Coda: Wolf, Pirsig, Barth

As the reader may have guessed, this montage of Fowles, Irving, and Barthes found its origin in the *Fragments'* scumble, the cover's glaze whose appeal was such that it seemed to call out for gloss, even though its authorship was unknown. Of doubtful canonicity in that sense, its presence nevertheless insisted, demanded some response. What resulted seems in turn to have been predicted by the words with which Barthes spoke of the image—Gradiva walking, Charlotte cutting, Groucha polishing—that compels love at first sight:

"I cannot get over having had this good fortune: to meet what matches my desire; or to have taken this huge risk: instantly to submit to an unknown image (and the entire reconstructed scene functions like the sumptuous montage of an ignorance)." (*FDA*, 194)

Not knowing who put the Apocryphal *frottis* on the cover of the book (nor, if it was the Barthes who wrote its contents, why—the hands? the sexually ambiguous embrace? the transparent, half-slit sleeve?), ignorant as Tobit's son, I set out in search of what was vaguely promised, unaware that I would find a way to dissolve the opacity of that glaze in a reading that would correspond so extravagantly to the story it represented: the surface I was scratching here, as the scales fell from older eyes, would become, eventually, the thing it had been in the very beginning, indecorous bird-dribble (*158PM*, 140). But before it did, the journey would have lengthened far beyond any original intent, extending to texts not heard of, to some not yet written, its direction, and most
certainly the impulse to its completion, furnished by that partially uncovered image. The last example Barthes cites when he writes, in the passage alluded to above, of the image that makes one fall in love comes closest to the situation that his cover generates; for while the other two find echoes in the story behind the cover’s scumble (as I argued in the last chapter), the third finds its counterpart in the frottis itself: the Wolf-Man’s fascination is something the reader who falls under the cover’s spell can also experience. Speaking of the deep impression Groucha makes on Freud’s famous client, Barthes recalls that she was polishing [frotter] the floor and that the work-posture somehow guarantees the image’s innocence. She wasn’t really trying to seduce him, but, unaware of his presence, was engaged in the most ordinary kind of work—though it would be wrong to conclude that he must have simply read into it some private obsession, for it is according to Barthes the innocence itself (as the frottis put on Barthes’s book may be innocent of all but the most commonplace associations—hands, a mysterious touching union, see-through sleeves) that caught his eye, something in the occasion (as there is something in the opportunity the cover’s glaze presents that can seduce the reader into imagining that its finishing touch leaves the book unfinished) that made him think that the object of his gaze was in some way accessible, open, available.

The reading of Barthes just presented here is in fact a reading of that space between the frottis of the angelic embrace and the text that follows it; its text is that space. Its occasion prompted the preceding readings of Irving and Fowles, and that it did is perhaps as much a result of chance as William Legrand’s discovery of the coded instructions on the underside of his scarab drawing in Edgar Poe’s illustration of how one can, to borrow Polonius’ words, by indirections find directions out (the Gold-Bug’s protagonist found his way to the treasure buried beneath the skull on the tree only by stumbling across the truth, and then only because the drawing he himself had made, to give the narrator a picture of the insect of the title, happened to coincide with the outline of a skull traced invisibly on the other side [GB, 59]). By a singular coincidence, the kind of gloss that is visible in Barthes through the Wolf-Man’s eyes was added to the cover of Irving’s best-selling book, a finishing touch that would irretrievably color its readers’ image of the text, by another Wolf: “A kind of wet finish glazed the photograph” that Garp’s editor John Wolf put on the front of The World According to Bensenhaver (WAG, 338). He put it there without the author’s permission, and in fact made certain he wouldn’t see it until it was too late to change it by sealing the advance copy of the front cover in an envelope, and that envelope in another, and by not giving
it to him until just before Garp got on a plane for Europe. “Blown up in black and white, with grains as fat as flakes of snow, was a picture of an ambulance unloading at a hospital”—a small, covered body; futility in the unhurried attendants’ faces. The wet-looking glaze, its graininess, “and the fact that this accident appeared to have happened on a rainy night” gave it the look of a cheap newspaper shot, “any catastrophe . . . any small death.” Garp could only think of Walt; his readers, once they saw the other photo, the one on the back, would only be able to think of the disaster that did in fact give rise to the novel: the novelist and his sons, pictured in happier days, with the caption, “T. S. GARP WITH HIS CHILDREN (BEFORE THE ACCIDENT)” (WAG, 338–39). Such exploitation for the sake of sales was as distressing to Garp as Wolf knew it would be; T. S. sat in the plane “feeling disgust at the people he imagined buying the book,” and at himself for having written a book that could lend itself to such an appeal (WAG, 340). He had only been given the first photograph; had he seen the second and “the jacket-flap description of his novel and his life, at that time, he might very well have taken the next plane back to New York” (WAG, 339). What John Wolf did, however, was not only commercially effective (“Years later, Helen would remark that the success of The World According to Bensenhaver lay entirely in the book jacket” [WAG, 328]) but, in a larger perspective than he could know, critically accurate: the wet finish glaze of the photograph that was itself a gloss on the book, Wolf’s paternal gesture that would assure its success in the world, lays stress on an aspect of the accident that had already held our attention as an insistent but necessary detail from the older, Apocryphal story. The moist glaze and heavy obscuring grain (“as fat as flakes of snow”) interfere with our view of the scene, and with Garp’s, making it resemble blurred, not entirely recognizable newsprint, and contribute to one’s notion of the weather (“the accident appeared to have happened on a rainy night”)—but what Wolf’s frottis also does is to bring back to our attention, and possibly Garp’s, the actual cause of the accident, the sleet-frosted shroud of a windshield that Garp had refused to scrape clean and that ensured he wouldn’t see the car parked at the end of his driveway.

(A lycanthropic reading of not only Barthes and Irving, but also Fowles, is possible; even in the latter one is constrained, in the case of Daniel Martin, to see things through the disguise of a wolf’s eyes: the author projects himself into the novel in the name of the hero of the novel his hero will write. “You can’t use your own name in a novel,” Jenny McNeil tells Daniel. So why not a name like S. Wolfe, from the back of the phone book? “‘As in lone. But with an e.’ She runs her
finger down a list of names. 'That's it. S. You can't get more wriggly than that'” [DM, 17]. The letters of Fowles's name flow through the surface of his characters' imagination like light through a magnifying loupe [with an e], coming out on the other side twisted and rearranged—where the degree of blur and the reversal of the image depend on how closely you look.

(Though a wolf too often announced is not always believed, this parenthesis could be stretched to include one more variation on our non-canonical theme seen through eyes that become increasingly wolflike:

(Robert Pirsig's Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, which a few years back enjoyed an American popular and critical success akin to that of Garp, is about a son who heals his father's affliction at the end of a journey whose itinerary undergoes a considerable but rewarding modification because of a certain Sarah, and along which an accompanying ghost goes too, one who knows the route because he has taken it before—a familiar story by now, but one that appears in one more guise, in a variation on the original that inverts the relationships of father, son, and ghost. Whereas in Tobit the persons of father, son, and angel were fairly distinct [through there is reason to believe the resurrection fish is, at the moment of its sudden appearance, in some measure the father], G. E. Gerould, reading Tobit in the context of the Grateful Dead stories, suggests a secular interpretation of the Apocryphal tale: that Tobias's traveling companion was not there as a result of divine intervention but was a function of the story itself, being the ghost of the man whom Tobit buried, aiding the son in gratitude for the father's kindness. Gerould's thesis is that Tobit, which we have seen as a theme whose variations recur in Fowles, Irving, and Barthes, is itself a variant on The Grateful Dead, though in that case it would be a variant whose own existence preceded the earliest known instance of its original, an interesting but perhaps not totally impossible state of affairs: that the inner logic of Tobit [to borrow Hofstadter's phrase] is such that it compels some of its subsequent variations to make the original that they imitate look like a variation on themselves. While the Raphaels that influence Irving's Trumper and T. S. Garp are definitely not ghosts but real people, even Ralphs, Fowles's Daniel Martin makes use of the possibility that the guiding angel may be a ghost by making him Anthony's; and since in Anthony, whose appearance coincides with the father's death, Daniel saw his father's spirit [DM, 71], the "familiar compound ghost" who leads Daniel to Jane [DM, 604] is in fact the ghost of the ghost of the father.

(Pirsig's ghost is, like Daniel Martin's, a version of the father; it is the father's former self, Phaedrus, a ghost who returns to haunt the
hero [who is the father] because, though disintegrated by electric shock treatment, he was never given a proper burial:

In the first grey of the morning what Chris said about his Indian friend’s grandmother came back to me, clearing something up. She said ghosts appear when someone has not been buried right. That’s true. He never was buried right, and that’s exactly the source of the trouble. [ZAMM, 63]

Chris is the son, young enough to ride behind his father on a motorcycle trip west across America—so that although, as in the Apocryphal narrative, the father makes the son [who is at times reluctant] make the journey, he goes with him this time. The traveling companion, full of instructions as before, is now no longer a substitute for the father but the father himself. Yet the father bears within him a ghostly double, his past self who when he was Phaedrus was seized with a passion for Quality, and it was in the course of his search for the meaning and origin of this elusive concept that he went insane.

(Along the journey west, he passes through places that he recognizes because Phaedrus has been there before. As they continue, the trip becomes more and more a retracing of the intellectual journey that he had made when he was Phaedrus, and his ghost’s threat to reappear becomes increasingly real. That earlier journey, the search for Quality, had been set in motion by something a certain Sarah had said, a “seed crystal,” a sentence said almost not quite seriously, like “a grain of dust or . . . a sudden scratch or tap on the surrounding glass” that will cause a supersaturated solution to begin to crystallize. Pausing by his office at a midwestern university where he was teaching freshman composition, this Sarah, an elderly lady classics teacher in her last year before retirement, said, almost teasingly, “I hope you are teaching Quality to your students”—

and within a matter of a few months, growing so fast you could almost see it grow, came an enormous, intricate, highly structured mass of thought, formed as if by magic. [ZAMM, 175]

What he had been looking for already, in his dissatisfaction with the traditional approach to teaching English composition—a subject that he realized was “undoubtedly the most unprecise, unanalytic, amorphous area in the entire Church of Reason”—in which it seemed that rhetoric had become a set of effects one added after the fact, “pasted on to the writing after the writing was all done” [ZAMM, 170], now suddenly began to assume a more definite shape, crystallizing around a single word, Quality, and the search for its definition.
“Is Quality a part of Greek thought?” he had asked.

“Quality is every part of Greek thought,” she had said, and he had thought about this. Sometimes under her old-ladyish way of speaking he thought he detected a secret caniness, as though like a Delphic oracle she said things with hidden meanings, but he could never be sure. [ZAMM, 328-29]

The search led him to ancient Greece, Sarah’s academic specialty, and in particular to pre-Socratic rhetoric, for which the person of Phaedrus, Socrates’ foil in the dialogue of that name, became in his eyes an exemplary figure. “Did I ever talk about an individual named Phaedrus?” he will later ask of a friend on the motorcycle journey west. “He was an ancient Greek . . . a rhetorician . . . a ‘composition major’ of his time.” Phaedrus and his fellow rhetoricians were vilified in Plato’s writings as Sophists, and these “first teachers in the history of the Western world” have stood condemned all this time, he came to believe, with no one to come to their defense. “The Church of Reason . . . was founded on their graves. . . . And when you dig deep into its foundations you come across ghosts” [ZAMM, 166]. The Sophists’ bones were buried “so deep and with such ceremoniousness and such unction and such evil that only a madman centuries later could discover the clues needed to uncover them, and see with horror what had been done” [ZAMM, 376]. Phaedrus, who did not at that time call himself by that name but whose real name is never given, took himself to be that madman.

(In his subsequent study of philosophy at the University of Chicago, in a department living in the aftermath of the Great Books Program, he encountered the Phaedrus of Plato. Something akin to the inner click that Sarah’s question had earlier caused must have happened here, for his adoption of Phaedrus’ name dates from the experience of reading this text in class, a setting that becomes a battleground for a conflict of interpretations. The Chairman, teaching the class, maintains that Socrates’ description of the soul as a charioteer guiding two horses, a white and a black one, is the absolute truth [“Socrates has sworn to the Gods that it is the truth!” (ZAMM, 383)]; Pirsig’s hero raises his hand to say that all this is just a fiction, “an analogy,” taking the text as his witness [referring evidently to 246a, where Socrates says that only a god could tell what the nature of the soul really is, “but what it resembles, that a man might tell. . . . Let it be likened to the union of powers in a team of winged steeds and their winged charioteer”].

Earlier in the class, he had earned the teacher’s approval with an insight into the meaning of the name of Socrates’ companion:}
Coda: Wolf, Pirsig, Barth

“I believe that in this dialogue the person of Phaedrus is characterized as a wolf.”

. . . “Yes,” the Chairman says, and a gleam in his eye shows he now recognizes who his bearded assailant is. “Phaedrus in Greek does mean ‘wolf.’ That’s a very acute observation.” He begins to recover his composure. “Proceed.” [ZAMM, 381]

Phaedrus the wolf "is carried away by Socrates’ discourse on love and is tamed,” but Pirsig’s Phaedrus, though impressed by the dialogue’s poetry and power ["It is an immortal dialogue, strange and puzzling at first, but then hitting you harder and harder, like truth itself" (ZAMM, 380–81)], is not so tamed; for he senses in the Phaedrus, particularly in Socrates’ second speech on love, the palinode that he gives to atone for his earlier, blasphemous one, “a faint odor of hypocrisy. The speech is not an end in itself, but is being used to condemn that same affective domain of understanding it makes its rhetorical appeal to” [ZAMM, 378]. The same could be said, although Pirsig’s hero doesn’t, about the dialogue itself; for it closes with Socrates’ notorious condemnation of writing [that, as Thamus told Theuth, it is not an aid to memory but to forgetfulness, the mere and possibly misleading image of speech (274d–275e)] yet it is, perhaps more than anything else, a written text.

(Refusing to be tamed by the dialogue, and assuming a wolflke ferocity and cunning as he prepares to take on the Chairman, Pirsig’s Phaedrus is truer to his name than was Socrates’, though he only comes to have this name because Phaedrus first had it. “When a shepherd goes to kill a wolf, and takes his dog to see the sport,” he observes as he watches another student, who had witnessed an earlier attempt on the Chairman’s part to entrap Phaedrus, turn on the teacher, "he should take care to avoid mistakes. The dog has certain relationships to the wolf the shepherd may have forgotten" [ZAMM, 384]. If Sarah’s question about Quality was the seed crystal that caused his own uneasiness with the traditional teaching of rhetoric to crystallize around an all-consuming quest for an understanding of that word, his encounter with the Phaedrus was the catalyst that brought on the more dangerous phase of his intellectual voyage. His eventual madness seems to find its origin in his growing identification with Socrates’ fellow traveler along that path beyond Athens’ walls [“Phaedrus meets Socrates,” as our Phaedrus retells the story, “who knows only the ways of the city [his emphasis], and leads him into the country” (ZAMM, 382)]; he becomes more Phaedrus than Phaedrus. Such an implied claim on the part of a latecoming variation of being stronger than the original it
imitates is one that we might well have reason to consider when reading Fowles, Irving, and Barthes in their relation to Tobit. At the risk of imitating Phaedrus' projection of his own quest onto Plato's dialogue, we might also feel a crystallizing jolt—a tap on the glass that brings everything together, allowing an intricate structure to emerge from the relationships, until now invisible, floating in the text—through a similar coincidence of names, wondering if Pirsig did not choose his names with the same care that his hero attributes to Plato: reading Pirsig as his Phaedrus reads Plato, ought we to see our Sarah in his?

(The outline of the Apocryphal tale is indeed traceable here, in this story of a long journey at the end of which father and son are at last reunited, the son recognizing in the stranger who has been making him take this trip his real father, the ghostly Phaedrus who was killed but came back at the end, becoming more unburied as the journey progressed, and ultimately responsible for guiding them there in the first place. Early in the book Pirsig's hero has a sense that this is true:

There, out in the window in the dark—this cold wind crossing the road into the trees, the leaves shimmering flecks of moonlight—there is no question about it, Phaedrus saw all of this. What he was doing here I have no idea. Why he came this way I will probably never know. But he has been here, steered us onto this strange road, has been with us all along. [ZAMM, 36]

Like Tobit, who unwittingly invoked the angel's guidance ["and may his angel attend you" (Tobit 5:16)] and like Barthes's Fragments d'un discours amoureux, whose angel on the cover implies an Apocryphal guidance that its text secretly elaborates in the richness of its relation to Goethe, to Balzac, and to Barthes's own life, Pirsig's invocation of the Phaedrus makes it possible to see connections between his text and Plato's beyond those made explicit in the novel—Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, whose title announces the union of entities as far apart as A and Z, seems almost to arise out of the conjunction of these two texts, Phaedrus and Tobit, one explicitly present in the novel and the other not, neither of which could reflect an awareness of the other's existence. Socrates' palinode, for example, over whose truth value Pirsig's hero and the Chairman clash, has at its origin a ghost: Socrates says he is imitating Stesichorus, who wrote a palinode to recover his sight, taken from him by the Dioscuri in retaliation for his first poem's defamation of their sister Helen [Phaedrus, 243ab]. What Stesichorus did to change his story was simply to declare that it was not Helen who was seduced by Paris and thereby became the cause of the Trojan War, but a ghost that was such a perfect likeness no one knew the difference. The very issue over which Pirsig's Phaedrus
and the Chairman fought was a similar one, whether Socrates’ palinodic speech, with its description of the soul as two horses and a charioteer, was the truth or merely an image. To say that writing is just the “image” of speech, as Socrates would later say in the dialogue, is to give it the same name as Helen’s ghost, an *eidolon* [in the *Republic*, 586c]. But Pirsig’s hero’s growing awareness along the shared transcontinental journey that Phaedrus has been there before him [“and then in the brilliance of the next lightning flash that farmhouse . . . that windmill . . . oh, my God, he’s *been* here! . . . that is his road” (*ZAMM*, 28)] can induce an even stronger experience of *déjà vu* in that reader who is led by Pirsig’s intriguing use of Plato to go back and read the *Phaedrus*. For not only is it a dialogue about a ghost [a phantom that haunts the margin of that text in a suggestive way, almost invisibly, lending itself as an allegory for the nature of writing], but it is also the story about a shared journey along a path where something remarkable, and perhaps a little terrifying, happened long before:

**Phaedrus**: Tell me, Socrates, isn’t it somewhere about here that they say Boreas seized Orithyia from the river? [*229b*]

The value of this anecdote, hidden near the beginning of the *Phaedrus*, for understanding the dialogue has grown, or ought to, since two fairly recent glosses: one, in Jacques Derrida’s “La Pharmacie de Platon,” that the fact that it was while Orithyia was, as Socrates tells it, “at play with Pharmacia” that she “was blown by a gust of Boreas down from the rocks” [*229c*] prefigures the danger Socrates will himself be in when he plays with the *pharmakon*, the “drug,” as Socrates calls it, of writing [in the form of the speech of Lysias’ that Phaedrus reads aloud to him, and then in the speech that Socrates composes in response to it, an imitation that is presented as an improvement on the original, while still adhering to Lysias’ theme—that the nonlover’s advances should be preferred to the lover’s]; the other, in Léon Robin’s note to his edition of the *Phaedrus* concerning the topography of the dialogue, that Socrates’ answer to Phaedrus’ question about where it was that Orithyia met her fate locates the event farther along the river Ilissus [“where you cross to the sanctuary of Agra” (*229c*)]—precisely at the spot where Socrates himself will almost cross it, but will hold back at the last minute in obedience to his inner voice:

**Socrates**: At the moment when I was about to cross the river, dear friend, there came to me my familiar divine sign—which always checks me when on the point of doing something or other—and all at once I seemed to hear a voice, forbidding me to leave the spot until I had made atonement for some offense to heaven. [*242bc*]
It is at this point, at the very place where Orithyia was swept away by Boreas' nordic blast, that Socrates suddenly realizes that he is likewise in danger of being overly inspired, "enthused" \([\text{enthousiaso} (241e)]\), caught up in the dangerous eloquence of his own discourse. He breaks off his speech in midstream, the one that he had been composing in response to the one that he had heard Phaedrus read, and begins to speak of Stesichorus, of his blindness and recovery, and of his own need to atone for the speech that imitated Lysias’ with one modeled after the truer poet (“truer” even than Homer, who never grasped the reason for his blindness (243a)), Stesichorus.

(Pirsig's hero's problem is that he had recanted too, had taken back what he had as Phaedrus said, had abandoned that lonely journey toward Quality in order to gain release from the mental ward to which it had led him:

> What I am is a heretic who's recanted, and thereby in everyone's eye saved his soul. Everyone's eyes but one. . . . If I hadn't turned on him I'd still be there, but he was true to what he believed right to the end. That's the difference between us, and Chris knows it. And that's the reason why sometimes I feel he's the reality and I'm the ghost. [ZAMM, 396]

Socrates' daimonic inner voice spoke at the water's edge, at a particular spot haunted by an earlier event; Pirsig’s hero’s ghostly former self, which from time to time along the journey west seemed to respond to the stimulus of a familiar place, threatening to break out of its half-buried state, reemerges definitively at the end, at the water's edge. Fighting an urge to run for the cliff overlooking the Pacific, he confronts and tries to comfort his son:

> Everything is all right now, Chris.
> That's not my voice. [ZAMM, 401]

It is Phaedrus' voice, and henceforth [for we are at the end of the novel] his real one, its emergence signaling the end of the journey—a journey that was threatening to end at “the bottom of the ocean” [ZAMM, 393, 400].

> After a while he wails, “Why did you leave us?”
> \(\text{When?}\)
> “At the hospital!”
> \(\text{There was no choice. The police prevented it.}\)
> “Wouldn't they let you out?”
> \(\text{No.}\)
> “Well then, why wouldn't you open the door?”
> \(\text{What door?}\)
> “The glass door!” [ZAMM, 402]
What Chris is remembering is the moment when he came with his mother to visit his father at the hospital, a scene of which Phaedrus has his own memory, in a dream that recurs at night along the journey. In his nightmare the glass door of the mental ward becomes the transparent door of a coffin. “Not a coffin, a sarcophagus. I am in an enormous vault, dead, and they are paying their last respects.” Chris motions for him to open the door. “He wants me to tell him, perhaps, what death is like.” But Phaedrus can’t open it; he can only call out:


The rendezvous—father and son reunited in a watery grave—is kept, almost; that it isn’t, though father and son do get as far as the ocean’s edge, is due to Chris’s saving intervention. He refuses to accept his father’s self-diagnosis; prompted perhaps by the sudden return of his father’s original voice, he is ready to affirm that his father was never really insane, that the only problem is that his father’s real self, Phaedrus, has been hidden away all this time and that he wants him back.

Now the fog suddenly lifts and I see the sun on his face makes his expression open in a way I’ve never seen it before. . . .

“Were you really insane?”
Why should he ask that?
No!
Astonishment hits. But Chris’s eyes sparkle.
“I knew it,” he says. . . .
I haven’t been carrying him at all. He’s been carrying me!
“I knew it,” he said. It keeps tugging on the line, saying my big problem may not be as big as I think it is, because the answer is right in front of me. For God’s sake relieve him of his burden! Be one person again! [ZAMM, 403–4]

How did it happen? How did Chris’s father become whole again? How did the story come to know it had reached the end? One looks for some sign, something new enough to constitute a break with the immediate past, that indefinitely prolonged journey, something familiar enough to make it possible to recognize the destination, now at hand. The ocean, of course, sets a natural limit to their westward course; it is also the place where Phaedrus, when he was insane, said he’d meet his son. But they turn south at that point, and could have continued indefinitely; and father and son do at last meet somewhere short of the ocean’s floor. There must be something else, and there is, something both strange and, ultimately, familiar: the very first thing one sees in that penultimate but final [in terms of plot] chapter, the one piece that was missing in
the crystallization that will allow one to see the Apocryphal Sarah in Pirsig's, the guiding angel in the ghost who "steered us onto this strange road," and Tobias in the son with the power to heal his father:

In the morning I'm stopped by the appearance of a green slug on the ground. It's about six inches long, three-quarters inch wide and soft and almost rubbery and covered with slime like some internal organ of an animal. [ZAMM, 393]

Not yet a fish, this seemingly eviscerated apparition, which multiplies to fill the area and block Phaedrus' path ["I see another slug and then another—my God, the place is crawling with them" (ZAMM, 394)], will later fade into an atmosphere of genuinely oceanic viscera ["the ocean smell of rotting organic matter is heavy here" (ZAMM, 396)]. It gives him pause, a halting jolt ["I'm stopped"] that sets the tone for what will become the last day of the journey. Like the woman Jane and Daniel found floating in the reeds, or the rabbit in Fishacre Daniel saw die and then eviscerated with the knife he would use to carve his signature, or Irving's cobblestones "wet with fish-blood . . . flecked with intestines" [158PM, 138] whose residue prefigures the spermatic bird-dribble that will obstruct a father's vision by staining the windshield [as a white glaze of windshield ice will blind another father in a later Irving book], this last-minute emergence of an internal organ, with its accompanying odor of oceanic decay, testifies to the power of the accompanying older story—the Apocryphal text that, like Phaedrus' ghost, seems, especially now, to have been guiding Pirsig's traveling companions all along.)

A certain sense of astonishment (surely akin to that which Phaedrus experienced—in the story just recounted—before the sudden and then suddenly proliferating spectacle of visceral molluscs), if not incredulity, would occur to any reader of Fowles, Irving, and Barthes who realized the common ground, as insistent as the recurring bass of the thirty (now forty-four) Goldberg Variations, that unites these otherwise disparate works in ways of which even their authors may be unaware. It is true that one is more likely to encounter a run of recurring events if, having already seen a few, one remembers to look for more; it is also true that the realization in question may at some point become one in the musical sense, a working-out of material already there—something more than a simple notation of already evident facts. But it is also true that drawing that part of the music which is not set down out of that part which is, Dowland's way of describing the solution of enigma canons, has been the goal proposed from the beginning for this set of Apocryphal variations.
Douglas Hofstadter, whose insights into the “pulling-out” process common to canons and DNA likewise proved useful in the framing of that initial ambition, writes at greater length about the Goldberg Variations, including the fourteen new-found puzzle canons, in the same place where he talks about the difficulty of knowing where an ending comes, a problem inherent to circle canons and in particular to these. His *Gödel, Escher, Bach* is organized into alternating chapters of technical discussion—where he elaborates his argument drawing together the three names in his title, as well as the realms of mathematics, drawing, and music—and dialogues in which a cast of recurring characters appear and where the concepts taken up in the technical chapters are first introduced in more down-to-earth, though fanciful, fashion. “Aria with Diverse Variations,” intercalated between chapters twelve and thirteen and named after the Goldberg’s original title, justifies its own title by treating three apparently different issues in such a way as to make them variations on the same theme:

the problem of how to know when what one calls the Goldberg Variations is finally what will at some indeterminate future date be known by that name—for the recent discovery of fourteen new variations, all puzzle canons, has raised the question of when the canon will ever be closed, in the biblical sense: what if some day more Goldberg variations are found? If that should happen, “we shall start to expect this sort of thing. At that point, the name ‘Goldberg Variations’ will start to shift slightly in meaning, to include not only the known ones, but also any others which might eventually turn up” [*GEB, 393*] (that name had undergone a major shift long before, ever since the collection somehow became associated with the name of its interpreter. Goldbach was a harpsichordist in the court of the insomniac Count Kaiserling, who commissioned Bach to compose a set of variations to fill his sleepless nights, and rewarded him with a golden goblet filled with Louis d’or),

the problem raised by the Goldbach (sic) Conjecture (first raised in 1742, the same year that Bach wrote the Goldberg Variations, as Hofstadter’s Tortoise points out to Achilles, it states a fact that appears to be true but unprovable: “Every even number can be represented as a sum of two odd primes” [*GEB, 394*]. It cannot be proved because, like the imagined quest for the last Goldberg Variations, it is a search that cannot be guaranteed to terminate),

and the problem of how to avoid letting the reader know ahead of time when the book he is reading is going to end: the physicality of the book tends to give it away, the Tortoise points out; he suggests
Johann Sebastian Bach's hand-annotated fourteen canons based on the first eight notes of the aria of the Goldberg Variations (Cote MS 17669, Bibliothèque Nationale). Reproduced by permission of the Chef de Conservation du Département de Musique, Bibliothèque Nationale, and Editions Salabert.
some extra printed pages at the end that would be part of the story but would "serve to conceal the exact location of the end from a cursory glance, or from the feel of the book." But Achilles notes that what is printed on these pages would have to resemble not only normal printed pages but also the pages of the real story itself, for even a cursory glance at one story will often be enough to tell it apart from another. The Tortoise replies that that's what he's always had in mind, a "post-ending ending" (like the quodlibet at the end of the Goldberg Variations, which was also called, earlier in Hofstadter's dialogue, a post-ending ending; the thirtieth and final—until Christoph Wolff's discovery—variation, it introduces "extraneous musical ideas having little to do with the original Theme—in fact, two German folk tunes" [GEB, 392]. But now it appears that this post-ending ending is followed by another, as the number of variations has increased from thirty to forty-four) that would follow the real ending without a break and look like a continuation yet be in reality "utterly unrelated to the true theme." But, Achilles objects, if the resemblance is close enough to work, it may be too close, and the reader won't be able to find the ending. What if, however, one could effect the transition from genuine story to extra pages "in such a way that, by sufficiently assiduous inspection of the text, an intelligent reader will be able to detect where one leaves off and the other begins"? One could plant certain clues:

*Tortoise*: Such as a sudden shift of letter frequencies or word lengths? Or a rash of grammatical mistakes?

*Achilles*: Possibly. Or a hidden message of some sort might reveal the true end to a sufficiently assiduous reader. Who knows? One could even throw in some extraneous characters or events which are inconsistent with the spirit of the foregoing story. A naive reader would swallow the whole thing, whereas a sophisticated reader would be able to spot the dividing line exactly. *(GEB, 403)*

Hofstadter loses no time presenting the same puzzle to his readers. Shortly after this point in the conversation, Achilles makes the Tortoise a present of a certain Very Asian Gold Box, filled with Louis d'or.

*Tortoise*: Now whatever has come over you, Achilles? Well, thank you for your outstanding generosity, and I hope you have sweet dreams about the strange Golbach Conjecture, and its Variations. Good night. *(GEB, 404)*

Suddenly there is a knock at the door. It is the police, in hot pursuit of a very gold Asian box recently stolen from the museum. Achilles leads them straight to his friend the Tortoise, trembling behind a piece of furniture, and accuses him of the crime. They take him away.
Three clues, all already described in the conversation of these apparent friends, have been given to alert the reader to the fact that he has already read past the ending without realizing it: extraneous characters (the police), events inconsistent with the spirit of the story (Achilles' treason), and a rash of typographical mistakes: what is missing from "whatever . . . outstanding . . . Golbach" signifies by its absence what it in absentia spells, the e-n-d.

Fowles exploits the same situation in *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, though in an opposite way, informing his reader a hundred pages before the end "And so ends the story" (*FLW*, 264). This happens, by considerable coincidence, in the forty-fourth chapter; the forty-fifth, like the yet to be discovered post-forty-four Goldberg Variations that Hofstadter's Achilles predicts, opens up a whole other set of possibilities:

And now, having brought this fiction to a thoroughly traditional ending, I had better explain that although all I have described in the last two chapters happened, it did not happen quite in the way you may have been led to believe. . . . The last few pages you have read are not what happened, but what [Charles] spent the hours between London and Exeter imagining might happen. (*FLW*, 266)

The last third of Fowles's novel thus becomes a "post-ending ending," in which the endings are multiple: chapter sixty, the penultimate, would have us believe that, despite Sarah's rough words, she does in the end forgive Charles, and that the two are united at last. But the next chapter goes back for another look at their hostile exchange and gives the story a different twist: "You have not only planted the dagger in my breast, you have delighted in twisting it," Charles had said on page 355, at the point when his anger peaked, to be followed by apologies and reconciliation. He says the same words on page 362, in the second version of the scene—but this time there is no turning back; all hope of reunion is gone.¹⁰

John Irving shows a similar reluctance to conclude—or perhaps the opposite, a special zeal for overkill. His *The World According to Garp* ends with an epilogue that follows all his characters to their end. Is it necessary to the story (or, like Achilles' projected fake ending, full of new characters and extraneous events)? The fact is that, like Barthes's *tabula gratulatoria*, whose presence counts (in a literal sense) in the *Fragments d'un discours amoureux*, Garp's epilogue contains at least one piece of information necessary for a proper reading of the novel: Mrs. Ralph's real name (*WAG*, 421).
It seems that Hofstadter uses his post-ending sections similarly, putting information there that is not only not found before but that is also capable of changing the way his text is read. As with Barthes's *Fragments*, it calls for a closer reading than one is usually expected to give of such things as indexes and bibliographies, and it requires the reader to count (not, after all, surprising in a book on mathematics); like Irving's last-minute revelation of the name Garp could never remember (but which, in retrospect, can be seen to have been active beneath the surface in the two stories he wrote in the wake of his encounter with its bearer), it concerns the discovery of the complete version of a name. In the "Aria with Diverse Variations," itself constructed on the model of the work whose original title it borrows, Hofstadter is able to weave his voices together all the more tightly through the remarkable coincidence of the Bach Goldberg Variations' and the Goldbach Conjecture's appearing in the same year (a year that serves as the first example of a number having the Goldbach property:

*Achilles:* Tell me—when was it that Bach wrote these celebrated variations?
*Tortoise:* It all happened in the year 1742, when he was Cantor in Leipzig.
*Achilles:* 1742? Hmm . . . That number rings a bell.
*Tortoise:* It ought to, for it happens to be a rather interesting number, being a sum of two odd primes: 1729 and 13. (*GEB*, 393).

But he wouldn't have been able to do that had it not been for a certain "fellow named Wolff" who

heard about a special copy of the Goldberg Variations in Strasbourg. He went there to examine it, and to his surprise, on the back page, as a sort of "post-ending ending," he found these fourteen new canons, all based on the first eight notes of the theme of the Goldberg Variations. So now it is known that there are in reality forty-four Goldberg Variations, not thirty. (*GEB*, 392)

Hofstadter couldn't have made the pun on the names of the composer, the music (the performer for whom it was written, actually: like the name Irving saved for last, the real name has been displaced by a borrowed one), and the mathematician, or at least he couldn't have made it work, had it not been for Wolff's news about the reopening of the Bach canon, for it is on the now suddenly open-ended nature of the Goldberg Variations that the analogy rests. But Wolff's role may not end there—for Hofstadter, like Bach, left something to be discovered in his back pages. If the author of *Gödel, Escher, Bach* is so intrigued by the coincidence of Bach, Goldberg, and Goldbach that he constructs an imitative (in two senses) dialogue around it, why does he conceal

*Goda*: Wolf, Pirsig, Barth
the fact that the discoverer of the open-ended Goldbach property and
the discoverer of the reopening of the Goldberg canon have the same
first name (or almost: as close as the names whose resemblance has
already been called into play)? He doesn't conceal it very well, of
course—only enough to let the reader think he discovered it first. Yet
the two pieces of information must have already existed in the author's
mind, that reader will imagine, lying there at least to the extent that
they lie in the index at the end of the book, each at the top of the right-
hand column on a right-hand page (there are only ten such locations,
among some 1,530 entries):

Goldbach, Christian, 394, 395
Wolff, Christoph, 392
(GEB, 765, 777)

One could echo Achilles' remark ("Chris and [the] Wolff? Hmm . . . Those names ring a bell"), but it would be more to the
point to pursue the other piece of information stored in the back of this
book whose last word (yet not the last: this is precisely the point) is
RICERCAR (GEB, 742), an encouragement to search. Following that
advice, though not knowing precisely what to look for, one might eventually begin to read seriously the other post-ending section, the bibli-
ography—or, what would lead in the end to the same thing, one could
return to the "Aria with Diverse Variations" for a closer look at the
dialogue that set this train of events in motion. There, just before the
Tortoise begins to speak of the possibility of a book's post-ending ending,
there is mention of another, curious book that seems to be either the
very book one is reading or its imagined double (or perhaps, like Phae-
drus, its former self):

Tortoise: Speaking of terminating and nonterminating processes, and
those which hover in between, I am reminded of a friend of mine, an
author, who is at work on a book.
Achilles: Oh, how exciting! What is it called?
Tortoise: Copper, Silver, Gold: an Indestructible Metallic Alloy. Doesn't
that sound interesting?
Achilles: Frankly, I'm a little confused by the title. After all, what do
Copper, Silver, and Gold have to do with each other?
[They consider other titles.]
Tortoise: I'll tell my friend. He'll be delighted to have a catchier title
(as will his publisher).
Achilles: I'm glad. But how were you reminded of his book by our dis-

cussion?
Tortoise: Ah, yes. You see, in his book there will be a Dialogue in which
he wants to throw readers off by making them SEARCH for the ending.
Achilles: A funny thing to want to do. How is it done?
Coda: Wolf, Pirsig, Barth

Tortoise: You've undoubtedly noticed how some authors go to so much trouble to build up great tension a few pages before the end of their stories—but a reader who is holding the book physically in his hands can FEEL that the story is about to end. (GEB, 402)

And he goes on to describe his prescriptions for how to keep the reader guessing until, and maybe past, the very end. The book with the problematic title that features a dialogue just like the one we're reading really exists; at least Hofstadter's bibliography would have us believe it does: between Martin Gardner and Kurt Gödel one can find


It now appears that both the bibliography and the index are integral parts of Hofstadter's book, real post-ending endings in the sense the Tortoise gives that term when he speaks both of the supplemental Goldberg Variations (themselves found in a similar location, as Chris Wolff explains: "At the very end of the Handexemplar, on the inner side of the back cover of the edition facing the quodlibet, we find a set of fourteen enigmatic circle canons, written by Bach himself and entitled . . . 'Diverse canons on the first eight notes of the ground of the preceding aria' . . . ") and of the pages at the end of a book that make the reader wonder where the end of the book really is. The fiction and the play of coincidence of the preceding chapters (or divisions, of which there are forty-two: an introduction, twenty chapters, and twenty-one intercalated dialogues) are continued and developed in these last two sections, with the result that Gödel, Escher, Bach is divided into as many functioning parts as Bach's Goldberg Variations. That there are now forty-four of these variations is important for Hofstadter's juxtaposition of their composition with the contemporaneous event of the Goldbach Conjecture: their present number stands as a sterling (or golden) example of "terminating and nonterminating processes, and those which hover in between." A measure of the importance of this association in Gödel, Escher, Bach (as well as another example of what is meant by its insistent RICERCAR) is the fact that the isomorphic but imaginary book to which the isomorphic and imaginary book in the bibliography refers, like one mirror sending us to another along an open-ended search in a maze of self-reference, would be the forty-fourth text to be listed there.

Perhaps this announced work would have some of the qualities of that "other" Barthes imagines: "If I reunited X . . . , Y . . . , and
Z . . . : out of all these points . . . I would form a perfect figure: my other would be born" (FDA, 270). Perhaps it would be something like the double Barthes's book seems to invite, a reader's response that lingers on one figure (there, Union), or passage (here, the "Aria with Diverse Variations") longer than the others, using it as a way to get into the work, to open it up and see what's inside, and then see what can be done (motivated, like the Apocryphal son, by a twofold desire to make the invisible visible and at the same time seduce) to express one's desire, to write that imagined isomorphic book.

Or perhaps it could even be something that, itself a double, makes possible another: the messenger, medium, or mirror that enables a double—in this case, Barthes's—to perfect its resemblance.

This is in fact what seems to have happened, and to explain how perhaps I had best reproduce a letter written to the author of an epistolary novel called Letters in which the "Author" is beseiged with letters threatening to sue him for plagiarism (Jerome Bonaparte Bray complains that "'your' 'novel' G.G.B." was cribbed from his father Harold's _Revised New Syllabus_ [L, 29–30]^{12}; Todd Andrews tells the author that his _Floating Opera_ "was decidedly a partial betrayal on your part of a partial confidence on mine" [L, 85]; Jacob Horner reports that he is indeed "the Jacob Horner of your _End of the Road_ novel" [L, 278]; A. B. Cook VI asks why his co-authorship of _The Sot-Weed Factor_ isn't acknowledged [L, 406]):

5 May 1980

Mr. John Barth  
Department of English  
Johns Hopkins University  
Baltimore, Maryland 21218  
Dear Mr. Barth:

I have read your _Letters_ with fascination, indeed with something like an induced madness. The folly is this: Did you know, when you made mention eight times (have I counted right? pp. 147, 283, 358, 360–1, 427, 489, 493 and 576) of Goethe's _Werther_, that that epistolary novel was, like your own, composed of 88 letters? And did you know it from my article on your French namesake (off-print enclosed)\(^\text{13}\)—which is, as far as I can tell, the first time anyone ever made such a declaration?

Sincerely yours,  
Randolph Runyon

That the choice of 88 was deliberate is clear from page 49 of Barth's book: "Their letters will total 88 (this is the eighth), divided unequally into seven sections according to a certain scheme." Later the author
makes apparent his interest in the number of letters that his epistolary novel’s forebears contain: he has counted 175 in *Les Liaisons dangereuses* and 537 in *Clarissa* (*L*, 654)—a choice of ancestry that allows the 88s to continue to work their spell: *Liaisons*’ number has 88 at its exact center; its total together with *Clarissa*’s equal \(8 \times 88 + 8\). Did the author of *Letters* know how many there were in *Werther*, or was it just marvelous luck (and whose?) that the two Barth(e)s should inscribe themselves into the same configuration of *Werther*-marked texts (recall that *Fragments* is based on a “regular reading” of Goethe’s novel [*FDA*, 12], as if it were a mandala, a breviary, a regimen-text consulted 49 times; and bear in mind that events in the lives of Barth’s letter-writers become anniversaries of dates in *Werther*’s [*L*, 147, 358, 427])? If he did know, then could it be because he counted them himself (an unlikely possibility, as I will soon explain)? I know of no other mention in *Werther* criticism of the 88 letters than my own, and this for a very good reason: I may have been wrong.

*Werther*’s letters are nowhere numbered; not all are dated, and some were never delivered. To determine the full extent of their number, I had resolved (in the earlier version of the third chapter of the present work, published over a year before the appearance of Barth’s novel of paranoid influence) to count everything that could be considered a letter—including the note to Charlotte’s father asking for burial on the margin of the churchyard, recounted only at secondhand in his last note to her but of considerable importance for the interpretation of the novel (paralleling the lot of the Apocrypha, in particular Tobit, in its survival just beyond the pale of canonicity: accompanying the Bible through the centuries from a position just outside. Goethe’s last recorded conversation with Eckermann, as it happens, began with a discussion of why “the noble Tobias” and his Apocryphal companions were excluded from the Christian canon), as well as the note “From the Editor to the Reader” (*Der Herausgeber an den Leser*), which comprises the last fifth of the novel (*W*, 79–99), and which itself contains 12 of the 88 letters. *Werther*’s last letter to Charlotte was written over a period of two days, and is inserted by the “Editor” “at intervals, just as—and this is evident from what happened—he wrote it” (*W*, 83). It is interrupted not only by its having been written at different times, at different stages in *Werther*’s progress toward suicide, but also by other letters; I therefore took each installment as a numberable part of the whole. The list is as follows:

4, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 22, 26, 27 May 1771; 16, 19, 21 29 June; 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 30 July; 8, 10, 12, 15, 18, 21, 22, 28, 30 August; 3, 10 September; 20 October; 10 November; 24
December; 8, 20 January 1772; 17, 20 February; 15, 16, 24 March; 19 April; 5, 9, 25 May; 11, 18 June; 29 July; 4, 21 August; 3, 6, 15 September; 10, 12, 19, 26, 27, 30 October; 3, 8, 15, 21, 24, 30 November; 1, 4, 6, 8, 17 December; "From the Editor to the Reader" (the framing "letter" that itself contains: an undated note thought to be the beginning of a letter to Wilhelm; a letter to Wilhelm dated 20 December; the first part of the letter to Charlotte, undated but begun on the morning of 21 December; part two of that letter, thought to have been written about 5 o'clock that afternoon; part three, written on the morning of the 22nd; the note he sent Albert asking for the pistols; part four of the letter to Charlotte, written on the evening of the 22nd; a farewell note to Wilhelm; a farewell note to Albert; the fifth and final installment of the letter to Charlotte, written just before midnight; the note to Charlotte's father, recounted in the aforementioned, entreatyimg him to arrange for burial in the far corner of the churchyard).

Some indication that 88 may indeed be the actual number of letters may be found from a close examination of what happens at the letters that thereby become the center of the sequence. Letter 43, 17 February, has attached to it a footnote from the "Editor" that speaks of the existence of a missing letter, which "together with another which is referred to later on, has been withdrawn from this collection out of respect for this excellent man [Count C., the government minister who was the immediate superior of Werther's employer], as it was not thought that such boldness could be excused by the gratitude, however warm, of the public" (W, 57). Like Hofstadter's allusion to a not entirely real book in what is also, as it happens, a forty-third entry (in GEB's bibliography), this letter threatens to break open the canon, calling into question the notion of there being a reality behind the fiction. Why is respect for the minister alleged as the reason for not publishing the letter when it would have been highly unlikely for it to have been included in the first place, as no other letter written to Werther (including what must have been scores from this faithful correspondent Wilhelm) ever appears? The practical effect of the insertion of the possibility of these two letters here is that an alternate number 44 and 45 is offered the counting reader, an alternate middle—44 and 45 occupy precisely that position among the 88—a slightly unsettling question mark, a miniature apocrypha concealed in the center of the novel's numerical system. As for whether the reader should have been counting, it is important to remember that at an extremely important moment Werther was led into a counting game by Charlotte, on the page immediately following the one in which he was able to dance with her
only because he knew how to perform the dance that culminated (culminated for Werther, for at that very point he realized who Albert was, he "because confused, forgot the steps," and soon had to stop because of the lightning) in "the big Eight" (W, 19), *die grosse Achte*, as well as to note that when Charlotte announced "We are going to play at Counting, so pay attention" (W, 20) close attention to her words would reveal that she could have been asking for an 8: *Wir spielen Zahlens, sagte sie, nun gebt Acht!*\(^{18}\)

If the Author of Barth's *Letters* thought *Werther* was composed of 88 letters, he either must have applied the same set of criteria (with which not every Goethe scholar would agree, perhaps, though they are in my eyes the most reasonable) or must have been keeping up with news of his French literary cousin (*Letters*' Author also bears the name Barth). But even these numerical results, well-argued as they may be, are called into question by the fact that a second version of *Werther* appeared in 1787, thirteen years after the first, in which many letters were added, and a few deleted, with the result that the novel now has either 100 or 101 letters (depending on whether one counts the framing letter from the editor to the reader). Yet even so the 88 will emerge, a hidden subset of the whole, if one adheres to a criterion that neatly avoids the problems raised by the way we counted the first edition, limiting the canon to those letters that, like all those appearing before the editor's intervention, bear a date. Thereby omitted are the letter never sent to Charlotte, in all its parts, the note requesting burial, and the one addressed from the editor to the reader, among others:

4, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 22, 26, 27, 30 May 1771; 16, 19, 21, 29 June; 1, 6, 8, 10, 11, 13, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 26, 26 [sic]; 30 July; 8, evening (of the 8th), 10, 12, 15, 18, 21, 22, 28, 30 August; 3, 10 September; 20 October; 26 November; 24 December; 8, 20 January 1772; 8, 17, 20 February; 15, 16, 24 March; 19 April; 5, 9, 25 May; 11, 16, 18 June; 29 July; 4, 21 August; 3, 4, 5, 6, 12, 15 September; 10, 12, 19, 26, evening (of the 26th), 27, 30 October; 3, 8, 15, 21, 22, 24, 26, 30 November; 1, 4, 6, 12, 14, 20 December.

It may be true, as the Author writes to Jerome Bonaparte Bray, acknowledging that it was Bray's madness that suggested it to him, "that every text implies a countertext" (*L*, 534). It may also be true that counting will help us find it. But one could not for a moment pretend that the strangest example imaginable of countertext, one in which Barth's text should produce yet another Goldberg Variation at the same time as what seems for a brief instant to be one more version of the story of Tobias—in effect, through this conjunction of canonical and noncanonical variations, a countertext to the book you're reading—
could be due to anything other than the kind of chance akin, but counter to, the luck that led William Legrand through error to the truth: Edgar Poe's hero, it will be remembered, found his way to the treasure only through an inordinate interest in a golden scarab that had ultimately no real relation to Captain Kidd's buried wealth. The connection that did exist between the gold and the bug was a fictive, textual one, something as thin as a sheet of paper,

the singular coincidence involved in the fact that, unknown to me, there should have been a skull upon the other side of the parchment, immediately beneath my figure of the *scarabaeus*, and that this skull, not only in outline, but in size, should so closely resemble my drawing [the skull, and the ciphered directions to the treasure, were inscribed in invisible, heat-sensitive ink. They became visible only through the intervention of Legrand's Newfoundland, who rushed in suddenly and caused the parchment to fall to the floor, upside down, and in close proximity to the fire. The dog's name was Wolf (GB, 61)]. (GB, 59)

What Barth's Gold-Bug variation so closely resembles is the moment Tobias's father's eyes caught the dribble that dropped from the bird above him, together with the peculiar combination itself of burying, bones, and bird droppings that comes together in Tobit and some of its variants (think, for example, of Irving's windshields). This happens because of J. B. Bray's persistent inability to say or to write the word *bug* (or *insect, fly, bee*), for which he will substitute a blank, *blank, flaw*, or any number of close relations, in this case *bird*:

Yes. Well: remember back there in all that fiction a tale by E. A. Poe called *The Gold Bird* (1843) in which William Legrand finds a message spelled out in numbers and deciphers it from the hypothesis that if the numbers stand for letters and the coded message is in English then the most frequently recurring number probably stands for the 5th letter of our alphabet *E* et cetera and he drops the bird through the eye of a skull. (L, 327)

As the solution of Bach's supplemental Goldberg Variations, the fourteen riddle canons recently unearthed in Strasbourg, served as a model for how the texts collected here could be read—making use of something like Dowland's "imaginary rule" to draw that part "which is not set down out of that part which is"—so might also, in a darker sense, this Poe/Barth Gold-Bug/Bird countertext. It seems to draw together the essentials—Bach, variation, error, puzzle-solving, ornitho-ophthalmic imagery, unburied dead—and to do so very well, yet we know it can't. But the story itself Barth embroiders is one that tells how an obsession is not always fruitless; how, like a fascination with a covering *frottis* or a Toby jug bearing narcissus (*FLW*, 271), it can bring to the surface qualities that weren't realized before.
And so perhaps it doesn’t really matter, so much, that a letter from the owner of Sarah’s Toby jug should lately arrive and provide an alternate explanation for the reunion of birds and eyes, women and fish that we thought came from the Apocryphal source:

A much more important private ikon in my life than the little Toby jug is a Balinese xoanon that a traveling friend once brought back for me; carved in wood, its base is a fish’s mouth, from which emerges a pregnant woman, whose head is that of an upward-looking bird. I might have used it as a colophon on all and any of my fictions; indeed seriously thought of using it on the jacket of *The Ebony Tower*. Metamorphoses. You are not altogether wrong about the fish part of it.21


2. Garp’s parentage was already somewhat lupine: his mother, who was struck by the qualities of John Wolf’s name when she sought an editor for her book (“a plain name, almost like an actor’s name,” as if it wasn’t somehow real, but adopted for some purpose, a floating sign [which it is], “or the name of an animal in a child’s book” [WAG, 120]), was herself, Garp once wrote, “a lone wolf” (WAG, 4); it was while T. S.’s father “wolfed at her breast” one night in the Boston Mercy Hospital that she began to realize his paternal potential (WAG, 21); Garp senior had a predecessor in the B-17E ball turret whose position he envied (“He was a better shot than Garp, but the ball-turret was where Garp wished he could be”), a certain Fowler (WAG, 16), a name whose anagrammatical potential may be lost on Garp (and even Irving).


4. See chapter 1, note 22, above.

5. Gerould, p. 167.


10. See Barry Olshen’s discussion of this episode in his *John Fowles*, pp. 82–88.

11. Christoph Wolff, “Bach’s Handexemplar of the Goldberg Variations: A New Source,” p. 229. Wolff is credited with the discovery in Hofstadter’s version of the story, but in fact his role was really that of proving the canons were written in Bach’s hand. This took place in the spring of 1975, thanks to the intervention of Olivier Alain, Inspecteur de la Musique for the French government, who came across them while visiting the Strasbourg Conservatory in 1974. Paul Blumenroeder had acquired the annotated edition of the Goldberg, with the 14 canons on the inside back cover, in 1932 and apparently had some knowledge of what they were (*Avant-Propos* to the French edition, *14 Canons sur la base Goldberg BWV 1087*, ed. Olivier Alain [Paris: Editions Salabert, 1976]).


14. Goethe’s novel is not the only source for the “almaniacal reflex” (L, 358) that so many of Barth’s correspondents share; but of the three epistolary models whose letters
he has counted (Les Liaisons dangereuses, Clarissa, and, it seems, Werther—though not, for example, Rousseau's La Nouvelle Héloïse), it is alluded to by far the most often.

15. Goethe argues that the Apocryphal writings (he mentions Tobit, The Wisdom of Solomon, and Ecclesiasticus) did not fit the Church's salvationist scheme, neither depicting the Fall of Man nor foretelling the Savior to come (conversation of 11 March 1832, eleven days before his death, Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann and Soret, pp. 566–68; in German: Gesprache mit Goethe, pp. 769–71).


17. The second missing letter, "referred to later on," is apparently the one mentioned in Werther's letter of 19 April 1772, 48th in the collection—so that what we have could also be thought of as a pseudo-44 and -49.


19. E = 8 in the pirate's cipher; that there are no less than five 88s in the message helps persuade Legrand that he is right, "for e is doubled with great frequency in English" (GB, 64). It is the only letter in Poe's list of the most frequent that agrees with a more recent, computer-determined list that Hofstadter provides: eaoidhnrstuy... (GB, 64) vs. ETAOINSHRDLU (GEB, 630).

20. To counter this apocryphal—i.e., false—variation of Tobias's story, I would like to make mention of a real one, an explicit reworking of the Apocryphal tale, but one that does not figure among the 14 texts (nor its protagonist among the 8 heroes) assembled here: Frank Yerby's Tobias and the Angel (New York: Dell, 1975). For more on how a gold-bug can suddenly appear at the most appropriate moment, see Carl Jung's essay "On Synchronicity" (Collected Works, vol. 8 [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979], pp. 525–26)—where he also tells of encountering some frighteningly insistent recurring fish on Good Friday, 1 April 1949 (the day of poissons d'avril, April Fool tricks; and for Barth's Bonaparte Bray, St. Elret's Day, "patron of cipherers" [L, 325], a wholly apocryphal feast-day based on an anagram of the name of the novel).