines of narrative: “one, a secularized sequence of events or incidents that take place in a supposed life; and two, a sequence to which ex post facto meaning or significance is attached” (95). For every major event, the book presents both a secular answer and a providential interpretation. Sometimes the secular explanation comes first, with the providential added later—such as reinterpreting journal entries through the lens of providence. But in some cases, such as the corn scene, providence becomes the first explanation until reason leads to a natural explanation. Importantly, Crusoe doesn’t completely deny one argument or the other. He moves on to new things, leaving blurred the line between accident and providence. In this instance, his religious meditation is short lived and perhaps forgotten. Crusoe quickly gets back to the laborious details of preserving the grain.

Following the horrible dream during his extended sickness, Crusoe reiterates his lack of divine knowledge:
what I had received by the good Instruction of my Father was then worn out by an uninterrupted Series, for 8 Years, of Seafaring Wickedness, and a constant Conversation with nothing but such as were like my self, wicked and prophane to the last Degree: I do not remember that I had in all that Time one Thought that so much as tended either to looking upwards toward God, or inwards towards a Reflection upon my own Ways; But a certain Stupidity of Soul, without Desire of Good, or Conscience of Evil, had entirely overwhelm’d me, and I was all that the most hardened, unthinking, wicked Creature among our commons Sailors, can be supposed to be, not having the least Sense, either of the Fear of God in Danger, or of Thankfulness to God in Deliverances. (65)

His only moral model, his father’s advice to live in the middle state, appears distant and inapplicable in the face of his current situation. Even his previous thoughts on providence shrink to insignificance in comparison to this new encounter. His view of providence dealing with the unexpected corn, for example, might be minor enough to be denied as “looking up toward God.” He draws a distinction between previous inchoate ideas of God and a more developed understanding. Wickedness, for Neoplatonists, would be focusing on bodily desires “without Desire of Good.” This moment might be interpreted as an epiphany for Crusoe. He finally considers looking “inwards towards a Reflection upon [his] own Ways,” instead of worrying only about external conditions. His religious views remain fragmented, but he admits his “Stupidity of Soul.” If taken to an extreme, this might be interpreted as a brief encounter with the One. He certainly attempts to work through the ramifications of his stirring experience.

G. A. Starr considers the dream of the avenging angel and the prolonged sickness as “bestirring” Crusoe, putting him in a state of mind and soul “eligible to receive” God’s gift of conversion (103). Along with Crusoe’s tobacco-remedy, he turns to the Bible, asks for repentance, and prays to Jesus:

This was the first time that I could say, in the true Sense of the Words, that I pray’d in all my Life; for now I pray’d with a Sense of my Condition, and with a true
Scripture View of Hope founded on the Encouragement of the Word of God; and from this Time, I may say, I began to have Hope that God would hear me. (71)

Starr sees this as Crusoe’s conversion and “the book’s turning point … God’s threats give way to his promises, and Crusoe’s dismal apprehensions are replaced by a hope that grows towards assurance” (104). After the very brief conversion scene, Crusoe quickly returns to his journal. Nonetheless, the change cannot be denied. While he has relapses in the face of future adventures, providence has now become personal. Instead of being, at best, a neutral fate, God’s providence becomes a point of strength and comfort.

After recovering his health and becoming more adept at making contrivances for convenience, such as baskets, Crusoe turns to a more hopeful outlook on his exile. He considers that maybe providence “order’d every Thing for the best” (80). This shift in attitude may be tied to his religious conversion; conveniently, however, it is also tied to better material conditions. Even though materially his life could not be as lavish as it might be back in England, it is comfortable enough. A certain peace of mind attends quiet labor. With this positive momentum, he considers himself happier in his solitary condition than in the company of others, with the “Communications of his Grace to my Soul, supporting, comforting, and encouraging me to depend upon his Providence here, and hope for his Eternal Presence hereafter” (82). Again, self-reflection and aspiration towards the One generate happiness. To reinforce these meditations, he incorporates reading the “Word of God,” the Bible, into his daily habits. As long as reading the Bible remains a source of thought, and not an empty ritual, it contributes to his spiritual life. Over a stretch of reflections, he considers the mercies of God—especially after he had “liv’d a dreadful Life, perfectly destitute of the Knowledge and Fear of God”—and his
current situation on the island “remov’d from all the Wickedness of the World” (94, 96). His exile, of course, removes him from many temptations and distractions. He has no neighbor’s wife to covet, and so on. But this doesn’t prove a mastery of desires. If one physically separates an alcoholic from his liquor, one can’t congratulate him for not drinking. At this point, Crusoe hasn’t reformed, or even fully formed the idea of what reform would entail. Physical conditions—relative prosperity in a secluded locale—make his morality easy. Such morality, not deeply entrenched into his mode of being, can easily lose religious dimension when he loses his material success.

Crusoe, attempting to sail around the island in his small boat, Periagua, gets blown out to sea by a strong wind and cannot reach shore for days, testing his belief. In his marooned state, he fears he’ll never get back to the island and will instead starve on his boat. In this despair, he turns on his fair-weather faith: “I saw how easy it was for the Providence of God to make the most miserable Condition Mankind could be in worse” (101). Like the makeshift boat, his faith isn’t grounded, so it remains susceptible to shifts in the wind. Predictably, when he gets back to solid ground, he thanks God for his deliverance.

Likewise, afraid that the footprint he discovers could indicate savage presence, Crusoe allows his imagination to fuel his fear. The growing dread preempts his early meditations on God: “my Fear banish’d all my religious Hope; all that former Confidence in God which was founded upon such wonderful Experience as I had had of his Goodness, now vanished” (113). His religious confidence grew from material observations on the “wonderful Experience” he expresses. Each major event in Crusoe’s life gets interpreted in its relation to providence. Unreliably, his situation at any given
moment heavily colors these interpretations. Reviewing these past moments in various temperaments and at various times yields a fuller interpretation. Eventually he regains a certain reassurance from Biblical scripture. For Crusoe, reading the Bible serves as a gloss for reading providence.

In *Vision of the Angelick World*, a companion piece to *Serious Reflections*, Crusoe further develops his distinction between the physical and the spiritual. He argues that while the Devil is commonly an “Agent in our Temptations… ’tis our own corrupt debauch’d Inclination which is the first moving Agent; and therefore the Scripture says, *A Man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own Lusts, and enticed*” (13). It’s tempting to personify evil as the Devil, but even Crusoe begins to move beyond that position, if only tentatively. Man’s distance from God, his depravity, allows for lusts that ultimately corrupt him. After a long discussion of spirits and dreams, Crusoe contemplates, “the Soul of Man is capable of being continually elevated above the very Thoughts of human Things, is capable of travelling up to the highest and most distant Regions of Light, but when it does, as it rises above the earthly Globe, so the Things of this Globe sink to him” (27). The “most distant Regions of Light” can be read as the One. Describing the Light without the figurative use of space would be impossible—one can only imprecisely describe it with analogies. The man returning to the cave, in Plato’s *Republic*, can never fully describe the light to those that have seen only shadows. Language such as “elevated,” “Highest,” and “ris[ing] above” are not to be interpreted literally, but as Crusoe’s aspirations to understand Providence directly. And yet figuring out God’s providence through the workings of the natural world is like trying to figure out the nature of the Light through the shadows on the wall of the cave—results remain limited.
The details of his fantasy shrink in the face of the perspective gained: life’s voyage is not a sea journey, but a spiritual journey.

Hunter describes the purpose of Puritan diaries and spiritual biographies, a tradition with which he identifies Defoe: “Recalling these events [the performances of Providence] was not only spiritually rewarding in itself but was also morally efficacious, for it revivified the magnetism of the goodness in a world where sin’s appeal was likely to be overpowering” (71). We see this meta-awareness in Vision; after his elaborate fantasy of rising above the world, Crusoe ends with a dialogue between a student and an atheist. The student has the atheist read the lines “That there MAY BE a God, a Heaven and Hell: / Had I not best consider well, for fear / ’T shou’d be too late when my Mistakes appear” (71). With the help of writing, the student works to convert the atheist, just as Crusoe works with the Bible to convert Friday. Reading the lines once through isn’t sufficient to change the atheist’s ways; the power of writing, however, lies in the ability to review a text more than once. Tears stand in the atheist’s eyes as he returns to the lines. Repetition spurs memories: the atheist remembers another time he has heard these words. He begins to reflect and reinterpret the events leading up to his entry into the bookshop and rapidly concedes to a belief in God. While the conversion may be quick and highly dramatized—arguably overdramatized—it echoes major ideas in Robinson Crusoe. Crusoe’s journal, and the Bible to some extent, has a similar effect when Crusoe writes his narrative over thirty years later, in what Hunter calls a “double time scheme” (145). The result, not exclusively a transcription of his journal or a purely a posteriori view, blends as it oscillates between one written text and another. The entire tale of
Robinson Crusoe, then, becomes the instrument of personal retrospection which often triggers introspection.

Watt connects the “idea of religious self-scrutiny as an important duty for each individual” back to early Christianity, especially St. Augustine’s Confessions, and adds that Calvin, in the sixteenth century, “re-established and systematized this earlier pattern of purposive spiritual introspection, and made it the supreme religious ritual for the layman as well as for the priest” (74-5). Ideas build and interact with each other: Calvin through St. Augustine through Plotinus through Aristotle through Plato. In this light, Robinson Crusoe displays a rich philosophical intertextuality. Crusoe never consistently embodies one of these philosophies; yet he embodies all of them, to a degree, in an ongoing dialogue. The work never ends. Crusoe’s position could not be final. His reflections constantly reinvent and reinterpret his previous views. The sequels emphasize this renewal by further challenging the idea of a finishing point. Although Defoe stops writing, Crusoe remains incomplete. The best expression of “purposive spiritual introspection” comes through the resistance to a formal, fixed meaning. Crusoe’s spiritual journey breaks out of a static narrative and more closely represents life’s journey; in this way, the readers of Defoe’s time could connect with Crusoe, as can the readers of today.
CHAPTER IV

READING CHARACTERS: LETTERS, GOSSIP, AND CONSTRUCTED IDENTITIES IN *PRIDE AND PREJUDICE*

Letters, and associated interpretations of them, provide the backbone of Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Many critics see Elizabeth’s reaction to Mr. Darcy’s letter, for example, as the turning point of the story; or, as Jodi Devine puts the claim, “Elizabeth’s repeated perusal of Darcy’s letter is the linchpin on which all subsequent action depends” (107). While I will examine the treatment of letters and letter-interpretation, I argue that letters symptomize a deeper concern: skepticism about what someone can truly know about another. Reuben Brower discusses the irony and ambiguity in language that makes it a difficult means of understanding or portraying someone else: “What most satisfies us in reading the dialogue in *Pride and Prejudice* is Jane Austen’s awareness that it is difficult to know any complex person, that knowledge of a man like Darcy is an interpretation and a construction, not a simple absolute” (68). The same man becomes someone different depending on his interpreter: “Mr. Darcy is hardly recognizable as the same man when he is described by Mr. Wickham, by his housekeeper, or Elizabeth, or Mr. Bingley” (69). The characters never know a person-in-himself; they know only the persona he allows the world to see, and that persona cannot
forcibly control the reactions of those who witness it. Partiality limits both sides of a person-to-person encounter. Moreover, judgment often doesn’t arise from first-hand experience. Characters form impressions of each other based heavily on hearsay; the subject’s countenance forms a composite of gossip and letters imperfectly melded with face-to-face encounters. Much of the story, then, tracks the characters learning properly to read and interpret these fictions in order to pierce beyond the superficial layers of identity.

The novel begins by constraining the image of a wealthy bachelor: “It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (3). A reader might easily attribute these first lines to Mrs. Bennet and her obsession to see her five daughters married. A few paragraphs later, she emphasizes her hopes that Mr. Bingley “may fall in love with one of them” (3). She overlooks or forgets any of Bingley’s particulars unrelated to his assumed position as a wealthy, available suitor. Mrs. Bennet sees all single young men through this lens. She hates Mr. Collins until he shows interest in marrying one of her daughters. She returns to hating him when he marries Charlotte instead. She hates Mr. Darcy for not taking an interest in her daughters: “he is a most disagreeable, horrid man, not at all worth pleasing” (10). But as soon as he plans to marry Elizabeth, Mrs. Bennet praises him: “Such a charming man!—so handsome! So tall!—Oh, my dear Lizzy! Pray apologise for my having disliked him so much before. … A house in town! Everything that is charming! Three daughters married! Ten thousand a year! Oh, Lord! What will become of me?” (247). With Darcy’s interest in Elizabeth as the only relevant variable, Mrs. Bennet offers a completely altered account of him. On some level, she may have found
him tall and handsome all along, but she doesn’t raise these features to consciousness until he becomes a fiancé to one of her daughters. Her praise, noticeably, still focuses on appearances and how the marriage will help her social reputation.

Mr. Darcy’s appearance from the very beginning depends on selective future prospects. The report of his “having ten thousand a year” precedes his speech. He, in turn, must “be in want of a wife.” If he deviates from this expectation, then something must be wrong with him. Quickly, he’s judged: “his manners gave a disgust which turned the tide of his popularity; for he was discovered to be proud, to be above his company, and above being pleased” (8). His hasty dismissal of Elizabeth exacerbates this sense of disproportionate pride: “She is tolerable; but not handsome enough to tempt me; and I am in no humour at present to give consequence to young ladies who are slighted by other men.” The harshness of this offhand comment fuels Elizabeth’s gossip: “She told the story however with great spirit among her friends; for she had a lively, playful disposition” (9). The specific example of his pride, delivered as a lively story, encases his personality into a stereotype. Later, at the Lucas Lodge, the women recall the ball, and Charlotte reiterates Darcy’s comment, “to be only just tolerable”—leading to a near unanimous attack on his pridefulness (13-14), thereby blinding the characters from seeing more about him. In a certain sense, a story replaces the man. Instead of interpreting Mr. Darcy more directly, the women interpret him through the gossip. Eventually the story fades, but the interpretation remains: people remember Mr. Darcy as prideful, without needing to recount the incident at the ball.

Charlotte shrewdly understands the danger of being misinterpreted. She warns Elizabeth of Jane being too reserved in her affections for Mr. Bingley: “In nine cases out
of ten, a woman had better shew more affection than she feels. Bingley likes your sister undoubtedly; but he may never do more than like her, if she does not help him on” (15). Elizabeth chides Charlotte for the business-like approach to relationships, countering that Jane “is not acting by design” (15). But Charlotte doesn’t mean deceit; she means being conscious of the persona one creates for oneself. Ignoring this projected image and being oneself often leads to misunderstandings. Characters often seek additional assistance in interpreting intentions. Bingley wants to believe that Jane is interested, but he’s easily swayed by Mr. Darcy, who construes her actions as indifference. Much like Mr. Darcy’s antisocial behavior, interpreted by the town as pride, Jane’s shyness, interpreted as indifference, haunts her for most of the novel.

Appearances of affection or indifference also shape the relationships between characters. During Elizabeth’s stay at Netherfield, Mr. Darcy asks her to dance, to which she answers no and adds:

I heard you before; but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say ‘Yes,’ that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kind of schemes, and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have therefore made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all—and now despise me if you dare. (35)

Elizabeth outlines her, albeit misguided, explication of Darcy’s persona. She short-circuits Darcy’s intended satisfaction. With Elizabeth playing hard to get, Darcy is “bewitched” by the “mixture of sweetness and archness in her manner” (35). Her rebuke, seen through affectionate eyes, becomes endearing. Similarly, Darcy’s repeated brush-offs to Miss Bingley contribute to her jealousy of Elizabeth and her desire for Darcy. The love triangle plays out as in Shakespearean comedy: the pursued acts indifferently to the pursuer, which only augments the pursuer’s desire.
As a point of comparison between *Pride and Prejudice* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, both emphasize eyes. Mr. Darcy expresses interest in Elizabeth’s eyes: “I have been meditating on the very great pleasure which a pair of fine eyes in the face of a pretty woman can bestow” (19). Miss Bingley uses this information to tease Darcy about Elizabeth’s eyes. Demetrius, likewise, dotes on Hermia’s eyes, which, in turn, causes Helena to dwell on her rival’s eyes:

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Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.
But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.
He will not know what all but he do know.
And as he errs, doting on Hermia’s eyes,
So I, admiring of his qualities.
Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love’s mind of any judgement taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste. (1.1.227-37)
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Helena is as attractive as Hermia, but Demetrius finds himself drawn to Hermia anyway. The eyes that Demetrius dotes on, then, stand for something other than physical beauty. Someone in love doesn’t see his lover as she is, but, instead, as a fancy of his imagination. He creates a mutable image of her. This is how affections can change without the lover physically changing. We see an analogous situation in *Pride and Prejudice*. Elizabeth doesn’t drastically change. Her views change; perhaps she matures
some. But she looks the same and has mostly the same personality throughout. Yet Darcy sees her differently, as the novel progresses, because his impression of her alters.

If eyes represent something deeper than physical beauty, something abstract—whether it be wit, acuity, or something less explainable—then this explains Miss Bingley’s and Helena’s confusion. How does one get fine or bright eyes? Later in the forest, Helena continues to question the power of Hermia’s eyes:

Happy is Hermia, wheresoe’er she lies;
For she hath blessèd and attractive eyes.
How came her eyes so bright? Not with salt tears—
If so, my eyes are oft’ner washed than hers.
No, no; I am as ugly as a bear,
For beasts that meet me run away for fear.
Therefore no marvel though Demetrius
Do, as a monster, fly my presence thus.
What wicked and dissembling glass of mine
Made me compare with Hermia’s sphery eyne! (2.2.96-105)

Helena, from previous experience, knows that she’s physically attractive—that isn’t the issue. The only distinguishable difference in value between Hermia and her, at least to Demetrius, is Hermia’s eyes. But the disparity between their eyes quickly leads to exaggerated, self-abasing criticism. Helena realizes that without that spark, that lover’s affection, she might as well be “ugly as a bear” or “as a monster.” Physical appearance constitutes only a fraction of the overall image. To Darcy, Elizabeth is only tolerable physically. This doesn’t mean ugly. When put in the context of Darcy’s high standards,
tolerable means pretty but not necessarily distinguished. Her fine eyes and “mixture of sweetness and archness” add something extra to create a newer, composite image. To Darcy, this image becomes beautiful. Miss Bingley’s confusion arises from not seeing anything in Elizabeth beyond a tolerable woman; she makes harsh comments and “witticisms on fine eyes,” attacking Elizabeth and her family, oddly enough, to—or at least in front of—the object of her desire, Mr. Darcy, without understanding why Darcy likes Elizabeth.

As expected, other critics have made connections to Shakespeare, but from varied starting points. Walter Anderson, for example, compares the frustration of the developing love between Darcy and Elizabeth to the “crossed” lovers in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, but does so to emphasize the precariousness of Elizabeth’s rejection of Darcy’s marriage proposal (368-9). In almost all cases, while never explicitly stated, the subtext of such comparisons uncovers the complexity of Austen’s weaving of characters and identities in a way that, perhaps, only Shakespeare could do. In more general terms, we can think of Shakespeare’s use of disguises. Take Rosalind from *As You Like It*. She consciously assumes a number of identities to achieve her goals and to remain in control of her evolving situations. Austen doesn’t have her characters literally dress up as someone else; but, in a more subdued manner, she still offers instances of characters attempting to disguise their identity—overtly in cases such as Wickham, and covertly in just about everyone else.

While not costumes, personal letters serve to subtly dress up one’s identity. Mr. Darcy, in the act of writing a letter to his sister, gathers an audience that discusses the qualities of writing. Miss Bingley observes that Darcy writes “uncommonly fast” and “so
even” (32). Darcy counters, “You are mistaken. I write rather slowly.” To Miss Bingley, Darcy appears to write long letters with ease. She interprets his swift, even lines as natural and flowing, attributing his pauses to his dislike of pen, not to contemplation: “I am afraid you do not like your pen. Let me mend it for you.” Mr. Bingley, on the other hand, observing Darcy’s deliberation, notes that “he does not write with ease. He studies too much for words of four syllables” (33). Even this reply adds the assumption that Darcy’s pauses are a search for large and imposing words instead of merely precise words. Miss Bingley then describes Bingley’s writing as rushed, to which he responds, “My ideas flow so rapidly that I have not time to express them—by which means my letters sometimes convey no ideas at all to my correspondents.” Darcy offers an explanation of Bingley’s response: “Nothing is more deceitful … than the appearance of humility. It is often only carelessness of opinion, and sometimes an indirect boast.” Bingley’s rapid writing is poorly thought out. He doesn’t take his words as seriously as Darcy. Instead of admitting this directly, he tries to turn his hastiness into a virtue. Darcy, to further his point, cites a similar example of Bingley, bragging that morning to Mrs. Bennet about quickly moving out of Netherfield “in five minutes” (33). Repeated experience aids in judgment. As a long-time friend, Darcy can see through Bingley’s posturing. Bingley, as far as characters in *Pride and Prejudice* go, is relatively harmless in his assumed image, but such interpretive scenes prepare the reader for more complicated interpretations later in the novel.

We see how quickly characters make judgments on one another’s writing. Later, with Mr. Collins’ first letter, the Bennets read an image of Mr. Collins, not the letter alone. After Mr. Bennet reads the letter aloud to his family, he offers an incomplete,
purposefully positive response so as not to be the first one to speak ill of the letter: “He seems to be a most conscientious and polite young man” (43). This response isn’t as much fake as it is side-stepping the elephant in the room. Elizabeth quickly points at the elephant: “He must be an oddity … There is something very pompous in his stile.—And what can he mean by apologizing for being next in the entail?—We cannot suppose he would help it, if he could.—Can he be a sensible man, sir?” Her father then confesses to what he had left unsaid. Mr. Collins is not sensible, and Mr. Bennet, accustomed to laughing at the silliness of those around him, revels in it: “There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him” (44).

Based on the letter, Elizabeth and her father have already judged Mr. Collins to be a stooge. His first letter is not an exception; his additional letters, with many delights for Mr. Bennet, confirm the early opinion of Mr. Collins as in fact servile while feigning self-importance.

By considering the letters in the novel in the light of contemporary letter-writing manuals and guides, Devine argues that much can be inferred about character class and identity through letters (100). After pointing out the flaws in Mr. Collins’ and Lydia’s letters, she praises Mr. Gardiner’s letter to Mr. Bennet on finding Lydia and Wickham: “In manner, tone, diction, and style, Mr. Gardiner’s letter could serve as a good model for a letter-wring manual. Mr. Gardiner, a member of the trading class by profession, writes better than Mr. Collins and Lydia, members of the gentry by birth” (106). The well-formed letter reveals Mr. Gardiner’s identity to be gentleman-like. This gentleman-like nature, Devine explains, allows Mr. Darcy to so easily embrace the
Gardiners as friends, while, at best, tolerating the Collinses. Whether intentional or not, how one writes presents a persona that others have available for interpretation.

Nancy Armstrong, in *How Novels Think*, describes Richardson’s *Pamela*, noting that “[i]t is literacy alone that transforms [Pamela] from an object [Mr. B] can forcibly possess into a self-possessed subject who can consent to his offer of marriage. [...] Pamela writes herself into existence” (5-6). Through writing the author can “inscribe him or herself in writing as an object, or body, separate and apart from the subject that inhabited that body, and put that body through a sequence of moves to enhance its social value” (6). *Pride and Prejudice* plays with this effect, such as in the scenario described above with the Gardiners or in Mr. Darcy’s letter to Elizabeth. Although Mr. Darcy doesn’t have to write himself into a higher social position, like Pamela, he does need to distinguish himself from the pompous reputation he has attracted based on the limited perspective others have of his actions.

Mr. Darcy, after his failed proposal, cannot exonerate himself by speaking directly to Elizabeth: she won’t listen. When approaching her to deliver his letter, he finds that she tries to avoid him. The letter eloquently expresses three pages of ideas that she would not have given credence to otherwise. Even if she had allowed him to explain his story directly, she might have dismissed much of it the way she dismisses part of the letter on her first reading:

Astonishment, apprehension, and even horror, oppressed her. She wished to discredit it entirely, repeatedly exclaiming, “This must be false! This cannot be! This must be the grossest falsehood!”—and when she had gone through the whole letter, though scarcely knowing any thing of the last page or two, put it hastily away, protesting that she would not regard it, that she would never look in it again. (135)
In conversation, interjections like this would have interrupted Darcy’s narration. Assuming she can remain silent and hear his story, she still might block out sections of it from her understanding. Heavy emotions get in the way of clear interpretation. The letter, on the other hand, becomes a book for Elizabeth to read and reread, the way she might a novel. Elizabeth forms a dialogue with the letter as she works through further readings. In one sense, she carefully interprets the letter, repeatedly “[examining] the meaning of every sentence” (135). In a broader sense, she reinterprets her impressions of Darcy and Wickham. By this point, Elizabeth has already become an active interpreter. While dancing at the Netherfield ball, Elizabeth explains her questioning of Mr. Darcy as intended “[m]erely to the illustration of your character … I am trying to make it out … I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly” (64). As well as reading books, she enjoys reading people. But sorting out various gossip and hearsay makes comprehending someone difficult. The letter, while not an unquestionable authority, gives her something to fix her interpretations on.

Elizabeth’s rereading and reinterpreting Mr. Darcy’s letter parallels Austen’s re-accentuating earlier novels. Austen layers complex patterns of social identity in seemingly mundane, unadventurous situations and locations. But it is not just a method of providing ironically detailed narratives of the common walks of life that sets Austen’s writing apart from her contemporaries and predecessors. Margaret Doody, in “Jane Austen’s Reading,” notes that Austen “is singular among novelists of her age in her refusal to admit references to the Bible, or to biblical characters, scenes, or stories. Her characters’ names (e.g. Mary) are never felt as references to sacred history” (348). In her entire corpus, she presents only one scriptural quotation (in *Emma*). Similarly she makes
only one classical reference (in *Mansfield Park*). Doody continues, “There is not one other reference to any classical myth, story, or character. There is no other novelist, male or female, of her time of whom this is true” (355). Despite these omissions, historically communal values still preside in her novels: all of them push toward marriages and social stability. Her references tend to be, instead, allusions to eighteenth-century novels. Doody adds, “Austen *is* a great novel reader and not ashamed of being so. Her letters move easily into allusions to novels, often to matters so minute as to prove an extraordinary knowledge of the works in question” (357).

In one specific example, Doody addresses the connection between the Tom/Blifil plotline in Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* and the Wickham/Darcy plotline in *Pride and Prejudice*. The Wickham/Darcy plotline reflects yet resists the Tom/Blifil one:

Wickham’s story is a kind of reworking of *Tom Jones*, with the late Mr. Darcy playing the part of Allworthy, “one of the best men that ever breathed.” Wickham figures as Tom and Darcy as Blifil, “inmates of the same house, sharing the same amusements, objects of the same parental care.” Elizabeth [who must be a novel reader] is readily moved by the story of the proud and mean-spirited heir who wrests an inheritance away from his more lowly childhood companion … Eventually the truth is known. Darcy is certainly no Blifil, and Wickham is not a Tom Jones—or perhaps in some ways he is too much like Tom, and a young man’s amiability and imprudence can damage a woman. (358-359)

In *Pride and Prejudice*, at a surface reading, the conflict between Wickham and Darcy can be seen as the conflict between writing and speech: between Mr. Darcy’s and Mrs. Gardiner’s letters and Wickham’s story. With Doody’s comparison in mind, this situation deconstructs: Wickham’s story echoes writing, that is, *Tom Jones*. Additionally, a major point in Devine’s essay shows that the characters Lydia, Mr. Darcy, the Gardiners, and Mr. Collins “write as they speak” (103). Both narratives, then, intermix elements of speech and writing.
In this light, Wickham’s and Darcy’s competing narratives become much closer and harder to privilege one over the other. Tara Ghoshal Wallace explores this tension in “Getting the Whole Truth in *Pride and Prejudice*.” Mr. Darcy’s letter doesn’t immediately negate Wickham’s story. Even after Elizabeth rereads Darcy’s letter and decides to believe him, she can still relapse into disbelief. Wallace contends that “[b]ecause Austen needs to ensure that no uncertainty remains about Wickham’s duplicity, she provides the comic melodrama of Lydia’s elopement and piles on evidence of Wickham’s perfidy. … Darcy’s generous activity on behalf of Lydia finally validates his earlier narrative and reassures us that we were right in crediting his words rather than Wickham’s” (56-57). To return to the *Tom Jones* analogy, the overall plot of *Pride and Prejudice* plays out, instead, with Darcy as Tom Jones and Wickham as Blifil. Tom Jones’ goodness and Blifil’s wickedness are made clear to the other characters, and the story swiftly arrives at a seemingly tidy conclusion.

In addition to reading, Elizabeth is adept at creating fictions—perhaps too adept. After working through the Darcy/Wickham fiasco, she has to disabuse her father of the image she has created of Mr. Darcy. Mr. Bennet calls her into his library after Darcy has asked his permission to marry her, and confusedly asks, “What are you doing? Are you out of your senses, to be accepting this man? Have not you always hated him?” Her response is telling:

> How earnestly did she then wish that her former opinions had been more reasonable, her expressions more moderate! It would have spared her from explanations and professions which it was exceedingly awkward to give; but they were now necessary, and she assured him with some confusion, of her attachment to Mr. Darcy … “I love him. Indeed he has no improper pride. He is perfectly amiable. You do not know what he really is; then pray do not pain me by speaking of him in such terms.” (246)
Elizabeth welcomed Mr. Bennet’s earlier bashing of Mr. Darcy, which in some ways she created and encouraged, but now such words from her father sting. She doesn’t deny that Mr. Darcy has pride; she denies that he has “improper pride.” The distinction depends on how one envisions his actions. Having to walk her father through an explanation, which amounts to a rereading of Darcy’s character, recapitulates for Elizabeth the history of her evolving image of Mr. Darcy.

Mr. Darcy and Elizabeth hardly change as characters, but they do change significantly in how readers interpret them and in how they interpret each other. Brower explains, “Since more kindly views of Darcy have been introduced through the flow of witty talk, Darcy does not at that point have to be remade, but merely reread” (71). In other words, the groundwork already exists for reading Darcy as either maliciously prideful or benevolently genuine. The turning point comes with the letter, when Elizabeth changes her inclination and rereads the previously ambiguous moments. If she only changes her mind, then she hasn’t really improved her understanding of Darcy; that is, she would have a different image of Darcy, not a better one. She gains a fuller sense of Darcy only when she can see how someone might interpret him either way. Instead of hastily making a judgment, she properly examines the ironies in the proliferation of conflicting reports. Although we may never know the ultimate truth of someone else, we can cut through the superficial layers of gossip and hearsay. Austen, through her narrative strategies of constructing identity and examining interpretation, gives us examples of how to assess the myths we must live in.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Examining the strands of inserted genres and the multiple layers of dialogue grows even more significant in literature after *Pride and Prejudice*. In an extreme sense, this approach may afford the only profitable manner of addressing the dizzying complexity of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* or Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*.

Returning to Bakhtin’s explanation that inserted genres add heteroglossia by “introducing an era’s many and diverse languages” (411), novels of the twentieth and twenty-first century incorporate and interact with numerous ideas of their time. As one example, Freudian psychoanalytic methodology permeates a number of twentieth-century novels. The correspondence-style mock-psychoanalysis in Nathaniel West’s *Miss Lonelyhearts* leads the columnist to internalize the suffering expressed in submitted letters and to confront his own growing depression. The unsent, open-ended letters in Saul Bellow’s *Herzog* expose the recesses of the protagonist’s mind. In both cases, working through letters becomes a pseudo-therapy, foregrounding a view of psychology not as fully expressed in earlier eras.

More recently, the tensions of globalization—although not new—have become prevalent in literature and literary theory in a number of ways: colonizer-versus-colonized, global-versus-local, West-versus-East, and so on. As a flagship example of this dynamic, 2006 Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk’s *Snow* uses inserted genres in an effort
to more fully portray the hybrid identity of modern Turkey. Although the story takes place mostly in Turkey, Pamuk frames it with Ka’s journals written in Germany. Additionally, Pamuk inserts a modified version of Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and a diagram of a snowflake labeled with Baconian terminology—putting Western ideas in dialogue with Eastern life. Although *Snow* has aspects of realism, Pamuk does not attempt a hyperrealist portrait of Turkey. Instead, by dramatizing conflicting voices and influences, he expresses a richer view of Turkish life than that of a documentary description.

For Azade Seyhan, in very Bahktinesque language, the Turkish novel’s “integration of other genres and styles, and its status as a nexus of cultural exchanges between reader communities all allow for a dialogue across time” (6). More specifically, she describes *Snow* as “a metafiction, a text that reflects on the act of (re)constructing a story from fragments of other stories, evidentiary documents, eyewitness accounts, tapes, videos, notebooks, and other traces of memory” (101). The story has multiple narrative levels. Ka investigates the events in Kars, Turkey, involving a wave of female suicides—which Pamuk bases on the Batman suicides. Ka is murdered after his return to Germany. The narrator, Orhan (not necessarily Pamuk, but perhaps any Turk), attempts to reconstruct Ka’s story based on his notebooks. The process remains incomplete; missing information at each level prevents a complete understanding. Resisting a singular interpretation, the novel offers a kaleidoscope of possibilities. Seyhan continues, “At the level of thematics and symbolism, *Snow* becomes a fictional vehicle in pursuit of a people’s identity in the complex web of history and modernity and an allegorical account of a fateful search” (101). Ka’s and Orhan’s investigations represent the Turkish pursuit
of historical identity: “The ironies of Kars history represent in microcosm those of Turkish history” (103).

As Snow shows, a personal identity—much less a national or cultural identity—cannot be reduced to a single view. Procrustean interpretations oversimplify complex relationships. Considering the multitude of voices, the narrative pieces, and the relationships between them allows for a more composite picture. Although ideologies may change over time, literature abounding with heteroglossia will continue to require careful analysis of allusions and inserted genres.
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