

**DURRELL WRITING
ABOUT WRITERS WRITING:
TOWARDS A SPATIAL DEFINITION OF
*THE AVIGNON QUINTET***

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The aim of this paper is to analyse the reciprocal influence between Lawrence Durrell and a number of writers who share with him similar creative techniques and preoccupations. The main problem is that, strictly speaking, these writers do not exist outside the literary text, but are Durrell's creations and fictional projections in *The Avignon Quintet*. In order to explore this blurring of boundaries between fiction and reality, I shall reflect the confluence of two opposite forces at work in *The Avignon Quintet*: on the one hand, the "closed" nature of fictions which cannot transcend their own fictional status; and on the other, the "open" nature of an endless process—the creation of different ontological levels through the presence of an author figure (i.e. a writer who "fixes" that reality only to be finally exposed as part of a broader design). In this way, through "writers writing about writers writing,"¹ the *Quintet* both acknowledges its own status as fiction while at the same time it gradually increases the feeling of proximity to a random, ineffable reality. Throughout this paper, I shall also try to interpret the shape of the quincunx² and its three-dimensional development—the pyramid—as the narrative architecture where these two antagonistic ideas are condensed into a single process of creation.

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I should like to begin with a brief analysis of *Monsieur*, the first novel of the *Quintet*. *Monsieur* is divided into five parts. The first four chapters include two hypodiegetic narrations (two versions of the same reality which correspond, respectively, to the diaries of Bruce Drexel and to the frustrated novel of Robin Sutcliffe). Both narratives give rise to an interesting application of the concept of entropy to the creation of a literary text.³ This process can be described in the following terms:

Bruce's narration entails the investigative task of reconstructing the past and thus achieving an understanding of the causes which brought about the present situation, that is, his wife's insanity and her brother's death. Bruce offers us clues to his personal evolution when he finally accepts that the determinist attitude with which he undertook his task is false: the search for the causes of a certain situation is not always possible. What is more, to assume that these causes exist implies the acceptance of a determinist universe. Reality, with its random elements, cannot be fitted into this model. Through his unsuccessful attempt to investigate the past, Bruce discovers the inaccessible nature of reality, its resistance to adapting to the strict laws of causality which rule any narrative:

It has done me good to put so much down on paper, though I notice that in the very act of recording things one makes them submit to a kind of ordering which may be false, proceeding as if causality was the real culprit. (*M* 171)

Bruce's failure to justify the present situation is preceded in the novel by small interferences in his account of the events. We discover through him the parallel existence of a novel, written by Rob Sutcliffe and about the same characters, to which the "real" incidents are surprisingly adapting themselves. These interferences increase as does the difficulty in integrating them within a single narration. In this way, Rob Sutcliffe, the professional writer, gradually inserts himself into the novel until by the third chapter he has become the main character.

This third chapter describes the working techniques of the novelist Sutcliffe, the creation of his characters, and the shaping of a plan for his novels. Sutcliffe bases his characters on real people. He combines characteristics from several acquaintances and lets the logic of the narration give a definite form to the result. Surprisingly enough, the beginning of the novel imagined by Sutcliffe not only resembles the present events described by Bruce in his diary (*M* 7) but turns out to be identical:

The Southbound train from Paris was the one we had always taken from time immemorial. . . . (*M* 187-8)

There is, then, a confluence, a blurring of boundaries between the real version of the events and their fictional rendering. Bruce's narration—accepted by the reader as real—fits unpredictably into the outline of Sutcliffe's novel, making us doubtful as to its genuine status. Faced with the task of describing the events from a historical or a fictional perspective, both writers have fixed reality, submitting it to a plan and therefore imposing a subjective order. In contrast, reality—as both writers feel in their own lives—is subject to unpredictable elements such as whim, accident, and sheer coincidence. The realization that it is impossible to convey the sheer randomness of reality through fiction leads Sutcliffe to abandon his creative work:

Yet the element of chance, of accident, had so much to do with what became of us that it seems impossible to search out first causes—which is perhaps what led to the defeat of Rob in his fight with his last book. He was overwhelmed, he says, by realising to what degree accident had determined his life and actions (*M* 171-2).

The gradual confluence between these two writers is completed in the fourth chapter: Bruce appears again as narrator but he is now in charge of putting the rough drafts of Sutcliffe's novel in order after his suicide. However, Bruce becomes aware of the subjectivity of any kind of ordering process, and so the reader is presented at the end of the chapter with the disordered notes of Sutcliffe (*M* 250-74): the ideas which could have been used or discarded in his own novel.

The increasing disorder is brought to an end by the appearance in the fifth chapter of a new writer—the novelist Aubrey Blanford. This novelist turns out to be the creator of what we now recognize as the previous fiction (or secondary reality), thus revealing the existence of a diegetic level (or primary reality). Bruce and Sutcliffe are only his characters, desperate writers hopelessly trying to understand and depict a life written by Blanford. In this new light, the element of accident and chance present in their lives, or even the amazing coincidence between the diaries of Bruce and the fiction of Sutcliffe, are now justified simply as part and parcel of Blanford's plan. Blanford is clearly at odds with his characters: his work seems to prove that the randomness of real life may be, in fact, the deceitful product of a

determinist fiction and an “evil” creator. On a different plane, his presence introduces a new element: through Blanford’s thoughts and plans for his future work, we eventually reach the moment of creation, the original idea which could be worked into a novel such as the one we are reading.

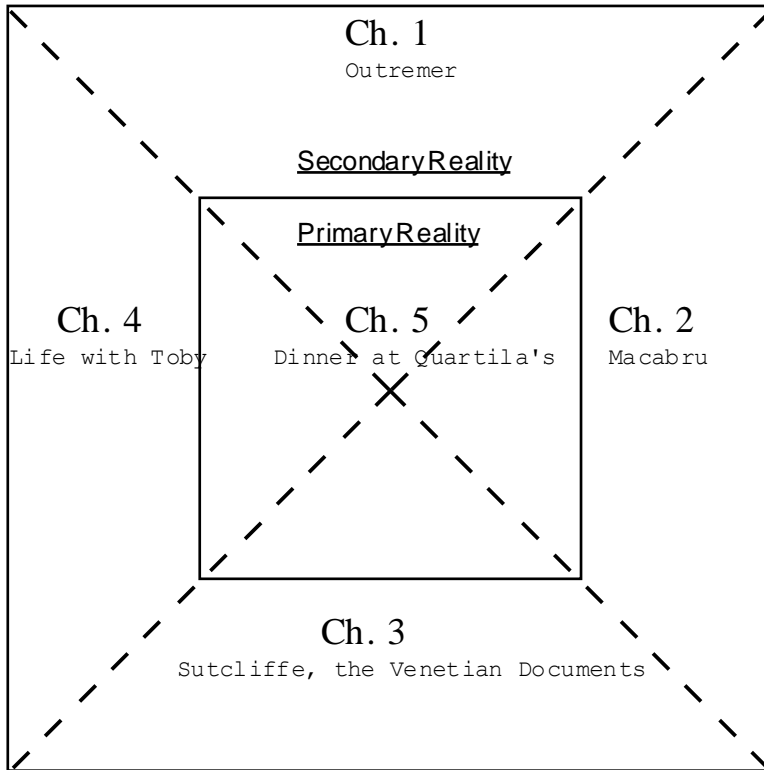
This global process of “disintegration” which leads us backwards from a traditional narrative, through the presentation of the notes which might have been used in a novel, to the original moment of creation, can be summarized in the following outline:

Chapter I	Unitary Fiction.
Chapter II	Unitary Fiction together with materials which are not completely integrated.
Chapter III	Process of creation of a novel (Outline, proofs, etc.).
Chapter IV	Previous Material (Notes, observations, drafts, etc.).
Chapter V	Poetic illumination. Moment of creation.

According to this outline, *Monsieur* reflects the destructive action of entropy on the very text which is gradually created through the representation of this process. Durrell’s apparent belief in the reversibility of all processes, including entropy (Gibaldi 1991: 101), compelled him to convey the illusion that this regeneration is possible, but brought him face to face with a problem of representation: we know that, scientifically speaking, the entropy of any closed system is irreversible⁴; an external force is needed if the process is to be stopped or the system regenerated. In much the same way, the increasing disorder of this fictional closed system (secondary reality) can only be regenerated by the action of an external force: the creative act, or imposition of an order on chaos, represented by the writer Blanford (primary reality). The inclusion of this external force, however, breaks the closed character of the system—a necessary requisite for the entropic process to take place. The only way to resume it is by presenting this writer as part of a new closed system and, therefore, equally subject to the action of entropy. According to the second law of thermodynamics, whenever two or more systems are joined together, the entropy of the combined system is bigger than the sum of the entropies of the individual systems. From this perspective, the different writers and their creations can be read as one single and paradoxically “generative” process of disintegration. My proposal, then, is to analyse this entropic process as a structuring principle in *Monsieur*.⁵

As we have seen, this unitary process of creation / disintegration is projected on three main writers and their respective fictional levels. *Monsieur*

confronts us with two views of the same reality, two symmetrical stories spun around the central narration which becomes both the origin of the story (moment of creation) and the end of the text (final chapter). One possible spatial representation of this arrangement can be seen in fig. 1.



MONSIEUR

FIG. 1

This mixture of hypodiegetic and diegetic levels which eventually reveals the existence of a superior reality and narrator becomes not “merely a novel within a larger novel,” as Barnes (1978: 378) defined *Monsieur*, but a

more complex process. As we have seen, Blanford's appearance can give sense to the contradictions of his characters and restore the feeling of order: Blanford's power over the narration seems absolute and so he feels that "he should perhaps offer a final summing up from the diary of Bruce" (*M* 276) or "let Sutcliffe finish and print his *Tu Quoque* if it could be found among his papers" (*M* 282). In this way, *Monsieur* introduces that "overt, self-conscious control by an inscribed narrator / author figure that appears to demand, by its manipulation, the imposition of a single, closed perspective" which Hutcheon (1984: xiii) points out as being one of the characteristics of postmodernist metafiction. The novelist Blanford represents the author figure in charge of imposing that single, closed perspective.

However, Hutcheon reminds us that, at the same time, postmodernism "works to subvert all chances of attaining such closure" (1984: xiii). Thus, we soon discover that Blanford's power over his novel "Monsieur" is not that absolute since *Monsieur*—the novel we are reading—includes some material he had discarded and had thrown into the wastepaper basket (*M* 294). Eventually, this final chapter plunges the reader into the vision of a "mad" novelist speaking to a person who turns out to be only the result of his imagination. The reader realizes something which Blanford can only suspect: there is a new writer, the creator of this "unreliable" novelist and of the novel we are reading.

This continuous deceit, whereby reality subsides into fiction soon after being created, plunges the reader of *Monsieur* into a final mistrust of any definite ordering or apparently closed narrative system. The Envoi, or appendix to this first novel, comes as a new attempt to restore order and confirm the existence of a global outline. However, through the combined actions of the entropic process and the Envoi, the way is open for the reader to accept both the existence of a series of boundaries between ontological levels, and the possibility of blurring them in a fluid universe—a new territory shared by both writers and their creations.

This possibility materializes in the following novels through, for example, Blanford's dialogues with his *alter ego* Sutcliffe. The novelist Blanford shares the working technique he attributed to Sutcliffe in *Monsieur*: they both create characters based on an amalgam of traits shared by real people. In *Livia*, however, they suggest the opposite by dreaming of "five panels for which your creaky old *Monsieur* would provide simply a cluster of themes to be reworked in the others" (*L* 11). This objective reflects the inversion of the conventional way of rendering the events: in *Monsieur* reality subsides into fiction, but now fiction must be reworked into reality. One important conse-

quence of this structural choice is that, by presenting the hypodiegetic level first and then the diegesis, we are forced to recognize several traits of the real protagonists through our previous acquaintance with the fictional characters they inspired. We cannot but help recognize them as both new fictional characters and real models. As a consequence, and irrespective of their inescapably fictional status, characters in the primary reality are perceived by the reader as, so to speak, “more real.”

On the other hand, the characters and events of the diegesis are not simple mirrors of their fictional counterparts. We rather perceive those allotropic⁶ changes which make us aware of the basic unity between apparently different things. Some physical and psychological traits, objects, characteristics or even names reappear slightly altered, condensed or telescoped into a different person or context thus becoming unifying echoes and also underlining the fact that character is a mere convention created by a writer.

Monsieur becomes, according to Blanford’s plan, the central volume, the fiction in which we first meet in condensed form the “echoes” of the different subjects and characters which will then be fully developed in the following novels. These four novels make up, in turn, a new arrangement around that central and generating text. As MacNiven puts it, “*Monsieur* is the hub about which the others rotate like stepchildren, both in themes and in structural devices” (1987: 238). The spatial representation of this relationship can be seen in fig. 2.

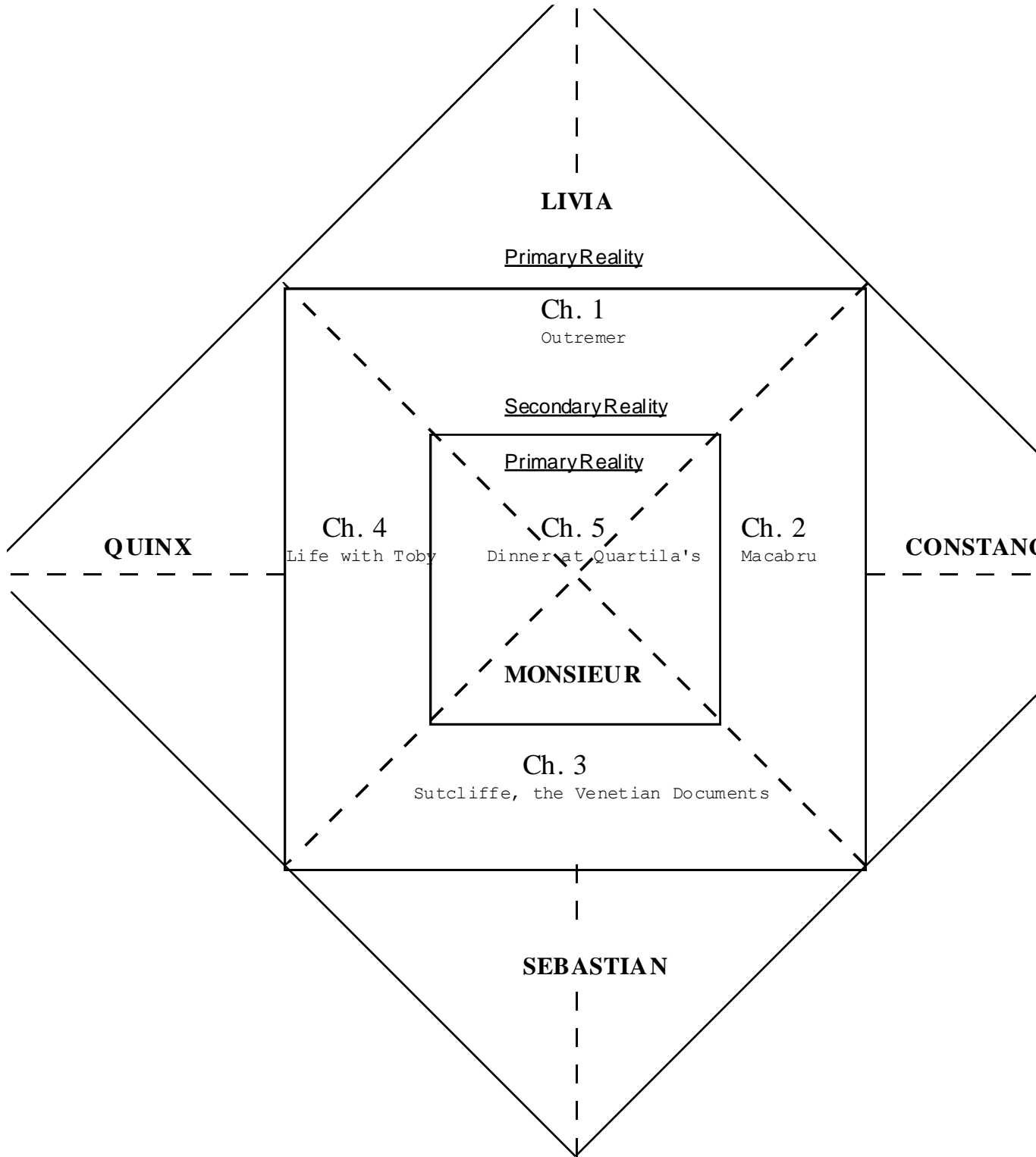


FIG. 2

We observe, then, a small quincunx which progressively expands into a bigger one. This structure has interesting properties since it is susceptible of unlimited expansion into new levels while keeping its generating central point and its initial shape. The resulting global structure maintains the fifth chapter of *Monsieur*, a sort of crossroads of ontological levels, as its central focus.

Apparently, however, Durrell did not make use of this unlimited possibility of development, but consciously gave the novel a closed character presenting this arrangement as an image of totality and closedness. Thus, in contrast with the “Workpoints” at the end of *The Alexandria Quartet* which suggested “a movement outward, a transcendence of the given work of art” (Kellman 1980: 96), Durrell warned his readers that this new work was complete in itself: “Aquí el final es lo contrario del *Cuarteto de Alejandria*, cuyo final era un final abierto. . . . En el *Quinteto*, la última página es efectivamente la última página” (quoted in Wajsbrot 1986: 28).⁷ It may be interesting, then, to elucidate which is the “last page” of the *Quintet*.

From a chronological point of view, the beginning of the story takes place in *Livia*, whereas the end goes back—through the first chapter of this same novel—to the fifth chapter of *Monsieur*. In this novel, Blanford reveals that most of the characters described in the primary reality are dead whereas he is depicted as a mad novelist. However, our reading of the whole *Quintet* enables us to re-interpret this ending in a different light. Blanford’s insanity can be seen now as a productive madness, associated with the act of creation or poetic illumination.⁸ It is only this madness that enables him—like Sylvie or Quatrefages (other “mad” characters), or the reader at this point—to perceive the existence of different ontological planes at the same time. Thus, Blanford not only wonders whether Sutcliffe (secondary reality) really “exists” (*M* 284) outside his work, but doubts whether he himself (primary reality) will be the real creator of this universe (*M* 281). Thus, the fifth chapter of *Monsieur*—one possible “last page” for the *Quintet*—presents us with chaos and confirms the vision of a creator who suspects his imprisonment in a closed and inescapable system.

We know that Durrell eschews linearity in his work and that the arrangement he proposed for the *Quintet* contradicts a linear interpretation. We cannot, however, dismiss another possibility: reading the novels in order of publication—that is, reading the plot in a linear way—the last page corresponds to the end of *Quinx*, or *the Ripper’s Tale*, the fifth volume of the sequence. At the end of *Quinx*, the narrator describes:

It was at this precise moment that reality prime rushed to the aid of fiction and the totally unpredictable began to take place! (*Q* 201).

The text ends up by suggesting the possibility of an explosion in the caves in quincunx—an image of the *Quintet*—thus breaking the prisonhouse of fiction, and giving way to the realm of unpredictability. In this new realm, the rules of fiction that govern, but also limit, any traditional narrative (such as causality or determinism) no longer apply. We are faced, then, with the existence of two hypothetical and contradictory “final pages”: one of them represents the end of the text, whereas the other represents the end of the story. In much the same way as happened with *Monsieur*, the end of the *Quintet* brings us face to face again with the imposition of a closed perspective and the impossibility of attaining closure.

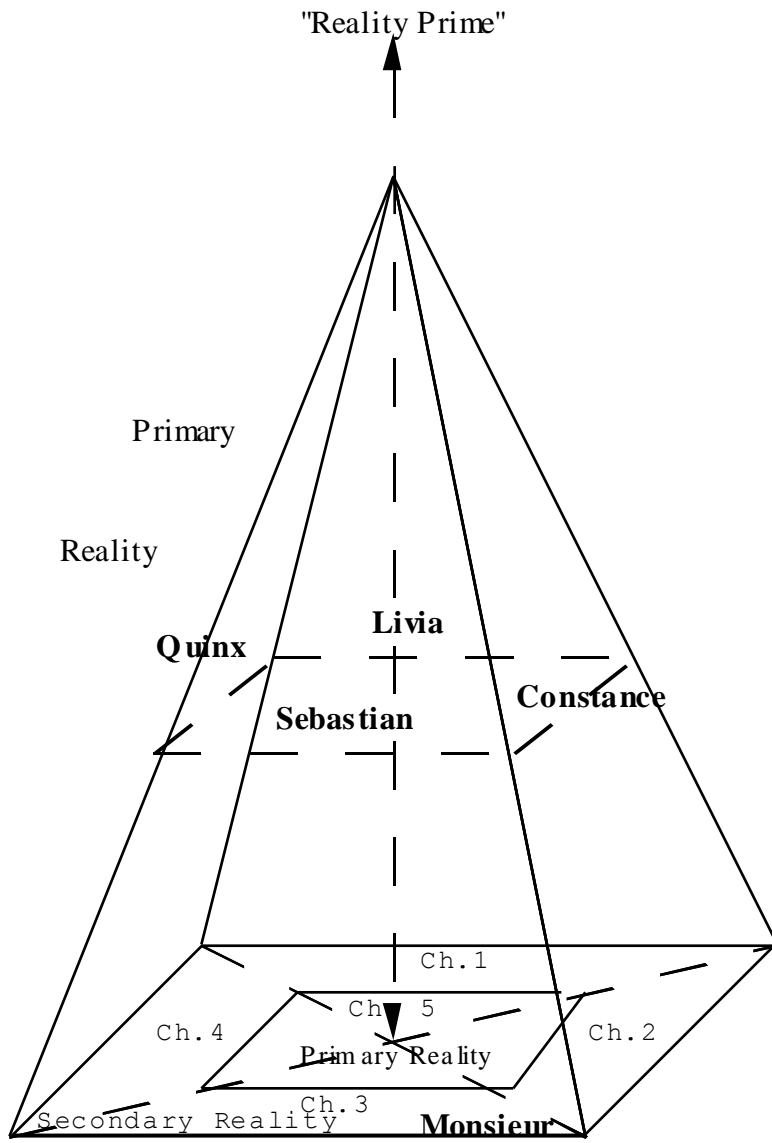


FIG. 3

By using now the three-dimensional representation of the quincunx—the pyramid (fig. 3)—it is possible to define the resulting structure with greater precision. As we have already noted, each chapter in *Monsieur* makes up one side of the square or base of the pyramid (secondary reality) around the fifth chapter (ontological breaking of boundaries). The following novels represent the four sides of the pyramid (primary reality) around the generating text *Monsieur*.⁹ As a result, the whole structure converges at one point, the apex of the pyramid, which stands for the final page of the text (*Quinx*). However, this point sends us back—through logic and memory—to the chronological end of the *Quintet* (*Monsieur*). Both ends are situated along the same axis that goes from the apex of the pyramid to the central point on its base. This descent leads to the death or madness of all the characters. They become prisoners of a determinist and closed system, and are incapable of transcending their fictional nature.

We must remember, however, that there are clues throughout the novels which allow us to reach a different interpretation. Thus, the references to the work of art as “the star-y-pointed pyramid to point to where the Grail lies hid” (*Q* 134) hint at a second possibility. Together with the descent to the fifth chapter of *Monsieur*, *Quinx* introduces the possibility of a redeeming explosion: the ascent to a superior ontological plane equated with the Grail. This second reading “breaks” the novel as a determinist prisonhouse and leaves it in the hands of randomness in the realm of the “unpredictable,” that is, the external world.

The pyramid, like the narration, is a closed structure which can only point to a superior realm (star or Grail) whose real nature is ineffable. The narration cannot escape its own determinism. The disappearance of an ultimate focalizer is impossible: there is always an observer who disturbs the course of nature. The disappearance of an ultimate narrator is also impossible: a subjective order is always imposed on the narration. However, by stressing the complexity of levels or blurring them, by representing the “generative” action of entropy and by plunging the reader into mistrust of a closed narrative, fiction can increase its proximity to that random and ineffable reality.

There is no point in deciding which of the two endings is, in fact, the real ending to the *Quintet*. Both of them are.¹⁰ But then, why was Durrell so categorical in emphasizing the existence of a last page? The answer to this dilemma can only be found “outside” the narration: in the Envoi, or appendix to the first novel, *Monsieur* (296). This outline confirms that there is, in fact, an external reality or new ontological level, represented by D., who is the

creator or “begetter” of this universe and whose existence turns the primary reality into an equally fictional construct.

In contrast to the closed character of the text, the Envoi becomes a condensed image of its process of creation and presents us with an open structure where the Centre—D—generates a series of inferior narrative levels *ad infinitum*. A concrete image of this condensation is given by D’s creation—Blanford—who creates the writer Sutcliffe endowing him with traits shared by real characters. Through Sutcliffe, Blanford creates his own parody: the novelist Bloshford (*L* 5). From then on, the boundaries blur gradually: Sutcliffe becomes increasingly more real whereas Blanford acquires more fictional traits. Finally, we are told that the person in charge of writing Sutcliffe’s biography after his death is his rival, a mediocre writer called Aubrey Blanford (*M* 279).

This process of creation, interrelation, and blurring of narrative levels is continuous throughout the *Quintet*. Thus, apart from the proper writer-characters, there are many other characters who initiate the creation of their own works. In *Monsieur*, the secondary reality, some characters, such as Bruce Drexel, write a diary; Piers de Nogaret writes his “Waterbiography” (*M* 42), and his own diary (*M* 152). We are also presented with some fragments from the fictitious diary of Piers, written in this case by Rob Sutcliffe (*M* 53). Toby Goddard writes the historical study “The Secret of the Templars” (*M* 235) where, in turn, he quotes fragments of the study of his opponent Basil Babcock. This process extends to the primary reality where, for example, Doctor Jourdain is writing a treatise on psychiatry, Constance writes a psychoanalytical study on the novel *Gynacocrasy* (*Q* 14) and Sylvie becomes a remarkable writer. All these cases point to the existence of inferior levels of narration which occasionally appear in the novels in a fragmentary form.

The existence of these inferior fictional levels is parallel to a game of allusions to elements drawn from “external” reality (actually from Durrell’s previous novels) which surpasses the closed character of the text. Thus, there are references in the *Quintet* to places such as lake Mareotis (*Q* 173) or characters like brigadier Maskelyne (*S* 47), Melissa (who appears in *Sebastian* as an old friend of Affad’s (*S* 45)), Capodistria (now a member of a gnostic jury (*S* 38)) or the writer Pursewarden (whom Sutcliffe describes as “the only enduring writer in England at the moment,” including titles and quotations from his works (*M* 226)). Lord Galen’s attempt to create a sexual robot or the presence of old Gregory (*S* 189) describing doctor Schwarz’s death are also examples of a process of intertextuality within Durrell’s own work.

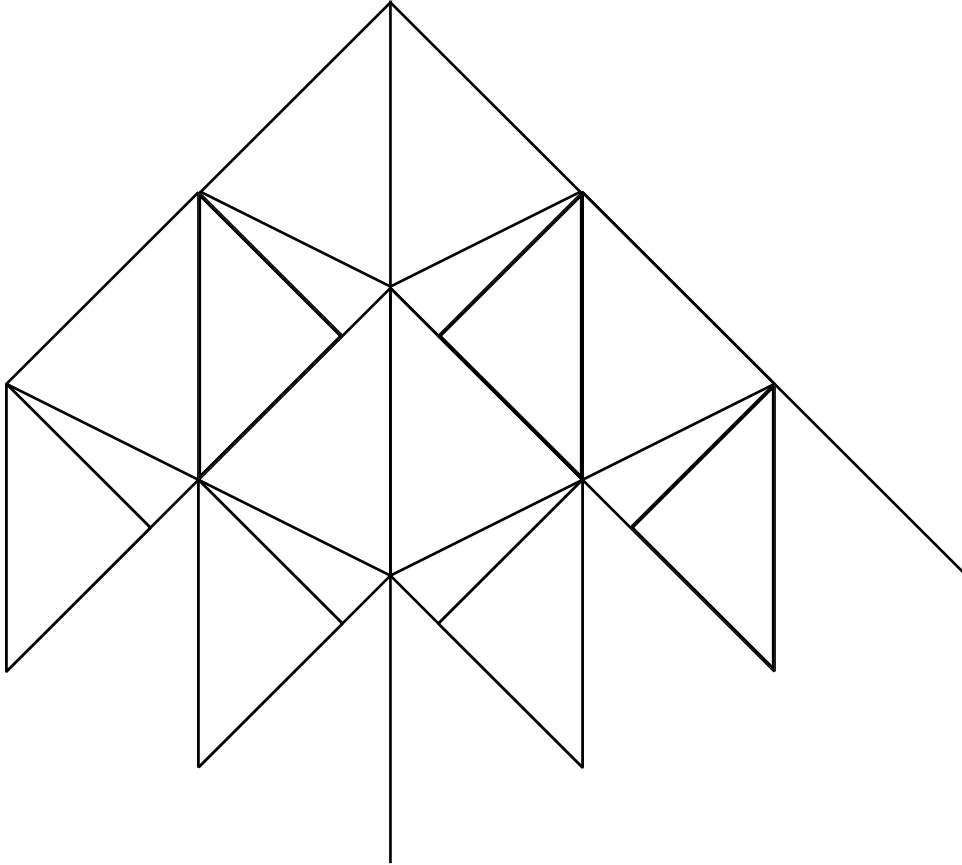
The process also extends to a plethora of other writers; in some cases only through quotations: St. Augustine, “inter faeces [sic] et urinam nascimur” (*L* 263), Cervantes (*Q* 83-4), etc.; on other occasions, well-known quotations are altered, “Clowns weep where angels fear to tread” (*M* 250), and reworked, “where angels come to weep” (*M* 253). There are literal or parodic quotations of T. S. Eliot (*M* 287), (*M* 293), Paul Valéry (*M* 178), etc. Implicit (Coleridge (*M* 251)) and explicit adaptations: “As Thoreau nearly said” (*M* 267). Joseph Conrad is parodied through a black stretcher-bearer: “Mister Schwarz he dead” (*S* 189), while the works of Shakespeare are repeatedly alluded to through parallelisms with some events in the *Quintet*—the trio of lovers reflected in the *Sonnets* (*M* 12), *Hamlet* (*M* 168)—or through particular interpretations of his plots (*M* 289). This sort of textual re-interpretation of historical or fictional events includes subjects such as Don Juan, Robinson Crusoe and Friday or the Thermopylae which are both openly discussed by some characters (*Q* 50) and subtly developed in the novels. It is a global process which does not spare the parodic inclusion of its own criticism by putting forward different subjects for a doctoral dissertation (*M* 227).

Historical figures undergo a similar process and they are fictionalized in the *Quintet* at different levels. Their presence in the narration seems to confirm Lord Galen’s statement: “A little celebrity and one subsides into being a character” (*M* 273). Thus, the *Quintet* mentions Groddeck, Einstein, Spengler—several bases of Durrell’s “own thinking” (Durrell 1970: xii)—together with Marx, Hitler, Nietzsche, etc. In some cases there are reworkings of names like Jung, who becomes doctor Young (*M* 254) or Joy (*M* 203)—the translation of *Freude*—while Freud, described also as doctor Fraud or Uncle Freddy, is in charge of treating Pia. The physical presence of Freud’s couch in the old château of Tu Duc clearly symbolizes this possibility of crossing ontological boundaries, irrespective of their real or fictional nature, confronting us with the paradoxical belief that “to be real means to be recorded in literature” (Alter 1975: 10).

While the Envoi suggests this endless multiplicity of inferior narrative levels that point to a superior reality, at the same time it apparently creates an impassable superior limit by placing D. as the origin of creation: D. seems to refer to Durrell,¹¹ the creator of that fictional universe, who finally restores order and confirms the reassuring superiority of our real world—the level of reality we share with the author—over the narration. However, the process does not stop at this point: D. might also refer to “the Devil at large” (*M* 281), the Prince of Darkness who, much in the same way as characters in a book, writes our apparently random lives and keeps us ignorant and impris-

oned in an inescapable fictional system.¹² In *Monsieur* we only become aware of the existence of a new superior level when its author chooses to reveal it. Thus, the reader is forced to share first the ignorance of some characters (thinking that there are only versions of a single reality), and then the suspicions of others (thinking that there might be a superior level of reality). Through the Envoi, this gradual realization may be extended outside the novel creating an endless process, and inducing that impression of “ontological vertigo” which Alter (1975: 6) finds in other self-conscious works such as *Don Quixote*. Ingersoll (1992) interprets the whole process as a *mise en abyme* whose superior level “reflects outward into our world, into “reality,” with the implications that Durrell’s biography is yet another text like our biographies as well.”

How, then, can a writer who depicts and makes us aware of that endless multiplicity of reality condense it into a closed, and therefore limited, fictional system? By suggesting that this generative process can be repeated in both ways *ad infinitum*. Faced with a similar problem of representation, scientists turn to the mathematical concept of “limit” which allows them to represent the infinite in a finite way. Some geometrical figures which use this concept of limit are the so called “fractals.” A fractal is a very irregular model put forward by Mandelbrot in order to represent objects and phenomena of the real world which—studied in detail—are also extremely irregular. In this way, the chaotic and irregular can be paradoxically represented through a perfectly defined geometrical structure. One possible way of creating a fractal is by choosing a geometrical object, establishing an alteration of this object, and indicating that this alteration will take place indefinitely in each of the resulting parts. An example of this process, based on a pyramidal structure, can be seen in the fractal represented in fig. 4.



In much the same way as the fractal, the Envoi represents the endless generation of new levels of reality. The finite character of the *Quintet*, like that of any narrative, imposes inescapable limits which put an end to this process. It is, then, the idea of an infinity that can only be reached outside the realm of fiction that the Envoi tries to convey.

We have seen throughout this paper that the shape of the quincunx is used to represent the co-existence of these two contradictory forces. *Monsieur* leaves us with the vision of a mad novelist imprisoned in a closed fictional system represented by the Envoi. A global reading of the *Quintet*

enables us to understand Blanford's madness as a sort of "illumination" and like him perceive that multiplicity of ontological levels reflected in the Envoi, the last page of the sequence. However, we are also able to perceive the opposite force: the basic unity of the different writers in a single and generative entropic process, the confluence of the different events and characters as allotropic states of a basic form, as options which are "hardly more numerous than the available Christian names used by the race" (C 123). In this new light, Sabina (Q 85)—Sabine—Sylvaine—Sylvie—Livvy (M 290)—Liv (Q 119)—Livia—Pia (M 9) start to condense under a kind of "panoramic vision" (Q 25) which Blanford and Sutcliffe describe in *Quinx* :

Actually, if you believe, as I do, that all people are becoming the same person, and that all countries are merging into one country, one world, you will be bound to see all these so-called characters as illustrations of a trend (Q 26).

If *Monsieur* stands for reality subsiding into fiction (i.e. the origin which will be manifested in the subsequent four novels), *Livia*, *Constance*, *Sebastian* and *Quinx* suggest how fiction can be reworked into reality, revealing its "constructedness" and leading us back to the original point of departure: *Monsieur* and the Envoi where this endless process is represented. We are now in a position to contemplate the whole work from a new perspective. We only have to analyse the *Quintet* , that "star-y-pointed pyramid" which points "to where the Grail lies hid" (Q 134) by placing us precisely at that point, the star or Grail—our external reality—pointed to by the pyramid. From this superior perspective, the pyramidal structure of the *Quintet* condenses into the concentric structure of the Envoi creating a classical image of all processes of creation (fig. 5): the Unity as point of origin and return.

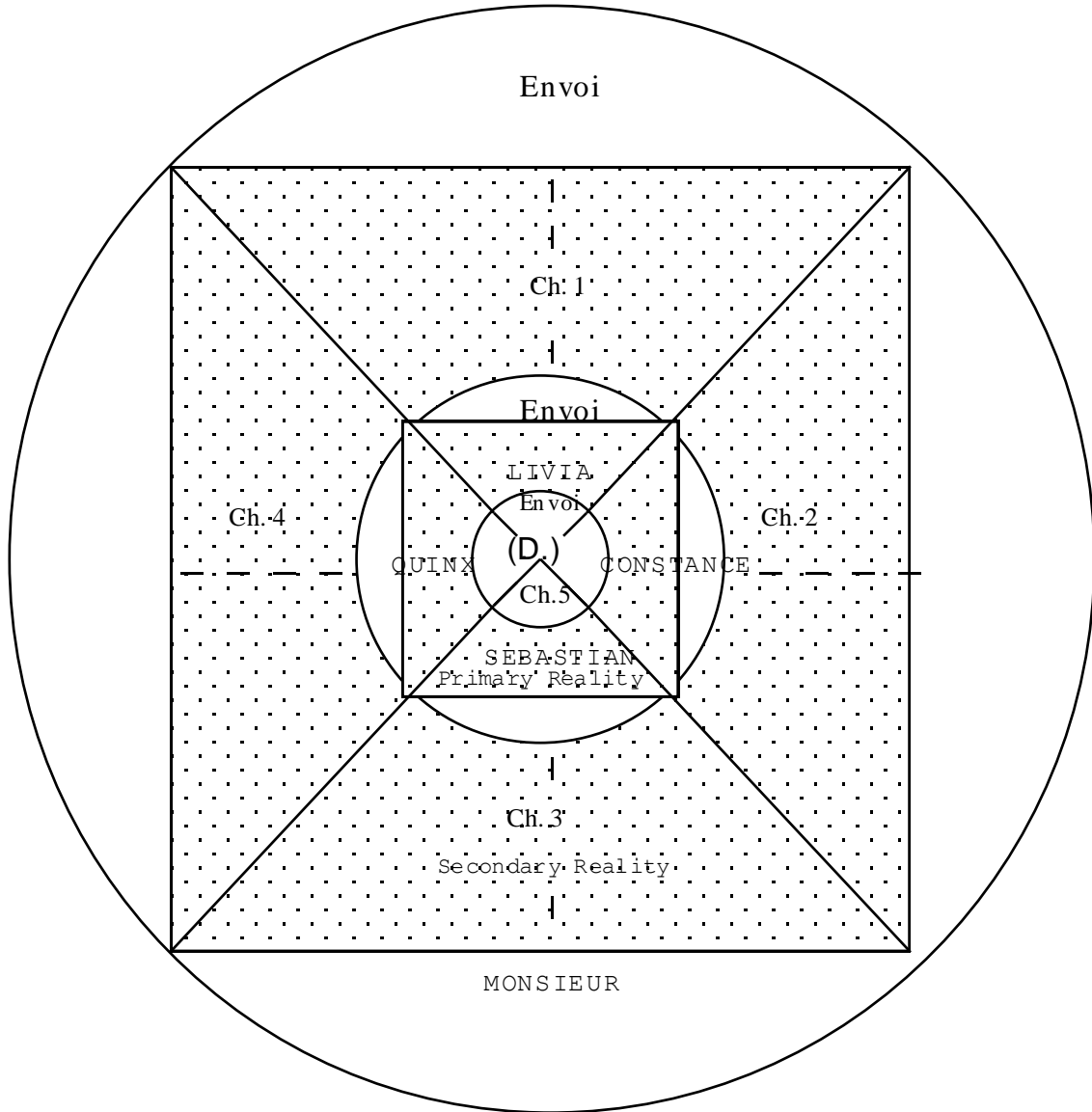


FIG. 5

This unity of the fragmentary—or, in Heraldic terms, “the Oneness of everything” (Durrell, in Wickes 1964: 203)—which can only be pointed at, or alluded to, through symbol would seem only too adequate as a means of extrapolating a global meaning (the authorial intention) and underlining, for example, the mythical unity of the *Quintet*: “In the heart of the licensed confusion a sense of meaning” (*Q* 179). Such an interpretation, however, would only highlight the complex process of creation of the illusion while playing down an equally important move—the subsequent revelation of its artifice, the admitted impossibility of attaining closure: “There is no meaning and we falsify the truth about reality in adding one. *The universe is playing, the universe is only improvising!*” (*Q* 167). This twofold movement—the “perpetual dialectic of interpretation and deconstruction” (Stoicheff 1991: 90) which is at the base of metafictional works like the *Quintet*—leads us to a complementary vision of the Envoi: its solid hierarchy of ontological levels, the “Great Plan” (*Q* 54), blurs now into a self-reflexive image of the novel’s perpetual deferral of a unified “meaning.”

The Envoi, much in the same way as Borges’s “circular ruins,” becomes a final labyrinth for the reader where “the more information he gathers, the greater the number of intervening circles of language to carry it, the larger the indeterminacy, the more complex the interpretation, and the wider the abyss whose circumference he travels” (Stoicheff 1991: 90). This final labyrinth reminds us that the text re-creates the complexity of reality only to eventually make us aware of its constructedness; that language both creates the Grail and prevents us from apprehending it.^a

NOTES

1. This mirror-sentence is taken from the first chapter of Stonehill’s study on self-conscious fiction, aptly entitled “Imitation’s Limitations; or, Why Writers Write About Writers Writing” (1988: 1).

2. Through several motifs associated to this five-part structure, Ian MacNiven shows that the shape of the quincunx provides a structural model of *The Avignon Quintet* which, “if not an end in itself, is at least an integral part of meaning” (1987: 234).

3. A preliminary account of this entropic process in *Monsieur* as well as the resulting outline can be found in Plo (1991: 111).

4. According to recent research in the field of nonequilibrium thermodynamics, there would be an alternative explanation to Durrell's particular use of a "reversible" entropy. In White's words: "Although change can destroy a system, at the critical moment of transformation matter may spontaneously organize itself into a more complex structure. That is, at a stochastic bifurcation point in far-from-equilibrium conditions, the famous second law of thermodynamics (according to which entropy never decreases) is consistent with *local* decreases in entropy" (1991).

5. This proposal seems consistent with Gibaldi's study on the subject where, in addition to dealing with it from a thematic point of view, she analyses two structural manifestations of Durrell's submission to entropy: "his peculiar use of repetition and his even more peculiar inclusion of inconsistencies in the novels" (1991: 104) which add to the creation of "a structure that defies the irreversibility of entropy in its reliance upon endless reversals" (1991: 106).

6. An allotrope is one of the different physical forms of an element, but possessing the same chemical properties as other allotropes, e.g. the allotropes of carbon include diamond, graphite and charcoal.

7. "Here the ending is the opposite of that of *The Alexandria Quartet*, whose ending was open. . . . In the *Quintet*, the last page is indeed the last page" (my translation).

8. The fact that the poet's inspiration can be compared to a state of madness is a classical convention stated, for example, in Plato's *Ion*: "The poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and reason is no longer in him; no man, while he retains that faculty, has the oracular gift of poetry" (1971: 14-15).

9. In *Constance*, the triangle formed by the billiard balls is described as "a formation suggesting the symbolic properties of the Grand Pyramid's square root of five; symbol which faraway Blanford was even then thoughtfully contemplating in a big book of engravings concerned with such abstruse matters" (C 139). In my opinion, this image alludes to the "Golden Section number" whose mathematical expression would be $x = (1 \pm \sqrt{5})/2$. This irrational number represents a mathematical proportion first formulated by Euclid and analysed by Luca Pacioli in his treatise *De Divina Proportione* (1509), illustrated with some "engravings" of geometrical figures by Leonardo. Pacioli describes the symbolic properties of this proportion which, allegedly, gives the sides of a rectangle "a particularly pleasant shape" (Vajda 1989: xiii). It has been said that the floor of the royal chamber in the "Grand Pyramid" of Cheops faithfully reproduces a "Golden" rectangle. In any case, this proportion has been widely used in painting and architecture. The fact that the novelist Blanford is "thoughtfully contemplating" this symbol where number 5 and a pleasant shape are combined may be viewed as a new reference to the spatial architecture of the *Quintet*.

10. This structural "indeterminacy" seems consistent with P. H. Lorenz's interpretation of the *Quintet* as ruled by the logic of quantum theory—the logic of Heisenberg or Heraclitus—whereby both endings can "co-exist" at the same time (Lorenz 1990). It could also be said that the *Quintet* goes a step further and adopts the logic of chaos, with a similar emphasis on

unpredictability, but concerned with systems “configured so as to bring even microscopic fluctuations quickly up to macroscopic expression” (Hayles 1991a: 11).

11. The identification of the almighty novelist with God (D. / Deus) is a common device in self-conscious fiction. However, Gass points out the new characteristics this relationship is adopting in recent examples: “These days, often, the novelist resumes the guise of God; but he is merely one of us now, full of confusion and error, sin and cleverness” (1979: 20).

12. This possibility links up with the gnostic account of the cosmogony described throughout the *Quintet*: the universe is actually ruled by an evil demiurge who supplanted God.

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Editor's note: due to the insertion of oversize graphics in the Internet version, the pagination of this article does not correspond with that of the printed version of *Miscelánea*.