Barthes's Amorous Discourse: Canon in U\textsuperscript{bis}

"Indeed, we often get an impression as though, to borrow the words of Polonius, our bait of falsehood had taken a carp of truth."—Freud, "Constructions in Analysis" (1937)

Roland Barthes describes himself as a child waiting for the return of his mother: "I would go, evenings, to wait for her at the U\textsuperscript{bis} bus stop, Sèvres-Babylone; the buses would pass one after the other, she wasn’t in any of them" (FDA, 14–15). Baby alone, not yet weaned (sevré)—from such an endured absence, Barthes maintains, language is born. He speaks of the child who concocts a bobbin, a spool that he alternately casts out and reels in, "miming the mother’s departure and return" (FDA, 16). Distorted time is transformed into rhythm, and the death of the other (for to the child absence is tantamount to death) is delayed. Barthes’s recent book, Fragments d’un discours amoureux (1977), is likewise born out of an “extreme solitude” (FDA, 1), for it is the discourse “of someone speaking within himself, amorously, confronting the other (the loved object), who does not speak” (FDA, 7). Like Plato’s Phaedrus, it is a text about both love and literature in which discourse about one becomes discourse about the other. In The Pleasure of the Text (1973), Barthes had already spoken of writing as “the science of the ecstasies of language, its kamasutra” (PT, 6). In the Fragments reading the text becomes a model for falling in love, and vice versa. Ostensibly an encyclopedia of the gestures of a person in love (Anguish, Declaration, Exile, Jealousy, Muteness, Night, Obscene, Rapture, Scene, Tenderness, Union, and sixty-nine other “figures”), this book becomes, the more one falls in love with it, a discourse on writing. And
when Barthes writes that "there is always, in the discourse on love, a person whom one addresses, though this person may have shifted to the condition of a phantom or a creature still to come" (FDA, 74), the amorous reader begins to see that he is himself that future phantom, addressed in ignorance by an author who has provided for such an eventuality by setting up his text to turn "like a perpetual calendar" (FDA, 7), a device capable of providing for future events without specifically predicting them.

"Rolling here and there," said Socrates in his denunciation of writing in the Phaedrus, a written text wanders aimlessly like an errant orphan, liable to fall into the wrong hands, unable to defend itself without parental assistance. It is in just such weakness that Roland Barthes founds the discourse that constitutes the Fragments, the roll of the bobbin of the child who takes himself for an orphan. Socrates can argue that writing is but the faint imitation of speech because he assigns its origin to a father whom it may unfortunately outlive, but Barthes's discourse originates in the orphan, and not in the father. There is no father to guarantee a correct reading of the text or to verify its canonicity. Orphancy and errant rolling—no longer reasons not to take writing seriously—thus become precisely what make such a discourse possible.

Barthes was always an orphan; his father, a naval ensign, died in combat at sea when Roland was less than a year old. This paternal absence seems to open up the first break in the alphabetical order of the fragments that make up the autobiographical Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes (1975): Actif/réactif, L'adjectif, L'aise, Le démon de l'analogie, Au tableau noir, L'argent, Le vaisseau Argo, For it is in Au tableau noir, the title that does not really fit between analogie and argent, that the father's name first appears, inscribed on the lycée blackboard along with all the relatives of students who "had fallen on the fields of honor." Uncles and cousins abounded; only Barthes could announce a father: a source of embarrassment, "an excessive mark." When the chalk was erased, Barthes writes, there remained of this proclaimed grief nothing but "the figure of a home socially adrift [sans ancrage social]: no father to kill" (RB, 45; 49). The absent father is equivalent to a missing ancrage—the word that really fits the alphabetical sequence, the word that should have figured in the title but is suppressed, as the father's name was erased from the other tableau noir.

There is another ancre, one that fulfills the same role toward the missing father that the bobbin's course plays in the absence of the mother: encre. In the RB fragment La seiche et son encre, he says of
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his text, “I am writing this day after day . . . : the cuttlefish produces its ink: I tie up my image-system [je ficelle mon imaginaire] (in order to protect myself and at the same time to offer myself)” (RB, 162; 166). He spins such threads of ink, as the child spins out his reel, to fill up an absence; the lover does the same, faced with the silence of the one he loves: “I love you, I love you! Welling up from the body, irrepressible, repeated, does not this whole paroxysm of love’s declaration conceal some lack? We would not need to speak this word, if it were not to obscure, as the squid [la seiche] does with his ink, the failure of desire under the excess of its affirmation” (RB, 112; 116).

These three models of discourse produced in the solitude of an endured absence (the mother: the child’s bobbin on a string; the tie of a paternal anchor: filaments of underwater ink; the beloved: repeated declarations of love, like a squid’s smoke screen) are joined by a fourth: the reader, whose absence the author overcomes by writing a discourse that is true to its etymology: “Dis-cursus—originally the action of running [courir] here and there” (FDA, 3; 7). The fragments of Fragments of an Amorous Discourse invite the reader to join in their running game—in particular, in that French parlor game known as courir le furet, in which the players form a circle around one of their number and pass from hand to hand, behind their backs, a ring; they sing a round, and when the music stops the one in the center must guess who has the furet. Each fragment of Barthes’s book is “offered to the reader to be made free with [pour qu’il s’en saisisse: so that he can seize it], to be added to, subtracted from, and passed on to others.” Sometimes in this game, Barthes continues, “by a final parenthesis” one holds on to the ring “a second longer [une seconde encore—a richly suggestive pause: a second encore, bis? Or, like the resurgent father, a second anchor?] before handing it on. The book, ideally, would be a cooperative: ‘Aux lecteurs—aux Amoureux—Réunis” (FDA, 5; 9).

What is written here, in this penultimate chapter, is situated in that delaying pause, in loco parenthesis. In the same figure (Absence) where he speaks of the Ubis bus and of the child’s game that defers the death of the mother (“To manipulate absence is to extend this interval, to delay as long as possible the moment when the other might topple sharply from absence into death” [FDA, 16]), he also tells the Buddhist parable of the master who holds the disciple’s head under water for a very long time. Little by little the bubbles become rarer; at the last possible moment, the master brings him to the surface: “When you have craved truth as you crave air, then you will know what truth is.” The absence of the other, Barthes continues, “holds my head under-water; gradually I drown, my air supply gives out: it is by this asphyxia
that I reconstitute my ‘truth’” (FDA, 17). Like the Buddhist master, Barthes bathes the reader in an airless expanse; his book threatens to overwhelm, to suffocate the reader (“Writing is . . . a kind of steamroller. . . . It smothers the other” [FDA, 78]) by the fragmentation of its discourse. Its fourscore topics have no definable beginning or end, no apparent direction. “To discourage the temptation of meaning, it was necessary to choose an absolutely insignificant order” (FDA, 8): that of the alphabet.

To realize the “truth” that is at issue here, one must undergo this threatening experience: to be held below the surface of the text until that penultimate moment when one nearly perishes. “Truth is what, being taken away, leaves nothing to be seen but death,” Barthes writes in the figure Vérité, using as an illustration the story of Emeth, the man of clay whose name meant “truth.” He was used as a domestic servant, never allowed to leave the house. His name was written on his forehead. Each day he grew stronger; out of fear, the first letter of his inscribed name was erased, so that all that remained was Meth: “He is dead”—and he crumbled into dust (FDA, 230). Like Emeth, the reader of the Fragments—fascinated by the text, in love with it, believing it somehow to be addressed to him—is a prisoner. And his movements within this house that he is not allowed to leave begin to resemble Barthes’s description of the discours amoureux: “a dust of figures stirring according to an unpredictable order, like a fly buzzing in a room [à la manière des courses d’une mouche]” (FDA, 197; 233).

If only a letter separates truth from death, then what is that letter? What happens when it is discovered? What would happen if it was erased?

From the beginning the front cover of the Fragments in the original French edition both attracts and puzzles, beckoning the reader with a visual fragment, as though offering a glimpse of what lies within. Below the title, and above the threshold of the publisher’s name (Seuil), a detail of a painting in color: two intertwined arms, the hands delicately, barely, touching; a thumb centered precisely on the border between sleeve and wrist. Are these two lovers? Are they not both male?

A primal scene? Writing in the figure Image of the wounding experience of seeing the beloved engaged in tender conversation with someone else, Barthes almost seems to be describing what is visible here: “The image is presented [découpée: literally, “cut out”—which is what the cover is, as we will see], pure and distinct as a letter. . . . I am excluded from it as from the primal scene, which may exist only insofar as it is framed within the contour of the keyhole” (FDA, 132; 157). Yet beyond giving the feeling of having stumbled across a scene
of desire that was already going on before one arrived, this image can itself become an object of longing—not only evoking the reader’s desire to know what is really going on, to complete the puzzle of which this is only a piece, but also charming him, capturing him as one is enthralled by the first sight of the beloved.

The first stage in love’s course, Barthes writes, is “instanteous capture (I am ravished by an image)” (FDA, 197). Consider, for example, Goethe’s young Werther, to whom Barthes returns for forty-nine examples of the gesture of the *amoureux* and who sees his beloved Charlotte for the first time “framed by the door of her house.” Barthes comments on this scene: “The first thing we love is a scene [un tableau] . . . what is immediate stands for what is fulfilled: I am initiated: the scene *consecrates* the object I am going to love” (FDA, 192; 227). Both fragmentation and framing play a role in the mystery of love at first sight; it is possibly because one can see only part of that person that one is free to fall in love—yet somehow, the very part that is framed by that glimpse responds in a marvelous way to one’s own desire. A great deal of chance and “many surprising coincidences (and perhaps much research)” are necessary, Barthes writes, before he can find the one image in a thousand that suits his desire. “Herein a great enigma, to which I shall never possess the key.” What do I desire in this person—“a silhouette, a shape, a mood [un air]” (FDA, 20; 37)?

An R? (pronounced in French as *air*): its P formed by the figure on our left, its remaining limb by the arm of the other, best seen by turning the book at a slight angle. Is that what so attracts us to the image, the key to the enigma of our love at first sight, silhouetted in the keyhole (“a whole scene through the keyhole of language” [FDA, 26–27]) through which we view this primal scene, cut out, “pure and distinct as a letter” (FDA, 132)?

What does it stand for? *Roland*?

Perhaps—but I would like to propose another solution.

Truth, we have seen Barthes say, is that which, once removed, would leave only death. Despite the arbitrary exigency of his alphabetical ordering of topics, *Vérité*, true to its name, occupies the penultimate position. The only one to follow it is *Vouloir-saisir* (*The Will to Seize*), where what is really discussed is *non-vouloir-saisir*, the decision to cease the expression of one’s desire, equivalent in this context to the death of the text, to the end of amorous discourse. Truth does in fact stand last before death.

But it is the figure standing just before *Vérité* in Barthes’s alphabetical ordering, the one that would take over that penultimate place were *Truth* to disappear, that will command our attention in the pages
that follow. In courir le furet, the game to which Barthes likens the way his book might be read, one is invited to hold on to the ring—to one of the eighty figures of the *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*—a second longer, should one wish, before passing it on. *Union*, the antepenultimate figure, will be for us that *furet* here, the piece we will hold on to longer than the others, in accordance with Barthes’s advice; like the cover, it will color our reading of the text.

Each of these fourscore figures is preceded by an “argument” that defines the area of the topic. Here, we read: “UNION. Dream of total union with the beloved.” If an amorous reading of the text leads us to see “the reader” where Barthes says “the beloved,” if indeed one remembers that he described the book in the introduction (Comment est fait ce livre) as a cooperative venture in which readers and lovers are reunited, then this figure, speaking of *union*, comes especially close to evoking the possible *reunion* to which the introduction appeals. The difference between these two words, which is reminiscent of the difference between reading the book as a discourse on love and reading it as a discourse on writing, is practically reducible to one letter, the same letter the cover frames.

Our holding on to the figure *Union* “a second more” will extend this parenthesis just enough to include the cover’s letter, enabling us to read each in light of the other. The first of the four sections into which *Union* is divided speaks precisely of just such a superposition: of *frottis*, scum­ble, the thin, opaque layer of color that a painter sometimes applies to his canvas to change, ever so slightly, the appearance of the colors underneath, while still allowing the grain to show through.

*This is fruitful union, love’s fruition* (with its initial fricative [a mistransla­tion: Barthes’s word here is *frottis*] and shifting vowels before the mur­muring final syllable, the word increases the delights it speaks of by an oral pleasure; saying it, I enjoy this union in my mouth). (FDA, 226; 267)

The best name for the dream of total union with the beloved, Barthes has been saying in what leads up to this passage, is “the *fruition* of love.” He can taste the union it denotes already, before its fulfillment in reality, just by saying it. The initial sensation, in turn, of this prior pleasure is *fr*—itself named best as *frottis*, while the name *frottis* itself bears the same relation to *fr* as *fruition* to *union*, for it not only names, it but embodies it as well in its own enunciation. The cover of *FDA* bears the same *frottis* in the first two letters of its title, *FRagments*. And it displays a more literal *frottis* as well: that splash of color that catches our eye the first time we see the book, and that cannot but color, however faintly, our reading of its contents.
There is a text behind the painting of which this is a detail. The back cover of the *Fragments* permits us to begin the reconstruction of that larger context, telling us the source of the cover’s fragment: a painting by Verrocchio (or, more likely, by one of his students: authorial attribution will be a continuing problem here), *Tobias and the Angel*, a scene from the Apocryphal story with which we are now familiar. Here, at least, the reference is explicit. Yet we don’t know who is responsible for it—was it Barthes who chose the picture, or was it just an editor at Seuil who decided to put a gloss on the cover (of which this is a gloss)? If one reason for its being there is to cause us to meditate on the Apocryphal story at the same time as we read the book, is there any limit on how far we may go into such a double reading? This question poses itself with all the more force when one realizes that a deep enough reading of Tobit will bring to the surface an exact analogue to the very problem that the presence of the picture on the cover raises: Tobit’s fatherly benediction to his son on the eve of his voyage had ironically invoked the angelic guide who, in the form of a disguised Raphael, would indeed accompany him—“Go with this man; God who dwells in heaven will prosper your way, and may his angel attend you” (Tobit 5:16). Tobit was in that extraordinarily lucky position, although he did not know it then, of being able to cause something to come about just by naming it. Barthes, similarly, can enjoy the dreamed-of union by pronouncing the right name for it, *fruition*; one might well wonder if something akin to this is going on in the evocation of the Tobias story itself by the fragment on the cover: Tobit had no idea that his prayer that an angel accompany his son was at that very moment being answered. Do the *Fragments* betray an awareness that they are accompanied by the Apocryphal book of Tobit?

Barthes surrounds his amorous discourse with a certain aura of innocence. Like Socrates’ errant, rolling orphan-text, it does not really know where it is going:

> a constraint in the lover’s discourse: I myself cannot (as an enamored subject) construct my love story to the end: I am its poet (its bard) only for the beginning; the end, like my own death, belongs to others; it is up to them to write the fiction, the external, mythic narrative. (*FDA*, 101)

Any reading of the *Fragments* must therefore run the risk of being noncanonical, of standing outside the text—as the books of the Apocrypha rest precariously on the edge of the Bible. Yet the author sanctions precisely this activity, asking the reader to continue the story he has begun: “Only the Other could write my love story, my novel” (*FDA*, 93). One is asked to accompany the text, to guide its desire, to play a role curiously like that which Barthes attributed to Fourier’s *Angélilcat*,...
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which "conducts desire: as if each man, left to himself, were incapable of knowing whom to desire . . . blind, powerless to invent his desire" (SFL, 119). Fragments d'un discours amoureux, indeed, is dedicated to an angel:

I dedicate the dedication itself, into which is absorbed all that I have to say:

"À la très chère, à la très belle,
Qui remplit mon cœur de clarté
À l'ange . . . " (FDA, 77)

Although this dedicatee is reduced to silence, although "your own discourse seems to you to be suffocated under the monstrous discourse of the amorous subject," Barthes reassures us that the angel, despite his silence and because he is desired, has, all the same, a certain role to play (as the reader is silent and yet desired: as this book is the discourse "of someone who speaks within himself, in love, facing the other [the loved one], who does not speak"):

In Teorema, the "other" does not speak, but he inscribes something within each of those who desire him—he operates what the mathematicians call a catastrophe (the disturbance [dérangement] of one system by another): it is true that this mute is an angel. (FDA, 79; 94)

The beloved, the silent other, the angel: the reader, Raphael—his initial inscribed ("he inscribes something within each of those who desire him") on the cover, formed by the union of those two figures? The angel R.: danger, dérangement?

Meanwhile—we recall—Tobias and Raphael continue their journey, along which they will find the river and the jumping fish. On the angel's advice Tobit's son will catch the creature, open it up, and put its inner organs to specific uses. If we thought we saw the father in the fish when, reading Irving and Fowles, we found a floating father (Old Thak), a water-buried one (John Marcus Field), or a fatherly friend compared to a salmon (Dr. Grogan), we ought especially to see Barthes's father in that light; as irrepressible as the leaping fish that frightened Tobias, Ensign Louis Barthes (RB, 184), though buried at sea and erased from the blackboard of his son's lycée, surfaces again in the name of the school, in the sign (the enseigne) above the door, Louis-le-Grand (RB, 44; 49).

In the fragment Au tableau noir, ancrage was the word that would have fit the alphabetical sequence of titles, and that therefore, though at first lost and hidden within the body of the text, is lifted to a position of prominence. The same double action of concealment and display is characteristic of the squid and its ink, and of Barthes, in a passage
already quoted: “I tie up my image-system (in order to protect myself and at the same time to offer myself).” In the FDA figure Cacher (To Hide), Barthes gives this subject a carnival context: “Larvatus prodeo: I advance pointing to my mask: I set a mask upon my passion, but with a discreet (and wily) finger I designate this mask” (FDA, 43). The occasion for this comment is La Fausse Maitresse of Balzac, in which a man hides his love for the wife of his best friend by pretending to love another woman, whom he parades to the woman he secretly loves in a Mardi Gras masquerade. The double movement of concealment and display is intensified in this carnival scene by the fact that, although the beloved woman thinks he is unaware of her presence in the crowd of spectators, it was precisely because he knew she would be there that he invited the fake mistress—and by the fact that he reveals the pretended mistress through the disguise required by a masked ball: Larvatus prodeo.

On the last page of RB, Barthes writes of the usefulness of a “Carnival esthetic,” a way to recuperate both violence and “the monster of Totality” (RB, 180); and at the end of Au tableau noir, he writes of a “carnivalesque affinity” between the fragment (the form his discourse assumes) and the dictée (the kind of extemporaneous composition that was the peculiar forte of the lycée professor whose idea it was to write Barthes’s father’s name, among others, on the blackboard). It is almost as if the figure of the father were surfacing again in the person of that professor who displayed an admirable “ease in composition” (RB, 45) in his ability to improvise dictées on any subject, no matter how far-fetched—as does Barthes, in The Circle of Fragments: “Take the words: fragment, circle, Gide, wrestling match, asyndeton, painting, discourse, Zen, intermezzo: make up a discourse which can link them together. And that would quite simply be this very fragment” (RB, 93).

Fragmentation is a kind of violence (Tobias fragmented the fish); writing in fragments prevents a monstrous totality from commanding the text, from subordinating it to a unified meaning. Elsewhere in RB (in Science Dramatized, where he also expresses his delight in learning of Saussure’s anagrams) Barthes writes of the “carnivalesque overturning” of traditional learning that would follow from the idea that “there is no science except of differences” (RB, 161). Robert Schumann (the composer, in fact, of Carnaval, a collection of subtitled fragments) is according to Barthes the man who best understood and practiced “the esthetic of the fragment,” in which each piece is sufficient in itself and is yet “but the interstice of its neighbors” (RB, 93). The two words in Au tableau noir on which we have been focusing our attention,
ancrage and carnavalesque—partly because of their ties to other parts of the text (ancrage/ancre to the squid’s encre; carnavalesque to the discourse on the fragmentary esthetic), partly because of their reincarnation of the father (no social ancrage because the father is already buried at sea; the lycée professor as the quasi-father of Barthes’s fragmentary discourse) —suggest their own difference: if we fragment them, doing the same violence that Tobias performed on the fish, we would find that they give rise to a name for this very violence—CARN/aval + ancr/AGE CARN/AGE: a word that is itself the exact anagram (that is, the breaking-apart and rearranging) of the paternal ancrage. Does this ancrage, the father’s trace, then conceal a carnage, and thereby offer a way to commit the murder Barthes complains he cannot perform: “No father to kill . . . : great Oedipal frustration!”? Could the father’s “excessive mark” be thus violated, broken and redistributed, so as to mark that very violence? (Carnality, by definition, excludes fish. But carnaval is defined by reference to fish: carnem levare, the putting-away of meat, the last moment that meat can be enjoyed before Lent, a penultimate celebration.)

Raphael’s instruction in the use of the fish is the scene depicted in the painting, the center of which Barthes has taken for his cover fragment. It is Tobias’s hand that is so ambiguously placed on the angel’s. In turn, Raphael’s right hand holds a golden box that will contain the drugs that the fish provides. Tobias’s left hand, beyond the frame Barthes gives us, holds the receipt for the debt he will collect, and the fish. Barthes fragmented the painting and took out its heart, quoting it out of context for his own ends. One could easily imagine that one of them was to provide a graphic example of what The Pleasure of the Text describes as the most erotic part of a body: “where the garment gapes” (PT, 9), the border between skin and cloth, where Tobias is placing his thumb—or better, the flesh-revealing slits in Raphael’s sleeve. Indeed, surely one reason the cover is so attractive is that it seems at the same time to uncover, to allow us a glimpse of something else.

Although we have portrayed it as a jeu de société (the parlor game known as courir le furet), reading Barthes’s Fragments is, of course, a solitary activity. Faced with the silence of the other (of the author: as the lover discourses in the face of the silence of his beloved, as the child casts out his reel), the reader (who, although invited to project himself into the role of the angel on the cover, must also imitate Tobias, breaking open the text to find its gall, operating to remove its ophthalmic obstruction: making its opaque cover transparent) is in danger of
wandering off on a trackless path, and needs some occasional sign that he is on the right road—if not an angel, perhaps a fish: we will reel in two more before this discourse is over.

The route we charted for ourselves, the reader may remember, was that projected by the figure Union, supplemented by the picture affixed to the cover of the book. The first of that figure’s four sections spoke of a frottis; the second has even more clearly a visual concern: how to draw the androgyne whom Aristophanes describes in Plato’s Symposium, an impossible task. The third likewise seeks to figure out the image of a couple, that of the perfect union. To accomplish that, according to Barthes’s dream of the ideal, each partner would have to be able to substitute himself for the other, “as if we were the vocables of a strange new language, in which it would be absolutely legitimate to use one word for the other.” But since each object of his love falls short of such an interchangeability, Barthes dreams instead of coalescing them all into one: “for if I united [si je réunissais] X, Y, and Z, by the line passing through all these presently starred points, I should form a perfect figure: my other would be born” (FDA, 228; 270). What Barthes says here in a lover’s context, we would say concerning our relation to his text—although we would prefer to use his own words to declare it: “Only the reading loves the work, maintains with it a relation of desire. To read is to desire the work; it is to want to be the work, to refuse to double the work in words other than the work’s own” (CV, 78-79). To double the work, using its own words, in order to be loved by the object of our love: to form “out of all these points” a double—in particular, another U (Union being the only figure to begin with that letter in the Fragments), a Ubis: long-awaited vehicle.

All of this might have seemed possible as long as we remained in the role of the mute angel to whom Barthes addresses his text, Raphael to his Tobias. But we realized that we were also Tobias, breaking open and redistributing the elements of the Fragments as he had done with the fish, and thereby in danger of doing something more than reading, for “to write is in a certain way to fracture the world (the book) and to redo it” (CV, 76). And “to pass from reading to criticism is to change desires, to desire no longer the work, but one’s own language” (CV, 79). To pass from Raphael to Tobias, to assume fully the latter’s role, would in fact be to develop a new desire, one directed not toward Barthes’s text but elsewhere. Indeed, Tobias found that the fish had an erotic application as well. Along the way, Raphael tells him about Sarah and her misfortunes and strongly suggests that Tobias is the best man for her, that with the fish’s heart and liver he will be able to win her
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definitively by frightening away the demon: "‘Do not be afraid, for she was destined for you from eternity . . . ’ When Tobias heard these things, he fell in love with her and yearned deeply for her" (Tobit 6:17).

This is not the first time our role has changed, however, for we were once what has become in this Apocryphal urtext the irrepressible fish, submerged, made to suffocate by the refusal of Barthes's amorous discourse to reveal a clear direction, a single sense. The pause in which we have been writing is not only the "second encore" for which we hold on to the furet/figure Union, but also the prolonged moment endured by the Buddhist disciple. Like the fish, and like the absent father, the reader too must surface. But if we become that fish, then once we emerge from the confinement that we have sought to escape, the discourse of the text, we are no longer in control of our own discourse; we are subject to another's fragmentation, another's desire.

This ability to play all three roles (angel, son, fish), this necessity to run from one to another to trace our androgynous double of the text, gives us an interchangeability like that which Barthes seeks in his "other," the "perfect figure" that would be formed by the reunion of "X, Y, and Z." But in saying that, are we not in danger of projecting ourselves into Barthes's love story, as would a naïve reader of sentimental fiction? Or as would Barthes himself, who confesses in the figure Identification that he not only projects but "adheres" to the image of the love in a romantic novel?

I devour every amorous system with my gaze and in it discern the place which would be mine. . . . I am to X what Y is to Z. . . .

. . . Werther is in the same place as Heinrich, the madman with the flowers, who has loved Charlotte to the point of madness. . . . A hallucination seizes me: I am Heinrich! (FDA, 129–30)

Besides Barthes, who indeed is Heinrich? The network in which he figures, Goethe's Werther, is to Barthes's amorous discourse as his figure Union is to ours (ultimately, a W behind our double U): a preexisting text from the lecture regulière (FDA, 8; 12: a regular, methodical reading, as of a breviary) of which Barthes constructs the Fragments. In Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, he mentions, among other future projects, taking a classical text and relating everything in daily life to it for a year, making of that book a calendar (RB, 153). In The Pleasure of the Text, he contemplates the reversal of origins that makes an earlier text seem to emerge from a later one (Flaubert, for example, from Proust), and describes Proust as his mandala: his reference work, his "circular memory," as the letters of Madame de Sévigné were for Marcel's grandmother and chivalric novels forDon Quixote (PT, 59). Goethe's Sufferings of Young Werther is manifestly that for Barthes's
Fragments, appearing in a category of its own in the tabula gratulatoria at the end of Barthes's book in its original French edition, placed between the friends whose conversations are among his sources and the sixty-nine authors from B to W (Balzac to Winnicott) whom he quotes.

Heinrich is a man who was once a fish. In the letter of 30 November 1772, written less than a month before his suicide, Werther describes an "apparition" that was certain to have given him pause. As he was walking by the river, he saw in the distance a man in a green coat crawling among the rocks, appearing to be looking for herbs. Werther approached him and asked what was the object of his search. "I look for flowers, but find none." Werther then pointed out that this was not the season for flowers, but the stranger insisted that they ought to be there in abundance. A strange smile distorted his face when Werther asked what the flowers were for.

"If you won't give me away," he said, pressing his finger to his lips, "I've promised my girl a bouquet." ... "And what is her name?" "If the Estates General would pay me," he replied, "I'd be a happy man. Now it's all over with me. Now I am ... " A tearful glance to heaven told everything. "So you were happy?" I asked. "Oh, I wish I were again," he said. "At that time I was as happy, as merry, as light as a fish in water." (W, 69)

"Heinrich!" an old woman cried out—it was his mother, calling him home to eat. Werther took the opportunity to ask her about her son. He has been docile for the past six months, Werther learns; until then he had been raving mad, lying in chains in the madhouse for a whole year. She would have continued, but Werther interrupts to ask what Heinrich meant by that time when he was so happy: it was when he was out of his mind, confined in the asylum, knowing nothing of his condition.

This struck me like a thunderclap. I pressed a coin into her hand and left her in haste. "When you were happy!" I exclaimed, walking swiftly toward the city, "When you felt as happy as a fish in water!" (W, 70)

This image affects Werther deeply. "Lord in Heaven! Have You so decreed men's fate that they are happy only before they attain the state of reason and after they have lost it again?" He continues in this vein, comparing the man's melancholy to his own. The letter concludes with this passage:

Father, Whom I do not know! Father, Who once filled my whole soul but now turn Your countenance from me, call me to You. ... Could a man, a father, be angry if his son returned unexpectedly, threw his arms about his neck, and cried: "I am back, father! Be not angry because I cut short my journey, which it was your will that I should endure longer." (W, 70–71)
In a recent book on Goethe’s novels, E. A. Blackall takes this quasi-prayer of Werther’s to be a “particularly revealing comparison of himself with the Prodigal Son.” Yet the father in the New Testament parable never sent his son on a journey (“which it was your will that I should endure longer”); it was the son who wanted to leave, “squander[ing] his inheritance in reckless living” (Luke 15:11–14). Werther is indeed using biblical imagery here, but we are reminded not so much of the Gospel’s Prodigal Son as we are of the Apocryphal Tobias when in Goethe’s text we encounter a young man

whose father has sent him on a journey: Werther addresses his heavenly Father, begging forgiveness for returning prematurely from the earthly pilgrimage on which God sends every man; his suicide, which he contemplates in this moment, would constitute both the admission of his inability to fulfill what his Father expects of him and the means to return home;

who is charged with the mission of retrieving a sum of money: the very first letter Werther writes from the country village where he has gone at the beginning of Goethe’s novel and where he will fall in love with Charlotte indicates that one reason he has traveled there is to collect for his mother a legacy that had been held back

who goes down to the river and meets a frightening fish: like Tobias, Werther experienced the shock of *déjà vu*, seeing himself in Heinrich; in his next letter we learn that the uneasiness he experienced in seeing this man who was once a fish was uncannily accurate: The woman the madman loved was Charlotte;

who falls in love with a girl who is described to him en route by his traveling companion, and who turns out to be a distant relative:

Barthes: Charlotte . . . will be pointed out to him before he sees her; in the carriage taking them to the ball, an obliging friend tells him how lovely she is. *(FDA*, 136)

The Book of Tobit: When they approached Ecbatana, the angel said to the young man, “Brother, today we shall stay with Raguel. He is your relative, and he has an only daughter named Sarah. I will suggest that she be given to you in marriage, because you are entitled to her and to her inheritance, for you are her only eligible kinsman. The girl is also beautiful and sensible. (6:9–12)

Goethe: “Cousin?” I said, as I offered my hand. “Do you think I deserve the good fortune of being related to you?” “Oh,” she said with an animated smile, “We would be sorry if you were the worst among them.” *(W*, 13)
But if Werther is following in the footsteps of Tobias, he does not share in his predecessor’s success. His journey is not successfully completed nor is his father’s charge fulfilled; he comes to a premature end. Unlike Tobias, however, he had no accompanying guide—the last sentence of the novel, Barthes takes pains to point out (for the sentence forms the alternate title of the figure Seul), is “no clergyman attended” [pas un prêtre ne l’accompagnait: Barthes’s American translator is more faithful to Goethe than he is to Barthes] (FDA, 210, 249).

As a suicide, Werther was denied Christian burial; like the Apocrypha, which though not accepted into the canon is granted space on the edge of the Bible, Werther’s body will lie on the outer margin of hallowed ground:

In the churchyard there are two linden trees, at the rear in the corner, toward the field; there I wish to rest... I do not expect Godfearing Christians to lay their bodies near that of a poor, unhappy man like me. (W, 94)

Goethe’s reader is reminded here of two other trees, those whose destruction sparked a remarkably ill-tempered outburst from Werther: “Cut down! I could go mad, I could murder the dog who struck the first blow at them” (W, 62). These, too, were planted in quasi-hallowed ground, the parsonage yard, and their demise was caused by an unwelcome resurgence of interest in the question of biblical canonicity. The wife of the new pastor had pretensions to learning and found that their shade made it difficult to read. Her studies involved “meddling in the investigations concerning the canonical books... Only such a creature could possibly have cut down my nut trees” (W, 62).

In biblical terms a book is noncanonical if it is not divinely authorized. We are on similarly apocryphal ground when we read Werther through the frottis of the story of Tobias, a perspective we owe to Barthes’s having chosen a fragment of it (the fragment from Verrocchio’s painting of the story) to grace the cover of his book, for the object of our analysis has no secure authorial origin: we cannot be certain that what we are reading is Barthes reading Geothe reading Tobit. Who is the father of this text, of this configuration of wandering orphans?

Is what we are reading coming into existence as we read it? “Is it my future that I am trying to read, deciphering in what is inscribed the announcement of what will happen to me, according to a method which combines paleography and manticism?” (FDA, 214) Barthes provides a footnote to this paleographic reference that speaks to our own concern, citing a character in Balzac’s Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan: “A knowledgeable woman can read her future in a simple
gesture, as Cuvier could say, seeing the fragment of a paw [patte]: this belongs to an animal of such-and-such a size, etc.” (FDA, 214; 253). Cuvier’s reconstruction itself appears in Barthes’s text as a fragment whose original context, like that of the prehistoric creature, can be restored—one has only to reread the Balzacian short story from which it has been borrowed. This paw fragment is surely a privileged, handy example, bearing a remarkable resemblance to the paleographic reconstruction we have already performed on the hands on the cover of the Fragments. And this activity itself resembles Barthes’s description of how one falls in love, enthralled, enraptured by “an unknown image (and the entire reconstructed scene functions like the sumptuous montage of an ignorance)” (FDA, 194). The beloved is unaware of his effect on the lover, who sumptuously builds upon this innocence. Barthes writes of this as if he were speaking innocently of how one falls in love: yet each of the three examples he gives of the “innocence of the image” that the lover stumbles across points unmistakably to that image on the cover whose fascination is such that it can induce the reader to fall in love with Barthes’s book. They are not, perhaps, so innocent:

When Werther “discovers” Charlotte (when the curtain parts and the scene appears), Charlotte is cutting bread-and-butter. What Hanold [in Jensen’s Gradiva] falls in love with is a woman walking (Gradiva: the one who comes toward him), and furthermore glimpsed within the frame of a bas-relief . . . Grusha, the young servant, makes a powerful impression on [Freud’s] Wolf-man: she is on her knees, scrubbing [frotter] the floor. For the posture of action, of labor, guarantees, in a way, the innocence of the image. (FDA, 193; 228)

Food-slicing, walking, and polishing (frotter/frottis), although presented here as the most indifferent of activities, are not without their counterparts in what we have seen in Barthes’s choice of a cover: Tobias will cut open the fish and, after removing certain vital organs, eat it; the two figures caught in Barthes’s frame are walking, advancing on an ancient journey; it is Barthes, like the maid, whom we stumble upon putting a polish, a frottis, on his text. His own commentary on the innocence of this housework suggests that we were led to find him in this position, decorating his book with an image that suggests only lovers and not a story about how texts are read, as if he chose the fragment for its color and its immediate usefulness, not for its original context:

The more the other grants me signs of his occupation, of his indifference, of my absence, the surer I am of surprising him, as if, in order to fall in love, I had to perform the ancestral formality of rape, i.e., surprise (I surprise the other and thereby he surprises me: I did not expect to surprise him). (FDA, 193)
The woman who could read her future as Cuvier could read the past is Diane d’Uxelles, princess of Cadignan; the man whose gestures she interprets is Daniel d’Arthez, a writer who until now had devoted all his energy to his work, leaving no time for pleasure, and who was profoundly ignorant of women. At the age of thirty-eight, his writings have finally brought him financial success: “You have justified your heraldic device,” a friend tells him, “which forms the pun so sought after by our ancestors: ARS, THESaurusque virtus.”

A “female Don Juan” (SP, 42), the princess has had a multitude of lovers; she and d’Arthez would form a very unlikely pair were it not that she shares with him the quality of never having experienced love: “I have been amused, but I have not loved” (SP, 19). Mutual friends, confident that each would fulfill the other’s deepest desire, arrange an initial encounter. It is an unqualified success: “D’Arthez let love penetrate his heart in the manner of our uncle Tobie, without the least resistance . . . The princess, that beautiful creature . . . became, vulgar though the evil of these times may have made the word, the dreamed-of angel” (SP, 38).

Daniel falls in love like Laurence Sterne’s Toby—but also, strangely, like Tobias (in French, Tobie), for each (1) falls in love with a woman who, paradoxically, has had a number of lovers/husbands and yet no real lover/husband, (2) is introduced to the woman by a matchmaking mutual acquaintance, and (3) follows in the footsteps of a Raphael: D’Arthez’s “incomprehensible” attachment to an ignorant woman of the lower class—a liaison that preceded his encounter with the princess and that constituted his first sexual adventure—is “justified” by the example of the painter Raphael as the lover of his model, the vulgar Fornarina (SP, 25). But that earlier attachment is in fact a prefiguration of d’Arthez’s affair with Diane d’Uxelles, for the comparison with Raphael and his model was made by a close friend (with the similarly angelic name of Michel Chrestien) who himself had been, long before d’Arthez, in love with the princess—and of whom the narrator of Les Secrets says, “He could have offered himself as a model in this genre [the genre Raphael-La Fornarina], he who saw an angel in the duchess of Maufrigneuse [Diane’s former name]” (SP, 25). Michel, who died in the civil disorders of 1832, fulfilled the role of guide for Daniel, in whom he confided his hopeless desire for Diane, thereby laying the groundwork for d’Arthez’s later passion. It is because he knew the late Chrestien that he came to meet Diane, who wanted to learn from him the details of Michel’s adoration: “Without knowing it, Daniel was to profit from these preparations due to chance” (SP, 35). D’Arthez had followed the footsteps of his angel-named friend in the most literal of
ways: accompanying Michel as he ran alongside the princess's carriage, he tells her, "struggling against the speed of your horses, so as to keep ourselves at the same point on a parallel line, in order to see you . . . to admire you!" (SP, 32). The purpose of the meeting arranged between d'Arthez and Diane was ostensibly to share reminiscences of their late mutual friend, but its result was that Daniel came to desire "to inherit the estate of Michel Chrestien" (SP, 34). Diane, for her part, fell in love with Daniel; he gave her the love that she had never known. Their ending was a happy one—though the reader's satisfaction is somewhat tempered by these concluding words: "[D'Arthez's] publications became excessively rare" (SP, 65).

Raphael, Tobie—what is in a name? Daniel's, when broken apart, like Tobias's fish, yields a double content, art and money. In Diane's estimation, d'Arthez has a fish's value: "I would willingly apply to my great Daniel d'Arthez what the duke of Albe said to Catherine de Médicis: The head of one salmon is worth those of all the frogs" (SP, 59). Only the angle (the angel/l'ange Michel who brought them together?) of an L separates his first name from Diane's: they were destined by their names, perhaps, to embrace in a perfect reunion of love. DANIEL/L/DIANE: do these shared letters not possess an androgynous quality, a successful and graphic depiction of what Barthes says he could not draw in the figure Union, the bisexed creature Aristophanes bisects in the Symposium?

But it is Daniel's last name that really seems to possess a mantic, predictive power. Consider the puzzle pieces that Barthes's text provides:

Emeth, the household servant whose fate it was to lose the first letter of his name, thereby changing its meaning fatally;

d'Arthez, the writer who fell in love, whose name is broken open to reveal ARS and THES;

Barthes, the writer in love, whose name can be broken apart, its first letter dissolving into the transparency of a frottis, thereby becoming the name of his fictive predecessor—(B)Arthez—and causing Balzac to predict Barthes.

One fragment remains to be examined in the figure Union, the furet we have chosen to play with in the circular game to which the Fragments invites us, over which we linger "by a last parenthesis . . . a second more" before handing it on. After the frottis, the androgyne, and the search for the perfect other, a companion with interchangeable roles, there is this:
4. Dream of total union: everyone says this dream is impossible, and yet it persists. I do not abandon it. "On the Athenian steles, instead of the heroicization of death, scenes of farewell in which one of the spouses takes leave of the other, hand in hand." (FDA, 228)

The hands insist (the hands that play the game of the _furet_, the hands on the cover, the hand that Cuvier reconstructs), and so does Barthes's impossible dream of (re)union. Sometimes such an insistence induces the dreamer, to whom it means so much, to tell the dream; and therein lies a danger, as he describes it in the _RB_ fragment _The Galloping Induction:_ "Temptation of reasoning: from this, that the narrative of dreaming [ou de _drague_: or of sexual conquest] excludes its auditor (from the pleasures of its referent), to induce that one of the functions of Narrative would be to _exclude_ its reader" (RD, 98; 102). Yet the real danger, Barthes is saying, lies in the "galloping," hasty, and therefore false conclusion that what is true of dream-telling is true of storytelling. In the same fragment he counters this precipitate induction with the contention "that narration is in no way projective"—that the storyteller does not put himself into the picture of what he is telling (as Barthes does, literally, in the case of a painting of a polar landscape in the _Fragments_, seeing himself in his sadness seated on one of the ice floes: "this void requires that . . . I project myself there" [FDA, 133]). What we are writing here is likewise nonprojective, or at least means to be, since it is but a presentation of some of Barthes's recent texts on their own terms, in their own words. Yet, as in a dream, there are images and words that insist, as does, to borrow an example from Barthes's own discourse, _galopante_ in the title. It has connotations (running, equitation) that are foreign to the fragment, as if, like the reader, it were excluded from that discourse. But if we listen to its insistence, we will find it again, elsewhere in the Barthesian context. It takes a great deal of luck, "many surprising coincidences (and perhaps much research)," Barthes writes in a passage we have quoted before (FDA, 20), "before I can find the one image in a thousand that suits my desire." Taking him literally, we could follow a train of coincidences to find that image, tracing a recurring clue through the four modern pretexts to our reading of the _Fragments_ (_Werther_, _RB_, _Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan_, and _La Fausse Maîtresse_):

Barthes returns to _Werther_, the book from the "regular reading" of which he constructed the _Fragments_, forty-nine times.

The fragment of _Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes_ to which we have most often returned, the one that bears the absent but insistent "excessive mark" of the father and the one that is the source of our
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reading the Fragments through the frottis of the story of Tobit and Tobias, is Au tableau noir, appearing on page 49 of the French text.

The one passage that Barthes quotes in Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan, the one that concerns Cuvier’s patte, from which we were able to make a paleographic (restoring its context in Balzac) and mantic (revealing the context Barthes gives it in the Fragments) reconstruction, occurs on page 49 of the edition he uses (Pléiade, volume 6).

The reconstruction of that patte, both in a past (Balzac) and a future (Barthes) sense, would not be adequately carried out if it did not extend to the other Balzacian text that is sufficiently important to be listed (and listed first, thanks to Barthes’s mastery of the not-so-innocent use of the alphabet) among his textual sources in the tabula gratulatoria at the end of the Fragments. When it is, it reveals a Paz (a name that, Balzac takes pains to point out, “is pronounced like it is written,” Paç [FM, 20]13—rather like paws [pattes]), the man who concealed his love for one woman by conspicuously displaying his pretended love for another. The carnival scene that is the consummation of his efforts, in which he parades the fake mistress before the one he really loves, disguising and revealing her at the same time through this masquerade—a paradox that is recaptured in Barthes’s phrase Larvatus prodeo, when he discusses Paz in the Fragments (FDA, 43)—is found on the same page of the Fausse Maîtresse (Pléiade, volume 2) as the patte in the Secrets, 49.

This trail of four forty-nines seems to lead us on, step by step, as if towards some discovery, as the angel once led Tobias. When we open up this page, as he broke open the fish, we find once again what insisted, through its excessive connotation, in the RB fragment on induction: the prodeo (“I advance”) of Barthes’s Latin phrase, the step (pas), the dance in which Paz and his pretended mistress are engaged, is the galop.

At four a.m. on the Mardi Gras of the year 1838, the countess, enveloped in a black domino and seated on the steps of one of the amphitheaters of this Babylonian hall . . . saw defile before her in the galop Thaddeus [Paz] as Robert Macaire conducting the horsewoman in the costume of a female savage, her head adorned with plumes like a horse of a coronation carriage. (FM, 49)

Malaga,14 the fake mistress, is a circus equestrienne, “who knows how to dismount and remount a horse at the fastest gallop . . . to stand tiptoe and then fall sitting on the horse’s back, still at a gallop” (FM, 38). These are Paz’s words, as he proclaims to the woman he really loves
that he adores his mistress for these very qualities. On both occasions the galop is for the reader of the story the sign of what is false about Paz’s mistress. It is inseparable from Malaga; it masks, and yet displays, incarnating both terms of Barthes’s carnivalesque phrase Larvatus prodeo.

We can recall another dance, one not so apparently charged with meaning: Werther’s first dance with Charlotte—the day he first saw here, when he fell in love. But that scene of a country ball conceals (and yet can reveal) evidence for another reading, one that will enable us to account for yet another train of coincidences. Werther has been waiting for some time to dance with Charlotte; the opportunity at last comes when it is time to dance a rather difficult step. Although it is customary for a lady’s escort to perform this dance with her, Charlotte’s partner is a poor dancer, and so she asks Werther. Knowing how to dance is thus of the utmost importance for Werther; knowing what they danced has its importance for us as well (just as it did in the case of Balzac’s bal masqué):

“Who is Albert,” I said to Lotte, “if it is not impertinent to ask?” She was on the point of answering when we had to separate to form the big eight, and it seemed to me her brow looked pensive as we crossed each other. “Why should I keep it from you? . . . Albert is a worthy man, to whom I’m as good as engaged.” (W, 16)

Thunder and lightning bring the dance to a premature conclusion. The shutters are closed, to allay the fears of the ladies. Charlotte proposes the distraction of a game, arranging the chairs in a circle and giving instructions.

“We’ll play counting,” said Lotte. “Now pay attention. I’ll go around the circle from right to left, and you count off in turn, each saying the next number in the series, and it must go like wildfire, and anyone who hesitates or makes a mistake gets his ears boxed.” (W, 17)

It is important not only to know how to dance but also how to count. If we pay attention to what they are dancing (die grosse Achte, a great figure eight that traces the plot of the novel: an encounter, a separation during which Albert intervenes, and a reunion tempered by the knowledge that they can never unite) and if we count, then we will come across the beginning of an intriguing coincidence—that Werther is an epistolary novel composed of eighty-eight letters.

If Werther is paying attention and is counting, then he will see that when he saw Charlotte for the very first time, framed in the doorway of her home and surrounded by her brothers and sisters, he was being invited, having been granted the status of cousin, to be the eighth in
that intimate circle—since he tells us there were six children. And, finally, this might constitute for him a clue—in addition to the others we have already seen—that he was following a path traced by an Apocryphal text, since for Sarah, Tobias was the eighth.

Yet not quite finally, for Barthes’s *Fragments d’un discours amoureux*, which he tells us is based on a “regular reading” of *Werther*, is, as we know, made up of eighty chapters, “figures.” And if we count once more, we will find that the *tabula gratulatoria* of all its sources—friends (nine), *Werther*, authors (sixty-nine), and a group of composers, a painter, and a film-maker (nine)—numbers eighty-eight entries. Goethe’s novel, Barthes’s *mandala* for this text, stands metonymically for all its “pretexts,” and whether one takes *Werther* or the entire *tabula*, of which it forms a principal part, the *Fragments* exemplify the formula $88^{80}$.

Baptismal fonts were customarly octagonal, the number eight signifying rebirth, its form having the shape of the mathematical symbol for eternity, tracing the path of an eternal return. There is an 8 missing in $88^{80}$, room for another twist, space for the reader to turn, to handle, even to pinch, the text.

The round that is traditionally sung when the *furet* is made to run suggests another kind of circular model for the relation that the *Fragments* allows for between reader and text. Each singer sings the same melodic line, each following the track of his predecessor. The voices never conclude at the same time (and this distinguishes it from a fugue, where various adjustments make the conclusion musically satisfying for each line), but would go on forever in search of a resolution.

Werther’s journey through life is cut short by his suicide. We have seen, however, that the road he takes has been traveled before. Though he travels it alone, from the perspective allowed us we can see that he accompanies Tobias at a distance, like a voice in a round or a canon, one measure or more behind the first; and consequently when that first voice comes to the end of its melodic line, his own end is premature. When Daniel d’Arthez ran alongside Michel Chrestien, together they traced a similar parallel to the princess’s carriage; the step Paz and his partner execute is also a round dance, “le galop, cette ronde du Sabbat” (*FM*, 49).

And the pleasure of a canon lies not in any one of its lines but in the way they are combined—reunited, as Barthes writes of the lover, the reader, he seeks:

out of all these points . . . I would form a perfect figure: my other would be born.


4. Noted also, but without reference to the father, by Alain Rey in “Le Corps aux miroirs,” p. 1017.

5. *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*.


8. *Critique et vérité*.


13. *La Fausse Maîtresse*.

14. Whose name is an amalgam, artificial construction *par excellence*. 