The Singularity of Reading

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From homo habilis to novelists

The novel, or so said the advocates of the Nouveau Roman, must outstrip itself of its former shapes and strive for originality in order to reach new aesthetic forms. In the hope of overcoming rigid academism (which tends to take for granted what form is), Robbe Grillet and his peers positioned themselves at the forefront of an avant-garde movement ingrained in a history of art—and most especially the history of the novel (and literature as a whole)—perceived as the result of a Darwinist evolution with at its core the notion of a "linear progress" (Scarpetta, "l'impureté" 292). As with most avant-garde thinking, the driving impetus behind it was an acute sense of limitation, steeped in an understanding of past aesthetic discoveries (Proust, Joyce) seen as a climactic point in the history of the novel: a point of crisis calling for a revolution. If we accept that understanding of literary evolution, novelists must reinvent what the novel is (and could be) so as to free it (and themselves) from the yoke of tradition in favour of a search for innovation instead of iteration. Continuing with the Darwinist simile, the linear progress of literature can therefore be read as a curve spanning the whole history of literature, and along which milestones mark radical discoveries and changes. Hence, past achievements become various steps in a series without which the state of the novel would not be the same today: following this logic, the novel supposedly progresses and gradually *improves*. In that sense, what we may call the secessionist DNA of the avant-gardes (at first, avant-gardes are always a wish for revolution or at least a call for radical transformations or redirections) drives the precious leaps

(improvements) in the history of literature, much to the same degree as the apparition of, say, the opposable thumb designates a fork in our evolution from primates to *homo habilis*.

However, as recent developments in evolutionary biology underline, evolution is as much the result of the (a) *survival of the fittest* (contextual improvements) as the consequence of (b) chance genetic mutations and mistakes. In that frame of mind, avant-gardes and their basic premise, the radical search for novelty in literature, could at once stand for (a) a life and death necessity (in this case 'life' is understood as the survival of artistic forms) as much as for (b) a mere fluke or chance discovery. And here we conclude our Darwinist opening, reminding ourselves that evolutionary biology is but a passive activity whereas the evolution of literature proves to be more susceptible to change due to the agency of novelists.

Kafka and the Kafkaesque: a case of two Kafkas

Literary history and more particularly the history of the novel, is governed by an evasive definition (if not several) of what a novel can be. As a genre, the novel is 'indeterminate' (Marthe) and constantly in the search of its own limits (i.e., its definition). In that regard, one might say that there are not only as many possibilities for the novel as there are novelists but also that there are as many versions of the history of the novel as there are novelists/novels. Consequently, each and every novelist (and his or her art) can be apprehended as one culmination among many of a specific literary heritage.

Herman Melville, thanks to his magnum opus *Moby Dick*, is commonly regarded as the culmination of Transcendentalism. In some other instances, however, critics are found to argue that an author can be the product of an originality without precedence, as is conventionally the case with Kafka's works—a judgement which can be easily pinpointed to the existence of a catchy adjective: Kafkaesque. Naturally, those adjectives are often a handy way to designates (if evasively) the specificity and uniqueness of an author without being specific as to what it entails, as Philip Roth observes: "At the popular level, the novels have given way to a word, 'Kafkaesque,' which by now is plastered indiscriminately on almost any baffling or unusually opaque event that is not easily translatable into the going simplifications" ("reading" 229). But while Kafka is undoubtedly a *singular* object amid 20th century-literature, one can nonetheless doubt his celebrated *peerless* originality. Is Kafka's singularity an

objective value or is Kafka's striking distinctiveness just a question of untraditional tradition? Has the word "Kafkaesque" named the thing or have the qualities of the thing been lessened by the naming? Whether the adjective discourages, "at the popular level", any attempt at defining what it presupposes or not, there is no doubt that it at least designates a cliché which, as much as Kafka's supposedly unprecedented originality, is not disputed. Opposite to Roth, geographically speaking, the British novelist Adam Thirlwell (in his introduction to *The Metamorphosis*) tackles the "Kafkaesque" smoke screen by lifting the veil of a list of "accepted truths" (Kafka x-xi):

> Unfortunately, it is now necessary to state some accepted truths about Franz Kafka and the Kafkaesque (…) Kafka's work lies outside literature: it is not fully part of the history of European fiction. He has no predecessors—his work appears as if from nowhere—and he has no true successors (…) He is therefore a genius, outside ordinary limits of literature (…) All of these truths, all of them are wrong. It is not a very accurate word, this word 'Kafkaesque'

Following this provocative *entrée en matière*, Thirlwell proceeds to contradict each and every one of these "accepted truths", mainly by mapping out possible lineages with Charles Dickens, Robert Walser or Gustave Flaubert (Kafka xv). At first sight, one might think that Thirlwell's strategy is to downplay the originality and importance of Kafka's in the European literary canon. However, a closer study of Thirlwell's understanding of the history of the novel calls attention to the paradox of 'familiar originality' which leads us to interrogate the very phenomenon of influence with regard to the notions of originality and tradition.

The aesthetic paradox

We have so far mentioned two possible ways to apprehend the history of the novel and the evolution of the genre as a whole. We will now be so bold as to say that both cases—the radicalism of the Nouveau Roman and the supposedly genuine originality of Kafka—reveal two sentimental[1] understandings of the novel, if not of literature. It appears that those two instances revel in the idea of literature as a process akin to (improving) biological evolution, as we have seen. In one case, the Nouveau Roman illustrates (dramatically) what is perceived as a sudden mutation (or change) operated in response to a situation of need; for the novel to survive, after the stylistic accomplishments of the Modernists, it needed to drastically mutate and become

[1] We insist on the meaning of 'sentimental': we denounce the *radical* and *exaggerated* nature of the propositions which we encapsulate as *sentimentalism*.

something entirely new and thus inaugurate a new dawn of the novel. In the other, Kafka's aforementioned genius embodies the chance *apparition* of distinctive traits (which all the more ironically impresses on Kafka's accomplishments a religious overtone that is no stranger to Kafka's critics, notably Max Brod, who has come to represent the quintessential Kafka critic, and from whom the Jewish mysticism line of interpretation originates[2]). What the evolutionary angle does account for is the undoubtedly historical nature of the art of the novel. In *Les testaments trahis*, Milan Kundera expresses his view of literary evolution as inherently historical:

> Selon moi, les grandes œuvres ne peuvent naître que dans l'histoire. Ce n'est qu'à l'intérieur de l'histoire que l'on peut saisir ce qui est nouveau et ce qui est répétitif, ce qui est découverte et ce qui est imitation, autrement dit, ce n'est qu'à l'intérieur de l'histoire qu'une œuvre peut exister en tant que *valeur* que l'on peut discerner et apprécier. Rien ne me semble donc plus affreux pour l'art que la chute en dehors de son histoire, car c'est la chute dans un chaos où les valeurs esthétiques ne sont plus perceptibles. (30)

However, let us note that Kundera dwells on the historical nature of the novel according to two specific criterions: (1) one is the *value* of a work of art not as intrinsic but contextual; (2) the other is the point of view from which one can judge its value. What is crucial to notice here is the importance imparted to the critic—that is to say the Reader—in the evolution of literature. According to Kundera, and as echoed by Thirlwell in *Miss Herbert*, the history of the art of the novel (and the value of the works within) is a matter that befell to posterity since "value is only visible retrospectively" (129). Similarly, Thirlwell defends the idea that the value of a work of art cannot be fully grasped as long as it is not contextualised within a tradition. For Kundera, as for Thirlwell, originality and tradition are therefore closely linked, if not dependent on one another—a paradoxical correlation that Thirlwell best expresses as the aforementioned 'aesthetic paradox'):

> If every new work regroups the preceding ones, then it initially seems original—but it then seems too fixed, when a new work comes along. The paradox of the aesthetic, then, is that it is a process which constantly claims not to be a process at all; 'every struggle for a new aesthetic value in art, just as every counter-attack against it, is organized in the name of an objective and lasting value (…) The process of literary history is a continual redefinition of what constitutes literary value at all. (24-25)

[2] As noted by Thirlwell: "These small acts of tidying up are important because they are part of Brod's overall project-to sanctify Kafka, to make him a writer of theological scruple, a great writer with a message of existential loneliness without God, and a writer of self-contained stories" (Kafka xxv)

For both novelists, the crux of the matter with regard to literary history is twofold: (1) novels and traditions are irremediably joint; (2) the value of a work of art is subjective and non-absolute, there is an interrelationship between novels and their contexts. According to this reasoning, therefore, we can imagine that a novel can go unnoticed for years (if not centuries) before being rediscovered and being restored within a literary heritage from which its originality will be all the more apparent—which leads us to a further observation: (3) the evolution of literature is at once subjective and non-topical: creation and critic is an ever-going process that Thirlwell encapsulates in the term “redefinition.”

“International mongrel”

From here on, we are in a position to give a more accurate definition of what literary evolution can be. It appears hardly fitting to restrict literary evolution to a “linear progress” since, as we have just seen, its value is always part of a tradition and depends on retrospective examination. In that regard, avant-gardes are undoubtedly a positive catalyst for change and innovation though, in their inception, they remain a gamble first and foremost. Sitting opposite the linear hypothesis is the shared idea (by Thirlwell and Kundera) that literary evolution is a chaotic and non-linear phenomenon which rather resembles an ever-mutating history. One of the best illustrations for the notion of mutating history, non-linear and subjected to delays, leaps and bounds as well as mistakes, can of course be read in Lawrence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*: “By this contrivance the machinery of my work is of a species by itself; two contrary motions are introduced into it, and reconciled, which were thought to be at variance with each other. In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too,—and at the same time” (63-64). Such evolution is liable to change and reinvention (a quality not too dissimilar from Bakhtin’s definition of the novel as a genre[3])—a mutable history that Thirlwell envisions as a *mongrel*: “The history of the novel’s form is not perfect, or linear; it abandons some possibilities and favours others. The novel, this international mongrel, is patchy at best.” (“Herbert” 382)

[3] According to Bakhtin, the novel *is* mutability: "la réinterprétation et la réévaluation permanente. Le centre de la dynamique de la perception et de la justification du passé est transféré dans le futur" (Bakhtine 465)

Born in translation

Therefore, we reach a point in our reflection where we can begin to fathom out a paradoxical dialectic between creation and influence, or between writing and reading. Thirlwell's attitude towards literary history not only offers us a glimpse at the creative process behind his fiction but it also accounts for the core tenets of his aesthetics. In that regard, his essay *Miss Herbert* is as much part of his fiction as his fiction is part of his 'theory' (or rather more 'theorising' or 'essayism'); an observation which can also be applied to a more experimental book of his, *Multiples*. In the latter, Thirwell orchestrates as series of translations among several participants (all of whom are novelists first and foremost) in order to see what sort of mutations appear and what changes the texts are subjected to. This playful experiment inextricably highlights Thirlwell's own interpretation of the history of fiction as well as the intricacies of writing, reading and translation. For him, the novel's *être au monde* is "portability" which he alludes to on countless occasions: "The reader who wants to investigate the whole art of the novel will end up with a whole warehouse of imported goods*"* ("multiples", 1) ; "a quick global map of some of the most agile practitioners, alive or dead, in the young art of the novel, that is also a portable library of experiments with fiction" (6) ; "I tend to think that literary history is haphazard; it is a system of interlinked revisions and inspirations, like Franz Kafka's importation of Gustave Flaubert. All techniques are portable. Yes, I prefer a roll-on, roll-off literary theory" ("Herbert" 330). It is therefore apparent that Thirlwell's art of the novel is subjected to (and no less motivated by) what he refers to as "importations" and transportation—that is to say multiple inspirations, influences and in a more concrete sense, technical borrowings which an author is free to adapt to his/her needs.

What is of utmost significance for Thirlwell is the international scale ("global map"; "imported goods") to which he tunes literary experiments. Of course, Thirlwell is not the only writer to perceive the history of the novel as an international art form. We have drawn similarities between him and Kundera earlier, to which we can add their corresponding view of *supranational literature* originating from the European crucible: "Cet espace imaginaire est né avec l'Europe moderne, il est l'image de l'Europe ou, au moins, notre rêve de l'Europe, rêve maintes fois trahi mais pourtant assez fort pour nous unir tous dans la fraternité qui dépasse de loin notre petit continent"

(Kundera,"l'art" 193)[4]—a notion which can be traced back to Herman Broch and Goethe and his 'weltliteratur'. What this supranational dimension is worth noting for is the pervasive notion of liberty and impertinence in relation to the art of the novel and the idea of influence. As such, the novel appears as an illustration for "cosmopolitanism" (and vice versa) which takes the form—in Thirlwell's aesthetics—of the ideas (most notably) of exile—a positive view of exile which is not far removed from Nabokov' own vision of the novel[5], emigration—which Thirlwell relates to "the universal problem of preserving the things one values. Everything disappears, always. Therefore everyone is an émigré, an amateur émigré. No one is in possession of their past." ("Herbert" 408). Finally cosmopolitanism takes the form of diaspora, about which Thirlwell notes "One of the problems with the word 'diaspora' in this regard is that it is so freighted with depressed, melancholic meaning and there is a pressure of biography on Schulz to read him in that way. Actually when you read it, what is so fabulous is the scope of his imagination, assimilating everything!" (Thirlwell, "Diasporas"). Hence, the art of the novel is an art of adaptation and adaptability combined with a *cosmopolitan imagination* of unlimited reach[6]. It is therefore not surprising that Guy Scarpetta deems Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* as a fit example of the complex phenomenon of influence in the novel:

> ce livre, qui télescope les références islamiques et l'art, propre aux Temps Modernes, du roman ; qui réinvente la littérature, non pas malgré l'impureté ou l'hybridation culturelles, mais à partir d'elle ; qui fait d'une situation de double ou triple culture, de poly-appartenance, non pas le ressort d'un malaise ou d'un déchirement, mais celui d'une euphorie créatrice, d'un élargissement de l'imaginaire (…) s'enrichissant de cette interaction ; ce livre, qui conjugue de façon souveraine l'Orient et l'Occident, l'immémoriale modernité. ("âge" 60)

For us, 'interactivity' is the key notion here as it designates the novel as an imaginary territory where different cultures (through tradition and heritage) interact with each other (as the whole ***œuvre*** of Salman Rushdie can attest) while different voices,

[4] See also « Je parle du *roman européen* (...) pour dire que son histoire est transnationale (...) laquelle crée le seul contexte où peuvent se révéler et le sens l'évolution du roman et la valeur des œuvres particulières » (Kundera, « testaments » 42)

[5] « Par sa nature parodique, l'œuvre nabokovienne impose une présence capitale des littératures auxquelles elle a emprunté ; en cela, elle compose un alléchant panorama littéraire de l'exil » (Barbedette 139)

[6] For Posnock, this very notion encapsulates the art of the novel: "Greek for "world citizen", *cosmopolitanism* is rarely a neutral term and often pejorative because it usually involves a refusal to revere local or national authority and a desire to uphold multiple affiliations. In an academic culture obsessed by identity, the cosmopolitan has the distinction of being grounded instead in the practice of appropriation: insouciance regarding claims of ownership and the drawing of boundaries becomes the basis of a cosmopolitan relation to culture. To achieve it liberates culture from the proprietary grip of a single group; possessiveness (…) is set aside for sampling, fixity for mobility. Cosmopolites refuse to know their place. And cosmopolitanism, which challenges the sense of entitlement to cultural riches assumed to repose in privileged birth or inheritance, is in theory at least, what democratic America embodies" (Posnock 6)

identities, times and authors *interact*, *cohabit* and *alter* each other. Borrowing Fuentes' words (which I translate), one of the consequence of such a view of the novel is to "increase awareness of literature as a phenomenon in perpetual realisation" (31), at the core of which resides "the consciousness of the dependence between creation and tradition" (29) which reinforces the idea that "nothing, in our world, can exist in the purity of isolation." (168)

Literary cosmopolitanism

Originality and tradition are therefore two side of the same (paradoxical) coin: that of imagination[7]. Recent developments in the art of the novel emphasise the key role played by the techniques of appropriation. As Patricia Waugh and Jennifer Hodgson point out in their article "On the exaggerated reports of a decline in British fiction", in recent years a noticeable number of young writers have categorized themselves as 'cosmopolitan writers', in the sense that they "marry with and promiscuously blend the foreign with the indigenous, the international with the demotic—but what seems to fix their identity in their own eyes and ours is the avowed association with cultures and traditions that are not British." A keen interest in multiple cultures and traditions is a central aspect of the aesthetics of Adam Thirlwell and Kazuo Ishiguro, both of whom have for instance explored in fiction the intellectual legacy of Mittel-Europa, a symbolic beckon of the cosmopolitan identity: Thirlwell's *The Escape* and Ishiguro's *The Unconsoled* both take place in a Central European metaphoric spa-town where historical, geographical and cultural boundaries blur in a cosmopolitan swirl. Those are only two British examples that are part of a constellation of international authors who inscribe their art in a global, or at least multicultural, legacy[8].

But what Waugh and Hodgson accurately observe about those writers is their acute sense of belonging to a common though *multifarious* tradition. What their art insists on is the anachronistic quality of literature, which Waugh and Hodgson allude to under the notion of "interregnum": "new age of 're'– redevelopment, recycling, restructuring, reparation, reconciliation, residue, remainder, remembrance, recession – trying to

[7] "But the point of reading Kafka's early stories, and their influences, is not simply to locate his tradition. It is also to see what he does with this tradition. Kafka develops Walser's technique of reticence, his exploitation of the apparently whimsical, into a far more stringent style" (Kafka xvii)

[8] European writers are not the sole representatives of literary cosmopolitanism. As we saw earlier, Philip Roth's strategies of appropriation are perceived as a decidedly American trait while the Mexican writer Alvaro Enrigue continues the South American tradition of looking at History between the Old Continent and the Americas. Other specific forms of literary cosmopolitanism have found their voice in the Caribbean, in the work of Patrick Chamoiseau and Edouard Glissant for instance.

rebuild foundations, recover roots and re-imagine a future re-connected with a revisioned past". As a result, such a conception unsettles the linear understanding of literature in favour of a more playful and flippant grasp of its dynamics.

Originality among thieves

To recognise and implement in one's art prior techniques and discoveries is at the same time a form of apprenticeship under the guise of homage but it is also a humble and humbling perception of literary history understood as a *multiple*: « Seule notre arrogance contemporaine voudrait nous faire croire que nous nous posons des questions qui n'ont jamais effleuré l'esprit de nos prédécesseurs. Les termes en sont différents mais l'équation demeure » (Barbedette 54). To clarify the terminology, it is important to appreciate the various understandings of 'multiple'—a notion regularly called forth by Thirlwell. It not only implies that various histories of the novel can coexist at the same time—for instance, Kundera considers both *Don Quichotte* and Rabelais as the origin of the history of the novel, to which Thirlwell adds the crucial novelty of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*—but it also implies that novels in themselves are complex objects that keep being reinvented and helping reinvent the genre. Thirlwell perceive this quality in the simple act of translation, noting that because of it "literature is one of those strange arts where the original is often experienced as a multiple" ("multiple" 1). Because of translation, there exist multiple variations of a novel, in different languages translated at different times in history by different translators. It goes without saying that few novelists, and readers, would otherwise be able to enjoy literature in its original language. As a result, Thirlwell is led to believe that the very nature of literature is governed by a phenomenon of rewriting and reinvention:

> I wondered now if the future for style should be multiplicity. It should be allowed any anachronism—for why should the styles of the past be forbidden to you?—just as it should be allowed any geographical displacement. My new ideal, I'm thinking, and not without a qualm, is the pure, unembarassed inauthentic. ("Multiples" 7-8)

The "inauthenticity" in question, perceived as a positive quality, obviously runs counter to our modern sensibilities. Inauthenticity as a *value* might appear as a flippant idea with regard to our Western literary legacy (ever since Romanticism, the accepted idea concerning the value of a work of art is its apparent originality) but various authors such as Thirlwell, Tom McCarthy and Ralph Ellison exemplify how inauthenticity proves to be the paradoxical driving impetus behind (literary) creation. Indeed,

McCarthy reminds us that "these practices—citation, reenactment, *repetition*, and modification-through-repetition—already of course, in one way or the other, have their place right at the heart of the Western canon (there'd be no Shakespeare without them)" (269), which echoes Ellison's idea of the 'appropriation game':

> What makes an artist American for Ellison is less a priori identity than a freewheeling approach to culture that rewrites heritage not as passive inheritance but as an assemblage produced by the act of seizing or appropriating from the past and present. Ellison calls this dynamic, anti-proprietary practice 'the appropriation game', one 'everyone played'. (Posnock 91)

Against modern proprietary isolationism to which the *copyright* is the commercial symbol (Barbedette 101), novelists perceive literary singularity first and foremost as a will to write from and among others—a phenomenon that Thirlwell flippantly designates as "stealing"[9] which shares a common ground with the idea of "recycling" in Barbedette's terminology:

> Mais *Don Quichotte* annonçait ce que *Tristram Shandy* a systématisé, à savoir le recyclage de la littérature. L'historien arabe permet à Cervantès de dire au lecteur que la littérature se reproduit en vase clos et qu'elle est à elle-même sa propre source. En d'autres termes, la littérature est hermaphrodite et n'a pas besoin de copuler avec la vie pour exister. La grande fornication interne qu'elle pratique conduit à penser qu'il ne saurait y avoir de textes-sources. Il n'y a que des textes recyclés. D'une certaine façon, l'histoire de la littérature recouvre l'histoire du plagiat. Chaque nouveau roman est le piratage d'un autre ; les histoires sont peu ou prou les mêmes. Un écrivain ne saurait trop espérer du grand chaudron de la vie ; il y a plus à apprendre de la fréquentation des œuvres—ou plus exactement, il y est contraint car rien de ce qu'il pourrait tirer de son expérience ne saurait surprendre par sa nouveauté intrinsèque. Seule son écriture est une occasion de transfiguration. (101)

For cosmopolitan writers (Thirlwell, Roth or Kundera) originality manifests itself, first of all, through the capacity of readers to appreciate the multifarious quality of literature and interpretation. What distinguishes a writer is therefore his/her capacity to read and reread (and therefore rediscover) past works in order to reinvent at once both their *value* and *invent* new values as regards the tradition of the novel—if only by re-using past techniques in new manners. Writing—original writing—is thus deeply rooted in the act of rereading, itself understood as creation:

> Pendant la course de l'histoire, le concept de tel ou tel art (qu'est-ce que le roman ?) ainsi que le sens de son évolution (d'où vient-il et où va-t-il ?) sont sans cesse définis et redéfinis par chaque artiste, par chaque nouvelle œuvre. Le sens de l'histoire du roman c'est la recherche de ce sens, sa perpétuelle création et re-

[9] "Influence is a complicated thing. There is copying, and copying is simple, but then there is everything else—the more structural, more abstract; more independent influences. These are less influences than steals. They are apprenticeship. Reading ambitiously, a writer is on the lookout for techniques to adapt. And this creates some weird genealogies" (Thirlwell, "Herbert" 270).

> création, qui englobe toujours rétroactivement tout le passé du roman. (Kundera, "testaments" 28)

Following this line of thought, it is conceivable that the future of the novel rests in its past. Literary influence, creation and originality are therefore closely related to the activity of (re)reading and translating—two activities which nurture the relationship between text and reader, the result of which consolidates the act of reading as the cornerstone between past and future: "[anachronism] is a form of reading that consists of the invention of new relationships within literary history. Such a method tends to relativize the traditional hierarchy of the acts of writing and reading, suggesting an inversion" (Rocha 132). Thus, anachronism and cosmopolitanism can respectively stand as novelistic strategies for reinvention and imagination, since "literature is a 'reversible' and 'curved' space where 'individual specificity and chronological precedence' do not apply" (de Obaldia 271) and "where 'each writer *creates* his precursors', and where 'his work modifies our conception of the past, as it will modify the future'" (*ibid*.). Because of the unrestricted scope of cultural and literary appropriations at hand (partly thanks to translation), novelists are free to reinvent the form of the novel as much as they are free to reinvent its history and its values. From this prospective-retrospective perspective, literary influence appears to be a two-way phenomenon, where past and present mingle in a reciprocal reinvention of the other through imagination and curiosity.

As a final observation, we can add that the question of influence in the art of the novel implies the timeless "you and I" dialectic. The novel reminds us of the necessary inclusion of the Other when constructing one's own (literary) identity, what Fuentes calls 'subjective collectivity' as Vincent Message points out:

> [Les romanciers] cherchent à rendre perceptible ce que Fuentes nomme notre "subjectivité collective", c'est-à-dire le fait que la construction de notre identité ne relève pas seulement d'un processus d'individuation qui rend chacun de nous unique, mais résulte aussi de notre inscription dans une collectivité qui nous dépasse. (11)

The art of the novel therefore epitomises the perpetual correlation between imagining and reimagining that Roth's narrator accurately portrays under the guise of a striking *mise en abîme* in *The Counterlife*: "the treacherous imagination is everybody's maker—we are all invention of each other, everybody a conjuration conjuring everyone else. We are all each other's authors." (149)

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