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Fictional Encyclopaedism in James Joyce,  
Leslie Marmon Silko, and Roberto Bolaño:  
Towards a Theory of Literary Totality

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FICTIONAL ENCYCLOPAEDISM

IN JAMES JOYCE, LESLIE MARMON SILKO, AND ROBERTO BOLAÑO:  
TOWARDS A THEORY OF LITERARY TOTALITY

SUMMARY

This thesis makes an intervention in the recent proliferation of work on encyclopaedism in fiction. By taking James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666* as its case studies, the project proposes that fictional encyclopaedism can be read through the responses authors make to the diverse forms that encyclopaedic thought and practice has taken throughout history. In this, I contend, 'encyclopaedism' can be dissociated from its commonplace conflation with 'great white male' theories of literature, and refigured as a literary category with the potential to restructure, or decolonise, both our sense of 'greatness' and 'mastery' in fiction and our idea of the world as a complete and coherent totality.

The project is divided into five sections. The introduction establishes the relationship between encyclopaedism and totality through a reading of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'s 'Great American Indian Leaders' exhibition in the 1980s, drawing particularly on the theoretical work of Gerald Vizenor and Walter D. Mignolo and on historians of encyclopaedism. The first and second chapters look to the ways Joyce and Silko, respectively, critique and re-tool specific forms of encyclopaedism, with *Ulysses* focusing on the *Britannica* and *Almanac of the Dead* reaching back to the encyclopaedic practices that gave epistemic shape to the European 'conquest,' or invasion, of the Americas (particularly those of Bartolomé de Las Casas). Both authors, I propose, imagine new, radical, decolonial encyclopaedisms that work by opening themselves up to their own productive failures. The third chapter explores how Bolaño uses *2666* to identify potential encyclopaedisms immanent to the contemporary, particularly through his dialogue with Julio Cortázar's *Hopscotch*. The conclusion synthesises the three authors' forms of fictional encyclopaedism into the beginnings of a theory of *literary* totality as 'totality-without-totality,' along the lines of Jacques Derrida's 'messianism-without-messianicity.'

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## Contents

<i>Declaration</i>	<i>ii</i>
<i>Summary</i>	<i>iii</i>
<i>Acknowledgements &amp; Funding</i>	<i>iv</i>
<b>1) Introduction: Fictional Encyclopaedism</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms	6
1.2 From Swigger and Mendelson to Saint-Amour and Barrenechea	16
1.3 Joyce, Silko, Bolaño	22
<b>2) James Joyce and the ‘Obscure Soul of the World’</b>	<b>26</b>
2.1 <i>Ulysses</i> and the <i>Encyclopaedia Britannica</i>	33
2.2 The ‘Circle of Learning’ and the ‘cracked lookingglass of a servant’	37
2.3 Bloom in the ‘giltbordered pierglass’	46
2.4 Paradise and the Periphery	59
2.5 <i>Amor Matris</i> upon the Void	64
<b>3) Leslie Marmon Silko in ‘the World of the Different’</b>	<b>70</b>
3.1 Conquest Encyclopaedism	78
3.2 Menardo in the ‘castle of one’s dreams’	88
3.3 <i>Trust</i>	94
3.4 Blind Universalism	102
3.5 Universal Insurance/Seguridad Universal	111
<b>4) Roberto Bolaño’s ‘Idea of the World’</b>	<b>116</b>
4.1 <i>Infinito Vertigo</i>	124
4.2 Gestalt Encyclopaedism	128
4.3 Florita Almada beyond the Labyrinth of Solitude	143
4.4 An Oasis of Horror upon the Void	155
<b>5) Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Literary Totality</b>	<b>159</b>
5.1 The Path to Bowling Green	161
<b>6) Bibliography</b>	<b>164</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Valley View Mall, LaCrosse, WI	4
Figure 2: <i>Great American Indian Leaders: A Special Exhibit Catalogue</i>	5
Figure 3: ‘Five Hundred Year Map,’ <i>Almanac of the Dead</i>	105
Figure 4: Giuseppe Arcimboldo, <i>The Four Seasons</i> (1563-73)	118
Figure 5: Giuseppe Arcimboldo, <i>The Roast</i> (c. 1570)	120
Figure 6: Amalfitano’s drawings (1-3), 2666	141
Figure 7: Amalfitano’s drawings (4-6), 2666	142
Figure 8: Amalfitano’s list of names, 2666	143
Figure 9: ‘Talk:Bowling Green Massacre,’ <i>Wikipedia</i>	162

Contact with Tlön and the ways of Tlön have disintegrated this world. Captivated by its discipline, humanity has forgotten, and continues to forget, that it is the discipline of chess players, not of angels.

Jorge Luis Borges, 'Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius' (1941)

# 1. Introduction: Fictional Encyclopaedism

Americans are the western pilgrims, who are carrying along with them that great mass of arts, sciences, vigour, and industry which began long since in the east; they will finish the great circle.

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur  
'Letter III: What is an American?' (1782)<sup>1</sup>

The whole world of knowledge is a single universe of discourse.

Mortimer J. Adler  
*Encyclopaedia Britannica* (15<sup>th</sup> edn.; 1974)<sup>2</sup>

Towards the end of the 1970s, in the suburbs of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, the Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust acquired a plot of land that contained the remains of a Native American village. The Trust excavated the remains and constructed Valley View Mall in its place.<sup>3</sup> To celebrate the mall's completion in 1980, the management decided to incorporate the site's Indigenous history into its grand opening, and approached the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, based in Chicago since the beginning of the century, for 'authentic information' in putting it together.<sup>4</sup> The result was an exhibition curated by the *Britannica*, entitled 'Great American Indian



Fig. 1. Valley View Mall, LaCrosse, WI.  
*billburmaster.com* (Bill Burmaster, June 2005. Web. 17 March 2017).

<sup>1</sup> J. Hector St John de Crèvecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. by Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> Mortimer J. Adler, 'Propædia: Circle of Knowledge,' ed. by P.W. Goertz, *New Encyclopædia Britannica* (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1974), 5–8 (p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> Patricia van Horn, 'Exhibit of Indian Leaders Devoted to Unraveling Myths,' *The Pittsburgh Press* (Pittsburgh, PA, 11 May 1983), p. N – 3; Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust, 'Valley View Mall: Property Overview' <[http://www.preit.com/leasing/detail/property\\_overview/18](http://www.preit.com/leasing/detail/property_overview/18)> [accessed 1 August 2014].

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. Production of the *Britannica* moved from Edinburgh, where it was originally founded, to Chicago in the early 1900s, after it was sold to Horace Everett Hooper, an American businessman. Richard R. Yeo, *Encyclopaedic Visions: Scientific Dictionaries and Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 170; Gillian Thomas, *A Position to Command Respect: Women and the Eleventh Britannica* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), p. 11.

Leaders,' designed, according to a spokesperson, '[to educate] people on the fact that the Indian is very much alive.'<sup>5</sup> The exhibition comprised twelve mannequins of historic tribal leaders in traditional costume, performances of traditional dances, fried dough and t-shirt concession stands, and lots of publicity for the recent Fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. The exhibition proved successful enough to be taken on tour to malls across the U.S.A.<sup>6</sup> The catalogue for the exhibition assures the reader that 'Britannica staff members spent long hours consulting scholars in the fields of Indian history, anthropology, and ethnology.'<sup>7</sup> Yet,

as Gerald Vizenor has pointed out, 'Such considerations seem ironic, because most of the tribal names were not entered in the encyclopaedia the sponsors promoted at the exhibitions.'<sup>8</sup> Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. used Indigenous cultures to fund an encyclopaedic project that did not deem those very same Indigenous cultures sufficiently notable to warrant inclusion.

This project addresses the intervention fiction can make in the modern history of encyclopaedic thought and practice, and takes as its case-studies James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*, and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*—three especially significant novels from the last 100 years that, when taken together, can be used to outline a theory about fiction and the totalising imagination. The almost tragically suburban example of the *Britannica*'s 'Great American Indian Leaders' exhibition might seem like a niche place to start, but it provides a helpful example through which to unpick what is at stake in encyclopaedic thought and practice, and to ascertain the relationship between encyclopaedism and fiction. Moreover, in the critical eye Vizenor brings to the exhibit, this project finds some of the theoretical terms of its de-totalising framework. In what follows, I will review the theoretical

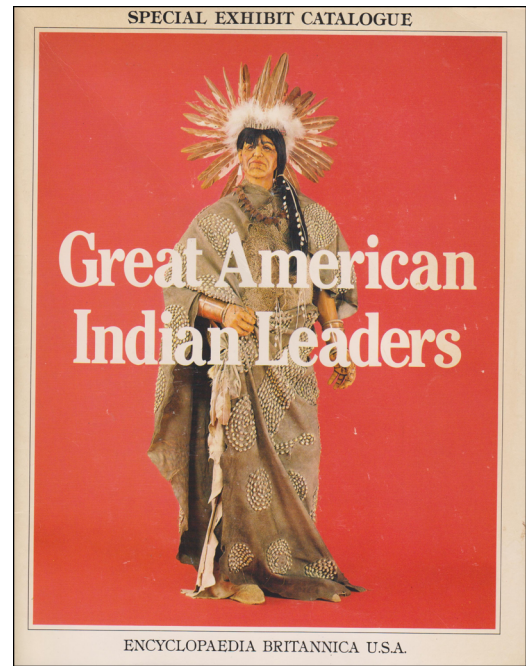


Fig. 2. *Great American Indian Leaders: A Special Exhibit Catalogue* (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1980).

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Stanton, qtd. in van Horn.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. The mannequins represented Black Hawk, Pontiac, Cochise, Massasoit, Joseph, Cornplanter, Powhatan, Red Cloud, Sequoyah, Tecumseh, Wovoka, and Sacagawea.

<sup>7</sup> *Great American Indian Leaders: A Special Exhibit Catalogue* (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1980), p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance*, First Bison Books (Lincoln, NE: Bison, 1994), p. 40. By the time of the 1991 reprint of the *Macropaedia*, Massasoit, Red Cloud, and Sacagawea were still omitted. Since at least 2011, all selected leaders have discrete entries on the *Britannica*'s website.

and literary contexts in which this study intervenes, and go on to trace the shape of its argument—but before I get to that, I will begin by introducing my key terms, by way of the *Britannica*’s ‘Great American Indian Leaders’ exhibition.

### 1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms

If an encyclopaedia summarises and organises all knowledge within a totalising epistemological framework, the edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* promoted by the ‘Great American Indian Leaders’ exhibition denied space within its totality to Indigeneity. In this, the *Britannica* positioned Indigeneity outside or beyond the remit of its ‘order of things,’ as if to suggest that Indigeneity is somehow incompatible with or insignificant to the framework with which the encyclopaedia summarises and organises all knowledge. What happens to knowledge that is excluded from order, or deemed insufficiently significant to be notable as part of order? Michel Foucault uses Jorge Luis Borges’ *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, the infamous imaginary ‘Chinese encyclopedia’ from his essay on John Wilkins’ analytical language, to posit that one of the key effects of the encyclopaedic framework is to ‘define a *common locus* beneath’ all that is included, regardless of its incongruity.<sup>9</sup> For Foucault, what is so unsettlingly hilarious about Borges’ *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge* is the suggestion that a ‘common locus’ might work through categories like ‘(k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush’ or ‘(n) that from a long way off look like flies.’<sup>10</sup> We could build on Foucault’s terms, then, to speak of the *Britannica* denying Indigeneity a part of that ‘common locus’ through which it assigns an order to things—and we could go on to infer from that that the *Britannica*’s exclusion of Indigeneity robs it of a certain factuality.

This is an important idea; but the inference that exclusion from encyclopaedic order implicitly renders facts untrue does not really get to how encyclopaedic thought and practice mediates reality according to that which is ‘notable’; after all, the inclusion of fictional constructs, like geopolitical categories, or, the taxonomy of animals in *Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge*, pose no categorical problem for encyclopaedic thought.<sup>11</sup> Rather, inclusion seems to endow those included with a particular kind of ‘common’ recognisability or commensurability—to make that which is included, fictional or factual, *real* in its eyes. It

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<sup>9</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘John Wilkins’ Analytical Language,’ *The Total Library: Non-Fiction 1922-1986*, trans. by Esther Allen, Suzanne Levine, and Eliot Weinberger (London: Penguin, 2001), p. 231; Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. xvii–xviii; emphasis in original.

<sup>10</sup> Borges, *The Total Library*, p. 231.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p. 231.

is not the boundary between fact and fiction that the encyclopaedia mediates: it is the category of legitimate and normative reality that it reifies. The *Britannica*'s self-congratulatory appropriation of 'Great American Indian Leaders' for its marketing makes clear that the relationship between exclusion-from and inclusion-in an encyclopaedic framework is not so easily reducible to a fiction-fact binary; indeed, while the *Britannica* may deny Indigeneity space within its framework, it still finds a way to co-opt the factuality of Indigeneity paratextually. It is not so much that exclusion from an encyclopaedia negates existence as that inclusion conflates legitimate and normative reality with 'notability,' to invoke *Wikipedia*'s key criterion. Indeed, we could take *Wikipedia*'s hint, since it has become almost certainly the most widely and heavily used contemporary encyclopaedia,<sup>12</sup> and consider how its definition of 'notability' not only articulates a key principle of encyclopaedic thought, but clarifies one of its key effects.

*Wikipedia*'s 'General Notability Guideline' is as follows: 'If a topic has received *significant coverage in reliable sources* that are *independent of the subject*, it is *presumed* to be suitable for a standalone article or list.'<sup>13</sup> For *Wikipedia*, inclusion repeats and indexes that which is already important to reality. We could describe its effect upon its content, then, as synthesising 'notable' fictions and facts into a single space to make them more easily and widely accessible. But, more importantly, we should also assert that that synthesis reifies the very 'notability' of those fictions and facts—it increases their 'notability,' making those fictions and facts and the 'common locus' into which they are subsumed more verifiably *real*. This is important: for encyclopaedic thought has no more special access to impartiality and objectivity than any other form of thought. What if there were systemic biases across the 'reliable sources' on which *Wikipedia*, and indeed all encyclopaedias, depend? What if, for example, those sources tended to be written by men, or funded by colonial governments, or used outdated methodologies, or normalised certain familial and societal structures, or disguised corporate conflicts of interest? Would that mean that the criterion of 'notability' cannot be detached from the power structures immanent to the status quo? If *Wikipedia*'s 'General Notability Guidelines' assert that '*Notability is based on the existence of suitable sources*,' then it follows that notability presupposes a reality in line with the structures of power that determine what

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<sup>12</sup> *Wikipedia* consistently ranks, across both Alexa Internet and SimilarWeb, as the fifth most viewed website on the internet, behind Google, YouTube, Facebook, and Baidu. 'List of Most Popular Websites,' *Wikipedia*, 2017 <[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List\\_of\\_most\\_popular\\_websites&oldid=765683495](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=List_of_most_popular_websites&oldid=765683495)> [accessed 18 February 2017].

<sup>13</sup> This 'General Notability Guideline' is described by *Wikipedia*'s editors as 'a test used...to decide whether a given topic warrants its own article.' 'Wikipedia:Notability,' *Wikipedia*, 2017 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Wikipedia:Notability&oldid=760576683>> [accessed 1 February 2017]; emphasis in original.

constitutes those ‘*suitable sources*.’<sup>14</sup> We could begin to speak of a ‘dialectic of notability’ inherent to encyclopaedic thought, whereby inclusion within the encyclopaedia’s ‘common locus’ synthesises the fictions and facts that constitute the status quo into that which in the world is ultimately the most *real*.

The consequence of this is that encyclopaedic thought and practice is always already legitimating and normalising that which it deems ‘notable’—and it is from this standpoint that we can begin to unpick what is at stake in encyclopaedic thought. How does encyclopaedic thought construct a relationship between ‘notability’ and ‘reality’? What kind of worlds does it imagine by assuming the authority to articulate that relationship? And most importantly, how can that which is excluded work within or against such encyclopaedisms?

In the context of the ‘Great American Indian Leaders’ exhibition, the answers to the first two questions at least are clear: the *Britannica*’s simultaneous appropriation of Indigeneity for marketing purposes and decision to not deem Indigeneity sufficiently notable for inclusion within its ‘common locus’ is an act that subordinates Indigenous reality to Euro-American reality—that uses the former to assert the supremacy of the latter. As such, Vizenor describes Indigenous exclusion from the encyclopaedic framework as motivated fundamentally by Euro-American ‘aversion to the presence of tribes’: it is the desire to sidestep the fact of ‘the tribal real’ that enables the exclusion of Indigeneity from the *Britannica*’s ‘encyclopaedia of dominance.’<sup>15</sup> Indeed, it is as if the ‘common locus’ from which the *Britannica*’s brand of encyclopaedism imagines its community is one that is struggling to repair itself with its history—as if the *Britannica*’s encyclopaedism is trying to make real a world wherein that history is less real. Building on Benedict Anderson’s theory of literature, national identity, and print capitalism, we can remind ourselves that the encyclopaedia’s idea of the world will always reflect, to some degree, the prevailing values held by the community it imagines.<sup>16</sup> As Vizenor notes, the *Britannica*’s sense of the ‘tribal real’ in its traveling exhibition is a simulation of ‘reality’ defined from the standpoint of compulsory tribal absence; or to use Vizenor’s words, ‘In the absence of the tribal real, the unreal simulations crossed the border of “fact and fiction” and became the real in the promotion of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.’<sup>17</sup> In the reality of the *Britannica*, Indigenous reality is defined as affirmation of the supremacy of the Euro-American real—the *Britannica* imagines a world that excludes the ‘tribal real,’ as if its very existence depends on that assertion of dominance.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid; emphasis in original.

<sup>15</sup> Vizenor, pp. 3, 41, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. edn (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>17</sup> Vizenor, pp. 40–1.



In all of this, one thing that the dialectic of notability makes crystal clear is that encyclopaedic thought is always selective thought—capacious thought, certainly, but by no means all-inclusive or universal or absolute. This is not unique to the *Britannica* or *Wikipedia*: while encyclopaedism may operate, as Foucault suggests, ‘to define a *common locus* beneath’ everything, it always, as Walter D. Mignolo asserts, emerges from a ‘locus of enunciation.’<sup>18</sup> Encyclopaedias may present themselves as universal, or be renowned for extensiveness and completion, but their compilation has always depended, to at least some degree, upon notability. This selective principle is built into the term’s very etymology: the term ‘encyclopaedia’ is derived from Quintilian’s Greek ‘enkyklios paideia’ (ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία), which translates literally as ‘circle of learning’ or ‘cycle of education.’<sup>19</sup> While the term entered into popular usage in the sixteenth century—the result, Robert L. Fowler describes, of the new Renaissance stress ‘on the notion of the unity of all knowledge’—it had emerged as the principle term for the Western *omne scibili* by at least the eighteenth century.<sup>20</sup> The explicit didacticism of the metaphor of a ‘circle of learning’ in itself tells us a lot about the standpoint of any encyclopaedic project. After all, a ‘circle of learning’ is not necessarily a totalising image: it does not define the entirety of reality so much as a set of predetermined pedagogical principles—principles that synecdochally make visible the order beneath reality. But, of course, since it is those pedagogical principles that define the ‘circle of learning,’ and not the other way around, its image of the entirety of reality is always already encoded with a particular set of values. In this, any ‘circle of learning’ necessarily repeats and makes accessible a world that is already known—not so much *all that is the case*, which we do not necessarily

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<sup>18</sup> Mignolo has explained that he derives this term from Foucault’s ‘modalities of enunciation’ [‘modalités d’enonciation’] in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. That said, since much of Mignolo’s work functions to re-place Foucauldian thought on a more solid geo-historical footing, I also interpret it in implicit dialogue with the ‘common locus’ of encyclopaedic thought that Foucault discusses in *The Order of Things*. Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, 2nd edn (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 5; Michel Foucault, *L’archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), p. 72; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 2nd edn (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 59; Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, p. xviii.

<sup>19</sup> Teresa Morgan, ‘Rhetoric and Education,’ in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. by Ian Worthington (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2010), p. 309.

<sup>20</sup> Fowler dates the term’s ‘invention’ among ‘humanistic circles’ in Europe back to the late fifteenth century. Yeo elaborates on this, suggesting that the metaphorical ‘circle of learning’ provided by the term reflected the increasing importance of pedagogical considerations as the remit of encyclopaedic projects grew unmanageably larger, since knowledge came to be ‘conceived as an open-ended search that could displace accepted truths’ and ‘the prospect of holding all important knowledge in memory’ began to seem ‘impossible.’ As such, projects like Gregor Reisch’s *Margarita Philosophica* (1496) and Johann Heinrich Alsted’s *Encyclopaedia, Septem Tomis Distincta* (1630) imitated the university curriculum or prescribed an order of study. Only after Francis Bacon’s interventions, in *The Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620) did encyclopaedic projects’ pedagogical considerations begin to incorporate the indexing that characterises the structure of most contemporary encyclopaedias. Robert L. Fowler, ‘Encyclopaedias: Definitions and Theoretical Problems,’ in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. by Peter Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), pp. 6–7, 27–9; Yeo, pp. 78–83.

know, as *all that has always been the case*, which is all we do.<sup>21</sup> In this, the ‘dialectic of notability’ that populates the ‘circle of learning’ comes to look much like the ‘dialectic of Enlightenment’ theorised by Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer: both have the potential to reproduce the status quo by shutting themselves off from the unknown. Indeed, as Adorno and Horkheimer write, in full cognisance of the consequences of this, ‘Humans believe themselves free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown.’<sup>22</sup>

The encyclopaedia’s content, then, can be described as a totalised version of reality. Its contents, which aim to paint a complete and coherent picture of our world and universe, have already been interpreted and arranged for its audience; that is to say, it articulates an idea of the world as a total object built from parts or fragments determined by the priorities of the agents constructing it. Moreover, its idea of the real is conflated with the known: that which is unknown is unable to structure or shape the encyclopaedia’s complete and coherent idea of the world. On what basis, then, could any ‘circle of learning’ assume objectivity?<sup>23</sup> Is an encyclopaedia not always on some level the ‘codification of a metaphorical intellectual dominion,’ to use Richard R. Yeo’s memorable description of the Eleventh Edition of the *Britannica*?<sup>24</sup>

J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur provides a neat image for visualising how encyclopaedic thought asserts the dominance of its idea of the world: in his letter to Europe on American identity and possibility, he explained that America’s ‘western pilgrims’ stand to ‘finish the great circle’ of ‘arts, sciences, vigour, and industry.’<sup>25</sup> Invoking the ‘circle of learning,’ Crèvecoeur casts America as the missing piece of a European tradition; and indeed, if America is an appendage to European knowledge, the European locus from which it is enunciated automatically marginalises, or negates, or overwrites, those loci indigenous to America. Moreover, Crèvecoeur suggests that the possibility of ‘completion’ is contingent on the assembly and enforcement of boundaries that exclude that which does not fit the pre-

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s own shift, in *Philosophical Investigations*, away from the logical positivism of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*’ propositions serves as a helpful reminder that any representation of the ‘world’ is always a signified—an idea of the ‘world’—rather than the world itself. As *Philosophical Investigations* makes clear, the ‘totality of facts’ does not necessarily mediate between what is and is not the case. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by D.F. Pears and B.F. McGuinness (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 1\*, 1.1.

<sup>22</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. by Gunzelin Noeri, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002; repr. 2007), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> And indeed, in this light, it is curious to note that the idea of ‘objectivity’ in itself is a surprisingly new concept: Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison note that ‘It first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century and in a matter of decades became established not only as a scientific norm but also as a set of practices.’ Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 27.

<sup>24</sup> Yeo, p. 241.

<sup>25</sup> Crèvecoeur, p. 44.

determined worldview.<sup>26</sup> The encyclopaedic imagination becomes one that re-states dominance over that which is deemed ‘other’: the completed circle that Crèvecoeur envisions will be one which overwrites that which has been the case in America with that which has always been the case in Europe—an imagination in service of colonial dominance. In the case of the *Britannica*’s ‘Great American Indian Leaders’ exhibit, it is clear how this works: Indigenous culture is excluded from the ‘great circle,’ made visible only insofar as it resources Eurocentric dominance. As Mortimer J. Adler, director of editorial planning for the Fifteenth *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, wrote in its *Propaedia*: ‘the whole world of knowledge is a single universe of discourse.’<sup>27</sup> For Adler, it is as if all knowledge were not only singularly coherent and mutually supportive but the same across languages—at best a universalist fantasy and at worst a supremacist calculation. ‘The truth,’ Mignolo reminds us, ‘is always relative to the locus of enunciation.’<sup>28</sup>

That said, it is far too easy to write a critique of encyclopaedic thought that ends on accusations of Eurocentrism—a charge Hamid Dabashi has rightly described as ‘punishingly boring’ in the twenty-first century.<sup>29</sup> Yes, the encyclopaedia, and the *Britannica* in particular, can be defined as total knowledge complete with built-in Eurocentric ignorance, but, as Mignolo insists, that is just the starting point: ‘The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges?’<sup>30</sup> Moreover, what does it mean for the ‘completeness’ of constructed knowledges to be contingent on the act of exclusion? Does it suggest that the ‘completeness’ of constructed knowledge depend on that constructed knowledge’s reception as ‘exceptional’? Indeed, to extrapolate from Giorgio Agamben’s political analysis of juridico-constitutional states of exception, if exceptional measures ‘find themselves in the paradoxical position of being juridical measures that cannot be understood in legal terms,’ and the state of exception ‘appears as the legal form of what cannot have legal form,’ then we could ask to what extent the prerogatives of encyclopaedic thought depend on its consideration by its

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<sup>26</sup> As Seth Rudy has noted, this attitude to ‘completion’ flourished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: ‘The frequent appearance and casual use of “complete” and its variants in the titles and prefaces of seventeenth-century guidebooks for example...helped to establish “complete” less as a determinate of quality than as a way of thinking about the order, organization, transmission, and progress of human learning—particularly as mediated by literature. The completeness of knowledge in general and the completeness of a “literary” work in terms of formal structure and generic propriety, moreover, were not always already divided, particularly in the cases of epic and encyclopedic endeavors.’ While Rudy focuses on texts associated with the Enlightenment in Britain, our approaches overlap in our mutual insistence on the political stakes of ‘completion.’ Seth Rudy, *Literature and Encyclopedism in Enlightenment Britain: The Pursuit of Complete Knowledge* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Adler, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 186.

<sup>29</sup> Hamid Dabashi, ‘Fuck You Žižek!’, *ZED Books*, 2016 <<https://www.zedbooks.net/blog/posts/fuck-you-zizek/>> [accessed 25 January 2017].

<sup>30</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, ‘Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and De-Colonial Freedom,’ *Theory, Culture & Society*, 26.7-8 (2009), 1–23 (p. 2).

imagined community as ‘exceptional.’<sup>31</sup> If we accept the latent biases conferred on encyclopaedic thought and its idea of the world by its ‘dialectic of notability,’ we are compelled to push further than exceptionalism. Is it inevitable for encyclopaedic thought to repeat the status quo’s supremacy? Is encyclopaedism without dominance possible? Moreover, how can the willed gaps and exclusions on which certain encyclopaedic ideas of the world depend—what Charles W. Mills describes as an ignorance ‘militant, aggressive...active, dynamic...presenting itself unblushingly as *knowledge*’—be unravelled?<sup>32</sup> Can encyclopaedic thought be made to productively address itself to or engage with that which is *not* known—the unknown? How can that which is excluded by the encyclopaedia’s framework make itself visible and active within the status quo? Indeed, to recall Gilles Deleuze’s and Félix Guattari’s terms, how ‘to challenge the language and [make] it follow a sober revolutionary path? How to become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to one’s own language?’<sup>33</sup> How can we read the disjuncture that exclusion enforces without buying in to that ‘taste for exclusive disjunctions’—that is, in a way that ‘would no longer be exclusive or restrictive, but fully affirmative, nonrestrictive, inclusive,’ allowing for a ‘disjunction that remains disjunctive, and that still affirms the disjoined terms...*without restricting one by the other or excluding the other from the one*’?<sup>34</sup>

With an eye, then, on James Baldwin’s dictum that the creative process ‘must drive to the heart of every answer and expose the question the answer hides,’<sup>35</sup> I propose that these questions emerge when Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, and Bolaño’s *2666* are taken, individually and collectively, as answers to the issues posed by encyclopaedism in fiction—and in Joyce’s, Silko’s, and Bolaño’s interpretations of and interventions in the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought, we can begin to get a sense of the worlds both through and beyond encyclopaedism that literary thinking makes possible. To explore the ways in which Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño raise these questions and work to think through and beyond them is to theorise the peculiar forms of imaginative possibility that fiction can

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<sup>31</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. by Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Charles W. Mills, ‘White Ignorance,’ in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. by Dana Polan (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 76; emphasis in original.

<sup>35</sup> James Baldwin, *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. by Toni Morrison (New York, NY: Library of America, 1998), p. 670.

activate in encyclopaedic thought.<sup>36</sup> That is to say, if encyclopaedic thought requires a totality that is complete, consistent, coherent, singular, and certain, then perhaps what a literary totality enables is a form of encyclopaedism that can involve its own failure—its own incompleteness, inconsistency, incoherence, multiplicity, and uncertainty.

By suggesting that the possibility which fiction affords encyclopaedic thought may be the possibility of its own failure—that the difference between an encyclopaedic totality and a literary totality may be the ability of the latter to allow for its own negation—my approach to theorising fictional encyclopaedism follows a similar critical trajectory as that which brings Jacques Derrida, in *Specters of Marx*, to his theory of the ‘messianic without messianism.’<sup>37</sup> Indeed, his is a helpful course to track, not just because the potential for radicalism he finds in a messianism that consciously withholds its messianic promise bears a family resemblance to that of an encyclopaedism that consciously undermines any attempt to totalise reality, but because Derridean thought, since *Of Grammatology*, takes a similar starting point to this project: that the idea of the world can never be coterminous with or reflective of the actual world. Just as the signified cannot be completely grasped by the signifier, the encyclopaedia cannot provide unmediated access to the world’s universal system. Indeed, if the conditions that make language possible cannot be accessed by language, then it follows that the system that makes the world possible cannot be accessed by encyclopaedism. In this, the way that Derrida’s grammatological thesis revises and re-tools Martin Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics proves a useful point of departure—for, while *Of Grammatology* specifically assimilates ‘presence’ and ‘Being’ as they are theorised in *Being and Time*, its ideas can also be productively applied to Heidegger’s statement, in ‘Age of the World Picture,’ about the possibility of imagining the world.<sup>38</sup>

In Heidegger’s understanding, the ‘world picture’ is the key category for ascertaining modernity: the modern ‘world picture’ is ascertained by ‘science as research,’ or the scientific

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<sup>36</sup> That fiction and encyclopaedic thought are conventionally seen to exclude each other is, as Renaissance historian Neil Kenny has observed, a sign of the extent to which modern encyclopaedic ideals diverge from those of the Renaissance: ‘We tend to assume...that science, philosophy, and learning are very distinct from fiction [...] It therefore comes as no little culture shock for us to find sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers commonly mixing fictional modes of discourse with the broad domain which they call philosophy, including all investigations into human and natural phenomena, from metaphysics to alchemy.’ Kenny goes on to argue that, since ‘Renaissance modes of organizing and conceiving knowledge, is deeply and overtly dependent on strategies which we would now label “literary,”’ the history of encyclopaedic thought can be seen to take a dramatic new path with ‘the rise of “literature” as a mode distinct from philosophy, science, and erudition occurred primarily in the eighteenth century.’ Neil Kenny, *The Palace of Secrets: Béroalde de Verville and Renaissance Conceptions of Knowledge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), pp. 2, 3–4.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida theorises this notion most thoroughly in the chapter entitled ‘Conjuring—Marx.’ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, ed. by Peggy Kamuf (New York and London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 74–92.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, ‘Age of the World Picture,’ in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 57–85.

method. Importantly for Heidegger, it is in the secular nature of ‘science as research’ that the modern ‘world picture’ differs from that of the Middle Ages, as it makes human ‘Being,’ rather than God, the central, transcendent element of the modern ‘world picture’; as he notes, ‘The essence of modernity can be seen in humanity’s freeing itself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in that it frees itself to itself’—a liberation that transforms ‘the essence of humanity’ so that ‘man becomes the subject.’<sup>39</sup> In Heidegger’s eyes, then, the modern ‘world picture’ is the one that encodes human ‘Being’ as the centre of the order of things:

When...man becomes the primary and genuine *subiectum*, this means that he becomes that being upon which every being, in its way of being and its truth, is founded. Man becomes the referential center of beings as such.<sup>40</sup>

If the scientific method is the means by which modernity is established, and the presupposition of that method (according to Heidegger) is that human ‘Being’ is central to reality, then modernity becomes the point at which human imagination reflects that centrality in the world and allows us to picture it accordingly:

Where the world becomes picture, beings as a whole are set in place as that for which man is prepared; that which, therefore, he correspondingly intends to bring before him, have before him, and, thereby, in a decisive sense, place before him.<sup>41</sup>

In Heidegger’s idea of the world, the world picture of modernity ‘stands before us together with what belongs to and stands together with it as a system.’<sup>42</sup>

It is clear how the Heideggerian imagination of the world is open to Derrida’s critique of the metaphysics of presence: Heidegger’s ‘world picture’ is coterminous with that which ‘presence’ makes comprehensible to ‘Being.’<sup>43</sup> That is to say, the ‘world picture’ is directly associated with that which is present to the observer, and as such implies that knowledge of the world is allied with presence—indeed, everything in the world is the ‘totality of beings...“in the picture.”’<sup>44</sup> The problem with this is that by characterising the ‘world picture’ as observable to ‘Being,’ Heidegger extends the thought in *Being and Time* that allows him to construct ‘Being’ as prior to language. For Derrida, this casts ‘Being’ as a ‘transcendental signified’—a situation that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak describes as one ‘where the signified [i.e., ‘Being’] commands, yet is free of, all signifiers.’<sup>45</sup> In so doing, the ‘world picture’

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, pp. 66–7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 66.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; repr. 2016), pp. 21, xxxiv.

becomes, for Heidegger, a way of understanding the essence of the world beyond signification—assumes, that is, that the ‘world picture’ observable to ‘Being’ coincides with the world in and of itself. For Derrida, of course, this is simply not possible:

‘Being’ as it is fixed in its general syntactic and lexicological forms within the area of linguistics and of Western philosophy, is not a primary and absolutely irreducible signified...it is still rooted in a system of languages and an historically determined ‘signifiability [*signifiance*].’<sup>46</sup>

As Mar Rosàs Tosas has outlined, the inescapable disjuncture between signifier and signified creates both the structural and causal grounds for Derrida’s later work on law, justice, and radical politics.<sup>47</sup> The apparently paradoxical ‘messianic without messianism’ affords, for Derrida, a modality for action once one has become conscious that the signified can never be reached, and that the messiah will never arrive—it provides a means for justice without reducing justice to ‘juridical-moral rules, norms, or representations, within an inevitable totalizing horizon.’<sup>48</sup> For this project, it provides a theoretical precedent that makes clear the implicit stakes of the similarly paradoxical *fictional* encyclopaedism: if any ‘world picture,’ or encyclopaedic totality, is necessarily unable to coincide with reality, and if any attempt to suggest that it could falls into the trap of depending on a ‘transcendental signifier,’ then a fictional encyclopaedism, or an encyclopaedism-without-facts, can provide a modality that allows encyclopaedic thought to move beyond the limits placed by the impossible completion it by definition seeks.

If Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño use fictional encyclopaedism to imagine the world beyond the encyclopaedic totality produced by the status quo, it is because fictional encyclopaedism provides a way of making encyclopaedic thought face the unknown, and the repressed, and recalibrate itself accordingly—in a way that an encyclopaedism invested in its success cannot. To write a totality without totality is not just to place value in failure, but to understand intuitively what is at stake in the creation of the ideas of the world that underpin our lives—what Jean-Luc Nancy describes, to admittedly rather different ends than my own, as ‘the sense of the world’: ‘*world* is not merely the correlative of *sense*, it is structured as *sense*, and reciprocally, *sense* is structured as *world*.’<sup>49</sup> Thought, or sense, in itself depends for its existence on how it values its absolute context, the world—so precisely how we enable ourselves to imagine the world matters. The narrative that Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño present when read

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 24.

<sup>47</sup> Mar Rosàs Tosas, ‘Derrida’s Way out of the Dead End of Contemporary Messianism,’ *Journal for Cultural Research*, 18.4 (2014), 350–69 (p. 351).

<sup>48</sup> Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, p. 34.

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. by Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8; emphasis added.

comparatively suggests that we can decolonise our ideas of the world by thinking without the totalising moves on which dominance depends—and in this, I contend, the radical potential of imagined (fictional) encyclopaedisms in the contemporary world presents itself.

## 1.2 From Swigger and Mendelson to Saint-Amour and Barrenechea

The field of critical scholarship on fictional encyclopaedism is typically dated from Edward Mendelson's 1976 article 'Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon'—an eccentric, quasi-comparative essay concerned with constructing a distinguished genealogy of 'encyclopedic narratives' from *The Divine Comedy* to *Gravity's Rainbow*.<sup>50</sup> Mendelson's essay has indeed had tremendous impact: as Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk note, it was responsible for popularising the term in U.S. literary scholarship.<sup>51</sup> Yet, as Paul K. Saint-Amour has noted, the primary motivation of Mendelson, who is otherwise a scholar of W.H. Auden, in writing the essay was the Pulitzer board's intervention to overrule its judges' unanimous decision to award *Gravity's Rainbow* the 1974 Pulitzer Prize for fiction: Mendelson chose to rise to Pynchon's defence by installing the novel 'in a rarefied lineage.'<sup>52</sup> In this, the role of 'the encyclopaedic' in relation to fiction is, for Mendelson, inherently linked to the type of nationalist cultural curation associated with national book awards. As such, Mendelson characterises 'encyclopedic narratives' as needing to fulfil a 'unique set of formal and thematic conditions' in order to be included in the genre: the terms of their success as 'encyclopedic narratives' lie in both their achievement of a formal and cultural mastery that simultaneously encapsulates and articulates their nation's nascent consciousness or identity.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, from Mendelson's perspective:

Each major national culture in the west, as it becomes aware of itself as a separate entity, produces an *encyclopedic author*, one whose work attends to the whole social and linguistic range of his nation, who makes use of all the literary styles and conventions

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<sup>50</sup> The essay is comparative in the sense that it attempts a comparison between different world cultures—and in Mendelson's invocation of Northrop Frye's short passages on 'encyclopedic forms' in *Anatomy of Criticism*, he specifically builds from that ur-text of comparative literary studies. Edward Mendelson, 'Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon,' *MLN*, 91.6 (1976), 1267–75 (p. 1268n1); Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, 2nd edn (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 315–26.

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Herman goes so far as to describe Mendelson's contribution as 'groundbreaking' in his entry on the 'Encyclopedic Novel' in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk, 'Gravity's Encyclopedia Revisited: The Illusion of a Totalizing System in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *English Studies*, 90.2 (2009), 167–79 (p. 168); Petrus van Ewijk, 'Encyclopedia, Network, Hypertext, Database: The Continuing Relevance of Encyclopedic Narrative and Encyclopedic Novel as Generic Designations,' *Genre*, 44.2 (2011), 205–22 (p. 205); Luc Herman, 'Encyclopedic Novel,' *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* (Routledge, 2005), pp. 137–38 (p. 137).

<sup>52</sup> Paul K. Saint-Amour, *Tense Future: Modernism, Total War, Encyclopedic Form* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 204.

<sup>53</sup> Mendelson, 'Encyclopedic Narrative,' p. 1267.



known to his countrymen, whose dialect often becomes established as the national language, who takes his place as national poet or national classic, and who becomes the focus of a large and persistent exegetic and textual industry comparable to the industry founded upon the Bible.<sup>54</sup>

Of course, ‘national culture[s],’ major or otherwise, and their boundaries are always subject to policing, or curation. By Mendelson’s logic, there may be narratives written that achieve the requisite formal mastery to be considered ‘encyclopedic,’ but their inclusion in the genre of ‘encyclopedic narrative’ depends on a national agreement to treat them as such—a point that Mendelson’s argument obscures in its suggestion that a national culture might produce ‘an *encyclopedic author*’ as organically as it might a messiah. In this way, Mendelson is able to claim that there has been, to date, only seven ‘encyclopedic narratives’: besides *The Divine Comedy* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, Goethe’s *Faust*, Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, and Joyce’s *Ulysses*.<sup>55</sup>

As an essay in response to the goals of the Pulitzer, Mendelson’s argument makes some sense—as an argument about the connection between encyclopaedism and fiction, however, it does not.<sup>56</sup> By arguing that encyclopaedic narratives need to be curated as such in order to achieve their potential, since it is ‘Only after an encyclopedic narrative has taken its place as a literary monument’ that it can be ‘recognized as a member of its small and exclusive genre,’ Mendelson conflates encyclopaedism with a national becoming that co-opts his authors into his specific idea of nationhood and national identity, and refuses those encyclopaedic narratives he does not identify to be recognised as having engaged with the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, Mendelson’s argument goes through awkward contortions when trying to clarify the supremacy of certain ‘encyclopedic’ authors over others. When, for example, discussing the ‘absence of a single monumental work that can serve as a cultural focus’ in England and Russia, Mendelson insists that Shakespeare and Pushkin respectively take on the ‘encyclopedic role’; and when considering those ‘encyclopedic authors who are not “national authors”’ in France and the U.S.A., the work of authors like Balzac and Dos Passos becomes subordinated to ‘the problematical positions of

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, p. 1268; emphasis in original.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, p. 1267.

<sup>56</sup> Mendelson refined his ideas in a later essay devoted specifically to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, but, as Herman and van Ewijk argue, he overvalues the role of ‘totality’ in the novel in a way that enables him to overlook that ‘*Gravity’s Rainbow* is predicated on an insight into its own limitations as an encyclopedic novel,’ and that Pynchon explicitly makes clear the futility of ‘any attempt at encircling the totality of knowledge on even one specific topic.’ This emphasis on success and completion is, as already suggested, anathema to the critical value of the term ‘encyclopaedic.’ Edward Mendelson, ‘Gravity’s Encyclopedia,’ in *Mindful Pleasures: Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. by George Levine and David Leverenz (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1976); Herman and van Ewijk, pp. 168–9.

<sup>57</sup> Mendelson, ‘Encyclopedic Narrative,’ p. 1268.

Rabelais and Melville.<sup>58</sup> For Mendelson, ‘encyclopedic narrative’ is a genre characterisable only through a nationalist ‘greatness’ that charges the term ‘encyclopedic’ with a transcendence which normalises his particular sense of the world and its geopolitical order. In this, the term loses its specificity—becomes, as Franco Moretti suggests in his aversion to the term some years later, indicative more of an inscrutable super-canoncity, for texts that are ‘virtually unread,’ ‘Obligatory for any educated person,’ and dependent upon ‘scholastic institutions’ for survival.<sup>59</sup>

It is little surprise, then, that when work on fictional encyclopaedism pays its dues to Mendelson, it tends to do so fleetingly—generally treating his argument as at best an eccentric staging post and at worst a strawman.<sup>60</sup> This tendency leaves this project with two questions: firstly, what to make of Mendelson’s centrality in the field, given his argument’s problems; and secondly, whether it has any productive potential as part of a project that aims to unsettle the familiar boundaries of encyclopaedic thought.

In answering the first question, it is curious and instructive to note that, Northrop Frye notwithstanding, Mendelson was not the first to try to explore the critical value of the term ‘encyclopaedic’ in literature studies: Ronald T. Swigger’s ‘Fictional Encyclopedism and the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 1268.

<sup>59</sup> Franco Moretti, *Modern Epic: The World-System from Goethe to García Márquez*, trans. by Quintin Hoare (London and New York: Verso, 1996), pp. 4–5.

<sup>60</sup> Besides Moretti, and Herman and van Ewijk, other significant contributions include: Gustavo Sainz, ‘Carlos Fuentes: A Permanent Bedazzlement,’ trans. by Tom J. Lewis, *World Literature Today*, 57.4 (1983), 568–72; Hilary Anne Clark, *The Fictional Encyclopaedia: Joyce, Pound, Sollers* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. v–vi; Hilary Anne Clark, ‘Encyclopedic Discourse,’ *SubStance*, 21.1 (1992), 95–110 (p. 95); Trey Strecker, ‘Ecologies of Knowledge: The Encyclopedic Narratives of Richard Powers and His Contemporaries,’ *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 18.3 (1998), 67–71 (p. 67); Adam Sol, ‘The Story as It’s Told: Prodigious Revisions in Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*,’ *American Indian Quarterly*, 23.3/4 (1999), 24–48; Mark D. Anderson, ‘A Reappraisal of the “Total” Novel: Totality and Communicative Systems in Carlos Fuentes’s *Terra Nostra*,’ *Symposium: A Quarterly Journal in Modern Literatures*, 57.2 (2003); Stephen Burn, ‘The Collapse of Everything: William Gaddis and the Encyclopedic Novel,’ in *Paper Empire: William Gaddis and the World System*, ed. by Joseph Tabbi and Rone Shavers, 2nd edn (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. 49–50; Len Platt, ‘“Unfallable Encyclicling”: *Finnegans Wake* and the *Encyclopedia Britannica*,’ *James Joyce Quarterly*, 47.1 (2009), 107–18; Søren Frank, ‘The Aesthetic of Elephantiasis: Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* as an Encyclopaedic Novel,’ *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 46.2 (2010), pp. 189–90; van Ewijk, pp. 205–6; David Letzler, ‘Encyclopedic Novels and the Craft of Fiction: *Infinite Jest*’s Endnotes,’ *Studies in the Novel*, 44.3 (2012), 304–24 (p. 127); Patricia Novillo-Corvalán, ‘Transnational Modernist Encounters: Joyce, Borges, Bolaño, and the Dialectics of Expansion and Compression,’ *The Modern Language Review*, 108.2 (2013), 341–67 (pp. 354–5); Stefano Ercolino, *The Maximalist Novel From Thomas Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow to Roberto Bolaño’s 2666* (Bloomsbury USA Academic, 2014), pp. 37–9; Mark D. Anderson, ‘Modernism, Crisis, and the Ethics of Democratic Representation in Fernando Del Paso’s Total Novels,’ *Latin American Research Review*, 50.2 (2015), 42–62; Saint-Amour, pp. 203–9; Antonio Barrenechea, *America Unbound: Encyclopedic Literature and Hemispheric Studies* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2016), pp. 13–4. Jed Rasula may be alone in treating Mendelson’s essay without suspicion, and as having established ‘a cogent vocabulary and a rationale for viewing *Gravity’s Rainbow* as the latest in a line of singular narratives exceeding the bounds of the novel.’ Jed Rasula, ‘Textual Indigence in the Archive,’ *Postmodern Culture*, 9.3 (1999), p. 1.

Cognitive Value of Literature’ predates his by a year.<sup>61</sup> Swigger’s argument takes a different stance on the term to Mendelson, associating it primarily with ‘use of and aspiration toward knowledge,’ rather than national identity, and uses Hermann Broch, Gustave Flaubert, Borges, and Raymond Queneau to sketch the beginnings of a theory of how ‘literature provides us with a central perspective on the fateful relations between mind and reality.’<sup>62</sup> In this, Swigger’s argument is much more rigorously theorised than Mendelson’s, building on what he identifies as a fecund and hitherto under-examined overlap between Frye’s ideas on ‘Specific Encyclopedic Forms’ and Menippean satire and Mikhail Bakhtin’s theories of polyphony, carnival, dialogism, and *menippea*.<sup>63</sup> For Swigger, this area should receive more attention:

not because the matter of generic classification is in itself so urgent, but because in these ultimate genres we may see how literature has served and may continue to serve to extend the boundaries of ‘culture’ so that all the various means of cognition which are employed in the pursuit and maintenance of ‘civilization’ may be comprised within one field, a field which speaks for and sums up the possibilities of knowledge open to humans.<sup>64</sup>

While Swigger’s use of the term ‘cognition’ feels very much of its time, in his insistence on the ways that fiction enables readers to envision the inherently contingent, partial, and possible constructions of knowledge, he provides a much clearer sense of what studies of fictional encyclopaedism without nationalism can look like. Indeed, in his, admittedly brief, readings of Broch, Flaubert, Borges, and Queneau, he begins to trace a sophisticated argument about how fiction can make clear the ‘vain, hopeless, or even dangerous’ elements of encyclopaedic thought while simultaneously asserting the heuristic potential in fiction’s ‘intellectual capacities and imaginative versatility,’ which maintain its place ‘at the center of man’s symbolic efforts.’<sup>65</sup>

All this is to say that Swigger presents a far less restrictive picture of the critical potential of ‘encyclopaedism’ in understanding fiction—and, in this, the important example that Swigger sets attests to the productivity of comparative study of fictional encyclopaedism beyond the geopolitical status quo. If for Mendelson encyclopaedism must be determined by

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<sup>61</sup> Ronald T. Swigger, ‘Fictional Encyclopedism and the Cognitive Value of Literature,’ *Comparative Literature Studies*, 12.4 (1975), 351–66. Although his contribution is overlooked by the majority of work in the field, Letzler and Rasula both name-check him. Rasula, p. 1; Letzler, p. 146n1.

<sup>62</sup> Swigger, pp. 351, 364.

<sup>63</sup> Frye, pp. 315–26; Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. by Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984).

<sup>64</sup> Swigger, p. 356.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, p. 363.

national curation, for Swigger all that a text requires to be productively considered through the lens of encyclopaedism is that it demonstrate consideration of encyclopaedic thought and practice; while Mendelson contorts his theory to omit certain encyclopaedists and include those whose work patently has no interest in encyclopaedism, Swigger's insistence on a porous generic classification allows him to open fruitful avenues for further research—avenues that critics like Sainz, Clark, Moretti, Strecker, and van Ewijk, for example, are at pains to construct.<sup>66</sup>

Why, then, is Mendelson, and not Swigger, constantly assimilated by studies of fictional encyclopaedism? There are, of course, plenty of hypotheses that can be made—from the essay's function as a rebuttal to the Pulitzer committee, to its centrality in Pynchon studies, to Mendelson's own modest celebrity in academic circles—but in the context of comparative studies of fictional encyclopaedism, it is tempting to conclude that critics can be rather too ready to allow 'encyclopaedism' to become a euphemism for a nation's 'great novel,' or for a re-packaged 'great man' theory of literature. This project aims to reach back past Mendelson to retrieve Swigger's sense of the term's categorical productivity beyond the tedious, Eurocentric, phallogocentric ideas of mastery that reify the prestige of that which the status quo deems unquestionably 'great.'

This returns us to the second question: for a project concerned with unsettling the familiar boundaries and use of encyclopaedism, is there any productive potential to be found in Mendelson's argument? In its weaknesses, I contend, the unconscious of Mendelson's essay makes for a helpful, if negative, example against which to position this thesis' argument: for if Mendelson's use of the term 'encyclopedic' makes it into something like a transcendental signifier that obscures his standpoint, it is, ironically, because he has fallen into a trap laid for him by the permutation of encyclopaedic thought that evolved in the nineteenth century. As Yeo and others have noted, the long nineteenth century saw the end

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<sup>66</sup> It is worth noting, briefly, the conspicuous exception of Leo Bersani: in his 'frankly polemical study' of 'encyclopedic fictions,' in *The Culture of Redemption*, he ignores both Swigger and Mendelson. Nevertheless, he has much in common with the latter: just like Mendelson, his concern is as much with his chosen texts' critical reputations and institutional use as it is with the texts themselves. Indeed, while he goes on to reach a very different conclusion to Mendelson, seeing fictional encyclopaedism as aiming to create a coherent and complete literary world that ultimately negates or depreciates the 'real world,' his conception of the encyclopaedic seems to emerge from a similarly unreconstructed place to Mendelson. For Bersani, encyclopaedism is conflated with a 'redemption' that he defines as attributing a logic of general equivalence to what he regularly, and imprecisely, describes as the 'catastrophes of history.' As Saint-Amour notes, his argument runs into problems by treating artworks and history 'as if they were fungible'—indeed, his argument comes to depend on '[eschewing] any engagement with the complex formal and epistemological interface between the encyclopedia and the novel.' An oddball in the field, my project continues in the same vein as Saint-Amour's: 'to counter Bersani's argument with something like its inverse'—that encyclopaedic thought does not try to *negate* the world so much as hold the potential to dominate it. Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 1–4; Saint-Amour, pp. 215–9.

of the Enlightenment's 'republic of letters,' and a shift from cosmopolitan encyclopaedic visions to those with a 'national focus'—a balkanisation that was sealed by the 'dramatic period of the revolutionary wars.'<sup>67</sup> That is to say, Mendelson's conflation of the encyclopaedia with national identity and becoming is an inheritance of the imperial-nationalism ascendant in the previous century. Indeed, as Fowler notes:

The notion of the *omne scibile* is not static; nor are the ways adopted to capture it. Peleus used genealogy, Eusebius used chronography to reduce chaos to order. [...] Every age has its peculiar encyclopaedia.<sup>68</sup>

By misunderstanding the malleability of 'encyclopaedism'—by allowing it to become a transcendental signifier that authorises his own prejudicial idea of western culture—Mendelson sets a vital, negative example in the study of fictional encyclopaedism: to understand whether, how, and why authors are engaging with encyclopaedic thought and practice, the idea of encyclopaedism must always be situated historically.

This is a stake that some of the most recent work in the field has embraced: the two most significant and provocative studies, Saint-Amour's *Tense Future* and Antonio Barrenechea's *America Unbound*, take radically different fields of writing—the former examining numerous canonical texts of western modernism and the latter four conspicuously encyclopaedic North American novels—and make their respective arguments using a historically situated idea of encyclopaedism. For Saint-Amour, this leads to a provocative argument about how encyclopaedism, as it emerged from the Enlightenment, became, for interwar novelists, 'a properly scaled alternative' to 'total war' discourse and the traditional epic, while for Barrenechea, it allows him to explore how the form of encyclopaedism that developed out of American and European contact, which he labels 'New World Encyclopedism,' is negotiated by authors seeking to understand America beyond its contemporaneous geopolitical boundaries.<sup>69</sup> If this study seeks to reach back past Mendelson to Swigger's sense of the critical productivity of encyclopaedism, it is also to insist that the core of Mendelson's error is a refusal to understand encyclopaedism historically—and to position the beginnings of a theory of literary totality between the deftly historicising work of Saint-Amour and Barrenechea.

If we take Mendelson's centrality in the field as even an unwitting or unconscious endorsement of the ahistorical use of encyclopaedism in literary studies, we can begin to perceive how easily the way 'encyclopaedic' can end up as a go-to category for safeguarding

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<sup>67</sup> Yeo, pp. 239–42. See also: Robert Collison, *Encyclopaedias: Their History throughout the Ages* (London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1964), pp. 1–20.

<sup>68</sup> Fowler, p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> Saint-Amour, p. 190; Barrenechea, p. 27.

the ‘rarefied lineage’ of western culture. In this light, the commonplace conflation of encyclopaedism with national ‘greatness’ and ‘mastery,’ begins to look a little less innocent and a lot more like the rear-guard of a culture’s structure of feeling—as if cultural dominance can be maintained through claims of cultural mastery. Indeed, we could take Frederick R. Karl’s description of the American ‘mega-novel’ as instructive:

While reviewers and critics have hooked on to categories of Jewish novelists, gays, black writers, female authors, another kind of novel has emerged: written mainly (not solely) by white Protestant males.<sup>70</sup>

A category with obvious investment in the encyclopaedic—Karl focuses on writers like Joseph McElroy and William Gaddis in his analysis—it is legible for him only as a reciprocal statement against an apparent, and implicitly suspect, institutional interest with identity politics. Just as for Mendelson ‘encycopedic narratives’ are definable only as a type of singular and national greatness that negates the encyclopaedism of other writers, for Karl the ambition of such texts becomes an occasion for the celebration of the putative mastery of ‘mainly (not solely)’ white Protestant Americans—that is, for blindness to the diversity of American writing.<sup>71</sup> Chief among the gambits this project makes is that the history of encyclopaedic thought and practice can help us to decolonise, re-think, and re-cast our inherited sense of literary ‘greatness’ or ‘mastery.’ Answers to the questions that fictional encyclopaedism presents to literary studies too often affirm lone genius, or the supremacy of similar sets of social identities—and it is with this in mind that I have taken as my guiding principle the conviction that new and different answers will come only through a comparative lens that seeks out difference amidst the manifestly apparent diversity of modern and contemporary authors of encyclopaedic fictions.

### 1.3 Joyce, Silko, Bolaño

In order to meet these goals, I have selected three texts diverse in their provenances but united by an implicit disregard for or disinterest in the rigidity of national boundaries: just as Joyce’s Irish Odysseus is a twice-baptised Hungarian Jew married to a Gibraltarian Penelope,

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<sup>70</sup> Frederick Robert Karl, *American Fictions: 1980-2000: Whose America Is It Anyway?* (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2001), p. 162.

<sup>71</sup> Besides Silko, works like Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) and Maxine Hong Kingston’s *Tripmaster Monkey: His Fake Book* (1989) stand in open defiance of Karl’s claim. It is worth noting, as do Ercolino, Nick Levey and Tom LeClair, that this tendency also rears its head in studies of maximalism and systems theory. Ercolino; Nick Levey, *Maximalism in Contemporary American Literature: The Uses of Detail* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017); Tom LeClair, *In the Loop: Don DeLillo and the Systems Novel by Tom LeClair* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Tom LeClair, *The Art of Excess: Mastery in Contemporary American Fiction* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* begins with a map that redraws the U.S.-Mexico border, and the events of Bolaño's *2666* take place across numerous national borders. Moreover, by considering alongside one of the most widely-read and -studied modernist writers two of the most important recent Native American and Latin American writers, I aim not only to suggest their equivalent significance, but to allow Indigenous and Latinx literary criticism and theory to interact with and re-shape the tools with which the field approaches fictional encyclopaedism. What this means is that while this project reads closely *Ulysses*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *2666* for their ideas on the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought, and the strategies they adopt to develop their own forms of *fictional* encyclopaedism, it endeavours at the same time to situate each text, at least initially, within the history of criticism that has developed around it—and to go on to put the tools of those discrete fields into dialogue with one another.

'James Joyce and the "Obscure Soul of the World"' begins by exploring the shifts in the critical use of the term 'encyclopaedic' in relation to Joyce's work, and posits that it can be productively considered in relation to 'totality' as it emerges across his oeuvre. Looking closely at *Ulysses*, I explore how 'Telemachy' sets up competing metaphors for totality, and establishes, through Stephen Dedalus, a critique of encyclopaedism that aims to totalise reality. In this, Leopold Bloom's fantasy of owning the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is cast as a cruelly optimistic commitment to the received totality of the Imperial status quo. For Joyce, the only way to perceive the world's 'obscure soul'—to move from the known to the unknown—is by thinking *without* totality—a method he gestures towards in the 'Nostos,' as the totalising androcentrism of Bloom and the totalising gynocentrism of Molly are made to complement each other. In this, the radical potential of fictional encyclopaedism, for Joyce, can be seen to inhere in its ability to imagine the world not according to a single totality, but through the interaction of multiple totalities.

This conception of the potentiality of fictional encyclopaedism finds, I contend, new life in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Bolaño's *2666*. In 'Leslie Marmon Silko in "the World of the Different,"' I begin by arguing that the controversy surrounding that Silko's under-appreciated second novel stems from its vision of the world from the multiple perspectives of 'the different.' In this, Silko characterises 'the different' as those subject to the dominant settler colonial gaze—which she figures, by way of reference to the early Spanish proto-encyclopaedist Bartolomé de Las Casas, as part of the inheritance of the Eurocentric encyclopaedic imagination that developed in the Americas alongside European settlement. As such, I provide a short excursus on the development of settler colonial encyclopaedism

in the New World, which I describe—pace Barrenechea—as ‘conquest encyclopaedism,’ before exploring how Silko presents its inheritance as proscribing ‘the different’ in order to preserve settler colonial dominance. For *Almanac of the Dead*, fictional encyclopaedism provides a means of envisioning detotalised, pan-American solidarity, and accordingly becomes a radical tool for imagining the decolonisation of the ‘world of the different.’

While Joyce and Silko both explicitly engage with and critique specific historical formations of encyclopaedic thought and practice, Bolaño uses *2666* to identify potential encyclopaedisms immanent to the contemporary. In this, Bolaño’s fictional encyclopaedism focuses on the possibility that such as-yet-unrealised encyclopaedisms may achieve synthesis and dominance over reality. Beginning with an interpretation of Bolaño’s theory of ‘semblance’ and the totalising imagination as it emerges in *2666*, I look back to his first exploration of such immanence in *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, in which, as with *2666*, the role of the reader in enabling potential encyclopaedism to achieve synthesis is emphasised—akin to how the viewer of a gestalt image pieces together its dots into a complete image. In this, Bolaño critiques and repurposes ‘reader-response’ theory, particularly as it is defined by Julio Cortázar in *Hopscotch*, to re-focus it on that to which we are customarily blind—and as such, argues for more ethically-guided ways of conceiving the world. Indeed, just as with Joyce and Silko, such radical steps are only conceivable for Bolaño by way of an encyclopaedism that makes itself aware of its own weaknesses.

In their study of ‘worldmaking’ among *Wikipedia*’s editors, Lindsay Fullerton and James Ettema observed that the collaborative editing of *Wikipedia* is an activity that is both ‘cognitive *and* normative.’<sup>72</sup> This is as much as to say that in the world according to the ‘General Notability Guideline’ the ability to think a given thing and the normativity of that given thing are conflated. *Wikipedia*’s world, fractious and incomplete as it is and always will be, aims to become a complete, consistent, coherent, singular, and certain totality. Between Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño, it is clear that a *fictional* encyclopaedism explicitly disrupts how we think and what we consider normal, implicitly insisting that the former does not necessarily lead to the latter. In *Ulysses*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *2666*, encyclopaedic thought is made to work without the totalising turns that can transform it into an expression of dominance. Fiction allows the totalising imagination to imagine the totality of reality without at the same time trying to totalise reality—enables, that is, ‘totality-without-totality.’ It is as if a *literary* totality depends on its capacity to make strange the assumptions that give us confidence in

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<sup>72</sup> Lindsay Fullerton and James Ettema, ‘Ways of Worldmaking in Wikipedia: Reality, Legitimacy and Collaborative Knowledge Making,’ *Media, Culture & Society*, 36.2 (2014), 183–99 (p. 198); emphasis in original.



our sense of the world. By invoking the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought in their diagnoses of the world, Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño create literary totalities that recalibrate our senses and our worlds.

## 2. James Joyce and ‘the Obscure Soul of the World’

Since the publications of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake*, encyclopaedism has been one of the least controversial aspects of James Joyce’s work and its legacy; indeed, considering that he described *Ulysses* to Carlo Linati as ‘una specie di enciclopedia’ and *Finnegans Wake* to Harriet Shaw Weaver as his ‘universal history’ or ‘history of the world,’ scholars can reasonably claim to be following Joyce’s lead when offhandedly referring to his ‘encyclopaedism’ or his ‘encyclopaedic style.’<sup>73</sup> Moreover, Richard Ellmann’s and Stuart Gilbert’s accounts of Joyce’s use of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* while writing the *Wake* have provided suggestive evidence of Joyce’s referential relationship with encyclopaedic practice.<sup>74</sup> Yet the relative absence of controversy around the term has allowed its critical capacity to become glib: as a phrase that illuminates Joyce’s work, ‘encyclopaedism’ cannot currently be said to hold the same cache as, for example, terms like ‘myth,’ ‘everyday,’ ‘epiphany,’ or ‘Uncle Charles’; rather, it has afforded a neutral vehicle for interpretations that can, as I will outline, be essentially at odds with one another. I maintain, however, that a robust understanding of Joyce’s engagement with encyclopaedic thought and practice affords an important, and specific, means for appreciating his novels’ achievements and influence—especially as comparators for those contemporary fictions, like *Almanac of the Dead* and *2666*, that have taken up similar ambitions. By looking at how it is that the term’s use in Joyce studies has come to lack the relative specificity required to become one of its key critical terms, we can start to reclaim it, and begin to reconsider Joyce’s texts, and those of his descendants, in its light.

Early readings of encyclopaedism in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* tended to conflate interpretations of the texts’ ostensibly totalising aesthetics with critiques of encyclopaedic method, often in a way that reified the novels’ qualities as universal. In this, the novels’ stylistic expansiveness was often portrayed as feeding into a broader mythological, universalised epistemology. In Gilbert’s critical work, for example, he explicated *Ulysses*’ encyclopaedism as the ideal Aquinasian realism of ‘wholeness, harmony, and radiance,’ while Harry Blamires’ theologically-inclined guide to *Ulysses* describes the ‘Ithaca’ episode as ‘encyclopaedic in its fullness, cosmic in its range.’<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Frank Budgen declared that ‘the

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<sup>73</sup> James Joyce, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. by Richard Ellmann (Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 271; Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. edn (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 544. On the controversial provenance of the latter quote, see: Eloise Knowlton, *Joyce, Joyceans, and the Rhetoric of Citation* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), p. 77.

<sup>74</sup> Ellmann, p. 628; Stuart Gilbert, *Reflections on James Joyce: Stuart Gilbert’s Paris Journal*, ed. by Thomas F. Staley and Randolph Lewis (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), pp. 20–1, 26–7.

<sup>75</sup> Stuart Gilbert, *James Joyce’s Ulysses: A Study* (New York: Vintage Books, 1930), p. 22; Harry Blamires, *The New Bloomsday Book: A Guide Through Ulysses*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 173.

persons in *Work in Progress* are as universal as the words through which they live.<sup>76</sup> Gilbert, Blamires, and Budgen saw Joyce's encyclopaedism as not only universalising, but also essentially apolitical, ahistorical, and unreflective in its own manifest significance.<sup>77</sup>

This type of reading has been highly unfashionable since at least the 1970s, when shifts in critical practice began to incorporate more structuralist approaches: critics such as Marilyn French and Margot Norris attacked the idea that Joyce's fictions allowed for the possibility of universalism, let alone valorised it as desirable, and as such separated the texts' expansive aesthetics from their critiques of encyclopaedism.<sup>78</sup> The subsequent work of deconstructive practice, in particular that of French theorists,<sup>79</sup> has institutionalised readings of *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* as assaults on the very notion of 'universality,' while reasserting the importance of the texts' performativity. So, for Jacques Derrida they represent 'the most powerful project for programming over the centuries the totality of research in the ontologico-encyclopedic field,'<sup>80</sup> which is to say that Joyce's fiction recapitulates the Enlightenment's epistemological project while simultaneously performing its own deconstruction. This school of thought has led to a recent surge in historically-led approaches to the novels, which examine what constituted Joyce's conception of the Enlightenment, and tend to emphasise the context in which any critique of encyclopaedism should be considered.

It is worth pointing out that this recent re-contextualising turn in readings of Joyce's encyclopaedism is in keeping with the broad critical trajectory of the past near century of Joyce scholarship. Since at least the 1990s, scholars have worked to remove Joyce from the de-contextualising silo in which his contemporaries and earliest critics revered him, in order to re-place and re-read him in the fabric of his historical moment. Vincent Cheng provides a succinct articulation of this move, in *Joyce, Race, and Empire*, when he criticises the tendency for Joyce's early critics' to detract from 'the manifestly political content and ideological discourse of Joyce's work.'<sup>81</sup> More recent work, by critics like Andrew Gibson, Katherine Mullin, and Laura Barberán Reinares, for example, seems to heed directly Cheng's call to rediscover the discourse surrounding Joyce's work directly, placing it among the highest

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<sup>76</sup> Frank Budgen, 'James Joyce's *Work in Progress* and Old Norse Poetry,' in *Our Exagmination round his Factification for Incamination of Work in Progress* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929), p. 21.

<sup>77</sup> Other significant contributions include: Frye; Joseph Campbell and H. M Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (Canada: New World Library, 1944).

<sup>78</sup> Marilyn French, *The Book as World: James Joyce's Ulysses* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976); Margot C. Norris, *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake: A Structuralist Analysis* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>79</sup> Derek Attridge and Daniel Ferrer, *Post-Structuralist Joyce: Essays from the French* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Ulysses Gramophone: Hear Say Yes in Joyce,' in *Acts of Literature*, ed. by Derek Attridge (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), p. 281.

<sup>81</sup> Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race, and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.

priorities: while Gibson's study of Joyce's relationship with history and politics begins from the premise that 'Joyce was Irish, and so was his subject matter,' Mullin and Barberán Reinares have shone new, and complementary, light on how Joyce's writing plays on contemporaneous popular anxieties about censorship and sexuality.<sup>82</sup>

The re-contextualising turn in Joyce scholarship provides a useful backdrop for understanding why and how recent readings of Joyce's encyclopaedism have tended to emphasise the historical specificity of the term. Cheryl Herr, for example, casts Joyce's encyclopaedism as exactly the opposite of the enactment of universal values alluded to by Gilbert and Blamires when she notes that the 'diverse body of information alluded to in *Ulysses* defines an encyclopedism that is at best hollow; it serves to emphasize...not wholeness but discrete sets that defy and thwart holism.'<sup>83</sup> Not dissimilarly, Maria Tymoczko, negating any reading of *Ulysses*' style as universal, historicises its affected encyclopaedism by locating its roots in early Irish cultural practices: for her, the text works as an elaborate hybridisation of very specific aspects of Irish antiquity with the modern.<sup>84</sup> In *Finnegans Wake* criticism, it is easy to see how Budgen's reading of 'universal historical experience,' is voided by a critic like Emer Nolan, who reads its interest in transnationalism as pertaining specifically to the creation of 'Irishness' and Irish identity.<sup>85</sup> What is important about this is that as scholars have worked to re-contextualise Joyce, the critical use of the term 'encyclopaedism' can be seen, over the past near-century of work, to have performed a *volte-face*: while it once signified a mythologising universalism, it has come to be the object of a historicising particularisation.<sup>86</sup> Implicit in this turn is the honing of a critical paradigm increasingly suspicious of any moves to claim that Joyce's *magna opera* aspired to, rather than critiqued, universality, and increasingly reparative with Joyce's historical context.

Once our understanding of Joyce's encyclopaedism is removed from any supposed valorisation of universality, and historicised accordingly, the peculiar way in which Joyce

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<sup>82</sup> Andrew Gibson, *Joyce's Revenge: History, Politics, and Aesthetics in Ulysses* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 2; Katherine Mullin, *James Joyce, Sexuality and Social Purity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 210; Laura Barberán Reinares, *Sex Trafficking in Postcolonial Literature: Transnational Narratives from Joyce to Bolaño* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2014), p. 9.

<sup>83</sup> Cheryl Herr, 'Art and Life, Nature and Culture,' in *Joyce's Ulysses: The Larger Perspective*, ed. by Robert D Newman and Weldon Thornton (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1987), p. 31.

<sup>84</sup> Maria Tymoczko, *The Irish Ulysses* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1994), p. 141.

<sup>85</sup> Emer Nolan, *James Joyce and Nationalism* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 144, 147.

<sup>86</sup> Although this trend has not been generally noted in *Ulysses* criticism, it has been relatively widely acknowledged in recent criticism of encyclopaedism in *Finnegans Wake*, by such critics as Norris, Hilary Clark, and Finn Fordham. Margot Norris, 'The Critical History of *Finnegans Wake* and the *Finnegans Wake* of Historical Criticism,' in *Joyce and the Subject of History*, ed. by Mark A Wollaeger, Victor Luftig, and Robert E Spoo (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996); Clark, *The Fictional Encyclopaedia*, pp. 64–5; Finn Fordham, 'The Universalization of *Finnegans Wake* and the Real HCE,' in *Joyce, Ireland, Britain*, ed. by Andrew Gibson and Len Platt (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), p. 198, 210 n.1.

presents the act of encyclopaedically imagining the totality of reality—of conceiving in written language a ‘totalised’ image of the world—starts to demonstrate a remarkable consistency across his oeuvre. Indeed, what emerges in *Finnegans Wake* as ‘the sum told of all’ is equally identifiable in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as a critique of encyclopaedic articulations of reality for depending on a ‘totalised’ interpretation of reality as entirely knowable, articulable, unified, and homogenous; as Herr argues, ‘more than representing unity and completeness, Joyce’s fictional encyclopedism reproduces and critiques the dominating divisions at the heart of the Irish life that he shows us.’<sup>87</sup> Stephen Dedalus’ schooling in the first episode of *Portrait* demonstrates this clearly, and is worth outlining before moving on to explore what exactly a *fictional* encyclopaedism might mean beyond the reproduction of Irish life identified by Herr.

Revising from his geography book, the young Stephen reflects on its description of the world, and considers how humanity can be identified according to its nesting categories: ‘They were all in different countries and the countries were in continents and the continents were in the world and the world was in the universe.’<sup>88</sup> In keeping with this, Stephen has written in his geography book’s flyleaf ‘himself, his name and where he was’:

*Stephen Dedalus*  
*Class of Elements*  
*Clongowes Wood College*  
*Sallins*  
*Country Kildare*  
*Ireland*  
*Europe*  
*The World*  
*The Universe*<sup>89</sup>

In this moment, Stephen imagines the whole of the universe knowable and unified in a totalising schema; it is a form of encyclopaedism: a complete, commensurable scale, identifiable and consistent throughout. Yet re-reading ‘himself, his name and where he was,’ Stephen finds himself questioning this received version of reality:

Then he read the flyleaf from the bottom to the top till he came to his own name. That was he: and he read down the page again. What was after the universe? Nothing. But was there anything round the universe to show where it stopped before the nothing place began? It could not be a wall; but there could be a thin thin line there all round everything. It was very big to think

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<sup>87</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. by Danis Rose and John O’Hanlon (London: Penguin Classics, 1939), p. 14; Herr, p. 32.

<sup>88</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (London, England: Penguin, 1992; repr. 2000), p. 12.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12. Emphasis in original.

about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be; but he could only think of God.<sup>90</sup>

Stephen answers his question by deferring to God's grace: only God is in a position to articulate the complexities of reality and its limits. As such, he must accept the formulation of totality he infers from his textbook; and in the impious connotations of the adjective 'big,' and his inability to think of anything but God, Joyce points to how Stephen's youthful curiosity is bounded by his learned sense of the blasphemous.

Joyce immediately sends up Stephen's learned image of totalised reality. Upon deferring to God's grace, Stephen begins thinking of the name for God in other languages, leading him to conclude that:

though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God.<sup>91</sup>

In the image of totalised reality Stephen learns, linguistic diversity is subordinated to a language that is, by implication, more 'real' than the others: English.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, when Stephen goes on to think about the picture of the earth on the first page of the book, which his friend has coloured green and maroon, he is reminded of 'Dante's press, the brush with the green velvet back for Parnell and the brush with the maroon velvet back for Michael Davitt.'<sup>93</sup> Looking at the image of the world coloured green and maroon, Stephen wonders:

which was right, to be for the green or for the maroon, because Dante had ripped the green velvet back off the brush that was for Parnell one day with her scissors and had told him that Parnell was a bad man. He wondered if they were arguing at home about that. That was called politics. There were two sides in it. Dante was on one side and his father and Mr Casey were on the other side but his mother and uncle Charles were on no side.<sup>94</sup>

The encyclopaedic image of reality as totalised—internally consistent and unified, simultaneously knowable, articulable, and unquestionable through God's indisputable grace—is undermined from its very first articulation: the unitary vision of 'himself, his name and where he was' belies a reality riven by its own complexity, in violent competition with other articulations of reality for dominance; indeed, conspicuously absent from Stephen's address on the flyleaf, between 'Ireland' and 'Europe,' is 'Great Britain,' belying the immanent complexity that dominates Stephen's life.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>92</sup> Conspicuously absent from Stephen's thoughts in this moment is the Irish word for God: 'Dia.'

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, pp. 13–4.

The younger Stephen's reality is one that the elder Stephen, by the time of *Ulysses*, has decided is shaped by the various forms of power that proscribe individual potential. While the young Stephen is taught an encyclopaedic ideal type for reality—knowable, articulable, unified, homogenous—the Stephen of *Ulysses* reasons to himself, while working as a teacher in the 'Nestor' episode, that all versions of reality are shaped, ineluctably, by the 'candescent' (2.76) observing individual.<sup>95</sup> The young Stephen is able only to defer his thoughts about what comes 'after the universe' to God's grace: the elder Stephen is portrayed stepping back from the issue to suggest that any shape given to the world is provided by the soul, since 'the soul is in a manner all that is: the soul is the form of forms' (2.75). For the Stephen of *Ulysses*, this means he is at odds with the education system—and his exchange with the school's headmaster, Mr. Deasy, is a vital and instructive moment in understanding Joyce's encyclopaedism to which I will return.<sup>96</sup> Suffice it to say, if the observer shapes the form by which totalised reality is envisioned, and if by definition no observer can achieve objectivity, then multiplicity, inconsistency, and uncertainty must figure, inevitably, as essential components of any articulation of totality, even as they invalidate any authority that articulation might assume. This is to say that, for the Stephen of *Ulysses*, any attempt to articulate totality would have to try to work without the Anglo-centric, Jesuit assumptions that precede, and universalise, the idea of the world he is taught in *Portrait*.

It may seem that there is a paradox here: if what Joyce's writing does is to demonstrate that the impossibility of encyclopaedic thought leaves it freely open to being co-opted by power, why try to reclaim 'encyclopaedism' as a key element of his work? This paradox is central to two of the most significant recent studies of Joyce's encyclopaedism: Len Platt's genetic study of Joyce's 'dismemberment' of the 1911 Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* in *Finnegans Wake*, and Paul K. Saint-Amour's study of 'encyclopedic modernism' during the inter-war period, which draws heavily on *Ulysses*.<sup>97</sup> For Platt, the *Britannica*, in its epistemological certainty and purported universality, 'stands as the antithesis of the *Wake*,' which goes about mocking the *Britannica*'s articles in 'such randomized ways' as to perform

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<sup>95</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler, Wolfhard Steppe, and Claus Melchior (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1986; repr. 1992), p. 2.76; all further references to this text in this chapter are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

<sup>96</sup> See '2.2 The Circle of Learning and the "cracked lookingglass of a servant,"' pp. 52-65.

<sup>97</sup> Platt, p. 111; Saint-Amour, pp. 179–262. Other significant studies of encyclopaedism in Joyce include: Significant contributions include: Hugh Kenner, *The Stoic Comedians: Flaubert, Joyce and Beckett* (London: W.H. Allen, 1964); Herr; Theoharis C. Theoharis, 'Unveiling Joyce's Portrait: Stephen Dedalus and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,' *The Southern Review*, 20.2 (1984), 286–99; Clark, *The Fictional Encyclopaedia*; Richard Hardack, 'Going Belly up: Entries, Entrees, and the All-consuming Encyclopedic Text,' *Lit: Literature Interpretation Theory*, 7.2-3 (1996), 131–51; Rasula; Matthew Creasy, 'Inverted Volumes and Fantastic Libraries: *Ulysses* and *Bouvard et Pécuchet*,' *European Joyce Studies*, 19.1 (2011); Novillo-Corvalán; Cólín Parsons, *The Ordnance Survey and Modern Irish Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 153–82.

a wrecking of ‘the order, the structure, and, by implication, the whole epistemology underlying’ the *Britannica*’s assumptions about itself and its project.<sup>98</sup> In his formulation, Joyce’s work in the *Wake* represents a type of anti-encyclopaedism that makes any form of knowledge ‘infuriatingly impossible.’<sup>99</sup> For Saint-Amour, conversely, *Ulysses* takes a more positive angle on encyclopaedism, transmitting a Diderotian approach to epistemology that models ‘comprehensiveness without coherentism’ as a strategy for ‘[contesting] the resurgent totality of the present,’ which is characterised by the ‘total war’ logic and discourse of the inter-war years.<sup>100</sup> For Platt and Saint-Amour respectively, Joyce’s encyclopaedism is a disavowal of the possibility of a descriptivist encyclopaedism and an embrace of the analytical potentiality of a volatile encyclopaedism. Both arguments are convincing, but I want to push beyond the binary they jointly suppose, to consider a different formation of the relationship between encyclopaedism and totality that reasserts *fictionality*. Between Platt’s and Saint-Amour’s respective understandings of Joyce’s encyclopaedism, I want to suggest that Joyce reasserts the necessary fictionality of encyclopaedic thought, and in so doing posits an epistemology resistant to completion, which can allow for its own failure through multiplicity, inconsistency, incoherence, and uncertainty.<sup>101</sup> In this, I contend, is the potentiality of fiction for Joyce: in its ability to imagine an encyclopaedism that involves its own failure, and accordingly to reconceive the totality of the status quo without the moves of totalising thought that allow power to usurp and dominate reality by creating false certainty and homogenising difference. In this, for Joyce, is the possibility of reconceiving the world beyond that which is ostensibly ‘known.’

In what follows, I will build on the ways Platt and Saint-Amour read Joyce’s relationship with the *Britannica* in order to suggest how *Ulysses* can be seen to engage with the *Britannica*’s peculiar brand of progressivist encyclopaedism. From this, I will go on to explore how Joyce drives *Ulysses*’ narrative by placing incompatible visions of totality in competition with one another, which manifests in the text’s extended deconstruction of the totalised thought internalised by Bloom as a centre-margin binary. In this, Joyce creates the space for *Ulysses*’ own fictional encyclopaedism to imagine the world without totality.

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<sup>98</sup> Platt, p. 111.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>100</sup> Saint-Amour, pp. 225, 215.

<sup>101</sup> Although I am following Herr’s lead in referring to this as Joyce’s ‘fictional encyclopaedism,’ her analysis is, as noted above, more focused on historicising the ‘dominating divisions at the heart of Irish life.’ My use is to slightly different ends. Herr, p. 32.



## 2.1 *Ulysses* and the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*

Platt's study of the relationship between the *Wake* and the 1911 Eleventh Edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is an excellent place to begin exploring Joyce's relationship with encyclopaedism because it explicitly works to avoid the pitfalls of earlier scholarship. Platt casts as his strawman 'the commonly held view that Joyce was a straight encyclopedic borrower,' who alighted 'magpie-like' on whatever took his fancy and bent it to 'whatever the particular demands of the *Wake* might be,' arguing that such a formulation does not allow readers to consider there to be anything 'specific about Joyce's work with the *Britannica*': 'It becomes just one more source for his final work, albeit an important one.'<sup>102</sup> Indeed, his reading of the *Wake* wrecking the *Britannica*'s epistemological assumptions is premised on exactly the opposite conviction: Joyce, Platt proposes, was 'highly sensitive to the limitations, ambiguities, and downright impossibilities of the confident modern universalism that characterized the encyclopedic tradition,'<sup>103</sup> and his genetic reading of the *Wake* and its notebooks is compelling.

Taking the 'Haveth Childers Everywhere' section as a key example, Platt notes that Joyce's use of information from the *Britannica* is traceable in the notebooks for the *Wake*, but the 'ordering principle to their incorporation' is unfathomable: 'there is no apparent explanation as to why notes appear where they do.'<sup>104</sup> For Platt, this can be read as a 'very precise act of critical cultural sabotage' that performatively dis-orders the *Britannica*'s totalising pretensions.<sup>105</sup> In this, he argues, undermining the encyclopaedic principle seems in some sense central to the *Wake*'s 'wider and foundational instincts,' as when the dis-ordering is acknowledged as such it begins to expose 'in highly inventive ways the absurdities of culturally specific knowledge formation' that poses 'as the universal.'<sup>106</sup> The *Wake*'s sabotage, Platt observes, persistently deflates the humanistic and progressivist aspirations that the 1911 *Britannica* outlines in its preface and uses to formulate its contents—to the point that the 1911 *Britannica* seems to provide another source for Joyce's eventual choice of title for his *Work in Progress*: in its article on 'Funeral Rites,' the *Britannica* describes feasting as 'an

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<sup>102</sup> Platt has in mind both Ellmann's biography and Gilbert's *Paris Journal*, and also by implication the use made of James S. Atherton's early study-cum-catalogue of the *Wake*'s intertexts. Platt, pp. 116, 110; J. S. Atherton, *The Books at the Wake: A Study of Literary Allusions in James Joyce's Finnegans Wake* (London: Faber and Faber, 1959).

<sup>103</sup> Platt, p. 116.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, p. 111; James Joyce, *James Joyce: The Finnegans Wake Notebooks at Buffalo*, ed. by Vincent Deane, Daniel Ferrer, and Geert Lernout, 12 vols (Turnout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2001).

<sup>105</sup> Platt, p. 112.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, pp. 116, 112.

essential feature of every primitive funeral [that] in the Irish “wake” still survives.<sup>107</sup> Platt’s argument shines light on how the *Wake* exposes the 1911 *Britannica*’s totalising universalism as merely a synthesis of scientific progressivism, paternalistic inclusiveness, and instinctive nationalism that ultimately reproduces Anglo-American cultural imperialism. Indeed, much of the *Wake*’s comedy derives from its near-slapstick deployment of knowledge that lies on or beyond ‘the shifting margins of contemporary knowledge,’ such as craniometry, heraldry, and blazoning: as Platt suggests, the *Wake*’s various send-ups of these terms, all highly-valued by the 1911 *Britannica*, serve to illustratively poke fun at points where its ‘knowledge’ becomes ‘crude ideology’—Flaubertian *idées reçues*.<sup>108</sup>

For Platt, the key value of reading the *Wake*’s relationship with the *Britannica* is how it ‘helps us to position Joyce the intellectual’ and refine an idea of his ‘politics.’<sup>109</sup> But can the same be said for *Ulysses* and the *Britannica*, particularly since it is largely absent from records of the novel’s genesis?<sup>110</sup> Saint-Amour suggests that it can, and offers a twist on Platt’s understanding of the 1911 *Britannica* by positing that the inarguable failure of the *Britannica* to actually achieve its totalising aims results in a text that is inherently ‘self-contradictory and polyphonic.’<sup>111</sup> In this, he suggests, Joyce may have extrapolated from the strictures of the *Britannica* some of the ‘Diderotian insight’ on the contingency of knowledge that he sees as central to *Ulysses*’ understanding of encyclopaedism.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, for Saint-Amour, the ‘literary encyclopedism’ of *Ulysses* asserts at once the ‘yearning’ for ‘a social portraiture so total as to comprehend the future’ and ‘the recognition that large-scale social portraiture lies not in coherentism but in arranging particulars in competing orders of order’—or competing totalities.<sup>113</sup> But Saint-Amour misses a trick by passing over an important reference to the *Britannica* in the ‘Ithaca’ episode: while imagining the particulars of his ideal home, Leopold Bloom conjures up the image of a ‘fumed oak sectional bookcase containing the Encyclopaedia Britannica’ (17.1581, 1522-3).<sup>114</sup> As Mark Wollaeger has observed, one of the amusements of *Ulysses* is examining the ‘specific ideological appeals’ that underpin its

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Funeral Rites,’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1911), XI, 329d – 333a (p. 331c).

<sup>108</sup> Platt, pp. 113, 112.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, p. 112.

<sup>110</sup> That is to say, the *Britannica* is not mentioned with regard to *Ulysses* either in Joyce’s letters, Gilbert’s journals, or Budgen’s study of the novel’s ‘making.’ It is, however, mentioned briefly in Ellmann’s biography, in which he implies that the *Britannica*’s description of poverty on Dublin’s Montgomery Street, or Monto, may have informed Joyce’s portrayal of Nighttown in ‘Circe.’ That said, Ellmann asserts that ‘Joyce’s knowledge of Monto was...as complete as his knowledge of the *Evening Telegraph*,’ suggesting that journalism was, in this case, the more important source. Ellmann, p. 367.

<sup>111</sup> Saint-Amour, p. 202.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, p. 202.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid, pp. 261–2.

<sup>114</sup> Saint-Amour does note this moment in passing, but does not unpack its significance. Ibid, p. 199n27.

characters' 'operations of desire,'<sup>115</sup> and this is certainly the case here: it can tell us, I contend, something more specific about how Joyce conceives of the consequences of the *Britannica's* brand of encyclopaedism in *Ulysses*.

Legible as a fantasy alternative to Bloom's actual homecoming, the reverie initiates an extended digression in which he imagines his ascent to the aristocracy: he envisions his 'ultimate ambition' as having 'civic functions and social status among the county families and landed gentry'—and being a *Britannica*-owner is implicated in this aspiration from its inception (17.1497, 1606-7). There are many ways of reading this peculiar and revealing moment—but its triangulation with the novel's bathetic Homeric parallel is worth dwelling on. Of course, Bloom's actual homecoming is severely ironic when compared with that of his mythical forebear: while Odysseus reunites with Telemachus and faithful Penelope, restores order to Ithaca by dispatching her suitors, and fulfils Athena's wish for peace, Bloom returns home to a wife he knows to have been unfaithful, Stephen 'Promptly, inexplicably, with amicability, gratefully' declines the paternal offer of shelter, and the suitors are slaughtered by the near-parenthetical assurance that Bloom 'would...have smiled' if he had dwelt on the infidelity, which he does not (17.955, 2126). Bloom's ideal homecoming might be expected to bear closer resemblance to that of Odysseus: instead, Joyce has 'Bloom of 7 Eccles street foresee Bloom of Flowerville' (17.1581) in an extremely vivid picture of bourgeois aspiration. If Odysseus' nostos is heroic, and Bloom's actual homecoming is bathetic, there is something pathetic about Bloom's fantasy homecoming. What might the *Britannica*, mentioned so conspicuously at the beginning of the reverie, have to do with this, and what can it tell us about *Ulysses'* own relationship with encyclopaedism?

While it may seem oddly materialist for Joyce's 'cultured allroundman' (10.581) to idealise the *Britannica* as a route to nobility, Bloom's utilitarian streak is called to attention earlier in 'Ithaca.' Believing that Stephen is 'engaged in mental composition,' Bloom reflects on:

the pleasures derived from literature of instruction rather than of amusement as he himself had applied to the works of William Shakespeare more than once for the solution of difficult problems in imaginary or real life. (17.384-7)

Although it is explained that despite 'careful and repeated reading of certain classical passages, aided by a glossary, he had derived imperfect conviction from the text, the answers not bearing in all points,' Bloom remains a devotee of instructional literature: and this is

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<sup>115</sup> Mark A. Wollaeger, 'Reading *Ulysses*: Agency, Ideology, and the Novel,' in *Joyce and the Subject of History*, ed. by Mark A. Wollaeger, Victor Luftig, and Robert E. Spoo (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1996), p. 92.

attested to by the ‘catalogue’ of his bookshelves, provided moments before the ideal homecoming fantasy (17.389-91, 1361-1407). With this proclivity in mind, it follows that the *Britannica* might represent for Bloom a Weberian ‘ideal type’ for the ‘literature of instruction.’ The placement of this ideal type at the beginning of an ‘ideal’ homecoming gives an important clue as to the ideological appeals underpinning the desirability of instructional literature for Bloom—appeals that the vision suggests he is both endorsing and pursuing.

Since the *Britannica* holds a position of such idealised significance in Bloom’s imagination, it follows that its own structures and proscriptions must influence to some degree what it is possible for Bloom to think. Indeed, just as *Portrait*’s young Stephen finds his thoughts resist questioning the limits of the totalised version of reality he is taught due to the inherent sin of being ‘very big,’<sup>116</sup> Bloom, as he considers the ‘course of action’ he would take were he ‘among the county families and landed gentry,’ suddenly finds himself having to ‘Prove that he had loved rectitude from his earliest youth,’ in one of the episode’s only catechistic imperatives (17.1616, 1606-7, 1634). The *Britannica*-led fantasy demands for its fruits a level of conformity for which Bloom feels he needs to make his case, even to himself. Of course, this is one of the key differences between Joyce’s two protagonists: Stephen grows up to blaspheme and question the totalised order, while Bloom seems, especially in this fantasy, to have embraced the *Britannica*’s image of totality and be trying to assimilate himself to its version of reality. Their divergence is suggestive: just like Stephen’s experience at Clongowes, it implies that the totalised, encyclopaedic version of reality demands a learned intellectual conformity that delimits the boundaries of thought; and while Stephen wants to claim his possibility beyond that status quo, Bloom can only envision his possibility according to it. That said, the revelation of Bloom’s relationship with the *Britannica* emerges only at the very end of *Ulysses*: before exploring it in full detail, it is helpful to outline how the preceding episodes of *Ulysses* present the encyclopaedic. In this, the ‘Nestor’ episode is vital: weaved through its narrative of Stephen’s morning teaching at a suburban school is a sophisticated argument about the ways in which totality can be imagined, and the ways certain representations of totality can establish dominance over others by shaping and proscribing that which is conceivable.

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<sup>116</sup> Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 13.

## 2.2 The ‘Circle of Learning’ and the ‘cracked lookingglass of a servant’

As discussed in the introduction to this study,<sup>117</sup> the notion that representations of totality themselves can define what is and is not possible by demarcating the boundaries of that which is and is not individually and collectively thinkable is built into the etymology of the word ‘encyclopaedia’: the metaphor of a ‘circle of learning’ suggests selective, didactic principles. ‘Nestor’ begins the novel’s critique of encyclopaedism by playing off the encyclopaedia’s literal meaning as a ‘circle of learning’ against another metaphor for totality: the ‘mirror of the world.’<sup>118</sup> Since the mirror implies a mimetic reflection of the world, and the circle suggests a description that has already been interpreted and arranged for its audience, these two metaphors are at root incompatible: while the mirror replicates the reality to be interpreted, the circle makes visible the hidden, immanent order of reality, and in so doing infers reality’s true, infinite pattern.<sup>119</sup> By pitting these two metaphors for totality against each other, Joyce uses ‘Nestor’ to make the pedagogical concerns of the ‘circle of learning’ start to look more like a form of social control, or indoctrination, which provides a framework for reading Bloom’s *Britannica*-led ideal homecoming in ‘Ithaca.’

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<sup>117</sup> See: ‘1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms,’ pp. 8–11.

<sup>118</sup> Incidentally, this metaphor is typical more of Medieval and Renaissance encyclopaedism. Richard R. Yeo notes that early encyclopaedic projects, before the term ‘encyclopaedia’ came into use, conceived of themselves using the metaphor of a mirror reflecting that in the world which ‘should be studied, and remembered,’ and points to Vincent de Beauvais’ *Speculum Mains* (c.1250) as a key example. Yeo, pp. 78–83.

<sup>119</sup> G.W.F. Hegel’s use of the infinite as a guideline for his thinking provides a useful demonstration of the significance of the ‘circle of learning’s’ infinite shape. Hegel’s basic understanding of ‘infinity [*Unendlichkeit*’] was that in its formulations as either an unending straight line (‘bad [*schlecht*’]) or a finite-but-endless circle (‘true [*echt*’]), it represented two distinct forms of reasoning. ‘Bad infinity’ is not truly infinite as it is unable to incorporate within it the ‘finite’; ‘true infinity,’ conversely, involves the finite, instead of contrasting with it, and does not go on forever. For Hegel, the importance of the distinction between the two is in terms of dialectics: while the former endlessly advances from one thing to another, the latter is reciprocal, allowing causes, inferences, and thoughts to support one another. As Michael Inwood explains, for Hegel:

The central application of true infinity is to the universe as a whole: God cannot be distinct from the world, since they would then be two finite entities, which could not be self-sustaining or self-explanatory. Equally the world cannot go forward and backwards forever: it must have a self-contained circular form. Again, thought about the world cannot be distinct from the world, for then thought and being would each limit the other and be two finite, non-self-supporting entities. Hence thought is identical to (but also different from) the world, and it too is circular. The concept is thus as infinite as the world. True infinity thus explains several features of Hegel’s system: e.g. why God must be the logical structure of the world and why forms of thought, such as the inference, must be embedded in the world.

In this light, it is useful to recall that Hegel’s own *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse* (1817) was given a circular structure:

as a whole [it] is seen as returning to its beginning, since logic, philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit are respectively the sciences of the idea in and for itself, in its otherness, and in its return to itself out of its otherness. (The last phase of spirit, philosophy, itself begins with logic.) [It] thus portrays philosophy as a ‘circle of circles,’ and provides a ‘circular education.’

Of course, Hegel’s *Enzyklopädie* was never intended to be more than a series of supplementary notes for his lectures, and it’s likely that the title was chosen in line with contemporaneous Bavarian educational regulations, but his decision to structure the text circularly is instructive. M. J. Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), pp. 141, 86–8.

As noted earlier, at the beginning of ‘Nestor’ Stephen seems to have decided that unity is subjectively constructed by the ‘candescent’ observer, whose soul is ‘the form of forms,’ and this puts him at odds with an education system that insists on its version of reality as an objective, organic, totalised unity (2.75-6). It is Stephen’s experience teaching children ancient history that turns his mind to this; responding to a student’s ignorance of Pyrrhus beyond ‘That phrase the world had remembered,’ he considers the position of Pyrrhus and Julius Caesar in cultural memory:

Had Pyrrhus not fallen by a beldam’s hand in Argos or Julius Caesar not been knifed to death. They are not to be thought away. Time has branded them and fettered they are lodged in the room of the infinite possibilities they have ousted. (2.14, 48-51)

The spatial image of the memory of Pyrrhus and Caesar locked into a specific formation within a room that could allow within it infinite permeations is key, and leads Stephen to more fundamental questions: ‘But can those [infinite possibilities] have been possible seeing that they never were? Or was that only possible which came to pass?’ (2.51-2). In this moment, Stephen asks himself how possible it is for cultural memories of history to be wrong: could Pyrrhus and Caesar themselves have ‘ousted’ all possible formations of the memory of their lives other than that which they achieved, or could what is remembered deviate from the truth? He reasons, like Aristotle, that memory ‘must be a movement then, an actuality of the possible as possible’ (2.67). This is to say that the form of a memory must depend on the conditions that make its remembrance by the ‘candescent’ observing soul possible—and thus that what it is possible to remember must be determined to at least some extent by the conditions in which the ‘candescent’ observing soul lives. Stephen’s conclusion seems to be that memory’s possibility must be determined by the conditions in which the soul is acculturated.

This reasoning is played out in his interaction with his ‘Ugly and futile’ student Cyril Sargent, who approaches Stephen after the class, when his students have left for hockey:

His thick hair and scraggy neck gave witness of unreadiness and through his misty glasses weak eyes looked up pleading. On his cheek, dull and bloodless, a soft stain of ink lay, dateshaped, recent and damp as a snail’s bed.

He held out his copybook. The word *Sums* was written on the headline. Beneath were sloping figures and at the foot a crooked signature with blind loops and a blot. Cyril Sargent: his name and seal.

—Mr Deasy told me to write them out all again, he said, and show them to you, sir.

Stephen touched the edges of the book. Futility. (2.123-32; emphasis in original)

While the ugliness and futility of Sargent weighs on Stephen's perception, Joyce's description of the mark on Sargent's face as 'dateshaped' implicitly recalls Stephen's thoughts on Pyrrhus and Caesar, who 'Time has branded'—the mark could be equally in the shape of a date palm or the imprint of the date. By connecting Pyrrhus, Caesar, and Sargent like this, the suggestion seems to be that the time which brands the memory of ancient history is the contemporary moment of instruction: the formation that the memory of Pyrrhus and Caesar takes depends on how Sargent and his generation are acculturated. If historical memory is this malleable, it follows that the forces which allow for Sargent's education, and cultivate his 'candescent' form-giving soul, must play a key part in shaping and proscribing his historical memory. In this light, the fact that he could have the date marked on his face simply repeats the pessimism indicated by his conspicuously militaristic, Anglo-Irish family 'name and seal' and implicated in the pointless rote learning Mr Deasy has demanded of him.

That said, Sargent's clear similarities to the young Stephen do not escape the older Stephen. Watching Sargent attempt a sum himself, Stephen thinks:

Like him was I, these sloping shoulders, this gracelessness. My childhood bends beside me. Too far for me to lay a hand there once or lightly. Mine is far and his secret as our eyes. (2.168-70)

What is important about this moment of empathy, in which Stephen acknowledges their mutually unknowable depths, is that it follows Stephen's only attempt to figure that which is universal beyond individual subjectivity: '*Amor matris*: subjective and objective genitive' (2.165; emphasis in original). As Stephen talks to Sargent, he finds himself thinking that, ugly and futile though he may be:

someone had loved him, borne him in her arms and in her heart. But for her the race of the world would have trampled him underfoot, a squashed boneless snail. She had loved his weak watery blood drained from her own. Was that then real? The only true thing in life? (2.140-3)

This passage, particularly the final two interrogatives, directly recall Cranly's advice to Stephen at the end of *Portrait*:

Whatever else is unsure in this stinking dunghill of a world a mother's love is not. Your mother brings you into the world, carries you first in her body. What do we know about what she feels? But whatever she feels, it, at least, must be real. It must be.<sup>120</sup>

If a mother's love 'must be real,' 'the only true thing in life,' then it follows that it is the universal basis for any version of reality—providing another way in which Stephen's flashbacks to 'Cranly's arm' (1.1.59, 3.451) haunt him. Although Stephen is posing the

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<sup>120</sup> Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 263.

universality of *amor matris* as a question to which he does not know the answer, its implication is that *amor matris* may afford the only source for individual possibility beyond indoctrination. This at once casts an important light on Stephen's relationship with his mother and her appearance in 'Circe,' as well as making motherhood a key idea through which to evaluate Joyce's fictional encyclopaedism—a point to which I will return at the end of this chapter in greater depth.<sup>121</sup>

For the moment, however, it is instructive to consider how Stephen reflects on the specifics of the education Sargent is getting. In a passage that also echoes *Portrait*,<sup>122</sup> Stephen's mind wanders as he demonstrates an equation's solution for Sargent, who still cannot do them in spite of his additional copying:

Across the page the symbols moved in grave morrice, in the mummery of their letters, wearing quaint caps of squares and cubes. Give hands, traverse, bow to partner: so: imps of fancy of the Moors. Gone too from the world, Averroes and Moses Maimonides, dark men in mien and movement, flashing in their mocking mirrors the obscure soul of the world, a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend. (2.155-60)

The equations remind Stephen that Arab and Jewish art and learning have contributed to contemporaneous Dublin's culture—in the morrice, or Morris Dance, derived from the Moors who inspired it—and mathematics and philosophy—in the work of Averroes and Moses Maimonides. Importantly for Stephen, these figures, unlike those of Pyrrhus and Caesar, are forgotten, and as such are locked out of the 'room of the infinite possibilities' in which their memory might be 'fettered.' Although the room may contain infinite possibilities, it is bounded by walls that exclude other knowledges, rendering them marginal and incommensurable, and as such unrecognisable; as Stephen thinks, Moorish culture, Averroes, and Maimonides are 'a darkness shining in brightness which brightness could not comprehend.' While the 'circle of learning' may give an infinite structure to knowledge, and allow for 'infinite possibilities' within it, it creates at the same time a boundary that is demarcated by the power deciding what lies within it—a power that Stephen notes has manifested itself in a refusal to acknowledge the work of 'dark men in mien.'

What is important about these figures' exclusion from the 'circle of learning' is that it is in keeping with the narcissistic British Imperial exceptionalism subscribed to by the *Britannica*, and Mr Deasy.<sup>123</sup> British Imperialism, as the dominant cultural force to which students'

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<sup>121</sup> See: '2.5 *Amor Matris* upon the Void,' pp. 64-9.

<sup>122</sup> Specifically, the description of maths problems at the beginning of the third episode. Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, pp. 109–10.

<sup>123</sup> Notably, while the 1911 *Britannica* contains entries on both Averroes and Maimonides, they focus merely on their biographies and religious significance. Discussion of their mathematical and philosophical work is



‘candescent’ souls are acculturated, decides where the boundaries of the ‘circle of learning’ are positioned. Stephen’s digression while solving the equation indicates his awareness that Averroes’ and Maimonides’ exclusion from the students’ education is a proscriptive effect of the very specific ideological appeal underpinning the ‘circle of learning’ by which they are taught, and which they are led to believe is objective and universal. In this, facticity within the ‘circle of learning’ can be seen to depend on the facts’ relationship to British Imperialism: facts selected for inclusion within the ‘circle of learning’ must support or be shaped to support it in some way—and the excluded becomes recognisable only insofar as it reaffirms the centrality of the included.

Mr Deasy, the school’s headmaster, is the walking embodiment of the configuration of the *Britannica*’s ‘circle of learning’ as a valorised ideological formation. In his conversation with Stephen, Mr Deasy unwittingly elaborates the image of Averroes and Maimonides as dark-skinned men that the brightness of the contemporary refuses to comprehend:

—Mark my words, Mr Dedalus, he said. England is in the hands of the jews.

[...]

—A merchant, Stephen said, is one who buys cheap and sells dear, jew or gentile, is he not?

—They sinned against the light, Mr Deasy said gravely. *And you can see the darkness in their eyes.* (2.346-7, 359-62; emphasis added)

The contrast between Mr Deasy’s anti-Semitism and Stephen’s liberalism is not hard to perceive, particularly from the vantage point of the Twenty-First Century; but besides their obvious disagreement, their interaction confirms Stephen’s vision of how knowledges can be wilfully marginalised, with Mr Deasy refusing to use his ‘candescent’ soul to see anything more than the ‘darkness in [the] eyes’ of an Other he believes are ‘the signs of a nation’s decay’ (2.347-8). In this, Mr Deasy makes the Other knowable only in its ambiguous formation as a nightmarish threat to the status quo. But if Mr Deasy can make understanding of the Other incommensurable within his ‘circle of learning,’ what is to be made of the knowledge he will recognise, like Pyrrhus and Caesar, in the room of ‘infinite possibilities’ where time brands and fetters them as commensurable? By way of *Ulysses*’ intricate web of allusions to *Hamlet*, Joyce makes clear precisely what inclusion in the ‘circle of learning’ does to knowledge.

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limited to the entry on ‘Arabian Philosophy,’ which outlines a typically triumphalist narrative of Arab and Jewish antiquity: ‘Jewish scholars held an honourable place in transmitting the Arabian commentators to the schoolmen. It was amongst them, especially in Maimonides, that Aristotelianism found refuge after the light of philosophy was extinguished in Islam.’ ‘Arabian Philosophy,’ in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edn (Chicago, IL: Encyclopaedia Britannica Company, 1911), II, 276c – 283a (p. 282d).

After Mr Deasy has admonished him for not being better at saving, he coerces Stephen into giving a letter he has written to his 'literary friends' (2.290) at the *Evening Telegraph*:

I have put the matter into a nutshell, Mr Deasy said. It's about the foot and mouth disease. Just look through it. There can be no two opinions on the matter. (2.231-3)

Mr Deasy's nutshell echoes that of Hamlet: speaking to Rosencratz and Guildenstern, he sardonically exclaims, 'O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count/myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I/have bad dreams.'<sup>124</sup> Mr Deasy, who earlier reveals his poor understanding of Shakespeare when he cites Iago as a model of thrift,<sup>125</sup> is likely oblivious to the echo; but what the reference does nevertheless is to suggest that Mr Deasy has quite happily bounded himself in a nutshell and declared himself king of the infinite possibilities therein. Indeed, in response to Stephen's comment that history is 'the nightmare from which [he] is trying to awake'—the bad dreams that keep Hamlet from blissful ignorance—Mr Deasy assures him, 'I am happier than you are' (2.377, 389).

The 'circle of learning' Mr Deasy represents may contain a 'room of the infinite possibilities,' but it is ultimately the space of a nutshell; and in his role as Headmaster of the nutshell, he can purvey as 'the dictates of common sense' his sycophantic praise of British Imperialism, attributing to the colonial status quo objectivity and universality (2.194, 335). While his letter to the *Evening Telegraph* is a relatively benign, and, in the context of the novel, uproarious, example of Mr Deasy's 'common sense,' the dangers implicit in his 'nutshell of learning' are numerous. In his wilful ignorance, Mr Deasy embodies the power of British Imperialism to totalise its version of reality, asserting its centrality and dominance over its Others. Stephen notes how this dominance manifests itself in the way that Mr Deasy's 'nutshell of learning' enables criticism and dissent to be neutralised through incorporation. In pre-emptive response to any disagreement from Stephen, Mr Deasy says:

You think me an old fogey and an old tory...I saw three generations since O'Connell's time. I remember the famine in '46. Do you know that the orange lodges agitated for repeal of the union twenty years before O'Connell did or before the prelates of your communion denounced him as a demagogue? You fenians forget some things. (2.268-72)

By categorising him as a Fenian, Mr Deasy forces on Stephen an identity with which he has given no indication of identifying; indeed, Mr Deasy positions him within a Tory–Fenian, or

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<sup>124</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by G.R. Hibbard (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008), II.2.252–3.

<sup>125</sup> Mr Deasy enjoins Stephen to do as Shakespeare says and '*put but money in thy purse*' (2.239; emphasis in original). Considering Stephen's thoughts on 'dark men in mien,' that Mr Deasy is actually citing Iago scamming Roderigo with a fake plan to steal Desdemona from Moorish Othello adds a further layer of irony.

Unionist-Nationalist, binary in which Stephen has expressed no interest. The implication is that within the ‘nutshell of learning’ all oppositional thought can be absorbed, categorised, and re-cast in its service. As Stephen will think in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ in the reality of contemporaneous Dublin his is ‘the voice of Esau’ (9.981), silenced by an ignorance that cannot and will not recognise him on his terms.

Stephen reasons, then, that within Mr Deasy’s nutshell, what happens to the memory of Pyrrhus and Caesar must be the same as that which has happened to the memory of the Battle of Diamond:

Glorious, pious and immortal memory. The lodge of Diamond in Armagh the splendid behung with corpses of papishes. Hoarse, masked and armed, the planters’ covenant. The black north and true blue bible. Croppies lie down. (2.274-7)

While the Battle of Diamond saw Protestants murder a group of Catholics, at the beginning of a concerted effort to run Catholics out of Armagh, Stephen reflects on how the victorious Protestants like Mr Deasy have normalised their win by removing the memory of dead Catholics from their history, homogenising anti-Union resistance and Catholics under the term ‘Croppy.’ Indeed, while Mr Deasy claims the Orange Lodges’ initial opposition to union as an example of the ‘immortal memory’ of his ‘nutshell of learning,’ Stephen cannot forget that the Orangeman’s toast to ‘Glorious, pious and immortal memory’ ignores those ‘corpses of papishes.’ The irony in which Stephen’s thoughts place Mr Deasy’s pre-emptive rejoinder becomes even more pronounced when, immediately afterwards, he explains that he is descended from ‘sir John Blackwood who voted for the union’—which is untrue.<sup>126</sup> In this, Mr Deasy’s description of Stephen as a Fenian starts to look less like a declarative and more like an imperative: ‘you fenians forget some things.’

Mr Deasy seems to do an awful lot of violence to people and memory: it is as if his conception of history is one that allows itself to be rewritten for expedience. There is something duplicitous, then, about his role as an educator, delivering the ‘circle of learning’: far from being the pedagogical expression of the infinite structure that holds the world’s ‘infinite possibilities,’ his sense of the ‘circle of learning’ seems to be more like a performance of a specific ideology as universal epistemology. As such, it is unsurprising that, at the end of the episode, Mr Deasy reveals his eschatological conception of history. He insists to Stephen that ‘The ways of the Creator are not our ways...All human history moves towards one great goal, the manifestation of God’ (2.377, 380-1), revealing that his ‘circle of learning’ is in fact

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<sup>126</sup> Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman, *Ulysses Annotated: Notes for James Joyce’s Ulysses*, 2nd edn (University of California Press, 2008), pp. 36–7.

a straight eschatological line: less an infinite structure that tries to capture the objective totality of universal reality than a totalised eschatological path on which he wants to set the world; as he tells Stephen, his motto is ‘*Per visa rectas*’ (2.282; emphasis in original), or by straight roads.<sup>127</sup> It follows, then, that Mr Deasy’s pedagogical inclinations are more about proscribing knowledge than developing it: his insistence that ‘there can be no two opinions’ on foot and mouth disease is of a piece with his adage, to Stephen, that ‘To learn one must be humble’ (2.322, 406). For Mr Deasy, the purpose of his ‘nutshell of learning’ is to indoctrinate students with passivity, and to incorporate them as British Imperial subjects into his eschatological mission. Knowing what we do about Stephen from *Portrait* and ‘Telemachus,’ it is unsurprising that he deems Stephen ‘not born to be a teacher’ (2.402).

Stephen’s disagreement with, and response to, Mr Deasy’s eschatological progressivism is an important statement of his conviction that the ‘candescent’ soul is the ‘form of forms.’ Reflecting on the school’s students as ‘many forms’ (2.196), and that thus their souls provide many forms of forms, Stephen rebuts Mr Deasy’s univocal ‘manifestation of God’:

Stephen jerked his thumb towards the window, saying:  
 —That is god.  
 Hooray! Ay! Whrrwheel!  
 —What? Mr Deasy asked.  
 —A shout in the street, Stephen answered, shrugging his shoulders. (2.382-6)

What for Mr Deasy can only be one thing, for Stephen, in keeping with his theory of the ‘candescent’ soul as the form of forms, is ineluctably multiple. While for Stephen this multiplicity is to be embraced, for Mr Deasy the children are a problem to which he must ‘restore order’ (2.191-2). In all of this, ‘Nestor’ can be read as introducing to the novel a vision of the status quo’s pedagogical encyclopaedism as a masquerade: if his ‘nutshell’ is a totalising eschatological march disguising itself as universal objectivity, it follows that the principles by which he delimits the boundaries of the ‘nutshell’ exclude multiplicity and complication, valorising British Imperialism and Protestantism. A jocoserious joke presents itself here, as the spatial assumption implicit in Mr Deasy’s eschatological progressivism links back to the straight line that introduces the episode: ‘Pyrrhus, a pier. [...] Kingstown pier, Stephen said. Yes, a disappointed bridge’ (2.26, 39). If Kingstown pier is a disappointed bridge, then Mr Deasy’s eschatological ‘nutshell of learning’ may well be a disappointed bridge to God. Of course, the flip-side of this joke is that if Pyrrhus is remembered, in the room of infinite possibilities, as a pier, then Mr Deasy’s pier to God may also be pyrrhic. Out

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<sup>127</sup> As Gifford and Seidman note, this is actually Sir John Blackwood’s motto—adding another ironic twist to Mr Deasy’s appropriation of his legacy. *Ibid*, p. 37.

of 'Nestor,' we may begin to speak of pyrrhic encyclopaedism: a pedagogically-inclined image of reality as totalised which exerts so devastating a toll on its students that it is worse than nothing.

Stephen, clearly settled on Mr Deasy's programme of learning as pyrrhic, has already lit upon the mirror as an alternative to the 'circle of learning' as an image for the totality of reality that may be less 'futile' than the Cyril Sargents the status quo produces (2.139). At the beginning of 'Telemachus,' Buck Mulligan flashes his cracked shaving mirror at Stephen, telling him: 'Look at yourself...you dreadful bard!' (1.134). Mulligan riffs on Oscar Wilde, describing Stephen's response as 'The rage of Caliban at not seeing his face in a mirror,' to which Stephen replies that Mulligan's mirror 'is a symbol of Irish art. The cracked lookingglass of a servant' (1.143, 146). As Gifford and Seidman note,<sup>128</sup> Stephen's quip is a riff on Mulligan's reference that builds on Wilde's Socratic dialogue 'The Decay of Lying':

CYRIL: What do you mean by saying that life, 'poor, probable, uninteresting human life,' will try to reproduce the marvels of art? I can quite understand your objection to art being treated as a mirror. You think it would reduce genius to the position of a cracked looking glass. But you don't mean to say that you seriously believe that Life imitates Art, that Life in fact is the mirror, and Art the reality?

VIVIAN: Certainly I do.<sup>129</sup>

In this, Wilde asserts that reality *is* its artistic representations; and by identifying Mulligan's 'cracked lookingglass,' which he has stolen from his aunt's servant, as a symbol for Irish art, Stephen seems to be suggesting that it follows that for Ireland Irish life must be the reflection of Irish art, which, in his vision, is invariably that 'of a servant.' In this, the mirror becomes, for Stephen, a metaphor of paramount significance: only in the image it provides, and not in the structure asserted by the 'circle of learning,' can reality be perceived. As such, Stephen's digression on Averroes and Maimonides in 'Nestor' dwells on their 'mocking mirrors,' 'flashing...the obscure soul of the world' (2.159)—as if their work provides a mirror against which the world may read its own collective soul, and discern the form by which it gives form. For Stephen, examination of the world's soul in the mirrors provided by such figures is the route to identifying the proscriptions placed on society by the 'circle of learning' represented by such figures as Mr Deasy. Importantly, this inherently validates the 'mirror of the world' as a metaphor for shaping totality over the 'circle of learning.' The implication,

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 16.

<sup>129</sup> Oscar Wilde, 'The Decay of Lying,' in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1997), p. 933.

then, of Stephen's 'cracked lookingglass of a servant' quip is that in the image it gives us we may find 'the obscure soul of the world.'

Stephen provides a clue as to his interpretation of the obscure soul reflected by the mirror in the word 'servant': as he tells Haines moments later, 'I am a servant of two masters...an English and an Italian...and a third...who wants me for odd jobs' (1.638-41). As such, the two faces presented by the 'mirror...cleft by a crooked crack' (1.135-6) reveal the two faces of an Irish people subject to both colonial and ecumenical rule, with the implied single face that unites the two images subject to the expectations of Irish nationalism. Looking in Mulligan's mirror, he sees these three ideological appeals proscribing him; as Stephen thinks later in 'Nestor,' while sitting in Mr Deasy's office and contemplating his future at the school, 'The same room and hour, the same wisdom: and I the same. [...] Three nooses round me here' (2.233-4). In this light, it is tremendously significant that Joyce introduces Mulligan's mirror in the novel's very first sentence. Among the numerous ways of reading the novel's opening must be asserted Joyce's use of Mulligan's mirror as his own 'nicely polished lookingglass'<sup>130</sup>—the image cataphorically anticipating its association with Wilde's argument that reality is constructed by its artistic representations, and Stephen's explication of the mirror as a 'symbol of Irish art' that reflects back the 'obscure soul of the world' as a reality that is servant to three masters. The importance of this revelation in Stephen's 'cracked lookingglass' becomes even clearer at the end of the 'Proteus' episode, when Stephen's stream of consciousness settles on the image 'Moving through the air high spars of a *threemaster*, her sails brailed up on the crosstrees, homing, upstream, silently moving, a silent ship' (3.504-5; emphasis added). In the conclusion to the 'Telemachia' on Sandymount Strand, Stephen forges the '*Nebeneinander*' and the '*Nacheinander*' through the Proteus of his consciousness into a final 'Signature...to read,' an image that casts its shadow over the forthcoming 'Odyssey' and 'Nostos': the three masters that totalise reality, place it in a nutshell, and allow for characters like Mr Deasy to perform it as universal (3.13, 15, 2; emphasis in original).

### 2.3 Bloom in the 'giltbordered pierglass'

This returns us to Bloom of 7 Eccles street foreseeing Bloom of Flowerville in his fantasy of an ideal homecoming rooted in owning the *Britannica*. It is significant that Bloom's thoughts are turned to his ideal bookshelf by 'The final visual impression' that is

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<sup>130</sup> Joyce, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, p. 90.

‘communicated to him *by [his] mirror*’: but rather than reading the reflection, in the same way that Stephen might, he lets it become an occasion for fantasy (17.1357; emphasis added). If we accept Stephen’s suggestion that we can find in the mirrors of art and culture the ‘obscure soul of the world,’ then it is immensely suggestive that in Bloom’s own mirror he only perceives, besides his own ‘solitary (ipsorelative) mutable (aliorelative)’ image, art and culture as ‘The optical reflection of several inverted volumes improperly arranged and not in the order of their common letters’ (17.1350, 13578-9). As Bloom reverts the inverted volumes, leading the ‘reflections [that] occupied his mind’ is ‘The necessity of order, a place for everything and everything in its place’ (17.1408, 1410): if the *Britannica* is Bloom’s ideal type for literature, there is something unsurprising about his rather materialist response to the image of his bookshelf. Nevertheless, what this moment tells us is that, in his concern with order, Bloom is not fully aware of the ideological appeals that define that order, constructing it as both natural and necessary, and as such proscribing him. Of course, this is hinted at by the fact that Bloom’s consciousness finds its final representation, in ‘Ithaca,’ in a language and form that are alien to him; but by reading in the reflection of his ‘giltbordered pierglass’ (17.1343) the ‘necessity of order,’ Joyce suggests that Bloom believes, unlike Wilde and Stephen, that art and reality ought to be commensurate with each other, as the chiasmic phrase ‘a place for everything and everything in its place’ seems to corroborate. The problem with this, as the homecoming fantasy explores, is that if art and life are seen to reflect each other, then ‘the obscure soul of the world’ and the powers that shape and proscribe reality disappear in a *mise en abyme*; in keeping with the wordplay of ‘Nestor,’ Bloom’s ‘pierglass’ begins to look like a pyrrhic-glass.

Examining the ideal homecoming, the structuring role of Stephen’s Irish servant’s three masters is easily perceived in Bloom’s vision of the kind of ‘Bloom’ required by ‘Bloom Cottage’ (17.1580). While the fantasy begins relatively modestly, as the outline of his ideal home, it becomes clear that the home would depend on Bloom’s social position: Bloom of Flowerville is described ‘In loose allwool garments with Harris tweed cap...achieving longevity’ (17.1581-7) in a vision that affects the trappings of the leisured, landed gentry. This vision digresses into a very specific configuration of Bloom of Flowerville’s formal and informal role:

What would be his civic functions and social status among the county families and landed gentry?

Arranged successively in ascending powers of hierarchical order, that of gardener, groundman, cultivator, breeder, and at the zenith of his career, resident magistrate or justice of the peace with a family crest and coat of arms

and appropriate classical motto (*Semper paratus*), duly recorded in the court directory (Bloom, Leopold P., M.P., P.C., K.P., L.L.D. (*honoris causa*), Bloomville, Dundrum) and mentioned in court and fashionable intelligence (Mr and Mrs Leopold Bloom have left Kingstown for England). (17.1606-15)

In this moment, Bloom imagines the version of himself that would suit his ideal home as one with recognition, status, and function among the British aristocracy; only 'Bloom, Leopold P., M.P., P.C., K.P., L.L.D. (*honoris causa*)' could exist in Bloom Cottage and be Bloom of Flowerville—not 'Bloom of 7 Eccles Street.'

It is significant, then, that what Bloom of 7 Eccles Street requires to become Bloom of Flowerville, besides the 'independent discovery of a goldseam of inexhaustible ore,' is, as noted earlier, proof 'that he had loved rectitude from earliest youth' (17.1753, 1634). In the proof that is given, rectitude is clearly interpreted as serving the three masters of British Imperialism, religion, and Irish nationalism: Bloom recalls that he 'had advocated during nocturnal perambulations the political theory of colonial (e.g. Canadian) expansion,' recounts the move of him and his father from 'the Israelitic faith' to 'the Irish (protestant) church' and then 'Roman Catholicism,' and his support for the 'constitutional agitation of Charles Stewart Parnell' and the 'programme of peace, retrenchment and reform of William Ewart Gladstone' (17.1642-3, 1636-40, 1649-51). What is important about this definition of 'rectitude' is that, although it may not be internally coherent, it synthesises the demands of his three masters, and sets the parameters for the 'course of action...he [would] outline for himself' were he to become Bloom of Flowerville:

A course that lay between undue clemency and excessive rigour: the dispensation in a heterogeneous society of arbitrary classes...of unbiassed homogeneous indisputable justice, tempered with mitigants of the widest possible latitude but exactable to the uttermost farthing with confiscation of estate, real and personal, to the crown. Loyal to the highest constituted power in the land, actuated by an innate love of *rectitude* his aims would be the strict maintenance of public order, the repression of many abuses...the upholding of the letter of the law (common, statute and law merchant) against all traversers in covin and trespassers acting in contravention of bylaws and regulations...all menial molesters of domestic conviviality, all recalcitrant violators of domestic connubiality. (17.1616-33; emphasis added)

In this vision of his 'ultimate ambition' (17.1497), Bloom remains a servant of the three masters that constitute and manifest the nebulous 'highest constituted power in the land'—and the maximum potential permitted by his 'innate love of rectitude' is the 'course that lay between undue clemency and excessive rigour,' enforcing that same 'rectitude' homogenously across a heterogeneous society.



All this is to say that while the image of Bloom's bookshelf in the 'giltbordered pierglass' reminds him of 'the necessity of order,' which in turn inspires his fantasy of an ideal *Britannica*-containing bookcase, that ideal image requires a version of Bloom that is not the one we know. *Britannica*-owning Bloom's first aim would have to be 'the strict maintenance of public order,' with 'order' defined according to a 'rectitude' that can be identified as the moralising imperative of the Procrustean 'circle of learning' with which Stephen wrestles in 'Nestor.' In this, the suggestion is that Bloom (of 7 Eccles Street) lives in a reality in which the latitude of possibility he can be allowed to envision as his 'ultimate ambition' is as a servant of the status quo with a more active role in the 'strict maintenance' of the order that dominates him. Over this 'order,' to which he can only be 'Loyal,' he can have no say, as he remains peripheral: even at 'the zenith of his career,' 'fashionable intelligence' parenthetically notes that '(Mr and Mrs Leopold Bloom have left Kingstown for England),' as if to suggest that the version of Bloom most deserving of Bloom Cottage would always be marginal—and, tragically, that the most agency he could exercise as an Irish subject would be to leave Ireland (17.1608, 1614-5).

Bloom provides a succinct example of how his subjectivity is negated within the order to which he is 'Loyal' in his final moment with Stephen, as the pair stand outside the house in contemplation of the 'heaventree of stars hung with humid nightblue fruit' in the 'penumbra of the garden' (17.1039-40). Before they part ways, Bloom begins a 'demonstration...of various constellations'—a party trick that, as Lenehan tells M'Coy in the 'Wandering Rocks' episode, he is wont to show off (17.1038-41). The stars inspire Bloom to consider alternately 'Meditations of evolution increasingly vaster' and 'obverse meditations of involution increasingly less vast' (17.1040-69). In this, Bloom attempts to articulate the totality of reality according to an aesthetic that purports to be both objective and consistent, from the maximum down to the minimum. What is most suggestive about this otherwise rather mundane articulation of the outermost and innermost limits of totality is that, besides a reference to 'a parenthesis of infinitesimal brevity' (17.1055-6), Bloom does not locate the space filled by himself, Stephen, and the rest of humanity, or even account for their agency as observers: reality is simply a continuum independently of human observation. As the space from which measurement is taken is skipped over, observational agency is implicitly negated, acknowledged only by the unstated space at which increasingly vast meditations become increasingly less vast. In this, Bloom seems to accept as a universal truth an 'order' within which he is peripheral and over which he can have no influence—a totalised version of reality in which the place and power of everything appears natural and organic, and to which he can

be at best 'Loyal.' Bloom's oft-referenced interest in star-gazing becomes coded, tragically, with the negation of his subjectivity.

Yet something about this feels inconsistent with the interest in political and social reform attributed to Bloom throughout the novel. Among his peers, Bloom is reputed as a 'cultured allroundman' implying the esteem with which he is generally associated, and he is rumoured at the Castle to have advised Arthur Griffith, indicating a public sense of his politics as radical (10.581; 12.1634-6). Indeed, during 'Lestrygonians' and 'Circe' Bloom himself recollects his activism against the Boer War, and his involvement in the protest against Joe Chamberlain's honorary degree (8.419-30; 15.791). Most strikingly, Bloom's opposition to 'injustice' is articulated clearly during the argument at Barney Kiernan's pub in 'Cyclops,' when he declares that he is against the 'persecution' that '[perpetuates] national hatred among nations,' and asserts his Jewish 'race' (12.1474, 1417-8, 1467). The Bloom *Ulysses* figures across its day's episodes does not seem exactly as 'Loyal,' or deferent, as the aspirational *Britannica*-owner presented in 'Ithaca.' In what way can Bloom's desire to reform and liberalise society be squared with his belief in 'the necessity of order,' and the deeply conservative aspiration that emerges from that belief in the form of the 'Bloom Cottage' fantasy (17.1410, 1580)?

It is notable that, moments before demonstrating to Stephen his agency-negating observational scale of totalised reality, Bloom refers to his desire 'to amend many social conditions, the product of inequality and avarice and international animosity' as little more than a 'recurrent frustration' (17.989-93). Moreover, Bloom chooses to 'desist from speculation' on the idea that 'human life was infinitely perfectible' by concluding that 'it was a task for a superior intelligence to substitute other more acceptable phenomena in the place of the less acceptable phenomena to be removed' (17.1007-10, 983). This process, in which Bloom yields his reformism in deference to 'superior intelligence,' provides the platform from which to think through the relationship between, on the one hand, his desire for reform and, on the other, his attachment to the order of the status quo, as represented by his totalised observational scale of reality and his fantasy of his maximum potential as a peripheral agent within it. Is the suggestion that Bloom believes his reformism and the status quo are actually compatible?

A useful clue is given in a comment he makes to Stephen, during 'Eumaeus':

It is hard to lay down any hard and fast rules as to right and wrong but room for improvement all round there certainly is though every country, they say, our own distressful included, has the government it deserves. But with a little goodwill all round. It's all very fine to boast of mutual superiority but what about mutual equality. I resent violence and intolerance in any shape or form. It never reaches anything or stops anything. A revolution must come on the

due instalments plan. It's a patent absurdity on the face of it to hate people because they live around the corner and speak another vernacular, in the next house so to speak. (16.1094-103)

In this, Bloom restates the key tenets of his reformism: his interest in universal equality, his hatred of violence and intolerance, his moderation, and his belief that fundamental improvements are necessary. At the same time, he insists on the actual occurrence of these reforms as certain: '*A revolution must come on the due instalments plan.*' This peculiar metaphor, connecting revolution to mortgage repayment, suggests that, for Bloom, the certainty of reform is linked to the role of the bourgeois aspirant within the status quo; it is as if, for Bloom, bourgeois homeownership will lead, slowly but surely, to the end of 'violence and intolerance'—as if revolution is inevitable so long as one is sufficiently invested in, or indebted to, the system.

This would suggest that Bloom does see his reformism and the status quo as mutually compatible—indeed, it speaks neatly to the specific detail framing Bloom's initial vision of Bloom Cottage as a 'dwellinghouse' that he is 'Not to inherit...but to purchase' (17.1499-1504). But the metaphor of mortgage repayments suggests something more than mere compatibility between reformism and the status quo: if revolution 'must come' with the reliability of mortgage repayments, it follows that the status quo does not just allow for his reformism, but makes it inevitable. Bloom's faith in homeownership within the parameters of the status quo seems to be linked to the certainty he believes that it provides for his reformism. But in what way could homeownership be understood to provide revolutionary certainty? Bloom's extension of this metaphor to visualise hated others as those 'in the next house, so to speak' clarifies his logic here: for Bloom, homeownership provides the possibility of a platform from which all people can be recognisable in and commensurable with society as a whole. This develops one of the fundamental neuroses underpinning Bloom's day: his identifiability within society. Indeed, this theme is established from the moment he is introduced to the novel: on seeing Blazes Boylan's letter to Molly, in 'Calypso,' Bloom sees that it has been addressed to 'Mrs Marion Bloom': 'His quickened heart slowed at once. Bold hand. Mrs Marion' (4.244-5). The immediate concern here is the mounting evidence of Molly's infidelity, but by using Molly's title as the catalyst for this, Joyce draws attention to Bloom's concern with how he should be represented formally: should all mail sent to 7 Eccles Street not be addressed to 'Mr and Mrs L. M. Bloom'? This is what is suggested when Bloom subsequently distracts himself in the outhouse by imagining 'Mr and Mrs L. M. Bloom' (4.518) as the name under which he would publish, and is expanded throughout the day as Bloom frets about who and what he is (reaching, of course, the heights

of fantasy parenthetical gossip in the Bloom Cottage fantasy). Indeed, not long after the crowd at Barney Kiernan's speculate on the fact that his father's 'name was Virag...He changed it by deedpoll' and chase him out of the pub, Bloom finds himself writing 'I. AM. A.,' in an immensely suggestive moment that will be returned to shortly (12.1639-40; 13.1258-66). This appellative anxiety goes on to reach one of its peaks in 'Eumaeus,' when he sees his name misspelt in the *Telegraph* as 'L. Boom,' which leads him to come up with a formula for 'who he in reality was': 'let x equal *my right name and address*, as Mr Algebra remarks *passim*' (16.1260, 1645-7; emphasis added). While there are numerous ways of reading Bloom's anxieties about his formal configuration, its use as a source of humour across the text highlights the importance of identifiability for Bloom; indeed, it explicitly connects recognisability in and commensurability with society with being known by the 'right name and address,' as if identifiability within society guarantees agency. In this light, the logic behind Bloom's suggestion that homeownership must guarantee revolution is illuminated: because homeownership provides subjects recognisability in and commensurability with society, revolution is certain.

Nevertheless, there is a presupposition in Bloom's attachment to recognisability and commensurability that it is necessary to disentangle in order to fully grasp how Bloom can be certain about his reformism within the status quo. If identifiability within society leads to revolution, then it follows that revolution depends on subjects making themselves an identifiable part of the whole. Indeed, this is what Bloom of Flowerville represents to Bloom of 7 Eccles Street: a fantasy of his 'ultimate' self as at his most recognisable in and commensurable with the status quo. Ultimately, this means that, in Bloom's eyes, revolution is only achievable by becoming an assimilated part of the whole—that is, by deferring one's conception of the whole and how one might fit into it to the prevailing powers that define and give it shape. This is why Bloom's maximum envisioned potential within the status quo, as Bloom of Flowerville, is necessarily 'Loyal to the highest constituted power in the land' (17.1622-3), rather than manifesting that power himself. Does it not undermine his reformism, to defer the definition of totality to the status quo? What exactly does deferral to the status quo afford Bloom that he cannot envision his reformism without? Looking again at his moment of deferral to 'superior intelligence' (17.1008) in 'Ithaca' clarifies his motivation.

While the text implies that Bloom has Stephen in mind as at least one potential 'superior intelligence,' Stephen's response to Bloom's 'dejection' regarding the improvement of humanity's 'social conditions' is described as such:

[Stephen] affirmed his significance as a conscious rational animal proceeding syllogistically from the known to the unknown and a conscious rational reagent between a micro and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void. (17.991, 1011-15)

In this, Stephen tries, using terms from his internal monologue in ‘Proteus’ and his discourse on paternity in ‘Scylla and Charybdis,’ to reassure Bloom that he himself can be confident that he has sufficient intelligence to ‘substitute other more acceptable phenomena in the place of the less acceptable phenomena to be removed’ (17.1008-10). Crucially, in this Stephen provides an image of totality that contrasts with Bloom’s observational scale: rather than a scale independent of the human observer, it is ‘a micro and a macrocosm’ that has been constructed ‘ineluctably,’ by ‘candescent’ observing individuals’ ‘modality of the visible,’ in order to construct shape amidst the void of reality, whose ‘incertitude’ signifies fathomless unknowability (2.76; 3.1). What is significant about this is that it provides, in the moments preceding Bloom’s agency-negating observational scale, a vision of totality as a human construction that is subject to ideological appeals, from the outermost macrocosm to the innermost microcosm, just like Mr. Deasy’s ‘nutshell of learning.’ Stephen, by affirming his confidence that Bloom is able to move ‘syllogistically from the known to the unknown,’ means to assure him that he can exist ‘conscious[ly]...*upon* the incertitude of the void,’ suggesting that Bloom can exist beyond human constructions of totality—that he can move into the unknown in the absence of a given totality.

Stephen’s confidence in the face of epistemological incertitude is one of the sources of Bloom’s optimism in deferring to Stephen; indeed, it is Stephen’s assurance that Bloom can operate ‘upon the void’ that is the source of Bloom’s ‘misapprehension’ (17.1018). Bloom is described as apprehending Stephen’s comment ‘Substantially’ rather than ‘verbally,’ and being comforted by the fact that ‘as a competent keyless citizen he had proceeded energetically from the unknown to the known through the incertitude of the void’ (17.1019-20).<sup>131</sup> While Stephen seems to endorse conscious movement ‘from the known to the unknown,’ Bloom is comforted by the thought that they have both moved in the opposite direction: ‘from the unknown to the known.’ Moreover, while Stephen affirms Bloom’s ‘significance’ as a ‘reagent...upon the incertitude of the void,’ Bloom comforts himself in the belief that they both have ‘proceeded energetically...*through* the incertitude of the void.’ The differences here are stark: while Stephen insists Bloom is capable of existing beyond versions of reality ‘constructed upon the incertitude of the void,’ Bloom is consoled by the idea that

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<sup>131</sup> Of course, since both Stephen and Bloom are ‘keyless citizen[s],’ this passage does implicitly refer to both of them.

they both have rediscovered order, and escaped ‘the incertitude,’ by passing ‘through...the void.’

In this light, Bloom’s deference to ‘superior intelligence’ in general, and to Stephen in particular, begins to look like a move to shut down epistemological uncertainty by embracing the familiarity of the status quo’s order. This brings us to the key issue underpinning Bloom’s belief in the compatibility of his reformism and the order of the status quo. For him, the status quo, as a ‘constructed’ totality that seems to take its subjects ‘through the incertitude of the void,’ rather than leaving them ‘upon’ it, provides certainty: certainty that there is ‘superior intelligence’ for which objectivity is possible, and thus certainty that loyalty to that ‘superior intelligence’ will allow for objective judgement to be dispensed. In this, it is clear that, for Bloom, reformism and the status quo are compatible as the latter will gradually lead to the former, since within the status quo it is possible to achieve objectivity, and since even peripheral subjects can become, through deference, commensurable agents that can dispense objectivity on its behalf. This is to say, despite having heard Stephen’s theory of how reality is ‘a microcosm and a macrocosm ineluctably constructed upon the incertitude of the void,’ Bloom presents Stephen with his totalising observational scale regardless, because, for him, it enables thought to exist with the certainty of objectivity as a possibility. The status quo provides the schema for an objective totality through which Bloom believes he can imagine an ‘infinitely perfectible’ (17.993) human life, without ‘the incertitude of the void.’

The relationship between certainty, objectivity, and revolution that emerges out of Bloom’s vision of himself in his ‘pierglass’ thus begin to look pyrrhic indeed, as a peculiar question immediately following Bloom’s observational scale clarifies:

Did he find the problems of the inhabitability of the planets and their satellites by a race, given in species, and of the possible social and moral redemption of said race by a redeemer, easier of solution? (17.1083-5)

The question’s final clause—‘easier of solution’—poses a genitival ambiguity typical, as Derek Attridge has noted,<sup>132</sup> of Joyce: do the problems of the inhabitability of the planets and the concomitant redemption of their human colonisers have easier solutions than the computational problems of his observational scale, or does the possibility of observing from another planet make for an easier way of tabulating ‘a more precise result’ (17.1070) on the scale, and thus assist human redemption through knowledge? The difference between these interpretations, particularly in light of what Bloom’s observational scale does to his agency, is acute: the former asks whether Bloom can answer a question objectively, while the latter

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<sup>132</sup> Derek Attridge, *Joyce Effects: On Language, Theory and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 22–29.

asks whether existence on another planet would facilitate humanity's objectivity. Bloom answers neither version of the question, bemoaning instead humans across the Solar System as 'inalterably and inalienably attached to vanities, to vanities of vanities and to all that is vanity' (17.1099-100). The pessimism of the answer recalls the warning against 'wisdom' at the beginning of 'Ecclesiastes,' wherein the reader is warned that 'all is vanity [...] For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow' (Ecc. 1.14-18). This allusion restates Bloom's resistance to the uncertainty of consciousness 'upon the void,' as it sees him recoil from a thought questioning the nature of 'objectivity' as if it is impossible to do so without vanity—a move akin to the sin of being 'very big'<sup>133</sup> that preoccupies the young Stephen. In the face of uncertainty about objectivity, Bloom defers to the status quo, rather than searching for the 'obscure soul' through which, like Stephen, he could reconceive the world; the gnomic quip given in response to the restated question makes this clear:

And the problem of possible redemption?

The minor was proved by the major. (17.1101-1)

This exchange reduces Bloom's uncertainty about social reform into something like a reassuring aphorism that all will end well: at once building on the vision of reality as a homogenous continuum independent of human observation, which is consistent from the maximum to the minimum, or the macrocosm to microcosm, the idea that the major will prove the minor implies that all questions relating to social reform will be resolved by the power at the highest point within that continuum. That is to say, peripheral subjects can trust that the actions taken by 'the highest constituted power in the land' (17.1622-3) will, in the end, be redemptive, and thus the maintenance of the order of the status quo is as necessary and natural as Bloom habitually thinks it—as if humanity can be consoled that universal redemption will trickle down, beginning with those at the top and reaching, eventually, those at the bottom.

Bloom's attachment to the totalised reality of the status quo does indeed seem pyrrhic; but if it is the wordplay in 'Nestor' that gives us the framework for identifying this, then it is important to acknowledge that this does not mean he sits easily alongside the tyrannical and odious Mr Deasy and his pyrrhic encyclopaedism. Indeed, although Bloom's reformism is built upon the same faith in totalised reality with which Mr Deasy indoctrinates his students, they are in many ways at odds with each other, not least because Bloom stands as an absolute

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<sup>133</sup> Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 13.

refutation of Mr Deasy's final words to Stephen, that Ireland 'never let [the Jews] in' (2.442). How, then, does Joyce make them work together in the context of the novel's argument about the totalised reality signified by the encyclopaedic ideals to which they both ultimately subscribe?

In answering this question, it is helpful to look at Bloom's rationale for his extended *Britannica*-ownership fantasy. After it peters out, on the vision of independence from the wealth of 'eminent financiers' by way of that cruelly optimistic 'independent discovery of a goldseam of inexhaustible ore,' Bloom thinks to himself that he 'meditate[s] on schemes so difficult of realisation' because:

It was one of his axioms that similar meditations or the automatic relation to himself of a narrative concerning himself or tranquil recollection of the past when practised habitually before retiring for the night alleviated fatigue and produced as a result sound repose and renovated vitality. (17.1748, 1753, 1754-58)

In this, the 'Bloom Cottage' fantasy is rationalised as efficacious preparation for the following day, as if a deferent vision of bourgeois aspiration fulfilled will prepare him for another day of personal aspiration unachieved. Leading directly from this, Bloom provides the 'justifications' for his rationale, which are appended by his fear of the 'malignant agencies chiefly operative during somnolence':

What did he fear?

The committal of homicide or suicide during sleep by an aberration of the light of reason, the incommensurable categorical intelligence situated in the cerebral convolutions. (17.1759, 1764, 1765-68)

In this moment, it is revealed that Bloom's attachment to the status quo, and his desire to be recognisable in and commensurable with it, is connected to a fear that if he holds on to information that is unrecognisable to or incommensurable with the 'categorical intelligence' of the status quo, which has shaped his 'cerebral convolutions,' he might lose control of his basic capacity to prevent himself destroying himself and others. This is key to understanding Bloom's relationship with the status quo, and the way he differs from Mr Deasy: for, if certainty of the possibility of reform is the carrot by which the status quo encourages Bloom's deference, 'fear' that non-conformity would lead to a deadly 'aberration of the light of reason' is the stick by which it assures it, as Bloom is forced to let go of information that is unrecognisable to and incommensurable with its parameters. With this in mind, it is worth reflecting briefly on how 'homicide and suicide' recur in relation to Bloom's concerns about his recognisability and commensurability throughout his day.



While suicide is associated directly with his father, homicide springs into Bloom's mind more obliquely, in his thoughts on the Invincibles' political assassinations in Phoenix Park and their later betrayal by James Carey.<sup>134</sup> During the 'Lotus Eaters' episode, Bloom remembers that Carey used the 'very church' he is visiting at the time, and later during the 'Lestrygonians' episode he recalls his betrayal to remind himself that you 'Never know who you're talking to' (5.380, 8.441). Carey is a figure about whom Bloom is deeply ambivalent: while he has respect for 'the courage of [Carey's] political convictions' and professes 'a certain kind of admiration for a man who had actually brandished a knife,' he is horrified by his treachery, and that he could lie to his 'Wife and six children at home,' who never realised he supported them by 'drawing secret service pay from the castle' (16.1058-9; 5.381; 8.444). That Bloom is never able to properly remember Carey's full name is conspicuous, especially considering his own appellative anxieties: it is as if his respect for the Invincibles' convictions and his instinctive condemnation of Carey's '[turning] queen's evidence' to betray them, renders Carey in some sense unrecognisable to and incommensurable with the 'categorical intelligence' that structures his thoughts (5.378l; 16.1053; 17.1767).<sup>135</sup>

Bloom's association of his 'categorical intelligence' with control over those 'malignant agencies chiefly operative during somnolence' starts to look quite consistent in this light; and Bloom's detumescent thought, at the end of 'Nausicaa,' that he might return to the beach in the same way 'murderers do' (13.1255) takes on tremendous significance. This thought is immediately followed by Bloom's aforementioned writing of 'I. AM. A.' in the sand, before deciding there is 'No room' and effacing the letters—a moment fraught with interpretative possibility (13.1258-66). To the many ways of reading it I would add that it weaves together at once Bloom's anxieties about his recognisability and commensurability with his fear that his agency outside of the parameters of the status quo may give life to those 'malignant agencies' that lead to 'homicide and suicide.' At the same time, the letters 'I AM A' anaphorically recalls Stephen's quip to Haines—'*I am a* servant of two masters...and a third...who wants me for odd jobs'—and as such connects the power to define those parameters to the 'threemaster[s],' or the 'three nooses,' that Stephen sees shaping his agency in Mulligan's 'cracked lookingglass of a servant' (1.638-41; 3.504; 2.234; 1.46; emphasis added). In this, Bloom's idealisation of the *Britannica* is synthesised into anxiety about his

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<sup>134</sup> Malcolm Brown provides a useful overview of Joyce's treatment of Carey in terms of 'the Judas theme.' Malcolm Brown, *The Politics of Irish Literature: From Thomas Davis to W. B. Yeats* (London, England: Allen and Unwin, 1972).

<sup>135</sup> In 'Lotus Eaters,' Bloom thinks of 'Peter Carey, yes. No, Peter Claver I am thinking of. Denis Carey' (5.380-1). He comes closest to recalling Carey's name in 'Lestrygonians,' when he thinks of 'that Peter or Denis or James Carey who blew the gaff on the invincibles,' but by 'Eumaeus' is again referring to 'Denis or Peter Carey' (8.442-3; 16.1053-4).

identity that ensures deference to a totalised order of reality which disguises its ideological appeals as universal truths; Bloom is proscribed, and unable, unlike Stephen, to read for the powers that are shaping him.

For Mr Deasy, conversely, anxiety about his recognisability in and commensurability with the status quo does not play a role in his behaviour: indeed, his confidence in the significance of his own hereditary and professional status and his attachment to historical error suggest that he has a rather different relationship with 'categorical intelligence' than Bloom. As noted earlier, Mr Deasy's conception of history has a tendency to proscribe and alter facts for expedience, particularly regarding Irish unionism and Jewish migration to Ireland; indeed, if Bloom is characterised by his desire to be recognisable in and commensurable with the status quo, Mr Deasy seems to be obsessed with deciding what does and does not fit within the status quo: it is notable that he sees himself as, by implication, 'born to be a teacher,' while at the same time a dictator of the 'common sense' of veterinary science, a historian of the 'Glorious, pious and immortal memory' of Ireland, and a herald of the 'decay' brought by 'jew merchants' (2.402, 294, 273, 348-50). Although Mr Deasy's is a belief that Joyce uses 'Nestor' to send up as pretentious and tyrannical, his confidence clearly emerges from his belief that he has the prerogative to categorise; Bloom, conversely, limits his categorising of others to his identification of them as 'people...in the next house so to speak' (16.1103). While Bloom is willing to defer to and proscribe himself for the status quo, Mr Deasy seems to assume the central prerogative of selecting what does and does not fit on its behalf. An important hint as to why is given in his tirade against the Jews who surround his influence at the Department of Agriculture 'by difficulties, by...intrigues by...backstairs influence' (2.343-4): if Bloom believes he is compartmentalising himself for the status quo, Mr Deasy could be described as believing he is its safeguard. Just as Bloom is certain of reform, Mr Deasy believes that 'Old England is dying' (2.350-1) and he is certain that he is a guardian of its light. As such, rather than acknowledging other 'people...in the next house so to speak' (16.1099-113), Mr Deasy actively curtails the realities of others, particularly Catholics and Jews, to support his nostalgia for an Imperial and millenarian totalised conception of the world; as he remarks, in implicit contradistinction to Stephen and Bloom, '*I am a struggler...But I will fight for the right till the end*' (2.395-6; emphasis added).

Mr Deasy's fundamental epistemological difference with Bloom is one of prerogative: while Bloom concerns himself with fitting in with received wisdom, Mr Deasy believes it is up to him to safeguard that received wisdom from decay, and thus decide with what it does and does not fit. In this difference, we can read the heart of Joyce's critique of

encyclopaedism: although ostensibly divergent, between Bloom's deferral to the status quo and Mr Deasy's paranoiac defence of it Joyce renders characters that, for all their obvious differences, are both attached to an idea of the world that is totalised, as represented by Bloom's attachment to the *Britannica* and his associated observational scale and by Mr Deasy's 'nutshell of learning.' Both believe they require the status quo's totalised version of reality as it produces certainty: for Bloom it is the certainty of reform that simultaneously secures his identity as recognisable and commensurable, while for Mr Deasy it is the certainty that he is at the self-confident centre, protecting order by performing the prerogative to decide what is and is not recognisable and commensurable. Yet, if their pyrrhic attachment to totalised reality is what unites them, a vital implication seems to be that they both depend on an idea of the world that is, in its totalised form, necessarily dependent on proscription and exclusion. That is to say, the attachment of Bloom and Mr Deasy to totalised reality implicates them inevitably in a Procrustean logic: for them, nothing can be thought without the supposed certainty afforded by the exclusionary boundaries of totalised reality.

## 2.4 Paradise and the Periphery

Such exclusionary logic may make sense for tyrannous Mr Deasy, who seems to relish the opportunity to occupy the 'locus of enunciation,' from which he can decide what is and is not registered as reality and what does and does not count as human,<sup>136</sup> but does not seem entirely compatible with mild-mannered and moderate Bloom, whose definition of a 'nation' includes 'the same people living in the same place [...] Or also living in different places' (12.1422-28). Indeed, Joyce elaborates on this specific difference between them—their willingness to occupy the 'locus of enunciation' from where the standards of recognisability and commensurability are set—by making it a central element of the Bloom Cottage fantasy. As noted, Bloom's maximum potential as Bloom of Flowerville is 'A course that lay between undue clemency and excessive rigour...Loyal to the highest constituted power in the land,' and his maximum achievement in 'fashionable intelligence' would be having 'left Kingstown for England': Bloom's agency at Bloom Cottage is peripheral and deferent to the standards set by that nebulous 'highest constituted power' (17.1617-23, 1614-5). In this, Bloom's other digressive fantasy, earlier in the day, leaps out for comparative analysis: the so-called 'Messianic Scene,' in 'Circe.'<sup>137</sup> Reading this scene alongside the Bloom Cottage fantasy's

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<sup>136</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> There is a solid genetic foundation for reading the 'Messianic scene' and the Bloom Cottage fantasy together. As Michael Groden notes in *Ulysses in Progress* and *The James Joyce Archive*, the 'Messianic scene' is an

investment in peripheral commensurability with a distant locus of enunciation, Bloom's hallucination of himself as 'Leopold the First' of 'the new Bloomusalem in the Nova Hibernia of the future' looks fundamentally like a vision of himself were he to *be* that 'highest constituted power,' and as such occupy the locus of enunciation from which the standards for commensurability are set (15.1473, 1544-5; 17.1622-3). Taking these two fantasies as variations on Bloom's epistemological centrality, in the paradise of the New Bloomusalem, and marginality, in the periphery of Bloom Cottage, they make an argument for understanding why the totalised reality to which he defers at the day's end, as he reflects on his 'solitary (ipsorelative) mutable (aliorelative)' self in his Pyrrhic 'pierglass' and dreams of the *Britannica*, is so seductive—and provides the terms on which *Ulysses* can be read as fictional encyclopaedism, imagining a micro and a macrocosm 'upon the incertitude of the void' without the proscriptions of a given totality (17.1350, 1343, 1014-5).

Suggestive parallels between the New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage present themselves readily: just as Bloom Cottage is a house from which Bloom of Flowerville pronounces judgement across society, so is the New Bloomusalem, which is described as 'a colossal edifice with crystal roof, built in the shape of a huge pork kidney' from which Leopold the First dispenses justice across his 'beloved subjects' (15.1548-9, 1542). The divergences, however, are clear: while at Bloom Cottage Bloom of Flowerville is fettered as a peripheral agent maintaining a 'public order' defined by a central power to which he must be deferent and over which he has no say, in the New Bloomusalem, Leopold the First blends all of society's most important leadership roles,<sup>138</sup> in a vision of a new Irish sovereignty that sees his own personal 'judgements in Ireland and territories thereunto belonging' setting the standards for objectivity, and announcing the dawn of 'year 1 of the Paradisiacal Era,' as he becomes and defines the epistemological centre (17.1624; 15.148-2, 1632). Indeed, if Bloom of Flowerville achieves his maximum potential having 'left Kingstown for England,' it is in stark contrast with Leopold the First's command for 'Immediate silence,' from the centre of

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anomaly in the narrative of Joyce's writing of *Ulysses*. While the majority of Joyce's edits to his previous drafts were small additions, rarely exceeding a sentence, the 'Messianic scene' constituted an entirely new and contiguous scene that was added some months after 'Circe' had been fully drafted. While Joyce informed Ezra Pound that 'Circe' was 'finished' in December 1920, and Ettore Schmitz that it had been completed 'some time ago' in January 1921, the 'Messianic scene' was not drafted until the summer of 1921, during which period Joyce was working primarily on his first drafts of 'Ithaca' and 'Penelope.' Although a genetic reading does not bear heavily on my argument here, since the parallels present themselves as readily as anything in *Ulysses*, it is worth noting the likelihood that something about the writing of the 'Bloom Cottage' fantasy may have made Joyce require Bloom's 'Messianic scene.' Michael Groden, *Ulysses in Progress* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), pp. 173, 218, 171; Joyce, *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, p. 277.

<sup>138</sup> Mark Wollaeger's essay on Bloom's 'coronation' remains the key reading of how Joyce synthesizes different authorities into the fantasy—although while he focuses on solely the regal and papal elements, professional (as 'chairman') and juridical (at the 'Court of Conscience') aspects are also conflated (15.1471, 1629). Wollaeger, pp. 93–5.

his apparently universal kingdom, by ‘hold[ing] up his right hand’ (17.1614-5; 15.499-500). While Bloom of Flowerville’s agency is negated as marginal, Leopold the First’s agency is literally the centre of the universe, with ‘Wireless intercontinental and interplanetary transmitters...set for reception of [his] message’ (15.1500-3). Little surprise, then, that while Bloom of Flowerville is ‘duly recorded in the court directory’ of a totality he cannot influence, Leopold the First repositions his ‘beloved subjects’ in relation to him, as the construction of the New Bloomusalem sees ‘Numerous houses razed to the ground’ and ‘inhabitants...lodged in barrels and boxes, all marked in red with the letters: L.B.’ (17.1611-2; 15.1542, 1552-4). Re-housing his subjects in boxes marked with his initials and naming his universal kingdom for himself, Leopold the First situates the paradisiacal sovereignty of his Ireland in his very name; and as such, the New Bloomusalem riffs on Bloom’s appellative anxieties by suggesting they would be quelled were he to become the indexical, normative principle against which everything else is measured—the central figure against which the shape of totality is constructed.

The binary the fantasies set up between epistemological centrality and marginality is the variable that determines Bloom of Flowerville’s and Leopold the First’s divergent judicial careers. Indeed, if the former can only perfect the ‘infinitely perfectible’ human race through ‘the dispensation in a heterogeneous society of arbitrary classes...of unbiassed homogeneous indisputable justice...Loyal to the highest constituted power in the land,’ the latter, as the epistemological centre, can take a more direct approach: as the locus of enunciation, he becomes that ‘superior intelligence’ which can ‘substitute other more acceptable phenomena in the place of the less acceptable phenomena to be removed’ (17.993, 1618-22, 993, 1008-10). So while Bloom of Flowerville’s maximum potentiality is limited to ‘undue clemency or excessive rigour’ as defined by the power at the centre, Leopold the First has the prerogative to articulate a programme for reform. As such, his ‘assistant town clerk’ introduces Leopold the First’s ‘Court of Conscience,’ from which is dispensed ‘solution of doubles and other problems’ (15.1626-31): as the principle to which everything is epistemologically relative, Leopold the First’s own conscience defines the parameters for justice.

This programme for justice and reform is worth dwelling on, as it provides the point at which his construction of a totality around himself fails, leading to the scene’s Messianic dénouement. Once the court has been opened, the trajectory of his vision for reform expands from the micro to the macro, or the minor to the major, as he advises on taxation, chemistry, and the family, until he announces his universal principles:

I stand for the reform of municipal morals and the plain ten commandments.  
New worlds for old. Union of all, jew, moslem and gentile. [...] General amnesty,

weekly carnival with masked licence, bonuses for all, esperanto the universal language with universal brotherhood. No more patriotism of barspongers and dropsical impostors. Free money, free rent, free love and a free lay church in a free lay state. (15.1685-93)

In this moment, Joyce provides the most specific image of Bloom's perfected human race. Yet, it is on this proclamation that the fantasy begins to fall apart, with O'Madden Burke immediately envisioned mocking it as 'Free fox in a free henroost' (15.1695). Moreover, in a manner absolutely antithetical to the proliferation of details in 'Circe,' when Lenehan asks Bloom about 'mixed bathing,' the stage directions outline that 'Bloom explains to those near him his schemes for social regeneration. All agree with him' (15.1701-3). In this imaginative ellipsis, the practicalities of his vision for reform are elided, revealing his inability to envision reform even were he to assume the privilege of the locus of enunciation from which totality is defined. Indeed, given that Leopold the First's coronation devotes more than fifty lines to its spectators, it is revealing that his opportunity to articulate his programme for reform takes up merely a fraction of one.

Moreover, it is conspicuous that this failure of imagination is followed by the appearance of:

a lorry on which are the shaking statues of several naked goddesses...and plaster figures, also naked, representing the new nine muses, Commerce, Operatic Music, Amor, Publicity, Manufacture, Liberty of Speech, Plural Voting, Gastronomy, Private Hygiene, Seaside Concert Entertainments, Painless Obstetrics and Astronomy for the People. (17.1704-10)

The appearance of these muses recalls the Enlightenment fascination with muses, as if Bloom requires the familiar order provided by the Enlightenment in order to reassure himself that, in the absence of his ability to think without totality, his vision for reform would be guided by a totality conferred by enlightened principles. In this light, the miscount of the number of muses (nine instead of twelve) looks like Bloom's inability to retain control of the scale of a totality over which he is attempting to be the defining principle: even in a hallucination of himself at the paradisiacal centre, totality is, for Bloom, unimaginable without the certainty provided by the status quo. And indeed, that the last of his muses is 'Astronomy for the People' neatly anticipates Bloom's agency-negating observational totality in 'Ithaca,' connecting the failure of his attempt to envision totality with his dependence on the version of totality he receives from the status quo.

Rather than instantiating the reform he desires, it seems that even in his hallucination of centrality all Bloom can achieve is the imagination of the same totality in which he lives—and, as such, of the same Procrustean policing of the boundaries of totality and performance

of that totality as universal rather than specific to him as its locus of enunciation. Indeed, just as the Bloom Cottage fantasy depends on subscription to a totality defined by a centre that decides what does and does not fit and renders Bloom of Flowerville peripheral as such, in the New Bloomusalem Bloom's authority depends on the purging of those who do not fit with his worldview and the presentation of the universal inclusion of everyone else. Leopold the First's epistemological restructure involves 'The instantaneous deaths of many powerful enemies, graziers, members of parliament, members of standing committees' and a complementary performance of inclusiveness, in which Bloom makes a show of including all members of society by 'shaking hands with a blind stripling...[eating] a raw turnip...[taking] part in a stomach race with elderly male and female cripples' (15.1566-8, 1600-15).

Understanding the fantasies as envisioning opposite positions in relation to the locus of enunciation, they seem to suggest that the great responsibilities of paradisiacal epistemological centrality are unsustainable, while the consequences of peripheral epistemological marginality are comforting and benign, as well as progressive and meritocratically-enabling. It is significant that Bloom of Flowerville's judicial career ends merely in the aforementioned cruelly optimistic vision of a 'goldseam of inexhaustible ore,' while Leopold the First's leads to an insurgency of 'antiBloomites' that bring about his pseudo-martyrdom (17.1753; 15.1753). The unsustainability of the paradisiacal New Bloomusalem would seem to arise from the necessity of imagining the world as a knowable, articulable, unified, and homogenous totality, while the consolation of the peripheral Bloom Cottage emerges from the readymade *Britannica*-shaped totality to which he can defer. The epistemological consequences of each vision seem, then, to be apiece: both fantasies enable Bloom to be consoled by the order of the status quo; Leopold the First reassures Bloom of 7 Eccles Street that, although it may be 'difficult of realisation,' Bloom of Flowerville is a vision not only possible but ultimately 'renov[ating]' for daily vitality (17.1754, 1758). Paradise consoles those in the periphery that their place in the periphery is preferable. If Bloom's fantasy homecoming is a pathetic riff on his actual bathetic nostos, it is because that fantasy reassures and comforts him in his position; whereas Odysseus actively imposed order on his return to Ithaca, Bloom passively perpetuates the order of 7 Eccles Street, seeking the consolation of the order he knows rather than construction of 'new worlds for old' 'upon the incertitude of the void' (15.1685; 17.1014-15).

## 2.5 *Amor Matris* upon the Void

It is in the nature of the order to which he returns and by which he is consoled that the terms on which *Ulysses* can be read as imagining a world without totality emerge; indeed, just as Odysseus' journey returns him to matrimonial order, the prerequisite of Bloom's consolation is his return to Molly. As such, if the epistemological consequences of Bloom's fantasies for paradise and the periphery are mutually reinforcing, it is unsurprising to find a key element of that mutual reinforcement in the fantasies' understandings of sex and gender roles. For all the differences engendered by the fantasies' visions of occupation of and commensurability with the locus of enunciation, the role of women is ultimately the same: to reassure Bloom that his masculinity affords him a default centrality of sorts.

This androcentrism is particularly clear in the New Bloomusalem, which is bookended by choruses of women heaping praise on Bloom. In the midst of his coronation, 'Women whisper eagerly':

A MILLIONAIRESS  
(*richly*) Isn't he simply wonderful?  
A NOBLEWOMAN  
(*nobly*) All that man has seen!  
A FEMINIST  
(*masculinely*) And done! (15.1460-66)

This apparently diverse array of admirable women is an essential element in the construction of Bloom's centrality—and his subsequent placing of 'his right hand on his testicles'<sup>139</sup> when taking his oath clarifies that his masculinity is an active component of his epistemological centrality. This privilege is reified even after the decline of the New Bloomusalem, and his diagnosis as 'a finished example of the new womanly man,' as a contemporaneous Irish nationalist women's organisation chant a litany that conflates his day with the 'Litany of the Sacred Heart':

THE DAUGHTERS OF ERIN  
Kidney of Bloom, pray for us  
Flower of the Bath, pray for us  
Mentor of Menton, pray for us  
Canvasser for the Freeman, pray for us  
Charitable Mason, pray for us  
Wandering Soap, pray for us  
Sweets of Sin, pray for us  
Music without Words, pray for us  
Reprover of the Citizen, pray for us

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<sup>139</sup> Notably, the same hand he uses to command 'Immediate silence' (15.1500) throughout his universal kingdom.



Friend of all the Frillies, pray for us  
Midwife Most Merciful, pray for us  
Potato Preservative against Plague and Pestilence, pray for us. (15.1798-9, 1940-52)

Integral to the fantasy of the New Bloomusalem is women's active curation of Bloom's epistemological centrality—to the extent that he even figures Molly as 'The former morganatic spouse' who has been 'repudiated' for her infidelity, and 'hastily removed' to make way for Selene, Greek goddess of the moon (15.1506-11). In this moment, Bloom, who later dwells on the 'special affinities...between the moon and woman,' tacitly acknowledges that adulterous Molly is incompatible with a fantasy of centrality, and allows himself to imagine, albeit only briefly, that the goddess of the moon may affect that 'satellitic dependence' he so desires from women (17.1157-8, 1160).

The role of women in Bloom Cottage is ostensibly far different, but ultimately serves the same androcentric ends. Women are conspicuous by their complete absence from Bloom Cottage: as Austin Briggs has recently noted, 'Bloom seems as solitary as Crusoe in his island,' and so completely is Molly missing that it seems in the fantasy as if 'a divorce might have already taken place'—suggestively, among the catalogue of furnishings for the cottage, 'no bed is inventoried.'<sup>140</sup> That said, Molly does get one important mention: as part of Bloom's aforementioned vision of his maximum commensurability and potency as 'Mr and Mrs Leopold Bloom' (17.1614-5)—and it is as a type of incorporation into and containment within his identity that Bloom fantasises women's reinforcement of his masculinity in Bloom Cottage; indeed, it is a vision of the incorporation he has been longing for since Boylan's letter arrives in 'Calypso.' A similar process is at work in the decision to name his estate 'Flowerville': just as he incorporates and contains Molly in his maximally commensurable title, in the name 'Flowerville' he is able to incorporate and contain his philandering pseudonym, Henry Flower, sublimating his libido into the public sphere. It is as if, in Bloom Cottage, women and the desire for women can be controlled by way of a sublimated containment that reaffirms the normativity of an androcentric order.

One of the givens that the New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage fantasies jointly proffer, then, is that androcentrism is a foundational element of both paradisiacal, Bloom-shaped and peripheral, *Britannica*-shaped totalities. Whether embodying the locus of enunciation at the centre or being relative to it in the margins, both totalised visions converge

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<sup>140</sup> Austin Briggs, 'Bloom's Dream Cottage and Crusoe's Island: Man Caves,' in *A Long the Krommerun: Selected Papers from the James Joyce Utrecht Symposium*, ed. by Onno Kusters, Tim Conley, and Peter de Voogd (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2016), pp. 63–75 (p. 70).

in their implicit understanding that women afford men centrality. In thematising this in both fantasies, Joyce necessarily questions the extent to which imagining without totality means imagining without androcentrism. Androcentrism is, of course, implicit in the novel's Homeric parallel—but if we accept that gender is an active component in the creation of totalities, then in what way can a micro and a macrocosm be articulated 'upon the incertitude of the void' *with* totalising androcentrism?

Since the act of totalisation always involves the Procrustean act of exclusion, it is unsurprising to find, in the New Bloomusalem, an extremely vivid image of Leopold the First's policing of gender, in the moments after his imaginative failure when explaining to his subjects his 'schemes for social regeneration' (15.1702-3). As people hurl accusations at him, women, led by a 'Veiled Sibyl,' rush to defend him:

THE VEILED SIBYL

*(enthusiastically)* I'm a Bloomite and I glory in it. I believe in him in spite of all. I'd give my life for him, the funniest man on earth.

BLOOM

*(winks at the bystanders)* I bet she's a bonny lassie. [...]

THE VEILED SIBYL

*(stabs herself)* My hero god! *(she dies)*

*(Many most attractive and enthusiastic women also commit suicide by stabbing, drowning, drinking prussic acid, aconite, arsenic, opening their veins, refusing food, casting themselves under steamrollers, from the top of Nelson's Pillar, into the great vat of Guinness's brewery, asphyxiating themselves by placing their heads in gasovens, hanging themselves in stylish garters, leaping from windows of different storeys.)* (15.1735-51)

In this moment, as Bloom envisions a voluntary femicide in his own honour, androcentrism starts to look like that which he fears most: 'the committal of homicide or suicide...by an aberration of the light of reason' (17.1766-7). The pressure of imagining a totality is thus restated as an anxiety about his ability to retain control over the emotional excess signified by women—to the extent that the Bloom Cottage fantasy allows for a compartmentalising of women that renders them invisible while allowing androcentrism to continue to function. The effect of this, however, is to render women, in each fantasy, as knowable only through their emotional excess—as if even idealised women are ultimately unknowable. And this is where Bloom of 7 Eccles Street is cannier than his fantasy selves.

While Bloom becomes extremely fatalistic about his relationship with Molly over the course of the day, the consolation of his return to matrimonial order is not merely passivity, but suggestive of a bond that makes him less androcentric than either of his ideal selves. Although he mourns, during Simon Dedalus' song in 'Sirens,' that 'all is lost' of their marital 'Order,' and proceeds to imagine paradisiacal and peripheral worlds in which her agency is severely curtailed, in these moments Bloom is allowing himself to forget his more instinctual,

empathetic connection with Molly (11.638-41). As he muses on food served in hotels during 'Lestrygonians,' Bloom suspiciously notes that '[you] Never know whose thoughts you're chewing' (8.717-8), conflating gustation with personal intimacy. Yet, moments later, having eaten his lunch and while drinking his burgundy, Bloom's thoughts turn to his proposal to Molly among the rhododendrons on Howth:

Ravished over her I lay, full lips open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweetsour of her spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. (8.898-9, 906-8)

If Bloom is distrustful of chewing the food of others, and of being exposed to their thoughts, he takes joy in chewing food Molly has chewed for him, of sharing thoughts with her. Indeed, as Molly famously thinks, during 'Penelope':

first I gave him the bit of seedcake out of my mouth and it was leapyer like now yes 16 years ago my God after that long kiss I near lost my breath yes he said I was a flower of the mountain yes so we are flowers all a womans body yes that was one true thing he said in his life (18.1573-7)

While Bloom later reflects, in 'Ithaca,' that 'What to do with our wives' is the 'domestic problem' that engages his mind 'as much as, if not more than, any other,' and laments, after demonstrating the stars to Stephen, that there is 'no known method from the known to the unknown,' the convergence between his and Molly's thoughts seem to suggest that he may be able to move into 'the unknown,' but only without ever knowing it for certain—as if the pursuit of certainty and completeness of knowledge of anything renders the quest for knowledge as such pyrrhic (17.657-9, 1140-1).

In this, *Ulysses* as a novel invested in imagining without totality 'upon the incertitude of the void,' implies that its own method 'from the known to the unknown' must be one that allows for such uncertainty and incompleteness—what might, in other words, amount to an aesthetic incoherence that depends on failure. Only in this can an idea of the world without the tyrannies of totalisation be thought—and in 'Penelope,' Joyce provides *Ulysses*' clearest stab at this. Indeed, if the New Bloomusalem and Bloom Cottage are totalised fantasies emerging from the totalised reality in which Bloom exists, 'Penelope' enables types of knowledge that are not possible within any of those realities. Typified by Molly's objection, near the start of the episode, to Bloom's unspoken assumption that 'nothing can happen without him knowing' (18.282), 'Penelope' enables knowledge by casting the androcentrism of the rest of the novel against Joyce's performance of gynocentrism. As such, the episode suggests that Molly has an inkling of Bloom's salacious pen pal, when she thinks that he may have 'picked up on the sly' 'some little bitch or other...because the day before yesterday he

was scribbling something a letter when I came into the front room'; that she may not have a straightforwardly Irish or English accent, since she spent so long in Gibraltar and expresses anxiety about whether Gardner 'mightnt like [her] accent'; and that she can actually still 'get [her] tongue round...Spanish' (a fact Bloom denies outright in 'Calypso') (18.45-7, 879, 1471; 4.60-1). Most importantly for our discussion of totality and universality is the knowledge that 'Penelope' affords of Molly's mother: Lunita Laredo, about whom Bloom 'hadnt an idea...till [they] were engaged otherwise hed never have got [her] so cheap,' and about whom she concedes to knowing relatively little, referring to her as 'my mother whoever she was' (18.282-3, 846-7). As Gifford and Seidman and Jonathan Quick have noted, the ambiguity about Lunita Laredo suggests, among other things, that Molly may be illegitimate, and that her mother may be Moorish.<sup>141</sup>

If for Stephen, who Bloom describes as the 'salient point' of his narration to Molly at the end of the day, the mother and the love of a mother may be the only universal, as noted earlier, 'Penelope' both explores and negates the suggestion that '*amor matris*,' subjective in its affect and objective in its existence, may be the only basis from which a universal idea of the world can be imagined. For, if Molly is able to encompass the scale of female potentiality, from 'earth goddess' to 'shrewish whore,'<sup>142</sup> the ambiguity of her relationship with Lunita Laredo necessarily suggests that that 'only true thing' may be as much of a 'legal fiction' as the conception of fatherhood Stephen outlines in his discourse on paternity in 'Scylla and Charybdis' (9.844). Indeed, while Molly asserts the objective sense in which '[men] wouldnt be in the world at all only for [women],' she negates the affective sense in which mother's love is an equivalent universal when she wonders 'where would they all of them be if they hadnt all a mother to look after them *what I never had*' (18.1439-42; emphasis added). 'Penelope' uses Molly's voice to complicate Stephen's tentative theory of '*Amor matris* [as] subjective and objective genitive,' and in so doing provides a gynocentric locus of enunciation against which the androcentric loci enunciating across the novel can be relativised. In this, *Ulysses* establishes two poles between which a 'micro and macrocosm...Upon incertitude, upon unlikelihood' can be imagined *in relation to* each other. Molly's final affirmative, then, could be read as negating her negation of universality by suggesting that women will always be available to say 'Yes' to men—although Molly's voice is entirely delegitimised by Joyce's

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<sup>141</sup> Gifford and Seidman, pp. 612–3; Jonathan Quick, 'Molly Bloom's Mother,' *ELH*, 57.1 (1990), 223–40 (p. 223).

<sup>142</sup> Richard Pearce, 'Introduction,' in *Molly Blooms: A Polylogue on 'Penelope' and Cultural Studies*, ed. by Richard Pearce (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), p. 3.

audacious signposting of his own 'dateshaped' signature on the final two lines: 'Trieste-Zurich-Paris/1914-1921' (9.841-2; 2.126; 18.1610-1).

If, in 'Nestor,' Stephen concludes that reality is constructed by a 'candescent' observing soul, because the soul is the 'form of forms,' and goes on to assert in 'Scylla and Charybdis,' erratically and without confidence, that mothers and their love may be 'the only true thing in life,' in 'Penelope' Molly reasserts the importance of recognising that the soul is form-giving, and reduces '*amor matris*' to merely 'one true thing [Bloom] said in his life': that '[women] are flowers all a womans body yes' (2.143; 9.844; 18.1577). In this, any semblance of truth can only be affirmed through interaction, and as such the world and its obscure soul can only be imagined, for Joyce, through the uncertain and incomplete empathetic thought, like that between Bloom and Molly, that fiction can make visible.

In the context of the discussion about how totalisation requires exclusion, which reaches its imaginative apogee during the Messianic scene in Bloom's fantasy of voluntary femicide in his honour, 'Penelope' offers up a grotesque and triumphant joke as a final coda. As Molly thinks to herself that she would 'rather die 20 times over than marry another of their sex,' she ostensibly offers simple corroboration of Bloom's feelings of consolation on his return to their matrimonial inaction (18.231-2). Yet the implicit parallel that this moment makes with the Messianic scene gives the line a different weight: the suggestion is not that Molly would die for Bloom, but that she would die twenty times and still retain her agency to choose—though she would still choose Bloom. Moreover, as their imaginations converge, Molly and Bloom seem once again to have thought themselves into each other's thoughts. If the Messianic scene affords a vision of totality that is commensurate with androcentrism, 'Penelope' asserts that women's agency will never be comprehensible within an androcentric order. By using 'Penelope' to open up a gynocentric locus of enunciation, Joyce creates another layer of fiction that enables *Ulysses* to generate an idea of the world without totality, upon the unknown—and, in the mirror it sets up between androcentrism and gynocentrism, a gesture towards discerning the 'obscure soul' by which we might reconceive the world.

### 3. Leslie Marmon Silko in ‘the World of the Different’

Just as Joyce uses *Ulysses* to respond to the strictures of the *Britannica*’s brand of encyclopaedism—imagining the world’s ‘obscure soul’ through the mixture of his fictional characters’ mutually incommensurable senses of totality—Silko uses *Almanac of the Dead* to insist on worlds beyond the totalised world picture of settler colonists that assumes universality. Nevertheless, *Almanac of the Dead* bears the dubious honour of functioning as the ‘odd one out’ in this project: while Bolaño works fairly explicitly under the influence of what César A. Salgado has recently described as a type of ‘transLatin’ Joyceanism, Silko’s sense of the novel and its potentiality emerges from a rather less Western idea of the possibility of fiction.<sup>143</sup> Arguably, this non-Western provenance is part of what made the publication of *Almanac of the Dead*, in 1991, such a toxic mixture of celebration and disappointment. Silko, whose *Ceremony* had won the 1977 Pulitzer Prize, had become known for a subtle lyricism that explored contemporary Indigenous life while blending Pueblo storytelling with the novel-form. *Almanac*, her much-anticipated second novel, is a novel that can feel very far away from subtlety or lyricism. Weighing in at 763 pages, Silko took as her subject the ‘depravity and cruelty’ in the Americas since European occupation began in 1492, and used her novel to prophesy the ‘eventual disappearance of all things European’ from the Americas.<sup>144</sup> Fourteen years after *Ceremony*, and an entire MacArthur Foundation ‘Genius Grant’ later, Silko seemed far less interested in letting the novel seem as if it could comfortably house Indigeneity. As she explained after *Almanac*’s publication, her previously minimal aesthetic had exploded into something aimed at nothing less than a reconstruction of time and American history:

I could not think of the story of *Almanac* as a single line moving from point A to point B to point C. I knew that I wanted to shape time inside my *Almanac*. I wanted to use narrative to shift the reader’s experience of time and the meaning

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<sup>143</sup> Notwithstanding their clearly divergent approaches to style, Silko has not expressed much interest in Joyce, besides noting his role in what she describes as ‘the breakdown between poetry and prose’ in Western Europe. That said, the parallel between *Ulysses* and *Almanac* has been made, in passing, by Janet Powers and David L. Moore. César A. Salgado, ‘Introduction: The Global Paradigm in Fourth-Wave Ibero-American Criticism on James Joyce,’ in *TransLatin Joyce: Global Transmissions in Ibero-American Literature*, ed. by Brian L. Price, César A. Salgado, and John Pedro Schwartz (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Leslie Marmon Silko, *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, ed. by Ellen L. Arnold (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), p. 114; Janet M. Powers, ‘Mapping the Prophetic Landscape in *Almanac of the Dead*,’ in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); David L. Moore, “‘Indian Country,’” in *Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead, Gardens in the Dunes*, ed. by David L. Moore (India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>144</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead: A Novel* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 317, 570; all further references to this text in this chapter are from this edition and are given parenthetically.

of history as stories that mark certain points in time...I had to figure out how to do this and still tell stories people could understand.<sup>145</sup>

There was immediate disagreement over whether she had achieved her goal: what Melissa Hearn described as a 'profound teaching story and a spiritual vision for the planet,' Sven Birkerts dismissed as a series of 'wish-fulfilment scenarios'; where Linda Niemann saw a 'radical, stunning manifesto,' Alan Ryan perceived an author and a novel 'in need of remedial help.'<sup>146</sup> As Rebecca Tillett has pointed out, the themes of *Almanac* are best read alongside this controversy: 'Silko's popular readership had, and often still has, real problems with the text,' and these problems can be instructive when looking for a way into a novel that can, from a Western European standpoint, feel at times overbearing and unwieldy.<sup>147</sup> When identifying how Silko uses *Almanac* to intervene in encyclopaedic thought, the terms of the controversy that engulf the text are a helpful place to begin.

The Birkerts review has become a favourite strawman among Silko scholars,<sup>148</sup> and the shrill tone of Ryan's indictment a badge of honour for Silko herself.<sup>149</sup> What is useful about their responses, though, is that they demonstrate a tendency for *Almanac*'s readers to find problems not so much in its McCarthyian levels of violence, as might be expected, but with the extremities of viewpoint it presents: while Birkerts decries the text's culminating events and characters as a disappointing 'rush' towards 'prophesied catastrophe,' Ryan moans odiously that Silko prioritises a 'teetering truckload of politically correct themes, from racial oppression to ecology' instead of presenting a 'special insight into the lives and minds of Native Americans.'<sup>150</sup> Much valuable critical work has been done to address the extremities of *Almanac* by making sense of some of the discrete political contexts that it narrates. Keely

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<sup>145</sup> Leslie Marmon Silko, 'Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,' *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 48.

<sup>146</sup> Melissa Hearn, 'Review of *Almanac of the Dead* by Leslie Silko,' *Prairie Schooner*, 67.2 (1993), 149–51 (p. 151); Sven Birkerts, 'Apocalypse Now: Review of *Almanac of the Dead*, by Leslie Marmon Silko,' *New Republic*, 4 November 1991, pp. 39–41 (p. 41); Linda Niemann, 'New World Disorder,' *The Women's Review of Books*, 9.6 (1992), 1–4 (p. 1); Alan Ryan, 'An Inept *Almanac of the Dead*,' *USA Today*, 21 January 1992, p. D6.

<sup>147</sup> Rebecca Tillett, 'Almanac Contextualised,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>148</sup> See, for example: Caren Irr, 'The Timeliness of *Almanac of the Dead*, or a Postmodern Rewriting of Radical Fiction,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Daria Donnelly, 'Old and New Notebooks: *Almanac of the Dead* as Revolutionary Entertainment,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Rebecca Tillett, 'Anamnesiac Mappings: National Histories and Transnational Healing in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *Transatlantic Voices: Interpretations of Native North American Literatures*, ed. by Elvira Pulitano (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2008).

<sup>149</sup> Silko, *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, pp. 108, 133, 159; Laura Coltelli, 'Almanac: Reading Its Story Maps after Twenty Years: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), pp. 214–5.

<sup>150</sup> Birkerts, pp. 40–1; Ryan.

Byars-Nichols and Amanda Walker Johnson, for example, have focused on elucidating *Almanac*'s 'African-Native crossroads,' while critics like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Paul Beekman Taylor, Ellen L. Arnold, Arnold Krupat, and Antonio Barrenechea have, in their various ways, tried to frame its Indigenous context.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless, some of *Almanac*'s most problematic criticism—and most of its denouncements—have stemmed from approaches that, unlike these critics, overvalue the novel's investment in certain of its stories relative to its many other stories.

Richard Rorty, for example, erroneously characterises *Almanac* as ending with a vision of the descendants of European conquerors and immigrants 'forced back to Europe,' and goes on to condemn it for its 'whole-hearted, gut-wrenching disgust for white America.'<sup>152</sup> Rorty's indictment is light on textual evidence, but it is not impossible to see how he reached this conclusion: consider the poem Wilson Weasel Tail delivers to the International Holistic Healers Convention, which culminates in the line 'The whites are crazy—Ahe'yuhe'yul' (725). The poem is interpreted by a delighted audience as a direct threat to the U.S. government: 'Give back what you have stolen or else as a people you will continue your self-destruction' (725). Yet, inferring that such a statement stands in for the text's political unconscious does not sit comfortably either with the complexities of Wilson Weasel Tail, or with the text's overarching focus on the emotional and political awakening of Seese, a white American, or even with the text's actual ending, which sees, in the penultimate chapter, Lecha recall a dream of a future Amsterdam in which 'the streets...were full of Indians from all the tribes of the Americas...many of the Indians had looked pale, as if they had been born there' (756).

Walter Benn Michaels falls into a similar trap, focusing misleadingly closely on Comrade Bartolomeo's tragicomic execution by Mayan insurgents in Chiapas for 'Crimes Against Tribal Histories' (525). Michaels reads this moment as bespeaking the promotion of 'ethnonationalism' at the expense of 'class and the elimination of economic difference';<sup>153</sup> and indeed, the repurposing of Marx along the lines of Indigenous land reclamation by one

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<sup>151</sup> Keely Byars-Nichols, *The Black Indian in American Literature* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Amanda Walker Johnson, 'Silko's *Almanac*: Engaging Marx and the Critique of Capitalism,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), p. 91; Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, 'American Indian Intellectualism and the New Indian Story,' *American Indian Quarterly*, 20.1 (1996), 57–76; Paul Beekman Taylor, 'Silko's Reappropriation of Secrecy,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Ellen L. Arnold, 'The World Made Visible: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic*, ed. by Ernest Stromberg (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006); Arnold Krupat, *Red Matters: Native American Studies* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Barrenechea.

<sup>152</sup> Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 6, 12.

<sup>153</sup> Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 24.



of the insurgents' leaders, Angelita La Escapía, could be made to fit this reading. Yet Michaels' spin is unable to account for the text's flagrant 'cosmopolitanism.'<sup>154</sup> The text's aforementioned figuring of the 'African-Native crossroads' in the history of the Americas is its most obvious rebuttal of this: the narrative of Clinton, a homeless 'Black Indian' activist and a key insurgent in the text, outlines his discovery of how the history of slavery has entwined Africans and Native Americans. Clinton's very existence in the novel is a critique of ethnonationalism—one that Byars-Nichols has described as challenging 'both Eurocentric paradigms and Native American notions of separatism.'<sup>155</sup> That Clinton's narrative positions *Almanac* very clearly on one side of the explosive and ongoing 'Freedpeople' controversies ought to make this more easily perceived.<sup>156</sup>

Confusion about the political extremes contained within the text has reached its apogee in scholarly debates about its approach to sexuality: accusations of Silko's homophobia are hotly contested, but often accepted even by her champions. Janet St. Clair has defined this peculiar strand of *Almanac* criticism, regretfully asserting that readers must identify the novel's proliferation of malevolent gay men as 'a metaphor of the insane solipsism and androcentric avarice that characterize the dominant culture': 'Mired in negative stereotypes, it offends. On the other hand, the metaphor works.'<sup>157</sup> But Silko's 'cannibal queers' could not be said to include Eric, who is one of the text's only sympathetic characters, and whose suicide takes place in the context of his meaningful friendship with Seese: his sexuality does not fit along

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<sup>154</sup> This is an oft-noted aspect of *Almanac*'s aesthetic, with important exegeses including: Cook-Lynn; Ami M. Reiger, 'Material Meeting Points of Self and Other: Fetish Discourses and Leslie Marmon Silko's Evolving Conception of Cross-Cultural Narrative,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); Channette Romero, 'Envisioning a "Network of Tribal Coalitions": Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *The American Indian Quarterly*, 26.4 (2002), 623–40; Eric Cheyfitz, 'The (Post)Colonial Predicament of Native American Studies,' *Interventions*, 4.3 (2002), 405–27; Laura Shackelford, 'Counter-Networks in a Network Society: Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *Postmodern Culture*, 16.3 (2006); Krupat; Joni Adamson, 'Indigenous Cosmopoetics and the Reemergence of the Pluriverse,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014).

<sup>155</sup> Keely Byars-Nichols, 'The Black Indian with One Foot: Reading Somatic Difference and Disability in *Almanac*,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), p. 53.

<sup>156</sup> These pertain to the difficult and often ill-tempered discussions about the tribal membership rights of Africans descended from slaveholding Native American tribes. For more on this subject and its history, see: Daniel F. Littlefield, *Africans and Creeks: From the Colonial Period to the Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979); William Loren Katz, *Black Indians: A Hidden Heritage* (New York, NY: Atheneum, 1986); Jack D. Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*, 2nd edn (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993); James F. Brooks, 'Confounding the Color Line: Indian-Black Relations in Historical and Anthropological Perspective,' *American Indian Quarterly*, 22.1/2 (1998), 125–33; *Crossing Waters, Crossing Worlds: The African Diaspora in Indian Country*, ed. by Tiya Miles and Sharon Patricia Holland (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>157</sup> Janet St. Clair, 'Cannibal Queers: The Problematics of Metaphor in *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), pp. 207–8.

St. Clair's allegorical lines. As Caren Irr, Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, and Penelope M. Kelsey have suggested, sexuality and desire in *Almanac* cannot be reduced to metaphor without failing to account for the equal amounts of heterosexual and bestial cruelty, or the specificities of Pueblo ideas of gender: desire as *Almanac* figures it is the outcome of a society 'psychologically ravaged' by the history of conquest.<sup>158</sup>

That the controversy tends to emanate from prioritising particular sets of opinions among *Almanac*'s characters gives us the outline of a trap into which it is too easy to fall when trying to understand how it works as a whole. While certain ideas leap out of the novel for their ostensible abhorrence or bluntness, it is imperative to think about how those ideas interact with the novel's other ideas: indeed, characters within *Almanac* have a frustrating habit of contradicting one another, both literally and as agents within the novel's structure. Mosca is an instructive example of this: while his misogynistic rants occupy long sections of 'The Fifth World,' his condemnation of the Brito sisters' involvement with the Church is undermined by the revelation of their clandestine operations with communist priests and nuns to rescue migrants abandoned in the Sonoran desert. An uncomfortable and unsettling amount of space is given over to Mosca's prejudices—but his is just part of *Almanac*'s method of placing relatively equivalent focus on subjectivities broadly at odds with one another. Root notes, in one of the novel's pivotal moments, that 'If you weren't born white...or if you weren't born what they called normal, or if you got injured, then you were left to explore the world of the different' (202-3): Silko uses *Almanac* to re-imagine the world from the position of the different.

As such, getting a grip on *Almanac*, and understanding how its narrative 'shift[s] the reader's experience of time and the meaning of history,'<sup>159</sup> necessitates focusing on its heteroglossia as its salient point—indeed, it is the very thing that makes critically powerful what can seem simply unpalatable. This has been a popular route for many of *Almanac*'s most successful critics. David L. Moore, for example, has made strong arguments for understanding *Almanac*'s plurality of subjectivities as the structuring principle of an elaborate retelling of the Pueblo Arrowboy/Estoy-eh-muut myth, whereby the text positions the reader as a 'circulating witness' who is forced to identify difference among the novel's cast,

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<sup>158</sup> Irr, p. 236; Dorothea Fischer-Hornung, "'Now We Know That Gay Men Are Just Men After All': Abject Sexualities in Silko's *Almanac*," in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillet (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), p. 78; Penelope M. Kelsey, 'Indigenous Economic Critique in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Gaspar de Alba's *Desert Blood: Against a Philosophy of Separatism*,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead, Gardens in the Dunes*, ed. by David L. Moore (India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), pp. 117–8.

<sup>159</sup> Silko, 'Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective,' *Yellow Woman*, p. 48.

and is asked to reassemble history and the future accordingly.<sup>160</sup> Not dissimilarly, Eva Cherniavsky identifies the text's politics by looking at how its sprawl of characters collectively establishes a 'tribal epistemology' that is resistant to 'a system of equivalence' she describes as 'the incorporative logic of identification.'<sup>161</sup> For Cherniavsky, the text's heteroglossia proposes a new grounding for identity politics—a vision of identity with a resemblance to the inclusive disjuncture in which Deleuze and Guattari see such revolutionary potential.<sup>162</sup> Tillett's numerous essays on *Almanac* also draw on its heteroglossia, focusing on how the characters and storylines are always collectively in dialogue with U.S. policy, reacting to events such as Evan Mecham's impeachment as Governor of Arizona and the U.S.-backed Contra revolt in Nicaragua, and prophetically anticipating the establishment of the North American Free Trade Agreement and the concomitant Zapatista revolt, and the militarisation of the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>163</sup> For Tillett, *Almanac* uses heteroglossia as a tool by which 'the final boundaries between textual and "actual" social justice activism' can be dismantled, and as such is nothing less than a vision for understanding difference as a fundamental pillar of an 'alternative worldview' based on 'reciprocity and justice.'<sup>164</sup>

One of the similarities that can be inferred from the approaches of Moore, Cherniavsky, and Tillett to *Almanac* is an implicit critical dependence on understanding the text's heteroglossia according to the binary it seems to presuppose between its elite and non-elite

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<sup>160</sup> The Arrowboy/Estoy-eh-muut myth, wherein Arrowboy's witnessing of evil-doers' sorcery stops it from working, is repeated across Silko's oeuvre, particularly in *Storyteller's* 'Estoy-eh-muut and the Kunideeyahs,' which she adapted for film as *Arrowboy and the Destroyers* (1978), and *Ceremony*. David L. Moore, 'Silko's Blood Sacrifice: The Circulating Witness in *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Louise K. Barnett and James L. Thorson (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1999); David L. Moore, 'The Ground of Ethics: Arrowboy's Ecologic in *Almanac*,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014).

<sup>161</sup> Eva Cherniavsky, 'Tribalism, Globalism, and Eskimo Television in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *Angelaki*, 6.1 (2001), 111–26 (p. 118).

<sup>162</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>163</sup> Silko writes passionately about these events in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit*. *Almanac's* supposed prophetic qualities, and Silko's personal contact with Subcomandante Marcos of the Zapatistas, have been favourite starting points for a number of critics. See: Deborah Horvitz, 'Freud, Marx and Chiapas in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, 10.3 (1998), 47–64; Joni Adamson, *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice, and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2001); Shackelford; T. V. Reed, 'Toxic Colonialism, Environmental Justice, and Native Resistance in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.*, 34.2 (2009), 25–42; Joni Adamson, "'[T]odos Somos Indios!': Revolutionary Imagination, Alternative Modernity, and Transnational Organizing in the Work of Silko, Tamez, and Anzaldúa,' *Journal of Transnational American Studies*, 4.1 (2012). For an especially strong discussion of how Silko's fiction works to 'twin' itself with history, see: Beth H. Piatote, 'Seeing Double: Twins and Time in Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead, Gardens in the Dunes*, ed. by David L. Moore (India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

<sup>164</sup> Rebecca Tillett, "'The Indian Wars Have Never Ended in the Americas": The Politics of Memory and History in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*,' *Feminist Review*, 2007, 21–39; Rebecca Tillett, "'Sixty Million Dead Souls Howl for Justice in the Americas!": *Almanac* as Political Activism and Environmental and Social Justice,' in *Howling for Justice: Critical Perspectives on Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*, ed. by Rebecca Tillett (Tucson, AZ: Arizona University Press, 2014), p. 15; Tillett, 'Almanac Contextualised,' p. 8.

voices. Cherniavsky is keenly aware of this: she contextualises her argument using Ranajit Guha's definition of subalternity 'as the difference, or remainder, when all forms of elite identity...are subtracted from the totality of "the people."' <sup>165</sup> Moore and Tillett err, as I will, away from the term 'subalternity': the use of terms from 'postcolonial' studies in Indigenous/Native American studies is, of course, controversial—not least since Indigenous Americans can hardly be said to be post-colonial, as numerous scholars have noted. <sup>166</sup> Indeed, as Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Allen Warrior have succinctly noted, since 'The study of American literature involves and proceeds from different critical assumptions than the study of Native American literature,' the 'norms in the second instance should derive from internal sources within the Native community itself.' <sup>167</sup> In the case of *Almanac*, this is as much as to say that it can be productively considered in terms of postcolonial theory's 'subaltern–elite' binary, but to do so in those terms would be to transplant a set of assumptions that risks erasing the norms with which Silko is working. As such, I will be following the lead of Moore and Tillett by using Silko's own terms in considering 'the people—the rich/elite.' Indeed, both depend on the concept, albeit more implicitly than Cherniavsky: the former's notion of ethically witnessing difference beyond the appropriative aggression of voyeurism and the latter's attention to the novel's specific investment in the stories of the politically oppressed both presuppose that *Almanac*'s sprawl of characters is selected and positioned according to the relationship between the subaltern and the elite. The arguments of Moore, Cherniavsky, and Tillett all imply that the 'people–elite' binary is the principle by which *Almanac* is populated; they identify as the heart of its heteroglossia those who live in 'the condition of the non-elite...without access to the exercise of institutional power or, by extension, to those institutions that produce the historical record of colonialism and its aftermath.' <sup>168</sup> For them, *Almanac*'s politics are best perceived when approaching the difficulty posed by its diverse, contradictory, heterogeneous mass of characters as an attempt to grasp the totality of the Americas by adding 'the people' to all forms of elite identity. Or, to take the title of *Almanac*'s final section as a hint, it is a portrayal of 'One World, Many Tribes' (707) in all its necessary internal fractiousness.

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<sup>165</sup> Ranajit Guha, 'On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India' (1988) quoted in Cherniavsky, p. 123.

<sup>166</sup> For general discussions of the use of postcolonial terms in Indigenous studies, see: Anne McClintock, 'The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term "Post-Colonialism",' *Social Text*, 1992, 84–98; Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999); Jodi A. Byrd and Michael Rothberg, 'Between Subalternity and Indigeneity,' *Interventions*, 13.1 (2011), 1–12. To get around this problem, this study is rooted more closely in theories of 'settler colonialism' than 'postcolonialism,' as discussed below.

<sup>167</sup> Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack, and Robert Allen Warrior, *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), p. 42.

<sup>168</sup> Guha (1988) quoted in Cherniavsky, p. 123.

Where critics like Moore, Cherniavsky, and Tillett stop short, however, is in considering what exactly it means that *Almanac*'s heterogeneous mass of 'the people' added to all forms of elite identity presupposes an image of totality. Adam Sol and Deborah L. Madsen begin this work in their readings of *Almanac*'s prodigiousness, with Sol considering the novel in terms of Edward Mendelson's aforementioned definition of 'encyclopedic narrative' and Madsen focusing on how the narrator of *Almanac* works as the novel's unifying principle to perform across the text's narratives a 'transcendent narratorial ontology'—but, as with Cherniavsky, Moore, and Tillett, the role of totality in the 'people–elite' binary is left in the background.<sup>169</sup> The notion that 'the people' exist in relation to an elite presupposes an identifiable, if theoretical, totality of people from which either group can be subtracted. It is conspicuous, then, that *Almanac* makes clear a very particular approach to 'totality' in a pivotal moment from its eponymous 'Almanac of the Dead':

A day began at sunset. 'Reality' was variously defined or described.



Narrative as analogue for the actual experience, which no longer exists; a mosaic of memory and imagination. [...] The image of a memory exists in the present moment. (574-5)

These passages reflect on the relationship between representation and power. If it is accepted that reality is 'defined or described,' it follows that any representation of reality is necessarily politicised by the presence doing the defining or describing. Awareness of this is crucial because 'actual experience' of 'the present moment' has to be represented using those definitions or descriptions in order to be understood: the 'mosaic of memory and imagination' is always ideological. Just as Derrida critiqued Heidegger's 'world picture' for depending on 'Being' as a 'transcendental signifier' that enables the misguided assumption of objectivity,<sup>170</sup> Silko suggests that the totality of humanity cannot be objectively known or measured, only imagined and represented—and since all representations are subjective definitions and descriptions, all representations of totality are by definition partial or incomplete or inaccurate.

As such, the term that carries the most weight in Silko's gnomic fragments is 'variously': that reality has been 'variously defined or described' suggests that more than one presence has done the defining or describing. The 'mosaic of memory and imagination' that constitutes

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<sup>169</sup> Sol; Deborah L. Madsen, 'Silko, Freud, and the Voicing of Disavowed Histories in *Almanac of the Dead*,' in *Leslie Marmon Silko: Ceremony, Almanac of the Dead, Gardens in the Dunes*, ed. by David L. Moore (India: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p. 147. On Mendelson, see: '1.2 From Swigger and Mendelson to Saint-Amour and Barrenechea,' pp. 16-22.

<sup>170</sup> See '1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms,' pp 13-5.

the present will therefore be a negotiation between different discourses. Of course, since the ‘Almanac of the Dead’ is a pre-contact document, the story immediately following these two passages is the beginning of the domination of ‘various’ definitions or descriptions of reality by a univocal, Eurocentric discourse: ‘Four piles of skulls: Spaniards, mestizos, Indian slaves, Africans. [...] Eleven Ahau is the Katun when the aliens arrived’ (575). Since contact, the ‘Almanac of the Dead’ suggests, the definitions and descriptions informing the present’s ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ have been Eurocentric: where once reality had been characterised ‘variously’ by a diversity of discourses, it is since understood ‘totally,’ univocally, by Eurocentrism; reality is re-organised into four piles of skulls—categorised according to European priorities. In this, it is clear that *Almanac*’s focus on ‘depravity and cruelty’ post-1492 ultimately emerges from a vision of a present ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ that is dominated by a totalising Eurocentric discourse. As such, *Almanac*’s heterogeneous bulk can be read as an attempt to rediscover and rearticulate the oppositional, antagonistic variety of realities that totalising Eurocentrism oppresses.

It is in this context, I contend, that *Almanac* intervenes in encyclopaedic thought. Over its numerous stories, it connects the totalising discourse of settler colonialism with the legacy of the intellectual activity that accompanied the European invasion and settlement of the Americas. In what follows, I will explore how *Almanac* achieves this by framing and reinterpreting the proto-encyclopaedic works of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a key figure of Spain’s ‘intellectual’ conquest. Against the totalising discourse of Eurocentrism, I will argue, the text’s mass of narratives work, at various levels, to dramatise the logic whereby decolonial insurgency against the elite, and the reconstruction of reality as the unity of inherently plural difference, becomes inevitable. In this, *Almanac* undoes the homogenising dominance of the history of European encyclopaedic thought in the Americas, supplanting it with its vision of a de-totalised world, reassembled by a pan-American solidarity among diversity; or, to use Silko’s terms, a ‘network of tribal coalitions’ that will emerge from ‘the world of the different’ (727, 203).

### 3.1 Conquest Encyclopaedism

*Almanac*’s vision of the present’s ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ (574) as defined and described from a totalising Eurocentric standpoint is not dissimilar to Joyce’s engagement with the 1911 *Britannica*’s brand of encyclopaedic discourse in *Ulysses*. Although, as noted, the comparison between Joyce and Silko may not be intuitive, it is notable that both

authors are demonstrably focused on encyclopaedism as a form of colonising dominance: while for Joyce, it is connected to a cruelly optimistic imperial status quo, for Silko encyclopaedism is part of the settler colonialism that seeks to overwrite Indigenous reality by producing ‘objective’ knowledge which simultaneously disguises the conditions of its production and erases Indigenous agency.<sup>171</sup>

The homologues between their respective approaches to their critiques are revealing. Both texts prioritise aspirational social outsiders in the development of their critiques of encyclopaedism: *Ulysses*’ Bloom and *Almanac*’s Menardo. Both Bloom and Menardo secrete anxieties about their ethnicity, their relation to women, their progeny, the possibilities of technology, and their self-destruction. Curiously, both are also in pursuit of their dream homes: while Bloom settles on his fantasy homecoming at Bloom Cottage, Menardo hires an architecture firm to build him an outsized mansion in the suburbs of Tuxtla Gutiérrez. At the centre of Bloom’s dream home is the ‘oak sectional bookcase containing the Encyclopaedia Britannica’—and behind Menardo’s castle is an organisation which teaches its staff that when working with clients ‘of darker skin and lower class who had managed to amass a fortune’ they must channel ‘the holy man Bartolomé de Las Casas’ (277), a Dominican missionary in the early days of New Spain and author of two important proto-encyclopaedic treatments of the New World. Just as Joyce presents the *Britannica*’s aesthetic as shaping and subduing Bloom, Silko portrays Menardo’s will to conspicuous consumption as directed by a form of settler colonial discourse. As with Joyce and the *Britannica*, by examining the ideological appeals that underpin *Almanac*’s invocation of Las Casas, the operations of desire that lead Menardo to his spectacularly inexorable self-destruction become clear—and the text’s critique of encyclopaedism comes into view.<sup>172</sup> It is useful to consider briefly Las Casas’ legacy, his texts, and the context in which he worked.

Bartolomé de Las Casas (1484–1566) is best known for his campaigns against the brutality of the Spanish in the New World, particularly in his roles as the Bishop of Chiapas and the Spanish Crown’s ‘Protector of the Indians’ during the early days of New Spain.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> L. Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 14. For more on settler colonialism as ‘specific formation’ of colonialism, see: Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Poetics and Politics of an Ethnographic Event* (London: Cassell, 1999); Walter L. Hixson, *American Settler Colonialism: A History* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>172</sup> In this, my approach to *Almanac*’s engagement with encyclopaedic thought and practice diverges from that of Antonio Barrenechea, who focuses primarily on the novel’s relationship with Indigenous texts like *Popol Vuh* and the extant codices. That said, although we address different aspects of encyclopaedic thought of the text, our arguments ultimately converge in reading *Almanac* as an affirmation of the revolutionary potential of fictional encyclopaedism. Barrenechea, pp. 110–27, 136.

<sup>173</sup> Or, ‘Universal Protector of all the Indians of the Indies.’ Lawrence Clayton, *Bartolomé de Las Casas and the Conquest of the Americas* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 1–9.

Accordingly, he is popularly remembered, more or less problematically, as a proto-anti-colonialist, with his capital in Mexico high enough for his name to have become attached to numerous schools, an ecumenical centre for human rights, and the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, the cultural centre of Chiapas and neighbour of Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Menardo's hometown.<sup>174</sup> Pablo Neruda's *Canto general* provides some sense of the esteem in which Las Casas is widely held:

Father, it was fortunate for mankind  
that you arrived on the plantation,  
that you bit into crime's  
black grains, drank  
each the daily cup of wrath.<sup>175</sup>

A brief look at Las Casas' life makes this hagiography understandable. On his first trip to the New World, Las Casas witnessed and documented the massacre of hundreds of Arawaks by Spanish soldiers in Cuba in 1514, and subsequently devoted his career to refuting the philosophical and theological reasoning used to justify the exploitation of the '*indios*.'<sup>176</sup> His very public defence of the rights of the *indios* led to his royal post, and eventually to a Crown-organised debate at Valladolid in 1550-1 with humanist philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda over whether *indios* could be defined as 'natural slaves.'<sup>177</sup> Among his writings, the most widely circulated was a short treatise entitled *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (1552), which exposed the exceptional mistreatment of the *indios* by colonists.<sup>178</sup>

So far, so 'fortunate for mankind'—in this light Las Casas' image as an anti-colonial hero in Latin America, particularly in Chiapas, makes some sense. So why does Silko have his named invoked by Federal District businesspeople to facilitate for-profit exploitation? It could certainly be argued that Silko is indulging in Las Casas revisionism: Angelita La Escapía

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<sup>174</sup> For two brief analyses of the extent to which Las Casas can be termed 'anticolonial,' see Marcel Merle, *L'anticolonialisme européen: de Las Casas à Karl Marx* (Paris: Colin, 1969); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

<sup>175</sup> Pablo Neruda, *Canto General*, trans. by Jack Schmitt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), p. 75.

<sup>176</sup> Clayton, pp. 47–8, 4; Anthony Pagden, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethnology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 142–3.

<sup>177</sup> So scathing and vituperative was Las Casas, particularly at Valladolid, that he is sometimes cited as the source of the so-called 'Black Legend,' which characterised the Spanish as 'uniquely cruel and barbaric in their encounter and conquest of Amerindians,' and his legacy became a source of hot contention in the struggle between Protestants and Catholics in succeeding centuries. Clayton, p. 23. See also: José Rabasa, *Inventing America: Spanish Historiography and the Formation of Eurocentrism* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), p. 233n31.

<sup>178</sup> As Vincent C. Renstrom explains, for those opposed to Las Casas' defence of the *indios*, the *Brevísima* and his other texts were a "handbook of destruction," and led 'the Spanish crown's decision to keep a tighter rein on all publications containing subject matter about America.' Clayton, pp. 23, 152; Vincent C. Renstrom, 'Censoring Encyclopaedic Knowledge: The Case of Sahagún and Sixteenth-Century Spanish America,' in *Pre-Modern Encyclopaedic Texts: Proceedings of the Second COMERS Congress, Groningen, 1-4 July 1996*, ed. by Peter Binkley (Leiden: Brill, 1997), p. 319.



is portrayed discovering that Las Casas is implicated to at least some degree in the rise of chattel slavery of Africans in the Americas. But the architects' use of Las Casas signals more than a simple revisionist spin on his legacy, as suggested by Menardo's class-based motivation for hiring the firm in the first place:

Menardo had been greatly relieved that Señorita Martínez-Soto [Alegría] was proceeding slowly and from the very beginning. For although Menardo had boldly ventured into many business arenas in previous years and had become a self-made 'millionaire,' he was quite aware that many of the intricate customs and rituals of the upper classes were still unknown to him. He had never engaged an architect before. He had simply understood this was the practice when one wished to build the castle of one's dreams. (267)

When Alegría is advised to channel Las Casas by her boss, it is with 'the benefit of all the knowledge his years in the profession had accumulated' (277): a learned sense of how Eurocentrism shapes aspiration because it 'passes as universal.'<sup>179</sup> Indeed, it is not a house that Menardo wants, but a 'castle'; Alegría promises her boss, 'If the wife wanted Gothic vaulted ceilings in the closets' she would get them (267, 277). For the architects, channelling Las Casas is a way of engaging with and profiting from the establishment of Eurocentricism as a universal norm; his is the charitable face of dominance. Las Casas' role as a progenitor of Eurocentrism is what motivates *Almanac's* invocation of his legacy; and, as José Rabasa, Anthony Pagden, and Walter D. Mignolo have all pointed out, Las Casas' longer writings were foundational in the formation of totalising Eurocentrism.<sup>180</sup>

Las Casas wrote two major descriptions or definitions of the New World: *Historia de las Indias* (1527-61), a natural history, and *Apologética historia sumaria* (c.1559), a lengthy ethnological supplement to the *Historia*. These texts, however, cannot be understood as natural histories or ethnographies in quite the same way as Pliny's *Natural History* or Herodotus' *The Histories*. Rather than describing and organising nature and humanity to an audience familiar with the objects of description, Las Casas' *Historia* and *Apologética* were communicating to a European audience a world of 'phenomena without precedent in the European stock of knowledge.'<sup>181</sup> Las Casas, of course, was neither the first nor the last to attempt this: Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés' *La historia general y natural de las Indias* (1526-35) and Bernardino de Sahagún's *La historia general de las cosas de Nueva España* (1545-90) are two other important *summas*.<sup>182</sup> What makes their attempts to communicate

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<sup>179</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. xii.

<sup>180</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, pp. 164, 179; Pagden, pp. 119-45; Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. xii.

<sup>181</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 16.

<sup>182</sup> Sahagún's is also known as the *Florentine Codex*, for where it was eventually found; given the similarity of Sahagún's title to Oviedo's, I will hereafter follow with convention in referring to it by this name. Other famous documents grappling with these problems include Christopher Columbus' *Diario* and Hernán Cortés'

‘phenomena without precedent’ to Europeans important is that the task necessitated confronting what Pagden describes as the ‘problem of recognition’: how could a ‘new’ world and its people be communicated by a language that was ‘the creation of university intellectuals who had never left Europe and never set eyes upon an American Indian’?<sup>183</sup> As Pagden outlines, the natural response among early settlers was to cope as well as possible in the belief ‘that the new could always be satisfactorily described by means of some simple and direct analogy with the old’; this is how, for example, the Spanish word for ‘pineapple’ has ended up the same as the word for ‘pinecone’: *piña*.<sup>184</sup> All this is to say that even as the Old World’s need for information about the New World grew, the chronicler was never ‘equipped with an adequate descriptive vocabulary for his task and was beset by an uncertainty about how to use his conceptual tools in an unfamiliar terrain.’<sup>185</sup> For want of any alternative, European words were made to approximate American reality.

By the time writers like Oviedo, Las Casas, and Sahagún were compiling their *summas*, the problem of recognition was joined by the problem of organisation. As Rabasa notes, the texts were attempting to ‘reconstitute an original New World’ for a European audience, and as such aimed to codify ‘a whole field of reference, of registered facts and opinions.’<sup>186</sup> This endeavour necessitated a form of categorisation, and as with the problem of recognition, the issue was managed by analogy between ‘old’ and ‘new’; this is where the influence of Pliny and Herodotus, as well as Isidore of Seville and Bartholomaeus Anglicus,<sup>187</sup> becomes extremely significant. In the same way that explorers paved over the problem of recognition by describing New World objects using Old World terms, Las Casas and his peers organised the vast quantities of ‘newness’ they observed by deploying the organisational structures bequeathed by their generic forebears. Accordingly, Oviedo explicitly sets out to ‘follow and to imitate Pliny himself’ and fits everything into his categories, while Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex* bears a clear structural debt to the categories of Anglicus’ Pliny-inspired *De proprietatibus rerum* (1220–40).<sup>188</sup> Similarly, Las Casas’ organisation of his texts into constituent *crónicas* owes much to Herodotus’ approach in *The Histories*.<sup>189</sup> As Mignolo comments, their texts were

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*Cartas de relación* to Charles V. José de Acosta’s *Historia natural y moral de las Indias* is another famous *summa* that I will not be touching on here.

<sup>183</sup> Pagden, p. 4.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 11; Rabasa, *Inventing America*, pp. 141–7.

<sup>185</sup> Pagden, p. 11.

<sup>186</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 17.

<sup>187</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, pp. 187, 194.

<sup>188</sup> Oviedo, *Historia*, 1:11 quoted in Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 145; Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, pp. 195–6.

<sup>189</sup> Pagden, p. 121.

written in the belief ‘that it was perfectly natural to organize all the information... without asking how the [*indios*] themselves organized and transmitted their knowledge.’<sup>190</sup>

To grasp fully the extent to which these problems of recognition and organisation established an image of the world ‘historically located from a European perspective,’<sup>191</sup> it is vital to consider the peculiar point in the history of the development of encyclopaedic thought and practice at which these texts were written. As Mignolo has pointed out with reference to Sahagún, although they were undertaking an encyclopaedic endeavour using tools bequeathed by writers of ancient and medieval encyclopaedias, they were doing so before Francis Bacon’s rethinking of the European ‘epistemological tradition’ and organisation of knowledge in *Advancement of Learning* (1605) and *Novum Organum* (1620) had established the aesthetic principles for the recognisably modern encyclopaedia. This points to a major difference between the objectives of Las Casas and his peers and Bacon and his descendants, and by extension to the encyclopaedisms engaged with by Silko and Joyce: while the former adapted an inherited aesthetic to *assimilate and organise* ‘new’ information into a recognisable totality, the latter rethought that very aesthetic in order to *re-examine* ‘old’ information into a totality reshaped by pedagogic and democratic principles.<sup>192</sup> Las Casas and his peers took a pre-modern model for encyclopaedism to their task, but rather than trying to transmit a general system of knowledge to all people, they were occupied in the orientation of European epistemology outside of its European context; theirs was less a ‘circle of learning,’ more an intellectual conquest: not quite *encyclopédistes*, but *enciclopédistas de la conquista*.

The development by Las Casas and his peers of an aesthetic to organise and articulate, or define and describe, the New World stands as an unparalleled demonstration of how the European epistemological tradition evolved to sustain itself and its settlers outside of Europe. But, as indicated by Silko’s presentation of Las Casas’ legacy channelled to exploit Menardo 500 years since contact began, conquest encyclopaedism did more than just keep European epistemology alive in the New World: it constructed a power relationship between Old and New Worlds whereby the Old could exert power over the New because the New had been cast as marginal to, and epistemologically dependent on, the Old. Following Rabasa, I contend that the texts of Las Casas and his fellow conquest encyclopaedists achieved this by making the concept of ‘newness’ the focal point in their definitions and descriptions of the

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<sup>190</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 194.

<sup>191</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. xii.

<sup>192</sup> Mignolo also points out that, since the *summas* of Las Casas and his peers are typically seen as proto-anthropological, the history of anthropology could be similarly re-appraised in this context: it would seem that their anthropological qualities have their roots in a form of proto-encyclopaedism that predates the innovations of Bacon. As much as Las Casas stands as a proto-anthropologist, he emerges from a proto-encyclopaedic tradition. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 187.

reality of the Americas: for if the Americas' reality, its 'mosaic of memory and imagination' (574), depended on its 'newness' to the European observer, its Indigenous reality is subordinated, dependent for its existence on the European gaze and its informing ideologies. The way in which the themes 'originally motivating the notion of a *new world*'<sup>193</sup> shape the *summas* of Oviedo, Sahagún, and Las Casas illustrates how this centralisation of European perspective works concurrently to 'replace rather than represent'<sup>194</sup> Indigenous reality. By unpicking the logic of conquest encyclopaedism, the type of intervention *Almanac* is making becomes clear.

Oviedo's *Historia*, the first conquest encyclopaedia, is a good place to begin outlining this phenomenon. Compiled after he was made 'Royal Chronicler of the Indies' (1532-56),<sup>195</sup> the *Historia* was an essential informational link between the New World and the Crown. As K. Myers points out, Oviedo was fully aware of the direct role his chronicles would play in determining legislation passed in Spain.<sup>196</sup> Accordingly, his encyclopaedia addressed the problems of recognition and organisation by defining and describing the New World's reality along lines he believed would motivate the Crown's interest: its potential for new wealth. To return to the *piña*, Oviedo's overloaded attempt to define and describe it illustrates exactly the New World's potential. Using Pliny's schema, Oviedo classifies the *piña* as a 'thistle,' but describes it as an artichoke that looks like a pinecone that smells like a combination of peach, quince, fine melons, 'and all other excellencies of all these fruits together and separate.'<sup>197</sup> The pineapple's objectification in Oviedo's taxonomy takes place alongside 'sensual excess that overburdens the will to classify.'<sup>198</sup> Within the Spanish Crown's stock of knowledge, the *piña* is installed as an exotic spoil, full of western promise.

While the *piña* is a relatively trivial example of how conquest encyclopaedism established a Eurocentric worldview by defining and describing the reality of the Americas according to what motivated its European audience's conception of its 'newness,' the deterministic trajectory of Oviedo's exoticising appeals to the Crown come to light in his handling of the *indios*. For Oviedo, these were not simply a people of 'thick skulls' and 'bestly and badly inclined understanding,' but the people of 'those famous islands, the Hesperides, thus named

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<sup>193</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, pp. 16–7.

<sup>194</sup> Larzer Ziff, *Writing in the New Nation: Prose, Print and Politics in the Early United States* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991), p. 172.

<sup>195</sup> Renstrom, p. 317.

<sup>196</sup> K. Myers, 'The Representation of New World Phenomena: Visual Epistemology and Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo's Illustrations,' in *Early Images of the Americas: Transfer and Invention*, ed. by Jerry M. Williams and Robert E. Lewis (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1993), pp. 184–5.

<sup>197</sup> Oviedo, *Historia*, 1:240 quoted in Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 146.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid*, p. 141.

after the twelfth King of Spain, Hesperus.<sup>199</sup> Oviedo used his encyclopaedia to explain that, as a people ‘formerly known to and possessed by the Sovereigns of Spain’ the New World’s inhabitants must be understood as having degenerated from antiquity.<sup>200</sup> This meant that they were accountable for their sins and due legitimate punishment and subjugation by Spain. In this light, the effect of Oviedo’s *Historia* is clear: the Americas’ Indigenous reality is supplanted by the Spanish Crown’s overriding interest in new sources of wealth, from the *piña* to the *esclava/o*.

Sahagún’s *Florentine Codex* works to a similar purpose. Both Mignolo and Rabasa point to it as a key moment in the Franciscan proselytising of the New World.<sup>201</sup> As an example of conquest encyclopaedism, it is unique for having incorporated a large amount of information directly from Mexica informants, having been written in both Spanish and Nahuatl, and having used both alphabetic and glyphic writing systems. But, as Rabasa points out, these innovations were ultimately motivated by the Franciscans’ need to identify sources of paganism among the Mexica: the text ‘has less to do with an intention to be value-free than with the task of reconstructing a native text that would allow missionaries to decipher public [Indigenous] behaviour and trace symbolic references and associations in confession’: it is ‘an arsenal for future battles against the devil.’<sup>202</sup> Just as Oviedo’s *Historia* defines and describes the Americas’ ‘newness’ in line with its exoticism, the *Florentine Codex* invents a New World in which Indigenous reality is simply the next frontier in the Franciscan theological mission.

Looking at Oviedo and Sahagún, it is possible to see how conquest encyclopaedism’s codification of the New World’s reality according to that which was ‘new’ to the European observer effaced the Indigenous perspective from representations of the New World’s reality; as Rabasa writes, in their encyclopaedias, the reality of New World phenomena comes to be dependent on the *European* gaze: the ‘European presence becomes an integral element in the descriptions.’<sup>203</sup> Unsurprisingly, ‘newness’ emerges as a motivating principle in Las Casas’ texts too. His *Historia* and *Apologética* explain to his audience a new type of primitivism among the *indios*: using the familiar metaphor of the ‘noble savage’ as a mediating concept, he creates

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<sup>199</sup> Oviedo, *Historia*, 1:111, quoted in Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 150; Oviedo, *Historia*, 1:17, quoted in Stephanie Merrim, ‘The Apprehension of the New in Nature and Culture: Fernández de Oviedo’s *Sumario*,’ in *1492-1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*, ed. by René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini (Minneapolis, MN: Prisma Institute, 1989), p. 176.

<sup>200</sup> Oviedo, *Historia*, 1:17, quoted in Merrim, p. 176.

<sup>201</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, p. 151; José Rabasa, *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You: Elsewheres and Ethnocide in the Colonial Mesoamerican World* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2011); Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 194.

<sup>202</sup> Rabasa, *Inventing America*, pp. 162–3.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

the model of an ‘ideal primitivism’ that stood as ‘a purely rational explanation’ for the New World, and in itself supported his condemnations of the conquistadors’ violence.<sup>204</sup>

Yet, Las Casas’ conquest encyclopaedism does something with the *indios*’ ‘newness’ that is slightly different to that of Oviedo and Sahagún: in his attempt to define and describe their humanity, he constructs a hierarchical model for the whole of humanity—Europe and its Others—that positions the Western European Christian subject at its top. In this model, the Western European Christian is both the ideal human and ‘the criteria and measuring stick for ranking’ the extent to which Western Europe’s ‘Others’ were civilised.<sup>205</sup> This model is clarified in the epilogue of his *Apologética*, ‘Kinds of Barbarism’ [‘Especies de Barbarie’], in which he sets out the four different ways [‘acepciones’] in which humans could be considered ‘barbarous’ [‘bárbaros’].<sup>206</sup> Rabasa summarises these accordingly:

- 1) in a broad (an equivocal) sense barbarism refers to a temporal loss of reason, as when a person blinded by passion becomes cruel and commits crimes worse than those of a wild beast;
- 2) in a more restricted sense those who lack letters and a learned language such as Latin are barbarians *secundum quid* that is, they lack some cultural aspect but otherwise are polished and wise. It also includes those who speak a different language;
- 3) in its proper sense, *simpliciter*, the term refers to peoples who have strange customs, lack laws, settlements, cities, have no marriage rules, and live scattered in the woods fleeing contact with other humans;
- 4) in the cultural sense of lacking the true religion barbarism comprises all infidels however wise and civil they might be.<sup>207</sup>

Las Casas’ classification of all those other to Western European Christians into different categories of barbarism had two important effects that clarify the epistemological impact of conquest encyclopaedism: firstly, it universalises a ‘European Renaissance model of humanity’ which set a value by which different degrees of humanity could be ranked; secondly, even as it differentiates between barbarisms, it homogenises those not at the top of the scale—non-European Christians—as barbarous, immanently inferior.<sup>208</sup> This intellectual move is clarified later in his epilogue, when Las Casas appends a fifth sort of barbarism: contrarian barbarism’ [‘la “barbarie” contraria’]. Practitioners of ‘la “barbarie” contraria,’ he explains, are simply ‘enemies of the Christian faith’ [‘los enemigos de la fe

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<sup>204</sup> Las Casas attributed the *indios*’ ‘ideal primitivism’ to ‘climate and body structures,’ figuring them as a type of utopian pagan. Rabasa, *Inventing America*, pp. 17, 164–5. See also: José Rabasa, ‘Utopian Ethnology in Las Casas’s *Apologética*,’ in *1492-1992: Re/Discovering Colonial Writing*, ed. by René Jara and Nicholas Spadaccini (Minneapolis, MN: Prisma Institute, 1989).

<sup>205</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. 17.

<sup>206</sup> Bartolomé de Las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, ed. by Edmundo O’Gorman, II vols (México D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), II, pp. 637–54.

<sup>207</sup> Rabasa, ‘Utopian Ethnology in Las Casas’s *Apologética*,’ pp. 265–6.

<sup>208</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, pp. 16–7.

cristiana’], which is to say non-Christians.<sup>209</sup> Las Casas provides the following summary of his rationale:

Barbarous are those who are outside of the Roman Empire, namely, outside of the universal church, because outside of the church there is no Empire...and this applies to the first barbarians and infidels as much as to the 4<sup>th</sup> and other types.

[‘Bárbaros son aquellos que están fuera del imperio romano, conviene a saber, fuera de la universal iglesia, porque fuera della no hay imperio...y esto cuanto a los primeros bárbaros e infieles desta 4a especie o diferencia.’]<sup>210</sup>

Las Casas’ simultaneous universalising of European discourse and homogenising of ‘Other’ discourses as barbarism is what *Almanac* summons by invoking his legacy: in Las Casas’ *summas*, any variety of definitions or descriptions of reality are supplanted by his universal hierarchy of humanity—the present’s ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ turns Eurocentric (574). The Federal District architects are able to invoke Las Casas as the charitable face of dominance because ‘the image of [his] memory’ has shaped ‘the present moment’ (575).

In Las Casas’ conquest encyclopaedism, Indigenous reality is ‘replaced rather than represented’<sup>211</sup> by a Eurocentrism that aims to totalise its own definition or description of reality—indeed, Las Casas’ encyclopaedic work encodes Indigeneity as irreducibly marginal. To recall Gerald Vizenor’s analysis of the *Britannica*, Indigenous reality becomes mislabelled in simulations that populate an ‘encyclopedia of dominance.’<sup>212</sup> In the shadow of European domination over American reality, Indigeneity is recognisable only within Eurocentric parameters that have encoded it as a barbaric Other. *Almanac* explores this phenomenon variously: from the European father of the half-Yaqui Zeta and Lecha, for whom ‘Indians...simply did not exist,’ to Lecha’s son Ferro, who is only attracted to ‘handsome country-club boys,’ to Wilson Weasel Tail’s savvy attempts to grab Europeans’ attention (‘Have no fear of aging, illness, or death!’), the mass cultural discourse represented in *Almanac* typically ignores, represses, or makes consumable Indigeneity in order to fit it to a settler colonial reality that conceives of ‘things European’ as not just normative but objective, valuing them over and above everything else (119, 454, 717, 14). In the worldview bequeathed by conquest encyclopaedism, settler colonialists can conceal their practice as ‘objective’ while the Indigenous subject becomes merely the extension of Europe’s ‘intellectual dominion.’<sup>213</sup> As *Almanac*’s auspiciously-named Cuban communist Bartolomeo

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<sup>209</sup> Las Casas, II, p. 649.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid, p. 649.

<sup>211</sup> Ziff, p. 172.

<sup>212</sup> Vizenor, pp. 40–1, 39.

<sup>213</sup> Veracini, p. 14; Yeo, p. 57.

explains to the Chiapan Mayans that will later execute him for denying ‘the people’s history,’ ‘Jungle monkeys and savages have no history’ (525).<sup>214</sup>

This is the challenge *Almanac* locates as inherent to encyclopaedic thought and practice in the Americas: historically, its totalising form has been used to attempt an epistemological erasure of Indigeneity, that makes it recognisable only by way of Europe’s imagination of it. By constructing the dominance of Europe in this way, Eurocentrism becomes a privilege of the European ‘elite’ through which the Americas’ barbarous Indigenous underclass can be defined or described. Silko suggests in *Almanac* that Las Casas’ work and his contemporary reputation are implicated in this, and that by reappraising his legacy as a part of the story of the construction of the world as a Eurocentric totality, the work of re-imagining a world without totalising Eurocentrism can begin.

### 3.2 Menardo in the ‘castle of one’s dreams’

Thinking about the political challenge inherent in the act of writing from an Indigenous perspective, Krupat invokes Antonio Gramsci to posit that ‘the question is whether *dominance* has also achieved *hegemony*, the internalization on the part of the colonized of the worldview of the colonizer.’<sup>215</sup> Does *Almanac* cast totalising Eurocentrism as hegemonic? Has conquest encyclopaedism completely overtaken its Indigenous subjects? Given the text’s investment in so many insurgent subjectivities, and its prophesied ‘disappearance of all things European’ (14), the answer is a clear *no*. So what, then, to make of Menardo, whose narrative is privileged with the introduction of Las Casas’ legacy that connects the text to the history of conquest encyclopaedism? By unpacking Menardo’s narrative, the importance of Las Casas’ legacy to the text’s vision of the ‘disappearance of all things European’ (14) is clarified; and the way *Almanac* manifests a peculiar form of *decolonised* encyclopaedic thought comes into view.

Menardo’s narrative is something like a cross between an Alger-esque ‘rags-to-riches’ tale and Nella Larsen’s *Passing* with a Naipaulian ‘mimic man’ playing the protagonist: rising out of relative poverty as a self-made businessman, he falls in an accidental suicide highly symbolic of his decision to ‘pass’ off his mestizo heritage as European. What is important about Menardo’s narrative, in terms of *Almanac*’s focus on the conflict between the people and the elite, is that it becomes a paradigm through which to understand ‘Indigenous

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<sup>214</sup> As Taylor has observed, notable besides their similarity in forename is Bartolomeo’s introduction immediately after Mr. Portillo’s invocation of Las Casas. Taylor, p. 47.

<sup>215</sup> Krupat, p. 21.



possibility<sup>216</sup> when it is totally ‘defined or described’ (574) by Eurocentrism. As I will outline, it functions as a tragicomic allegory for the ways that Eurocentrism proscribes Indigenous possibility by simultaneously curtailing Indigenous subjects’ agency in the present and determining their dreams and aspirations for the future.

Menardo’s narrative contains two conspicuous structural features that make for helpful signposts in unravelling its polemical study of Indigenous possibility within Eurocentric reality. Firstly, its use of narrative voice, and secondly, its division between two non-contiguous sections (Part 2, ‘Mexico,’ and Part 4, ‘The Americas’). By understanding the former as a metaphor for the narrative as a whole, the way that the latter transforms the allusion to Las Casas’ legacy into one of the text’s central thematic kernels becomes clear—and Menardo’s archetypal colonised subjectivity and allegorical downfall begins to look like the diagnosis of a contemporary American malaise shaped by the persistence of conquest encyclopaedism’s ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ (574).

Menardo’s narrative begins with the only passage of first person prose in the entire novel:

The old man was slow, lazy, and dangerous. He would get enough of his smelly home brew in him and then he would start bragging about his ancestors and how they had been the most illustrious and powerful. Full of beer he used to get very serious, and when I was a young child, I felt frightened. (257)

As the story of Menardo’s education and emotional development begins, his voice, in a Flaubertian twist, vanishes:

Menardo had loved the stories his grandfather told him right up until the sixth grade when one of the teaching Brothers had given them a long lecture about pagan people and pagan stories. (258)

In the disappearance of his nascent narrative voice, the text performs a loss of identity: he is shaped by his Catholic education to prioritise Europe over his ‘pagan’ (or ‘barbarous’) heritage. The realisation that he is counted among these pagans is the crucial moment in his development: ‘His grandfather’s nose had been much shorter and wider than his was; the people the old man called “our ancestors,” “our family,” were in fact Indians’ (259). Menardo’s lament that ‘Without the family nose, [he] might have passed for one of *sangre limpia* [clean blood]’ (259), and his subsequent decision to tell people that his Mayan nose was the unfortunate outcome of a boxing match, clarifies why his voice disappears: he chooses to deny his Indigenous ancestry and ‘pass’ for European. The reasoning behind his

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<sup>216</sup> James H. Cox and Daniel Heath Justice, ‘Post-Renaissance Indigenous American Literary Studies,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Indigenous American Literature* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 11.

decision to 'pass' is unambiguous: to achieve the privileged possibility he associates with the elite *sangre limpia*.

In the metaphor of Menardo's vanishing voice, the narrative posits that 'passing,' repressing one's identity by negating one's history and 'actual experience' (574), is not compatible with privileged agency: as the voice disappears, so does the possibility for self-representation and concomitant critical self-awareness. 'Passing' is, rather, an affective symptom of colonisation, as the rest of Menardo's narrative demonstrates. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's description of the effects of internalised colonisation is helpful to bear in mind:

The effect...is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves; for instance, with other people's languages rather than their own. It makes them identify with that which is decadent and reactionary, all those forces which would stop their own springs of life. It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are despair, despondency and a collective death-wish.<sup>217</sup>

Menardo's decision to 'pass' can be read as an attempt to distance himself from the 'wasteland' of his barbarous grandfather: it is the decision of a mind colonised. It is unsurprising, then, to find that Menardo's agency is equally colonised: in his ability to do things in the present, and his aspirations, his sense of his own futurity, he is fully proscribed and pre-determined, or 'defined and described' (574), by Eurocentrism.

Menardo's proscribed agency is clear in the joke the text makes of his practical failure at 'passing': it is clear that everyone, from the Federal District architects to the local tribes to the members of Tuxtla's elite men's club, El Grupo, to their wives to his own servants, know and treat Menardo as a 'monkey-face who passes himself off as a white man' (274). It is Menardo's 'large fortune' (277), as Mr. Portillo reminds Alegría, that permits him this cognitive dissonance: although it is unconvincing, Menardo can attempt to 'pass' for European because he can afford to. Nevertheless, his 'otherness' remains ultimately inescapable, as is clear in his relationship with his wife, Iliana.

Menardo's marriage to Iliana is clearly meant to signal that he too is one of *sangre limpia*: 'her great-grandfather on her mother's side had in fact been part of the original Gutiérrez family that had settled the area,' 'descended from the conquistador De Oñate'<sup>218</sup> (260, 269).

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<sup>217</sup> Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers Ltd., 1986), p. 3.

<sup>218</sup> Don Juan de Oñate y Salazar (1550-1626).

Yet, of course, during the courtship Menardo cannot help thinking that ‘her father was staring at his nose,’ and ‘had to swallow hard to keep from blurting it right out like a maniac: “It got broken in a boxing match!”’ (260). This augurs badly for Menardo; and their engagement is only announced ‘after one of [his] greatest triumphs as an insurer’ (262) proves that to Iliana’s family that he is profitable. In the same way that Menardo’s wealth means he can afford some cognitive dissonance about his inability to pass, it provides the excuse by which his ‘dark skin and lower class’ can be considered acceptable to Iliana’s family, who ‘had lost much of their wealth over the years’ (277, 269).

The elite privilege Iliana and her family enjoy over Menardo reaches its fullest expression when Menardo’s affair with Alegría is uncovered. During the affair, he promises Alegría that if his wife, Iliana, ever found out, “‘Arrangements would be made’” (286) to protect her and her career; auspiciously, Alegría looks at his ‘brown moon face and flat nose and the shining dark eyes,’ and thinks ‘how little he knew or understood, despite the wealth he had begun to accumulate’ (286). And indeed, on the revelation of their affair, Iliana and her family go to:

great lengths to make sure that Miss Martinez-Soto would not find new employment in any of the prestigious architectural firms. This had been accomplished rather simply via the grand old family connections in Mexico City, and with the aid of the women at the club. (295-6)

Menardo’s *sangre limpia* in-laws cut him down and humiliate him by demolishing his claims of agency, and they can do this because his ‘darker skin and lower class’ (277) remain determining factors.

So why does Menardo persist with the lie if it convinces no one and the privilege it affords fails when it counts? The answer, to borrow again from Thiong’o, can be found in the way that colonisation of the mind makes Indigenous subjects ‘want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves.’<sup>219</sup> By submitting his agency to Eurocentric dominance, Menardo allows it to determine his sense of future: because he can only imagine himself as a European, he can only aspire to become that which is determined by Eurocentrism. Menardo must persist with the lie because, within the Eurocentric ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ (574), it is all he can do. He thinks, in a moment of frustration, that ‘The silence of Indians is maddening’ and that he understands ‘why *his* ancestors found it necessary to kill a few’ (324; emphasis added). Menardo’s inability to do anything but ‘pass’ is what the Federal District architects are manipulating when he commissions his castle in suburban Tuxtla; and this absence of critical self-awareness develops, tragically, as Menardo pursues the aspirational dreams he believes to be the privileges of the elite, but are actually the proscribed

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<sup>219</sup> Thiong’o, p. 3.

and pre-determined functions of a totalising Eurocentrism that depends on erasure of Indigenous reality and possibility.

Tacho, Menardo's Indigenous chauffeur, finds himself thinking that 'the battle would be won or lost in the realm of dreams' (475)—and in Menardo's case, the loss is absolute, as the Eurocentric moulding of his sense of futurity culminates in his spectacularly inexorable and highly symbolic death. In the days leading up to the incident, insurgent activity begins to increase across Chiapas, and Menardo finds himself so worried that he has 'no control over his thoughts': 'the voice of the old man, his grandfather, acting out stories and changing his voice for different characters' reappears in his mind (494). The return of Menardo's Indigenous grandfather's repressed voice in some sense speaks for itself: as *Almanac's* Indigenous uprisings gain momentum, his repressed Indigenous unconscious instinctively returns, reminding him that ancestry cannot be escaped through denial. Yet the way that Eurocentrism determines Menardo's sense of his future by blinding him from such introspection and redirecting his agency towards Indigenous genocide is striking.

Menardo specifically recalls his grandfather's story 'about Prince Seven Macaws, who had been undone by two sorcerer brothers' (494). By this point in the text, it is clear that he is being plotted against by Tacho and his twin brother, El Feo. Menardo lacks the critical wherewithal to draw the connection between his grandfather's story and his reality; that is, to interpret the message sent to him by his own unconscious. In keeping with his inability to represent and think critically about himself without his Indigenous voice—the voice that vanishes at the start of his narrative—he is unable to situate himself in a narrative that is non-European. This moment, which neatly restates the narrative's initial performance of his vanishing voice, emphasises Menardo's absolute inability to conceive of a personal future connected to Indigeneity. It is instructive that, on the story's repetition 'over and over inside [his] brain,' his subsequent action is to meet his colleagues at El Grupo to discuss genocidal 'solutions' to Indigeneity:

Menardo had agreed with the police chief and the general: only blood spoke loudly enough [...] the best policy was to kill [Indians] as you found them. Otherwise, you ran into all the logistical problems the Germans had encountered with disposing of the Jews. (494-5)

Eurocentrism's proscription of Menardo shapes his belief that his future is connected to a purge of Indigeneity; his internal desire to 'pass' is externalised into a desire for Indigenous genocide.

Since Menardo comes to see ‘quick annihilation on the spot’ (495) as the only solution to his worries, it is little wonder that concurrently Menardo becomes obsessed with the supposed corporeal invulnerability provided by his bulletproof vest:

[Menardo] had begun to enjoy the nightly ritual of the brandy, then looking at himself in the mirror wearing the vest and pajama bottoms. The vest was bright white against his skin. (497)

Menardo’s developing interest in the necessity of genocide is inseparable from his fetishisation of his bulletproof vest: it signals his total faith in his ability to ‘pass,’ and an absolute surrender of any critical faculties to the parameters of Eurocentrism; indeed, it literally masks his skin ‘bright white.’ As he thinks to himself:

All of it was a matter of trust—trust of the high technology that had woven the vest fibers, and trust in those most intimate with you. *Trust*. Menardo had repeated the word over and over until he was asleep. (497)

If Menardo is to enact a genocide of Indigenous people with the police chief and the general, he ought to be able to demonstrate that he, like them, can ‘pass’ through its ethnic cleansing. By trusting in Eurocentrism and the privilege he thinks it bestows upon him, he comes to be certain that, although he is ‘passing,’ he could survive the genocide:

Menardo gazed back over his shoulder at the shining white palace that was his home: how silly his lapses of confidence had been! All was safely protected, securely guarded, and shielded; each detail, each element, each person, in his life was secure. No one and nothing could touch him! (499)

It is by this logic that he decides to perform the ‘test’ (340, 498) of his bulletproof vest by having Tacho shoot him in front of El Grupo. That ‘microscopic imperfections in the fabric’s quilting’ mean the bullet is not stopped and Menardo is himself annihilated on the spot figures everything that *Almanac* has to say about the possibility of Indigeneity within the Eurocentric ‘definition or description’ of reality (509, 574): nostalgic for a genocidal past that belongs to the coloniser, enslaved through proscriptions on agency in the present, and doomed to re-enact the story of its own ‘conquest’ for the future, Indigenous possibility under conquest encyclopaedism’s totalising Eurocentrism looks less like the rise out of barbarism that Las Casas wrote towards and more like the ‘collective death-wish’<sup>220</sup> of the colonised. Menardo’s death-by-misadventure is ultimately suicide, not ‘A freak accident’ (509). Menardo thinks that he ‘wanted to feel it, to experience it and to know the thrill, to see the moment of death and not have to pay’ (338), but the joke, as always, is on him: in his commitment to demonstrating his own racial ‘purity,’ he gives for El Grupo a performance

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

of how their race conquered his; a form of internalised colonisation Rabasa describes, in relation to the role undertaken by Sahagún's Indigenous informants in the compilation of the *Florentine Codex*, as 'ethnocide'.<sup>221</sup> If the references to Las Casas are *Almanac*'s key identification of the prevailing representational challenge posed to Indigeneity by conquest encyclopaedism in the Americas, Menardo's 'ethnocide' is its diagnosis of how that same encyclopaedism continues to colonise Indigenous subjects in the present. Menardo is the logical conclusion of an attempt to fit into the Procrustean 'mosaic of memory and imagination' (574) bequeathed by the workings of conquest encyclopaedism: compliance with its instruction to become commensurate within its parameters is colonisation of subjectivity that necessitates personal ethnic cleansing through attempted negation of history. In this, *Almanac* suggests, conquest encyclopaedism's parameters proscribe Indigeneity to the point of programming it to destroy itself.

### 3.3 Trust

Just as Leopold Bloom renovates his vitality by deferring to the *Britannica*, Menardo lulls himself to sleep by uttering the word 'trust' (497), as if all both characters need to do is have faith in the certainty of their respective aspired-to totalities. The difference, of course, is that while Bloom's encyclopaedic aspirations specifically assure him against 'suicide during sleep,' Menardo's 'trust' leads him to precisely that somnambulant suicide. Out of Menardo's ethnocide, we could speak of his cognitive dissonance as his 'dialectic of trust': 'trust' that creates affective certainty that the dominant order is not just dominant but absolutely, universally hegemonic. To recall Krupat's Gramscian distinction,<sup>222</sup> Menardo's investment in Eurocentric dominance requires that he 'trust' in it *as* hegemony—since, as the novel makes resoundingly clear, Eurocentrism has not achieved hegemony. Indeed, one of the key arguments that Silko uses Menardo's narrative to make is that the difference between dominance and hegemony is certainty: hegemony is dominance that is certain of its perpetuity—and certainty is the highest form of 'trust.' Although Menardo's narrative ends up as a performance of Eurocentric hegemony, the text structures his narrative to assert that hegemony is just that: a *performance*. In this *Almanac* posits that conquest encyclopaedism's 'mosaic of memory and imagination' (574) depends on mere faith in its hegemony; and this, as the novel prophesies, disappears as soon as it is recognised as such.

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<sup>221</sup> Rabasa, *Tell Me the Story of How I Conquered You*, pp. 12–3.

<sup>222</sup> Krupat, p. 21.

This argument is staged in the narrative's structural division between Parts 2 ('Mexico') and 4 ('The Americas'), with Part 3 ('Africa') introducing a new series of characters and stories based in Tucson. At the end of 'Mexico,' Menardo is left meditating on the forthcoming 'test' (338) by which he will demonstrate his certainty about both his *sangre limpia* and the 'high technology' (338) that secures the clients of his company, Universal Insurance, completely. At the beginning of 'The Americas,' the nature of Tacho's work as a spy against Menardo is clarified, and the specifics of his, El Feo's, and Angelita La Escapía's roles among the local Mayans are fleshed out. The thematic connection between these two aspects of Menardo's narrative is their illustration of his hubristic certainty: he is certain about the forthcoming test and his insurance company's efficacy, and convinced of Tacho's loyalty to him. The interjection of 'Africa' between these two sections is ostensibly digressive, but taken in the context of the narrative's exposition of Menardo's certainty it looks a lot like an elaboration on exactly that theme. 'Africa' opens with mob boss Max Blue's recollection of an ambush that marked the catastrophic failure of the 'security precautions' that had provided him and his uncle certainty, and closes with a meeting of members from the elite Owls Club discussing measures to insure themselves against the 'human refuse' littering the U.S. and spilling over the border (349, 461). The symmetry is suggestive: Max remembers that on the day of the ambush that his uncle 'had been lecturing [him] about security precautions,' while at the Owls Club an Arizona senator waxes to Max and Judge Arne about 'order and control at home, order and control abroad' (349, 462).

Before unpacking how 'Africa' explores certainty in Menardo's narrative, it is helpful to remind ourselves that certainty is integral to the standpoint of conquest encyclopaedism. And indeed, since Menardo is so invested in the totality bequeathed by Las Casas and conquest encyclopaedism, to the point that he blinds himself to evidence to the contrary, it is unsurprising to note that his professional career is devoted to curating 'trust' in its received order. Menardo's company, Universal Insurance (or 'Seguridad Universal,' as it is sometimes rendered), is the key here. Universal Insurance is what takes Menardo from rags to riches: 'the concept of life insurance and insurance for buildings, livestock, and crops was new to the people outside the Federal District,' so his decision to sell "'insurance of all kinds"' to the whole region around Chiapas' is innovative (260). It is through Universal Insurance that Menardo becomes rich, marries his *sangre limpia* wife, and ascends to El Grupo. The symbolism of Menardo's career in insurance is clear: if Menardo's decision to 'pass' signals an acceptance of Eurocentric dominance, selling insurance 'against all losses, no matter the cause, including acts of God, mutinies, war, and revolution' (261) represents a very literal

commitment to helping Eurocentrism retain its dominance. Menardo rises ‘quickly in the insurance business because he knew exactly what people wanted to hear’ (260): that a society premised on the unjust dominance of masses of people by a small elite—that is, the inheritance of ‘conquest’—can be certain that its privilege is hegemonic. Pitching his offer to businessmen left sceptical by the remembered upheaval of the Mexican Revolution, Menardo uses suggestive terms: ‘the “new world” could belong to them just as the old one had’ (261)—the world pre-Mexican revolution could still belong to the elite post-revolution, in the same way that the ‘New World’ of the Americas could belong to the European ‘Old World.’ Universal Insurance must, then, be understood as a vessel through which Menardo exhibits his commitment to the status quo: it is the externalisation of his internalisation of totalising Eurocentrism. Universal Insurance’s function is to provide the status quo with certainty that its dominance is hegemonic: it gives it a vehicle by which hegemony can be affected.

But there is also an inconsistency in this story: why do elites who, due to his racial difference, never fully accept Menardo as one of them entrust their insurance to him? This is what connects Menardo and the local and Federal District elite to which he aspires: it is not that either he or they are actually certain or secured against all losses, but that they need to feel that certainty in order to maintain their privilege and to continue to perform their dominance *as* hegemony. They are united by their desire for certainty of Eurocentrism’s perpetuity, of their insulation from the people, and of their security amidst inevitable change. This shared need for certainty is what ‘Africa,’ in its oblique way, unpicks. Through the narratives it introduces, ‘Africa’ posits that the elite investment in certainty is the key means by which Eurocentric hegemony is performed, and that that performance depends upon aggressive militarisation of the boundaries of its definition or description of reality.

The introduction of Max Blue at the start of ‘Africa’ articulates clearly how the desire for certainty is concomitant with violence. Max is a former mob boss from New Jersey, who decides to move to Tucson and live out his retirement orchestrating assassinations from his golf course. He plans the assassinations’ details and lets subcontractors carry them out: ‘Max never lifted a finger, or if he did, he was hundreds, even thousands, of miles away lifting only a telephone receiver’ (354). Max’s thoughts on death provide a useful entry-point into understanding how the text links certainty and hegemony:

Max believed in death because death contained certainty. The changes in once-living tissue, the decay, were absolute. The dead were truly destroyed and gone. Max was fascinated by the thought that death terminated all being; death changed a man to a pile of rotting waste. (353)



The certainty that death contains is twofold. Firstly, it is final: once a person is dead, a person becomes 'waste' and they and the entirety of their life can be defined or described by those who remain, since the dead are 'truly destroyed and gone.' Secondly, it is universally inevitable. As Max thinks:

All death was natural; murder and war were natural; rape and incest were also natural acts. Serial murderers who chewed their signatures on victims' breasts and buttocks and even the baby-fuckers—they were all consequences of human evolution. (353)

For Max, since death is the universal certainty, anything it touches is justifiable as 'natural.' What this obviously amounts to is a sophistic defence of murder, in which 'human evolution' is a convenient tool for rationalising any death, regardless of context; but what is instructive about Max's conception of death is how, as an assassin, it enables him to think of himself as an artist working with certainty.

Indeed, Max thinks of himself as 'an executive producer of one-night-only performances' (353). Since, for him, death contains certainty constituted of its finality and universal inevitability, his job as an assassin is to make that finality and universal inevitability converge in a way that is legible both to his clients and to potential investigators. That is to say, he has to manufacture at least two discrete perceptions of the death's certainty: one for the client and one for the Police; and in this Max 'liked to think of himself as somewhat a scholar' (354). He thinks dismissively of Ferdinand Marcos' assassination of Benigno Aquino, Jr. 'at the airport instead of the whorehouse': an amateur mistake, resulting in 'instant sainthood for Aquino and political jet-power for his widow' (354). He believes that:

the ordinary details and normal circumstances of accidental death had been the components of his success. The one-car accident at night, the hit and run while the subject jogs a residential street, the garden hose to the car exhaust and the victim at the wheel with the engine running; irrefutable accidents. People slipped and died of blows to the head in tubs and showers all the time. [...] The key to success was to give the cops ample simple explanations for the death. Any appearance of even a remote possibility of accident or suicide was explanation enough to satisfy the police and relieve them of further investigative work. (354-5)

Max manipulates the certainty of death to give both clients and investigators what they want; as his nephew Angelo jokes to himself, 'What had the movie been called, *Dial Max for Murder?*' (372).

Max's role as an assassin allegorises the text's key argument about certainty: the only way to control certainty, to achieve 'universal insurance,' is by controlling death. Absolute certainty necessitates control of the lives of others and the stories of those lives, and this can

only be attained through death. Indeed, Menardo is programmed not just to eliminate his possibility, but to kill himself: for Eurocentrism to perform its hegemony, it requires certainty that its Others are dead or dying. It is unsurprising to find, then, that Universal Insurance's growth depends on blurring the line between 'traditional' insurance and paramilitary security: Universal Insurance 'had been the first insurance company to employ a private security force,' some time after Menardo's arms dealer, Greenlee, has convinced him that 'the real future lay in insurance and security of a different sort' (261, 266). In 'The Americas,' it transpires that Universal Insurance has become 'Universal Insurance and Security' (490), and has grown the capacity to co-ordinate the Indigenous genocide Menardo, the general, and the police chief intend to commit.

Max Blue's interjection in the midst of Menardo's narrative hints at the connections between certainty, hegemony, and death that define the logic of Universal Insurance's culmination as a paramilitary force. If Menardo's company is to provide 'universal insurance,' total coverage against all losses the status quo may endure, it necessarily has to take control of the certainty of death, just like Max Blue. If the totalising Eurocentrism needs its dominance to feel like hegemony in the face of the vicissitudes of chance, it is only able to do so through murder. Eurocentrism, supplanting the various definitions or descriptions of reality with its total, dominant version, needs violence to sustain itself. In a sly joke, Max's eldest son thinks about the policy he has bought with Universal Insurance:

Sonny agreed to the 'foreign businessman's protection package'; the package had been expensive, but had included everything. 'Everything' included the use of Universal Insurance's 'air force,' and in the event of emergencies, one of General J.'s Learjets. (435)

'Everything' is militarised: any totalised definition or description must necessarily be secured against that which is outside totality—totality is seen to depend on the act of exclusion. Eurocentrism's total definition or description of reality creates margins that undermine its affected hegemony, and as such it must be protected from them.

The division between the Eurocentric centre and its marginalised others is another way of articulating the division between the elite and the people that preoccupies the text. Indeed, 'Africa,' like Menardo's sales pitch for Universal Insurance, demonstrates that the pursuit of certainty is only for the dominant elite through the parallels that it offers between the two convalescences it narrates—Max's and Trigg's—and that of Root, who is introduced in Part 1 ('United States of America'). While Max is in the hospital, he is disgusted by the 'permanent "wheelies"' (352) in his ward, and determines never to become like them. Although he makes a full recovery and returns to the privilege of physical ability, he finds that:

he could not remember what it felt like to be Max Blue [...] A different Max had somehow pulled himself back into this world, but not completely. [...] Max had told Leah exactly how he felt; emotional bonds between everyone and himself had been severed. (350-3)

Max's rejection of these 'emotional bonds' transforms him into a solipsist, disinterested in his wife and estranged even from his own body:

In the shower he'd lather his balls with soap, then work the suds in the top of his dick. But that was all. It might have been his foot he was touching. [...] They had been in Tucson for a year and a half, and Max had not had sex with [Leah Blue] or even slept in the same bed with her. [...] All Max could tell her was the shooting had changed him. He lived and sometimes even slept at the golf course. (360)

In his subsequent rebirth as an artist of certainty, Max chooses the certainty of death over the unpredictability of life. His golf course is the key figure of this solipsism: besides being an obvious Eurocentric aberration in the Arizona desert, Max's pleasure in it is described in terms of its simulated exemption from time and space: it is only on the golf course, where he 'loved to watch the arc of the ball and the way wind currents held the ball aloft perfectly suspended as if time no longer existed,' that Max conducts business and initiates assassinations thousands of miles away, insulated from the 'danger and death' of his actual desert surroundings (637). After pulling himself back from death, Max entombs himself alive; he could be described using the same words that ironically describe Menardo before his death, at his most certain: 'All was safely protected, securely guarded, and shielded; each detail, each element, each person in his life was secure. No one and nothing could touch him!' (499).

If Max is read as an illustration of an elite, ableist mind-set making a full physical recovery, Trigg can be read as his Borgesian forking path: he is of a similarly elite mind-set but has to live as a 'wheelie,' or 'Steak-in-the-Basket' as Max labels him (378). Trigg comes from wealth, but is effectively abandoned by his family after his car accident; he lives in the belief that 'All it would take was enough money and his mother would be telephoning to invite him for tea' (388). He never gives up the belief that he will become elite again, and convinces himself that one day he will walk again using 'electronic-impulse hook-ups to his legs and skull' (389). Similarly to Menardo, Trigg aspires to be elite by assuming elite behaviours: he makes huge amounts of money with real estate, and internalises the elite's disgust at otherness; as he writes in his diaries, 'The chair is not me. The chair is not part of me' (384). He uses his fortune to found Bio-Materials, inc., which helps 'research teams obtain the fresh biomaterials they needed' to find the cure for his paralysis (389), and allows his sense of his

own superiority to inform a eugenicist approach to his blood and organ donor business. Two contiguous entries in his diaries summarise his internalisation of the elite-subaltern division neatly:

I see myself as being superior to others. I am better than all of them.

Tucson, city of thieves. Third generation burglars and pimps turned politicians. These alleged human beings, the filth and scum who pass through the plasma donor center, get paid good money for lying with a needle in their arms—an activity they pursue the rest of the day anyway. I could do the world a favor each week and connect a few of the stinking ones up in the back room and drain them dry. They will not be missed. (386)

‘Africa’ posits that Max and Trigg are two sides of the same coin: both cling to their elite status, and in doing so become solipsists, barricading themselves into a world where they can trust in their own dominance, secure and supreme.

Yet, as Root’s mentor Calabazas explains to him in ‘United States of America,’ “Those who can’t learn to appreciate the world’s differences won’t make it. They’ll die” (203). Max and Trigg subscribe to a form of ableism, among other prejudices, that constructs the able-bodied as hegemonically normative and the disabled as homogenously deviant; and in keeping with Calabazas’ sense of justice, Max is, in a statistical aberration, struck by lightning on his golf course, and Trigg is murdered by seditious employees. Root is the foil against which Max and Trigg can be read. Root decides to embrace the ‘difference’ conferred on him by his severe injury in a motorcycling accident, and in this finds friends and comfort. Root is descended from an elite Tucson family, who grew wealthy running ‘whorehouses and gambling halls’ during the ‘Indian Wars’ in the 1880s; his mother, like Menardo, feigns European ancestry, insisting her father is ‘of “*Spanish* descent,” not Mexican’ (168-9). After Root wakes up from his coma and is reintroduced to his family, he decides to tell people that ‘all his family had died in his accident. That the instant his skull had bounced off the car bumper, mother, grandmother, sisters, and brothers died’ (169). He explains to Lecha that at that point he realised ‘they weren’t really my family. All they cared about was how much I was going to cost them, and whether I was going to mean extra work for anyone’ (170). Root’s experience with physical disability is the opposite of Max’s: he makes peace with the certainty of death, and discovers a world of emotional bonds to which he had previously been blind; indeed, to recall his thoughts in full:

Being around Mexicans and Indians or black people, had not made him feel uncomfortable. Not as his own family had. Because if you weren’t born white, you were forced to see differences; or if you weren’t born what they called normal, or if you got injured, then you were left to explore the world of the different. (202-3)

While Max and Menardo entomb themselves in the world of the elite, Root embraces otherness; he keeps himself alive and, conspicuous in a novel concerned with depravity and cruelty, happy.

The interjection of 'Africa' in the middle of Menardo's narrative must be read, then, as making a series of related arguments that elaborate the text's narrative of his rise and fall and, accordingly, his relationship with conquest encyclopaedism. Firstly, through Max, and the section's other elites, 'Africa' posits that the elite desire to see Eurocentric dominance become hegemony can only be attained by achieving total certainty of its security and perpetuity, and that that level of certainty can only be realised by controlling death. In this, the pursuit of total certainty becomes an expression of the Eurocentric categorical prerogative bequeathed by conquest encyclopaedism: the power to categorise 'individuals according to their level of similarity/proximity to an assumed model of ideal humanity,'<sup>223</sup> which ultimately entails, in Judith Butler's words, the power to decide 'whose lives count as lives.'<sup>224</sup> Yet, just as Max's assassinations are 'one-night-only performances,' total certainty is not actually realisable, only performable, and thus dependent on its militarised enforcement, particularly in the forms of 'high technology' over which Menardo and Trigg obsess (353, 338, 380). Of Menardo, then, 'Africa' suggests that the dominance he assumes by 'passing' into conquest encyclopaedism's 'mosaic of memory and imagination' (574) is sustained by the 'certainty' he generates through Universal Insurance's ability to perform hegemony through its military power. In this light, is it any surprise that Menardo's answer to his resurgent memories of his Mayan grandfather is genocide, the 'gunning down from the air' of any 'illegal refugees' (495)?

For *Almanac*, the salient point in all of this is that dominance can never achieve hegemony, but only perform it through force. It is worth stating again how clearly this is illustrated by the various narratives' dénouements: besides Max Blue getting struck by lightning, Trigg's betrayal by his staff, and Menardo's bulletproof vest snafu, David, for example, is killed by an 'unkenneled' horse, while Greenlee is murdered by Zeta while reciting his 'Never Trust an Indian' joke, and Beaufrey's certainty that with a 'kilo of coke' Seese would 'dispose of herself automatically' is thwarted by her recovery and survival (545, 704, 50). There seem to be only two certainties in *Almanac*: firstly, its prophecy of the 'disappearance of all things European' (14), and secondly, the ironic twists of fate that will

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<sup>223</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. 16.

<sup>224</sup> Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 20.

visit anyone insured against that prophecy. It becomes clear that all it takes is probability to bring the performance of hegemony to an end. As Clinton explains to Rambo Roy, in 'Africa':

The white man would stop everything before it started; the white man would pretend to know all the answers ahead of time, but of course, really, the white man didn't have a clue. The white man had made some monumental errors in the five hundred years Europeans had disrupted Africa, China, and the Americas. The Chinese and the Africans had broken free; now it was only a matter of time before all captive people on the earth would rise up. (413)

The question for Silko, then, is how to envision that rising up: what are the strategies for bringing it about? The analysis 'Africa' offers of certainty in relation to Max and Trigg, and summed up by Clinton's reading of the white man's hubristic certainty—his '[pretending] to know all the answers ahead of time'—suggests that *uncertainty* must be the starting point for reimagining the world without the performed hegemony of totalising Eurocentrism. But how is it possible to build uncertainty into revolutionary prophecy? By looking at how Silko associates blindness with totalising Eurocentrism, the novel's vision of how uncertainty creates revolutionary inevitability becomes clear.

### 3.4 Blind Universalism

In the narrative of Leah, Max's property tycoon wife, 'Africa' satirises the performance of hegemony through hubristic certainty as a universalism that generates types of blindness which makes it unstable and unsustainable. After Max gives himself over entirely to solipsism, Leah becomes an Arizona realtor; 'Buying real estate was a real rush, Leah was fond of saying' (360). Leah is able to procure large swathes of desert land cheaply, and as her portfolio grows she begins to execute her grand development scheme: a recreation of Venice in the desert surrounding Tucson, literally called 'Venice, Arizona, city of the twenty-first century' (375). As Leah explains to Max:

People wanted to have water around them in the desert. People felt more confident and carefree when they could see water spewing out around them. Max had frowned. 'I didn't say human beings were rational,' Leah said. (374)

Her plan is not without precedent:

The water gimmick had really worked in Scottsdale and Tempe. A scattering of pisspot fountains and cesspool lakes evoked memories of Missouri or New York or wherever the dumb shits had come from. Leah wanted Venice to live up to its name. [...] Market research had repeatedly found new arrivals in the desert were reassured by the splash of water. [...] her dream-city plans revolve around water, lake after lake, and each of the custom-built neighbourhoods linked by quaint waterways. (374-5)

‘Venice, Arizona’ is an unambiguous performance of Eurocentric hegemony: it is a project to reconstruct literally the Old World in the New World, and the parched aridity of the Sonora is made to resemble the cool, ‘familiar’ comfort of Western Europe. In the performance, Europe is affected as universal: it is not only replicable universally but the universal standard of desirability. In this, ‘Africa’ satirises the way that Eurocentric dominance performs the hegemony it needs to provide itself certainty by masking its location—its referring back to Europe—as a universal norm. As Mignolo writes, one of the ways in which the ‘geopolitics of knowledge’ can be used to advance colonialism is by masking or disguising the ‘locus of enunciation,’ from which are assigned simultaneously ‘the standards of classification’ and ‘the right to classify,’ as universal—simply ‘the natural course of history.’<sup>225</sup> Venice, Arizona sums this up neatly: within the Eurocentric imagination, it is not possible for the Sonora desert to exist in its own right—as if the geography of the coloniser must be internalised by the geography of the colonised.

Nevertheless, as previously noted, ‘the truth’ is always ‘relative to the locus of enunciation.’<sup>226</sup> It is not surprising, then, that ‘Venice, Arizona’ is deeply, comically unconvincing in its absolute unsustainability. Leah is aware of this: she explains to Max that although ‘The amount of water needed for such a grand scheme was astonishing,’ she is ultimately ‘in the real estate business to make profits, not to save wildlife or the desert’ (375). For *Almanac*, what is important about ‘Venice, Arizona’ is that Leah’s universalising of the idea of ‘Venice’ masks the fact that ‘Venice’ is emphatically local and specific to Europe and its geography—and this masking is easily identifiable as such because the idea of Europe’s universality falls apart under any scrutiny; indeed, Leah has to rely on the corrupt Judge Arne throwing out a number of cases against her for the project to begin. In this, ‘Venice, Arizona’ can be seen to manifest the same act of marginalisation that enforces the division between the ‘elite’ and the ‘people.’

This becomes especially clear during an argument between Leah and Trigg about ‘Venice, Arizona’ towards the end of the text. Trigg is sceptical of the project’s profitability, since the insurgency in Mexico and Arizona’s ‘water problems’ have led to a drastic ‘drop in population in Tucson and Phoenix’ (660):

Trigg was not interested in hearing about the security features that the canals and lakes would provide; he wanted to know who were these people and why would they bother to come to, much less buy property in, a state such as Arizona, the first state ever forced into federal receivership by her creditors. As both the U.S.

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<sup>225</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. 8.

<sup>226</sup> Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*, p. 186.

economy and the civil war in Mexico got worse, Arizona's population would continue to drop. Why build a new city from scratch when you could buy Tucson already built for ten cents on the dollar? (661)

Leah is intransigent: 'Her dream city had been calculated with Arizona's financial collapse and Mexico's civil war in mind' (662). Trigg is missing a basic point about the market and its relationship with the division between the elite and the people: 'Residential property priced over a million was still reliable. Leah's homes in Venice would be priced beginning at two million' (661). Indeed, that their argument is interspersed with descriptions of 'the dead weight of [Trigg's] thighs and hips' (661) serves as a useful reminder that Trigg, like Menardo, is irreversibly non-elite: he does not understand 'Venice, Arizona' because it is not for him.<sup>227</sup> In response to Trigg's suggestion that Leah ought to invest in Tucson because 'the only whites downtown' are now 'police, lawyers, and the clerks and workers in the county and city courts,' Leah confirms this as evidence that 'Tucson had been run-down too long' and would be of no interest to the elite (661, 662). She explains:

Venice, Arizona would rise out of the dull desert gravel, its glazing purity of white marble set between canals the color of lapis, and lakes of turquoise. The 'others' had to live someplace; let it be Tucson. (661)

For Leah, 'Venice, Arizona' will be the citadel to Tucson's garrison. Europe's affected universality becomes the mode through which dominance performs hegemony, making the marginalisation of non-elite communities look natural, inevitable, and normal.

Yet, unconvincing though it is, in the way Leah maps the division between the elite and subaltern onto a division between 'Venice, Arizona' and Tucson, *Almanac* makes its key point about the potency of the affected universality: if universality is simply affected, then it follows that the 'the standards of classification' and 'right to classify' from the European 'centre' that that universality encodes are vulnerable to rejection.<sup>228</sup> Indeed, affected universality is presented in 'Venice, Arizona' as the 'right' to draw a 'natural' boundary between the elite and the people: but in its comic unconvincingness, it is obvious that these are simply tools for elite self-preservation and gain. Leah will set up deep wells for her 'city of the twenty-first century' (375) because she knows the activity will affect 'Arizona's Indian tribes' specifically—and in spite of the fact that 'The water supplied by the deep wells might be enough now, but [there was] no guarantee in ten years or even five' (375, 660, 661). In

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<sup>227</sup> Indeed, this moment provides an interesting coda to Leah's initial conversation with Trigg during 'Africa': 'Leah hated handicap-designed toilets...Leah wondered if Trigg had thought about a custom development strictly for the physically handicapped. Was there "soft money" available from the government specifically for the disabled?' (381). For Leah, there is nothing objectionable about segregating the disabled from the 'normal.'

<sup>228</sup> Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America*, p. 8.





Beyond its prefatory map, the text repeatedly asserts that the U.S.-Mexico border is both arbitrary and purely a guarantor of elite privilege on either side. Root's mentor, Calabazas, is once again a font of wisdom in this regard, introducing this idea to the text. Calabazas is a Yaqui Indian, whose lands stretch over what is now Sinaloa, Sonora, and Arizona; for the Yaqui, the U.S.-Mexico border is one of the clearer statements of the incommensurability of their Indigeneity, dividing their lands into two according to the agreement of two colonising federations. Calabazas makes his living running an 'import-export business,' which is effectively a smuggling operation across the border, from the 'Indian Country' near Tucson (236, 220). It is explained that, in spite of 'thefts from both private citizens and the city of Tucson' (220), Calabazas' business grew year on year. Calabazas, for whom doing things 'Indian Style' is paramount, allows himself to become a patriarch of sorts, taking in 'the whole family, cousins and stray in-laws.'<sup>230</sup> Assuming this role is in itself a tacit rejection of the 'imaginary line' dividing his tribe (215, 236, 214). His business is able to take off through a more explicit refusal, however: rather than seeking to make his fortune according to the rules of the states invested in the U.S.-Mexico border's continued existence, he puts his Indigeneity to practical use and plays on border guards' unwillingness to see the reality of his difference. As he explains to Root, border guards:

'hated to see the Indians coming because they knew that meant rat-trap cars, pickups loaded down with pigs and firewood, corn and melons. The U.S. guards were on the alert for brothers and uncles hiding under firewood. They didn't think we were smart enough to bring across anything else.' (217)

Calabazas outlines to Root his confidence in his smuggling abilities accordingly:

'We don't believe in boundaries. Borders. Nothing like that. We are here thousands of years before the first whites. We are here before maps or quit claims. We know where we belong on this earth. We have always moved freely. North-South. East-West. We pay no attention to what isn't real. [...] We don't see any border.' (216)

Calabazas' peculiar use of present tense verb phrases—'We are here'—is notable, explicitly connecting the Yaqui refusal to acknowledge the border with a broader refusal to allow Eurocentric domination to categorise Indigeneity out of history and the present. For Calabazas, while the border provides the U.S. security against 'brothers and uncles' from the rest of America, it protects the Mexican state from the possibility of its people arming themselves.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> As the text makes clear, however, Calabazas' patriarchal privilege is complicated, and his acceptance of its dismantling is one of the text's most important thematic dénouements. This will be returned to below.

<sup>231</sup> By putting together various clues, it is possible to infer that the business Calabazas is referring in his conversation with Root is smuggling weapons from the U.S. to the insurgents in Mexico. The 'blue Samsonite

By playing on the blindness of dominance to realities that persist independently of the categories it enforces, Calabazas resists the definitions and descriptions of the colonisers' reality; this is why he insists on Root learning "to appreciate the world's differences" (203). Root recalls, early in their relationship, having once 'remarked that he thought one dull gray boulder looked identical to another dull gray boulder a few hundred yards back':

Calabazas took his foot off the accelerator, and Mosca tried to save Root by adding quickly, 'Maybe in the dark they look alike.' But that had not prevented Calabazas from giving them one of his sarcastic lectures on blindness. Blindness caused solely by stupidity, a blindness that Root and Mosca would probably always suffer from, just as they would always suffer from the location of their brains below their belts. 'I get mad when I hear the word *identical*,' Calabazas had continued. 'There is no such thing. Nowhere. At no time. All you have to do is stop and think. Stop and take a look.' [...] Root's ass had been dragging he was so tired; but that night Calabazas marched them up and down, up and down the same stretch of the arroyo, until Root suddenly realized what the old bastard was saying. 'Look at it for what it is. That's all. This big rock is like it is. Look.' (201-2; emphasis in original)

In this very literal demonstration of the world's differences, Calabazas asserts the importance of perception beyond names: for Calabazas, accepting the equivalence of objects because of their shared name is tantamount to accepting the categories that have been imposed by the European settlers. Indeed, later on Calabazas reminisces about the time he spent among the Yaqui elders when he was younger, recalling their observation that 'one of the most dangerous qualities of the Europeans' was that they 'suffered a sort of blindness to the world. To them, a "rock" was just a "rock" wherever they found it' (224). They note that 'the whites put great store in names. But once the whites had a name for a thing they seemed unable ever again to recognize the thing itself' (224). The subsequent illustration of this through the farcical story of the various Apaches mistaken for 'Geronimo' by the U.S. army makes clear, as Moore has outlined, that 'A looser relation to definitions...allows a more alert perception, freeing the witness from her own filtering categories, from the illusion that the sign is the signified.'<sup>232</sup>

Moore calls this *Almanac's* 'epistemology of witness,' and opposes it to a Euro-American epistemology of 'commodification, colonization, and demonization of nature and the people

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suitcases' to which he refers crop up again three times: first, during 'Africa,' when Leah rents warehouse space to a U.S. army major who 'paid cash up front: out of his blue Samsonite suitcase'; secondly, during 'The Americas,' when Root informs Seese that all the cocaine in Tucson is "packed up in blue Samsonite"; and finally, during 'The Fifth World,' when Awa Gee is described as having found evidence that Greenlee has been making "cocaine for guns" transactions' (218, 434, 597, 690). Between these mentions of the Samsonite suitcase it is possible to surmise that cocaine is being smuggled into the U.S. for sale to Greenlee in exchange for weapons, and that Calabazas, in this conversation with Root, is considering a request to help smuggle the weapons South.

<sup>232</sup> Moore, 'Silko's Blood Sacrifice,' p. 168.

of the desert.<sup>233</sup> Cherniavsky touches on a similar idea, describing Calabazas as articulating a ‘tribal epistemology’ that is ‘excorporative (decentred; temporalized)’ in contrast with the Eurocentric, ‘incorporative (identitarian; spatialized)...system of equivalence.’<sup>234</sup> In the context of my argument here, both Moore and Cherniavsky offer mutually complementary theories of how Silko uses Calabazas to introduce a form of resistance to conquest encyclopaedism’s prevailing ‘mosaic of memory and imagination’ (574) that is dependent on vision beyond Eurocentric categories. For Moore, this vision is a witnessing that is the opposite of voyeurism: ‘Voyeurism erases difference; witnessing asserts difference. The one is a compressing and capturing, the other an expansion and releasing. The one wants closure, the other wants openness.’<sup>235</sup> For Cherniavsky, this vision is not vision as such, but rather an ‘antidote to “blindness”’ that is more ‘a particular kind of cognitive process (thinking) initiated through arrest...a de-mobilization of the thinking/viewing subject.’<sup>236</sup> Both share common ground in their reading of Calabazas’ epistemological vision as a type of perception that is consciously rooted in a pluralist ethics which tries to move away from the marginalisation inherent in acts of totalised definition or description; but in the context of *Almanac*’s larger idea of the world, I would assert that the importance of Calabazas’ vision is also that it emanates from the standpoint of the unrecognised and incommensurable—that is, from the agency of those to whom settler colonialism’s performance of hegemony permits blindness.

This, for *Almanac*, is how a revolution can be at once certain to occur and rooted in uncertainty: by making space for the unpredictable agency of those on whose unrecognisability and incommensurability the colonial status quo depends, the dominant Eurocentric totality will be inevitably countered and pluralised, and thus made to disappear. The epistemology Calabazas learns during the Geronimo story, and teaches to Root with the boulders on the reservation, establishes for *Almanac* a way of thinking and knowing without Eurocentric totality and the cognitively dissonant ‘dialectic of trust’ that permits it hegemonic certainty: by accepting the agency of people who are rendered invisible by reality’s parameters—those to whom blindness is universally encouraged. In this, it is instructive to note that Calabazas’ narrative across the text is a journey from patriarchal dominance to the acceptance of uncertainty and the agency of women. Indeed, Calabazas’ narrative across the novel follows the culmination of his acceptance of the negation of his traditional patriarchal

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid, p. 168.

<sup>234</sup> Cherniavsky, p. 114.

<sup>235</sup> Moore, ‘Silko’s Blood Sacrifice,’ p. 161.

<sup>236</sup> Cherniavsky, p. 114.

role by his wife and her sister. The story of Calabazas' relationship with the Brito sisters, and his acceptance of their agency beyond his traditional vision of women, illustrates plainly how the epistemology he learns from his tribe, and eventually teaches to Root, necessitates an embrace of uncertainty.

Eager to impress the Brito family, Calabazas had helped their father out with some gambling debt, and in return, 'Old Brito had worked a deal: Calabazas would marry Brito's eldest daughter, Sarita' (241). Calabazas spends the rest of his life lamenting that he had never 'spoken up':

Because long before the wedding Calabazas had been in love with Liria. Liria had loved him too, but she had also been confused and frightened by her betrayal of her sister. Sarita was the eldest, the one the other children looked up to and had to obey. (236)

Calabazas accepts the marriage and his role as a family patriarch, and continues his affair with Liria; Sarita is not bothered, he figures, because he 'had lived up to his side of the bargain; he had accepted responsibility for Sarita, as his wife, but also for the others, Liria included' (236). For Calabazas, the marriage to Sarita was 'an arrangement with the family, as well as an arrangement with Sarita' (238). In his patriarchal role, Calabazas becomes certain of his privilege to the extent that he forgets that Sarita herself has agency of her own; indeed, that part of the 'arrangement with Sarita' may be to do with more than finding jobs for her 'clanspeople' (238). And of course, although he recalls Liria 'telling him about Sarita's unusual devotion to the Church and to the altar society,' it is only when he catches them in the act that he realises 'Sarita had been in love with the monsignor when she had married Calabazas in the cathedral' (239).

Calabazas uses conspicuous terms to chastise his younger, hubristic self for not guessing this:

Calabazas could look back on that day with Sarita and laugh at himself. Because in those days he had been such a cocky bastard. He had thought back then he could "read" what was going on inside a person. How wrong he had been about Sarita! [...] How stupid! How *blind*! How arrogant! A more humble man would have seen it. (238, 239; emphasis added).

Calabazas' realisation that masculinist hubris leads him to the 'Blindness caused solely by stupidity' (201) on which he will lecture Mosca and Root as an elder is pivotal in his own history. From being 'so certain he knew the score on everything and on everyone,' he goes to laughing at his 'absurd pride, his absolute belief in himself and in his little world' (244). Sarita's affair with the monsignor forces Calabazas to realise that to identify a thing 'for what it is' (202) necessarily involves acknowledging that thing's agency and possibility, and

imagining a world in which various agencies can co-operate interdependently, rather than positioned around a central patriarch. From then on, Calabazas tries to embrace the requisite uncertainty and unpredictability inherent in accepting the agency of others, and of women in particular; he is very relaxed, as arch-misogynist Mosca complains (601), about what the sisters get up to.

Yet Calabazas' evolution over the course of the text suggests that, even at the beginning, he has not yet fully got to grips with the ramifications of embracing the agency and uncertainty of others. At the beginning, Calabazas is introduced as a patriarch and businessman, and by the end has decided he should take a back seat in the insurgency, and give women the space to take control. It is in this movement that the text envisions Calabazas' epistemology being enacted to imagine a reality more plural and interdependent—albeit more uncertain and unpredictable. Although Calabazas laughs at his own youthful hubris, his ability to let the Brito sisters have a say in directing the family's priorities is still lacking. His catalyst for relinquishing his privilege almost entirely is their argument over the sisters' involvement in refugee smuggling across the border. Initially enraged by the danger in which the sisters' operations put the family, Calabazas goes on to accept that maybe they are simply better at fighting the U.S. government than he is; 'Liria and Sarita had recently accused him of getting soft inside like white-bread dough; maybe they were right' (629). This de-privileging of his own agency reaches its head at the text's end, at the International Holistic Healers Convention, where many of the text's insurgents, the majority of whom are women, meet to discuss the insurgency. Calabazas mostly spectates, assuming no privilege among the various viewpoints, and finds himself giving himself over to their agency and the uncertainty that entails:

Calabazas felt uneasy. He had trusted the men who had been in Room 1212, but he wasn't sure about the women, especially not the Eskimo or the Maya woman. [...] Calabazas had seen the Maya La Escapía talking to Zeta, and he knew what that meant. For years Zeta had been buying and stockpiling weapons in the old mine shafts. Calabazas was content to retire from smuggling, politics—everything; he had put in his time and had earned a rest in the shade with his little mule and burros. Calabazas would sit back and let the others make the decisions and give the orders, the way he always had, since he was a child with the old time people in the Yaqui mountain strongholds. They had told him what must be done and he had done it. Since he was an old man now, maybe the women would give him something easy to do. (740)

Putting together Leah's and Calabazas' narratives, a strategy for undoing the conquest encyclopaedism's 'mosaic of memory and imagination' becomes clear: because it is a performance of hegemony that depends for its dominance on affecting total certainty in the

universality of its locus of enunciation, those who are unrecognised and incommensurable are able to exert an unpredictable agency on it that may overturn it, bringing about the variety of definitions and descriptions of reality lost to Europe's colonisation of the world. In *Almanac*, it is those to whom the status quo is blind—those within the 'world of the different'—that will destabilise the legacy of totalising Eurocentrism left by conquest encyclopaedism—and generate the 'network of tribal coalitions' by which plural ideas of the world can co-exist.

### 3.5 Universal Insurance/Seguridad Universal

In this, the eponymous 'Almanac of the Dead' is vital: just as it sets up the text's vision of reality as 'a mosaic of memory and imagination' (575), it provides, in Old Yoeme's own addition to the notebooks, a model for how those unrecognisable to and incommensurable with the status quo can undo Eurocentric certainty. Yoeme's entry narrates her improbable escape from 'hanging and dismemberment' at the hands of the federal government, who have convicted her for 'sedition and high treason' (579). As she explains, although she is imprisoned, her execution is 'delayed by their needs for pageantry': 'Elected officials from other jurisdictions arrive. I am on display, an example to all who dare defy authority. Postponement is due to the governor's busy schedule' (579). She is mocked in her cell by police and guards, whose chief makes her count down the days till her death. Yoeme's retort is significant: 'I laugh and call him "barbarian" in my language' (579). In this key moment, Yoeme asserts an Indigenous epistemological space entirely independent of the European gaze: she challenges and disrupts Eurocentrism's assumed prerogative to classify 'otherness' as 'barbarism'—an intellectual move Las Casas typifies in his *Apologética*'s concluding 'Especies de Barbarie'.<sup>237</sup> Using her own language, which is incomprehensible to the guard, Yoeme instantiates the possibility of knowledge without the European gaze. Of course, the chief's response is to mock her, in terms that explicitly recall Menardo's planned Indigenous genocide and Max Blue's assassinations:

'You will die! That is certain!' All the others of my kind have already been sent to hell, he says. My death is certain. I am not afraid to die. I am sorry to leave the people I love when the struggle is only beginning. (579)

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<sup>237</sup> Las Casas, II, pp. 637–54.

But just as the certainty of Menardo and Max Blue is ironically cut short, Yoeme's 'Day of Deliverance,' as she names the story, sees her escape once everyone in the town is killed by the Spanish Flu:

Influenza infects the governor and all the others. The police chief burns to death from fever. The jailer leaves a bucket of water and a bowl of parched corn.

'The authorities want to keep you alive,' he says, 'until they recover enough to hang you.' [...]

I laugh out loud but the jailer reacts slowly.

'Someone will come to hang you,' he reassures me, but when I ask who, the jailer shakes his head. [...]

The Blessed Virgin of the Indians had just worked me a miracle; I had been saved by the hand of God. (579-80)

As Lecha thinks, there is something unsettling or absurd about Yoeme putting this story in the 'Almanac of the Dead':

What good was the story of one woman's unlikely escape from the hangman? Had old Yoeme known or cared that 20 to 40 million perished around the world while she had been saved? Probably not. (580)

But in the marginalia on the pages following what Yoeme terms her 'Day of Deliverance,' some sense of the method of the story, and by implication the novel, is made clear:

Yoeme had believed power resides within certain stories; this power ensures the story to be retold, and with each retelling a slight but permanent shift took place. Yoeme's story of her deliverance changed forever the odds against all captives; each time a revolutionist escaped death in one century, two revolutionists escaped certain death in the following century even if they had never heard such an escape story. Where such miraculous escape stories are greatly prized and rapidly circulated, miraculous escapes from death gradually increase. (581)

If Yoeme's story works, with the others in the 'Almanac of the Dead,' to narrate ways of disentangling the colonised from Eurocentric certainty, tipping the odds out of its favour, and decolonising a space for narratives of insurgency, the same, I believe, can be said of Silko's *Almanac of the Dead*. As noted, the novel's broad focus on Indigenous insurgency and the forthcoming revolution in itself makes clear that its idea of the Americas is one in which the totalising Eurocentrism bequeathed by conquest encyclopaedism is unravelling. But I would argue that the constituent narratives of *Almanac* are more than the sum of their parts: between them, they imagine a world in which the categories on which the Eurocentric 'mosaic of memory and imagination' that shapes its totality depend have been made strange, and are no longer required for thinking and knowing.

A provocative example, in relation to my discussion of totalising certainty, comes in the novel's subtle bilingualism. Silko's oscillation between English and Spanish names for Menardo's company—Universal Insurance, or Seguridad Universal, his tool for giving the



elite certainty that ‘the new world could belong to them just as the old one had’ (261)—is deeply suggestive: ‘Insurance’ and ‘Seguridad’ are presented as ostensibly interchangeable nouns. Yet, to adapt Maria Lauret’s method in her study of language migration in the U.S., the space between these two words—the dialogue they implicitly create with each other—can be seized on for close reading;<sup>238</sup> and in this, the way in which *Almanac* works as an aesthetic beyond Eurocentric categories comes into view.

On Menardo’s very first trip to procure supplies for Universal Insurance/Seguridad Universal in Tucson, soon after his introduction into the novel, strong hints are dropped about the kinds of violence that his policies will presuppose: visiting gun shops, he thinks that he wants ‘an elite security force, one that the wealthy and the powerful will rent for special occasions—elections or funerals and even weddings’ (264). When Menardo meets Greenlee, the violence implicit in the English term ‘insurance’ is hinted at by the term’s hermeneutic overlap with the term ‘security’ as Menardo struggles with his English:

Menardo sits back in the taxi and ignores the English words of the driver. The taxi stops at the army surplus store near the railroad tracks. [...] Menardo admires the parachute in halting English. He might find use for those in his company. The man pulls nervously at the driving gloves and asks what the company sells. ‘Insurance and security,’ Menardo answers, not sure he has used the correct English word for insurance. (264-5)

The reason for Menardo’s uncertainty is significant: the Spanish, ‘seguridad’ refers to both ‘insurance’ and ‘security.’<sup>239</sup> Universal Insurance’s Spanish name thus covers conspicuously more ground than its English one: with an eye on its Spanish name, the aforementioned transformation of Universal Insurance’s English name, after the ‘Africa’ section, into ‘Universal Insurance and Security’ is far from surprising.

Universal Insurance’s iteration as Seguridad Universal draws the bilingual reader’s attention to the fact that the ‘Universal’ to which it refers is defined from a Eurocentric locus of enunciation, and thus blind to that which is unrecognisable or incommensurable—its universality is, like the certainty it provides, a violent performance of hegemony, as ‘universal’ as Venice, Arizona. Since the categories by which Universal Insurance/Seguridad Universal

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<sup>238</sup> Maria Lauret, *Wanderwords: Language Migration in American Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), p. 2.

<sup>239</sup> Looking at the definitions given by the Real Academia Española, we can see this is the case: the first two definitions for ‘seguridad’ are ‘a secure or certain quality’ [‘una cualidad de seguro’], and ‘a service responsible for the security of a person’ [‘un servicio encargado de la seguridad de una persona’]. The word ‘seguro/segura’ gives us similar results: as an adjective, ‘free and exempt from risk, certain and undoubted’ [‘libre y exento de riesgo; cierto, indubitable’]; and as a noun ‘security, certainty, trust’ [‘seguridad, certeza, confianza’], ‘a situation free of all danger’ [‘lugar o sitio libre de todo peligro’]. Real Academia Española and Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, ‘Seguridad,’ *Diccionario de la lengua española* (Real Academia Española) <<http://dle.rae.es/?id=XTTrIaQd>> [accessed 11 August 2016].

operate generate the same blindness to difference on which an articulation of universality depends, that totalised vision of the world as that universe against which it can be insured and secured is as doomed to failure as Menardo himself. In the connective tissue *Almanac* draws between Universal Insurance and Seguridad Universal, a model for imagining a world without Eurocentrism emerges in the dissolution of Anglophone and Hispanophone monolingualisms. This is the heart of *Almanac*'s vision of a variety of definitions or descriptions of reality: the imagination of a world becomes less like a single totality performing its hegemony, and more like an openness to plurality—a totality as decentred potentialities, which is as much as to say a totality that does not totalise.

This idea is summed up neatly in the figure of Zeta's and Lecha's European father, a failed mining engineer in West Texas from whom they were estranged as children. When they are eventually reunited with him at a hotel in El Paso, they find him disinterested and sleepless:

He never smiled or spoke, merely nodding in the direction of the hotel restaurant. His forehead was continually trying to solve a mathematical formula even while he sat with them. (122)

Increasingly frustrated by his inscrutability, Lecha decides to burst into his hotel bedroom:

Zeta saw he did not recognize them immediately. Lecha was looking past him in the room and did not see this. Zeta felt her heart fall in her chest. The bed had not been slept in. The pillows and spread had not been touched since the hotel maid. The black wire hangers in the closet nook were empty. He had been sitting at the small desk. The desk top was bare, although for an instant Zeta had mistaken cigarette scars along the edges for a pattern of decoration. 'Where is everything?' Lecha said, walking around and around the small room impatiently. Their father had turned as if he suffered from stiffness in the neck and shoulders. He had begun to hunch under long, unkempt white hair. They had always spoken English with him since he had never been able to learn Spanish. But Lecha had had to repeat the question twice before he could answer. 'Everything?' he had said in a steady voice. 'I am trying to think about it,' he had answered. (122)

In this moment, the failure of Eurocentrism to articulate its idea of the world is made clear. In the same way that Yoeme's entry in the *Almanac of the Dead* tilts the odds in the favour of captives everywhere, Silko's *Almanac* models the eventual disappearance of totalised Eurocentrism in Zeta's and Lecha's father's death, 'dry and shriveled as a cactus blown down in a drought' while trying, in lonely isolation, to think about 'Everything' (122-3). 'Everything' cannot be totalised and to do so is toxic; and in the sisters' ability to accommodate their helpless father's monolingualism, the moment gestures at bi- and multilingualism as a means of decentring European epistemological dominance. For Silko, conquest encyclopaedism's inheritance of totalising Eurocentrism is an idea of the world the only certainty of which is

its expiration—and in direct opposition to the father’s assumption that ‘Everything’ can be articulated from a central space, *Almanac* counters that inheritance by imagining a fictional encyclopaedism in which the conditions for revolution become possible as insurgent realities decentre and pluralise the world’s ‘mosaic of memory and imagination.’

## 4. Roberto Bolaño's 'Idea of the World'

There are highly suggestive parallels between Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, which to date have been only scantily explored.<sup>240</sup> Among the most significant of these similarities is their concern, like Joyce's novels, with imagining totality. There is, however, a slight difference: while *Almanac* sees Zeta's and Lecha's father literally shrivel up 'trying to think about' everything—that is, trying to figure totality using a method implicated in toxifying colonialism—in *2666*, a minor epiphany is afforded to Nazi soldier Hans Reiter on his realisation of a rather less self-destructive technique for visualising 'everything.' In the notebooks of Boris Abramovich Ansky, a Jewish Bolshevik from the fictional Russian village his Division is occupying, Reiter notes the following reflection on Giuseppe Arcimboldo:

The Milanese painter's technique struck him as happiness personified. The end of semblance. Arcadia before the coming of man. [...] the paintings of the four seasons were pure bliss. Everything in everything, writes Ansky. As if Arcimboldo had learned a single lesson, but one of vital importance.<sup>241</sup>

This key moment, in *2666*'s fifth and final part, pulls together the novel's extended discussion of the relationship between metaphor and totality—providing us a lens through which to conceive *2666*'s relationship with encyclopaedism. In what follows, I will unpick the terms Bolaño uses in his invocation of Arcimboldo so as to clarify exactly the novel's conception of totality, and use the light it shines across *2666*'s parts to elucidate as such its own vision, and critique, of millennial totality.

As Reiter notes, Ansky does not equivocate in his praise for Arcimboldo's *Four Seasons* (Fig. 4): he praises the paintings for manifesting 'the end of semblance,' which is a blissful vision of 'everything in everything'—or totality. 'Semblance' ['las apariencias'] is a key term in *2666*, and is given its fullest definition by Ansky himself, moments earlier in the notebooks as 'things that only *seem* and never *are*, things all surface and no depth, pure gesture,' which are often the refuge of 'the fearful' (722).<sup>242</sup> Ansky dwells on the connection between fear and semblance: for him, unchecked fear leads people to create semblances in order to sooth

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<sup>240</sup> Hermann Herlinghaus has drawn an explicit comparison between *Almanac* and 'The Part about the Crimes,' offering *Almanac* as an example of a 'critical spirit' that Bolaño '[takes] up into the twenty-first century.' Although Herlinghaus does not explore the comparison in particular depth, he makes a useful gesture toward the possibilities for comparative analysis of the two texts. Hermann Herlinghaus, *Narvoepics: A Global Aesthetics of Sobriety* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), pp. 203–231.

<sup>241</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666*, trans. by Natasha Wimmer (London: Picador, 2009), p. 734; all further references to this text in this chapter are from this translation and edition and are given parenthetically, unless otherwise specified.

<sup>242</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *2666* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2004), p. 903.

themselves, as they give form to reality in order to make it palatable and knowable, but can easily become a space for facile fantasy. His specific example for this theory are his fellow Russian writers, many of whom fear ‘above all...being no good...of forever dwelling in the hell of bad writers’ (722). These ‘bad writers,’ Ansky suggests, create semblances to quell their fear of inadequacy; yet the creation of semblances, which after all ‘only *seem* and never *are*,’ enables these ‘bad writers’ to valorise semblance as an ends rather than a means—that is, to believe in the thing that *seems* rather than that which *is* (722; emphasis in original). As Ansky puts it, for such ‘bad writers’ it is ‘as if the paradise of good writers...were inhabited by semblances,’ and that ‘the worth (or excellence) of a work were based on semblances’ (722). This, for Ansky, is the crux of the problem with ‘semblances’: while they may vary ‘from one era and country to another,’ they ‘always remained just that, semblances’: fictions that, when seen as a goal rather than a method, enable disingenuous and insincere thought and knowledge about reality (722).

Implicit in this critique is a theory of the ‘worth (or excellence) of a work’ as an ethical quality that resides beyond mere figuration—in what artistic works *are* rather than what they *seem*, or in fiction that is a method to reality rather than a didactic sketch of its goal. A cryptic digression on Tolstoy gives a sense of exactly the implications of this; for Ansky, Tolstoy’s works are:

[gestures] muddled by an effort of will, the hair and eyes and lips of Tolstoy and the versts traveled on horseback by Tolstoy and the women deflowered by Tolstoy in a tapestry burned by the fire of seeming. (722-3)

This oddly agglutinated sentence suggests that Ansky reads Tolstoy's works and theory of art, which Tolstoy made decisively clear in *What is Art?*,<sup>243</sup> as so invested in semblances of pastoral masculinity that they negate, or burn, themselves: for Ansky, semblances of 'versts' and 'women deflowered' put the reader in an unethically disingenuous and insincere relation with a reality that *seems* but never *is*. Using the example of Tolstoy, Ansky's critique of semblance could be seen as addressing the way totalising fictions are constructed to provide blithe reassurance to a status quo—what Professor Albert Kessler, in 'The Part about Fate,' describes as 'the art of avoidance, not of revelation' (267). So if Tolstoy is an example of 'bad' semblance, what does it mean that Ansky sees Arcimboldo's *Four Seasons* as the 'end of semblance,' 'pure bliss,' and 'everything in everything'? How do these phrases relate to one another? And what does it have to do with the encyclopaedic imagination?

If Ansky's implication is that Tolstoy's semblances 'only *seem* and never *are*,' and thus valorise semblance as goal for reality rather than method for interpreting and apprehending it, then it would follow that he reads Arcimboldo's *Four Seasons* as doing the opposite: using semblances as a method that enables viewers to proceed to a reality that really *is*. In this, Ansky's description of the *Four Seasons* as 'Everything in everything' ['todo dentro de todo'] is highly suggestive.<sup>244</sup> Bolaño's Spanish offers a more specific inference than Wimmer's translation: besides



Clockwise: *Spring* (1563), *Summer* (1572), *Autumn* (1573), *Winter*, (1573).

Fig. 4. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *Four Seasons* (1563-73). Oil on canvas. Musée du Louvre: Paris. 'Giuseppe Arcimboldo,' *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (Wikimedia Foundation, 2 October 2016. Web. 11 October 2016).

<sup>243</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *What Is Art?*, trans. by Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995).

<sup>244</sup> Bolaño, 2666, p. 917.

meaning ‘in,’ ‘dentro de’ specifically connotes ‘inside’ or ‘within’;<sup>245</sup> with this in mind, Ansky can be understood as reading Arcimboldo’s *Four Seasons* as a semblance of totality—a totality in which human potentiality is commensurable with a natural order of things, which vision of total coherence and organic possibility is ‘pure bliss.’ For Ansky, Arcimboldo’s ‘end of semblance’ is the use of semblance—that which *seems*—to return the viewer to a world of absolute possibility that really *is* (or at least could be): semblance as means to an ethical end. In this, that mysterious single lesson Arcimboldo had learned starts to look like a method for articulating a semblance of totality that does not remain merely semblance; and ‘The end of semblance’ [‘El fin de las apariencias’] comes to be less the termination of semblance than the ultimate goal or aim or culmination of semblance.<sup>246</sup> What makes the *Four Seasons* ‘happiness personified,’ then, is the optimistic connection it draws between totality and human possibility—as if the act of imagining ‘everything’ need not always be tyrannically Procrustean. In this, Ansky reads cause for revolutionary optimism:

When I’m sad or in low spirits...I close my eyes and think of Arcimboldo’s paintings and the sadness and gloom evaporates, as if a strong wind, a *mentholated* wind, were suddenly blowing along the streets of Moscow. (735; emphasis in original)

It is significant, however, that Ansky does not find the same optimism across the whole of Arcimboldo’s oeuvre:

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<sup>245</sup> *Diccionario de la lengua Española* (DLE): ‘2. prepositional phrase. In the interior of a real or imaginary space. *Inside/within/in a drawer, a city, the heart, the soul.*’ [‘2. loc prepos. En el interior de un espacio real o imaginario. *Dentro de un cajón, de una ciudad, del corazón, del alma.*’] Real Academia Española and Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, ‘Dentro de,’ *Diccionario de la lengua española* (Real Academia Española) <<http://dle.rae.es/?id=CDuZpeI>> [accessed 11 August 2016]. Sergio Marras spells this out in his study of Bolaño’s use of Arcimboldo: ‘According to Ansky, Arcimboldo means that although everything is located in everything, ultimately everything is found in the part. And vision of the whole and the part is always provisional....’ [‘Según Ansky, Arcimboldo quiere decir que si bien el todo está en el todo, este se encuentra fundamentalmente en la parte. Y la visión del todo y la parte es siempre provisoria....’]. Sergio Marras, *El héroe improbable (cómo Arturo Belano siempre quiso ser Benno von Archimboldi)* (Santiago de Chile: RiL Editores, 2011), p. 22; my translation.

<sup>246</sup> Bolaño, 2666, p. 917. This interpretation of the word ‘end’ works in Bolaño’s original Spanish as well as Wimmer’s English translation. As the definition of ‘el fin’ in DLE makes this clear, ‘el fin’ and ‘the end’ share implications of resolution or culmination as well as termination: ‘3. noun. Objective or motive with which something is carried out.’ [‘3. m. Objeto o motivo con que se ejecuta algo.’] Real Academia Española and Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, ‘Fin,’ *Diccionario de la lengua española* (Real Academia Española) <<http://dle.rae.es/?id=HxFMc9Z>> [accessed 11 August 2016].



*The Roast* [Fig. 5], for example, was like a horror painting, a reversible canvas that, hung one way, looked like a big metal platter of roast meats, including a suckling pig and a rabbit, with a pair of hands, probably a woman's or an adolescent's, trying to cover the meat so it won't get cold, and, hung the other way, showed the bust of a soldier, in helmet and armor, with a bold, satisfied smile missing some teeth, the terrible smile of an old mercenary who looks at you, writes Ansky, and his gaze is even more terrible than his smile, as if he knew things about you that you never even suspected. (734)



Fig. 5. Giuseppe Arcimboldo, *The Roast* (c. 1570). Oil on panel. Nationalmuseum: Stockholm. *Giuseppe-Arcimboldo.org* (Web. 11 October 2016).

Those ‘things about you that you never even suspected’ that Ansky sees in the gaze of Arcimboldo’s mercenary suggest a hidden knowledge about or joke at the expense of the viewer which directly recalls Amalfitano’s discourse on eyes in ‘The Part about Fate,’ when Charly Cruz describes the magic disk he used to own. As Charly Cruz explains, the magic disk had a ‘little old drunk’ on one side and ‘a picture of a prison cell, or the bars of a cell’ on the other: ‘When you spun the disk the laughing drunk looked like he was behind bars’ (334). Amalfitano leaps on the fact that the little old drunk is laughing, and offers two possible explanations for the little old drunk’s amusement at what ‘isn’t really a laughing matter’:

‘The *little old drunk* is laughing because he thinks he’s free, but he’s really in prison,’ said Óscar Amalfitano, ‘that’s what makes it funny, but in fact the prison is drawn on the other side of the disk, which means one could also say that the *little old drunk* is laughing because we think he’s in prison, not realizing that the prison is on one side and the *little old drunk* is on the other, and that’s reality, no matter how much we spin the disk and it looks to us as if the *little old drunk* is behind bars. In fact, we could even guess what the *little old drunk* is laughing about: he’s laughing at our credulity, you might even say at our eyes.’ (334, 335; emphasis in original)

If the little old drunk is laughing at our credulity, it is because our eyes render us unable to identify the component parts of ‘apparent movement’ (333), which would enable us to distinguish the ‘everything’ of totality rather than a single, persistent image. In a very similar way, Arcimboldo’s mercenary smirks knowingly at his viewer’s inability to know



simultaneously his image and that of his constituent elements: his terrible gaze and toothless smile mock the determinism of our vision and the ways we must adjust ourselves to enable our eyes to piece together not just his image but its implication of the ‘horror’—the hidden violence—that underpins quotidian life. In this, we should note that the ‘single lesson’ Arcimboldo has learnt allows him to create contrasting semblances of totality: if the *Four Seasons* is optimistic about human possibility and *The Roast* pessimistic, they are nevertheless both semblances of ‘Everything in everything’ that return the viewer to visions of reality that *are*, contingent on either a revolutionary or a deterministic perspective of human possibility.

The tragedy in this, of course, is that it implies that the blissful optimism of the *Four Seasons* depends on an Arcadian humanity that is not fully self-aware, while the horrific pessimism of *The Roast* envisions a modern humanity that is grappling with the determined limits of its vision. As such, while for youthful Ansky in revolutionary Russia the *Four Seasons* is like a ‘mentholated wind,’ for jaded Amalfitano on the neoliberal *frontera*, the wind:

[hurls] itself against the slope of the mountains to the east, raising dust and a litter of newspaper and cardboard on its way through Santa Teresa, moving the clothes that Rosa had hung in the backyard, as if the wind, young and energetic in its brief life, were trying on Amalfitano’s shirts and pants and slipping into his daughter’s underpants and reading a few pages of the *Testamento geometrico* to see whether there was anything in it that might be of use, anything that might explain the strange landscape of streets and houses through which it was galloping, or *that would explain it to itself as wind*. (202-3; emphasis added)

While the Arcadian potentiality of the *Four Seasons* is like a refreshing wind that reinvigorates Ansky’s optimism, the wind blowing along Amalfitano’s streets is, like the Chilean professor himself, frustrated by the limits of possible knowledge and his consciousness of those limits. It is as if, for 2666 as a whole as much as in the divergence between Arcimboldo’s *Four Seasons* and *The Roast*, there is a certain point of consciousness or self-awareness beyond which epistemology becomes exponentially more uncertain, diminishing the returns of human possibility. The question yielded by this point is whether these divergent poles—the optimism of the *Four Seasons* and Ansky’s mentholated wind and the pessimism of *The Roast* and the ontologically dumbstruck wind engulfing Amalfitano—are merely incompatible images of totality, or whether they can be used dialectically, to generate ideas of the world that do not negate either pole. Is it possible to provide a reader the optimistic bliss of ‘Everything in everything’ without obfuscating the determined limits of possible human knowledge—to envision the world as a whole while acknowledging the credulity of our eyes, but without taking advantage of that credulity to assert malevolent power or create facile semblance? Can visions of totality return us to a world that does not *seem* but really *is*?

These questions are articulated in Protean form earlier in ‘The Part about Archimboldi,’ by General Entrescu:

Did Jesus Christ, he asked, suspect that someday his church would spread to the farthest corners of Earth? Did Jesus Christ, he asked, ever have what we, today, call an idea of the world? Did Jesus Christ, who apparently knew everything, know that the world was round and to the east lived the Chinese (this sentence he spat out, as if it cost him great effort to utter it) and to the west the primitive peoples of America? And he answered himself, no, although of course in a way having an idea of the world is easy, everybody has one, generally an idea restricted to one’s village, bound to the land, to the tangible and mediocre things before one’s eyes, and this idea of the world, petty, limited, crusted with the grime of the familiar, tends to persist and acquire authority and eloquence with the passage of time.

And then, taking an unexpected detour, General Entrescu began to talk about Flavius Josephus, that intelligent, cowardly, cautious man, a flatterer and odds-on gambler, whose idea of the world was much more complex and subtle than Christ’s...(686)

In Entrescu’s speech, Bolaño implicitly sets the ambitious parameters for *2666*’s ‘idea of the world’ [‘idea del mundo’]: one that is beyond the limits imposed by ‘our village’ and ‘the grime of the familiar.’<sup>247</sup> Shortly afterwards, in Ansky’s reading of Arcimboldo, Bolaño elaborates these parameters by suggesting that that move beyond ‘our village’ and ‘the grime of the familiar’ necessitates a form of totalising thought—a way of conceiving the world—that incorporates the failures implicit in the actual inability of humans to conceive totality objectively. Indeed, if Entrescu suggests that everyone’s ‘idea of the world’ is, by default, a totalised idea rooted in that which has always been the case, which does not even necessarily have to account for the roundness of the globe, Ansky’s reading of Arcimboldo’s *Four Seasons* and *The Roast* seems to suggest that the most useful or ethical ‘idea of the world’ would be a semblance of totality that at once allows for its own failure through multiplicity, inconsistency, and uncertainty. Little surprise, then, that Reiter unconsciously echoes Entrescu’s fascination with Flavius Josephus’ ‘idea of the world’ when he recalls his discovery of Arcimboldo:

It’s in Ansky’s notebook, long before he sees a painting by the man, that Reiter first reads about the Italian painter Arcimboldo, Giuseppe or Joseph or Josepho or *Josephus Arcimboldo* or Arcimboldi or Arcimboldus (1527-1593). (729; emphasis added)

*2666*, I propose, constructs an ‘idea of the world’ that repositions our ethical relationship with reality by valorising thought which can imaginatively construct a semblance of totality while incorporating the implicit failure of any such semblance of totality to be actually

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<sup>247</sup> Bolaño, *2666*, p. 857.

totalising—that is, which thinks dialectically with both the optimism of the *Four Seasons* and the pessimism of *The Roast*. Implicit in this is a critique of ideas of the world that depend, like much encyclopaedic practice, on a positivism that prioritises the validity of that which is knowable through observation. Just like us, General Entrescu, Boris Ansky, and Hans Reiter tend to depend on the knowability of that which is beyond the eyes in order to conceive of the world; Bolaño's gambit is that if we embrace the unknowability of that which is beyond our eyes and work with our dependence on fictions that make the unknown knowable, instead of simply trusting in 'the grime of the familiar,' we can generate ideas of the world that enable us to take bolder ethical steps—steps that may keep alive the possibility of disrupting the genocidal patterns of history. Just as Stephen Dedalus encourages Leopold Bloom to move 'from the known to the unknown,'<sup>248</sup> Amalfitano likes to hold on to his 'rather idiosyncratic ideas' about the knowability of that which is not immediately visible:

He believed (or liked to think he believed) that when a person was in Barcelona, the people living and present in Buenos Aires and Mexico City didn't exist. The time difference only masked their nonexistence. And so if you suddenly traveled to cities that, according to this theory, didn't exist or hadn't yet had time to put themselves together, the result was the phenomenon known as jet lag, which arose not from your exhaustion but from the exhaustion of the people who would still have been asleep if you hadn't traveled. (188, 189)

For Amalfitano, believing, or liking to think you believe, in 'Make-believe ideas' that presuppose the fundamental unreality of that which is beyond personal vision is not solipsism. Rather, such ideas:

turned the pain of others into memories of one's own. They turned pain, which is natural, enduring, and eternally triumphant, into personal memory, which is human, brief, and eternally elusive. They turned a brutal story of injustice and abuse, an incoherent howl with no beginning or end, into a neatly structured story in which suicide was always held out as a possibility. They turned flight into freedom, even if freedom meant no more than the perpetuation of flight. They turned chaos into order, even if it was at the cost of what is commonly known as sanity. (189)

The only way we can 'blaze paths into the unknown' (227), Bolaño seems to suggest, is if we acknowledge the unknown as in some sense unknowable or knowable only according to the failures of our eyes. In this, we can begin to imagine and figure ideas of the world that reconceive our ethical connection to the world and its history—or, to adapt the terms of the novel's epigraph, to be revitalised by the horror hidden by the apparent boredom of millennial modernity.

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<sup>248</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 17.1013.

## 4.1 *Infinito Vertigo*

To date, the majority of critical work on *2666* has focused on the ethics of Bolaño's portrayals of femicide in Ciudad Juárez and the Holocaust. In this, a productive consensus is emerging, in which *2666* is read as twinning femicide and the Holocaust in order to identify and critique the historical trajectory of the contemporary, from Twentieth Century capitalism to millennial neoliberalism and necropolitics.<sup>249</sup> A generalised perspective on the novel's scope has tended to go implied in this approach; to approximate, *2666* is a new epic form, fit to succeed Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, Mario Vargas Llosa, and the other *boomistas*, and to capture and critique the realities of contemporary globalisation.<sup>250</sup> While this

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<sup>249</sup> Significant contributions to this predominant current include: Laura Barberán Reinares, 'Globalized Philomels: State Patriarchy, Transnational Capital, and the Femicides on the US-Mexican Border in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*,' *South Atlantic Review*, 75.4 (2010), 51–72; Cecilia López Badano, '2666: el narcotráfico como anamorfosis muralista,' in *Roberto Bolaño: Ruptura y violencia en la literatura finisecular*, ed. by Felipe A. Ríos Baeza (México D.F.: Ediciones Eón, 2010); Daniella Blejer, 'Pensar/clasificar/denunciar: Las resignificaciones del archivo en *2666*,' in *Roberto Bolaño: Ruptura y violencia en la literatura finisecular*, ed. by Felipe A. Ríos Baeza (México D.F.: Ediciones Eón, 2010); Carlos Burgos Jara, 'Los crímenes de Santa Teresa: Estado, globalización y mafia en *2666*,' in *Roberto Bolaño: Ruptura y violencia en la literatura finisecular*, ed. by Felipe A. Ríos Baeza (México D.F.: Ediciones Eón, 2010); Manuel Asensi Pérez, 'Atreverse a mirar por el agujero: Lo real y lo político en *2666* de Roberto Bolaño,' in *Roberto Bolaño: Ruptura y violencia en la literatura finisecular*, ed. by Felipe A. Ríos Baeza (México D.F.: Ediciones Eón, 2010); Grant Farred, 'The Impossible Closing: Death, Neoliberalism, and the Postcolonial in Bolaño's *2666*,' *Modern Fiction Studies*, 56.4 (2010), 689–708; Gabriela Muniz, 'El discurso de la crueldad: *2666* de Roberto Bolaño,' *Revista Hispánica Moderna*, 63.1 (2010), 35–49; Jean Franco, *Cruel Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Patrick Dove, 'Literature and the Secret of the World: *2666*, Globalization, and Global War,' *CR: The New Centennial Review*, 14.3 (2014), 139–61; Margaret Boe Birns, '666 Twinned and Told Twice: Roberto Bolaño's Double Time Frame in *2666*,' in *Roberto Bolaño, A Less Distant Star*, ed. by Ignacio López-Calvo (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2015); Martín Camps, '"Con La Cabeza En El Abismo": Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* and *2666*, Literary Guerrilla, and the Maquiladora of Death,' in *Roberto Bolaño, A Less Distant Star*, ed. by Ignacio López-Calvo (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2015); Martin Paul Eve, 'Keep Writing: The Critique of the University in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*,' *Textual Practice*, 30.5 (2015), 949–64; Eli Jelly-Schapiro, '"This Is Our Threnody": Roberto Bolaño and the History of the Present,' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 56.1 (2015), 77–93; Shaj Mathew, 'Ciudad Juárez in Roberto Bolaño's *2666*: Mexico's Violent Cradle of Modernity,' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 57.4 (2016), 402–16; Nicholas Birns, 'Black Dawn: Roberto Bolaño as (North) American Writer,' in *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*, ed. by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Juan E. De Castro, 'Politics and Ethics in Latin America: On Roberto Bolaño,' in *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*, ed. by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017); Federico Finchelstein, 'On Fascism, History, and Evil in Roberto Bolaño,' in *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*, ed. by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>250</sup> This is particularly the case with Anglophone Bolaño criticism, which is still catching up, as Héctor Hoyos has noted, with Hispanophone criticism. This is primarily because Bolaño was well-known and highly regarded in the Hispanophone world at least a decade before he became popular in the Anglophone world, but is also down to the relatively niche nature of Anglophone scholarship on Latin American writing and the anomalous nature of his Anglophone popularity. While the trickle of Anglophone Bolaño scholarship has started to gather pace, Hispanophone scholarship in general remains substantially more advanced. In this study, I will be drawing from both fields. For discussion of the contrasts between Bolaño's Hispanophone and Anglophone receptions, see: Wilfrido H. Corral, *Bolaño traducido: nueva literatura mundial* (Madrid, Spain: Ediciones Escalera, 2011); Héctor Hoyos, *Beyond Bolaño: The Global Latin American Novel* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2015); Will H. Corral, 'Bolaño, Ethics, and the Experts,' in *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*, ed. by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017). For discussion of *2666*'s relationship with 'world literature,' see: Sergio Villalobos-Ruminott, 'A Kind of Hell: Roberto Bolaño and The Return of World Literature,' *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 18.2-3 (2009),

is a useful shortcut into the novel, and one clearly shaped by its more or less explicit ambition to be not just within the tradition of the Latin American *novela total*, but one of the ‘great, imperfect torrential works’ of the ‘great masters,’ it does not quite get to the stakes presupposed by that immense scale (227).<sup>251</sup> By taking as starting points Entrescu’s and Ansky’s articulated fascination with representations of totality—‘an idea of the world’ and ‘Everything in everything’—the ways in which *2666* can be productively read in the context of the history of encyclopaedic thought becomes clear. In this, my approach is in ostensible contrast with Sharae Deckard’s assertion, in her important study of *2666*’s ‘peripheral realism,’ that the novel is ‘not an encyclopedic fiction.’<sup>252</sup> Although Deckard refuses the term, there is, I believe, overlap between our respective readings which the term addresses, and that can be used to clarify the nature of Bolaño’s concomitant valorisation and critique of the totalising imagination.

Deckard explores the ways in which ‘Bolaño reformulates realism to interrogate the ideological nature of art and the limits of realism while encoding the conditions of millennial capitalism in the semi-periphery,’ and in so doing proposes that *2666* ‘be called a “world-system novel,”’ as it ‘[maps] the incommensurable geographies of global capital from Europe

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193–205; Sharae Deckard, ‘Peripheral Realism, Millennial Capitalism, and Roberto Bolaño’s *2666*,’ *Modern Language Quarterly*, 73.3 (2012), 351–72; Peter Boxall, ‘Sovereignty, Democracy, Globalisation,’ in *Twenty-First Century Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2013); *Roberto Bolaño as World Literature*, ed. by Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>251</sup> The *novela total* is a category typically associated with the *boomistas*: it was first theorised by Vargas Llosa in his doctoral dissertation on García Márquez, and elaborated soon after by Fuentes. Bolaño himself mentions the category favourably, in ‘The Vagaries of the Literature of Doom’ referring to Julio Cortázar and Leopoldo Marechal. As Mark D. Anderson explains, ‘These novels are identifiable by their vast scale; an encyclopedic but “anthropophagic” range of cultural references; multiple, entwined narrative strands recounted by polyphonic voices; synchronistic representations of time and space; and, not least, by their massive volume.’ While there is clear overlap between the *novela total* and fictional encyclopaedism, the former is more general about the role of encyclopaedic thought while the latter is more specific. To my knowledge, there has not yet been any work in English or Spanish considering how *2666* speaks to the category of *novela total*. Roberto Bolaño, ‘The Vagaries of the Literature of Doom,’ *Secret of Evil*, trans. by Chris Andrews (New York: New Directions Books, 2007), pp. 69–70; Mark D. Anderson, ‘Dissonant Worlds: Mario Vargas Llosa and the Aesthetics of the Total Novel,’ in *Critical Insights: Mario Vargas Llosa*, ed. by Juan E. De Castro (Ipswich, MA: Salem Press, 2014), pp. 201–18. For more on the *novela total*, see: Carlos Fuentes, *La nueva novela hispanoamericana* (México D.F.: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969); Mario Vargas Llosa, *García Márquez: Historia de un deicidio* (Barcelona: Barral, 1971); Sainz; Robin Fiddian, ‘James Joyce and the Spanish American Novel: A Preliminary Study,’ *The Crane Bag*, 6.2 (1982), 84–88; Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría, *Myth and Archive: A Theory of Latin American Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Wilfrido H. Corral, ‘Novelistas sin timon: exceso y subjetividad en el concepto de “novela total”,’ *MLN*, 116.2 (2001), 315–49; Mark D. Anderson, ‘A Reappraisal of the “Total” Novel’; Ryan F. Long, *Fictions of Totality: The Mexican Novel, 1968, and the National-Popular State* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

<sup>252</sup> Deckard, p. 369. Martin Paul Eve also depends on the term ‘encyclopedic’ in his latest work on *2666*, though he focuses more on theorising what he describes as the text’s ‘crypto-didacticism’ and, following Andreea Marinescu, its ‘capacity to generate discourse about its place within the conformity/resistance binary,’ rather than the novel’s engagement with the totalising imagination. Martin Paul Eve, *Literature Against Criticism: University English and Contemporary Fiction in Conflict* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2016), pp. 89–111; Andreea Marinescu, “‘I Can’t Go On, I’ll Go on’: The Avant-Garde in the Works of Roberto Bolaño and Raúl Ruiz,’ *Romance Notes*, 54.3 (2014), 391–98 (p. 393).

to the Americas.<sup>253</sup> Oswaldo Zavala rightly criticises Deckard's argument's dependence on a periphery-metropole binary, describing it as the result of '[invocating] theoretical models that generalise recent discussions of the "post-national" from the U.S. and European academy' to the rest of the world:

In this way, Deckard adopts the same epistemological platform that judges the Latin American space as *a priori* an unstable periphery and which reduces the region to the transition from utopian *caudillos*...to the arrival of forms of economic and labour exploitation belonging to neoliberalism.<sup>254</sup>

While Zavala goes on to intimate quite a deal of scorn for Deckard's argument, as well as that of Sergio Villalobos, it is not inaccurate to say that, despite its obvious perspicacity, her model of *2666* as a 'world-system novel' encodes Latin America as the periphery of a European centre—and the consequence of this is that Deckard's reading of *2666* ends up implicating the novel in a form of Eurocentrism that it is difficult to identify in its 'idea of the world.'

Deckard's reading is built on understanding it as the 'welding of multiple genres and modes of realism with irrealist imagery and language' in order to capture the 'radical mixtures of residual and modern temporalities, cultural formations, and social relations in the peripheries of millennial capitalism.'<sup>255</sup> As such, Deckard proposes that:

*2666*'s multiple genres are embedded in a new realist narrative that represents the conjunctions of millennial capital across a range of peripheries and former colonies and metropolises: this compendium of realist genres might be said to register anachronistic temporalities within a singular modernity.<sup>256</sup>

In this, *2666* forges an aesthetic that restores throughout the modern 'world-system' what Johannes Fabian would term 'coevalness',<sup>257</sup> and which Bolaño combines with 'a totalizing historical impulse' that enables the novel to 'represent totality' through its structure, which, 'moving among classes, geographies, and genres, re-creates the fractured social relations of life in the semiperiphery.'<sup>258</sup> For Deckard, *2666* makes out of its parts a whole that captures

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<sup>253</sup> Deckard, pp. 351–2, 369.

<sup>254</sup> '...los análisis invocan modelos teóricos que generalizan discusiones recientes de lo que se denomina como 'postnacional' en la academia estadounidense y europea. Deckard adopta así la misma plataforma epistemológica que dictamina *a priori* el espacio latinoamericano como una precariedad periférica y que reduce la región al tránsito de las utopías caudillistas...hasta llegar a las formas de explotación económica y laboral propias del neoliberalismo.' Oswaldo Zavala, *La modernidad insufrible: Roberto Bolaño en los límites de la literatura latinoamericana contemporánea* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 148; my translation.

<sup>255</sup> Deckard, p. 356.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 368.

<sup>257</sup> Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1983).

<sup>258</sup> Deckard, pp. 368–9.

and offers a ‘negative critique’ of ‘the totality of millennial capitalist modernity.’<sup>259</sup> Yet this ‘negative critique,’ which Deckard perceives in Bolaño’s ‘critical unreal[ism],’ does not quite get to the novel’s diagnosis of ‘one’s eyes’ (686), and as such overlooks its very positive critique of generating, and reading, totalised images as such.<sup>260</sup> Accordingly, while Deckard identifies in *2666* an image of ‘the totality of millennial capitalist modernity,’ she does not substantially account for the novel’s in-built critique of its imaginative creation of that very ‘idea of the world.’ In this, as Zavala’s criticisms suggest, that ‘singular modernity’ within which *2666* registers the world’s temporalities begins to look, like its ‘world-system,’ rather Eurocentric:

...[Deckard’s and Villalobos’ analyses] reify cultural logics organic to late capitalism: the notion of the centre and the periphery, the reduction of Latin America to a general history of failed *caudillista* utopias and geopolitical subjection, the total removal of its politics from the global context, the supremacy of the aforementioned global currents of domination that transform literary objects into mechanisms of global meaning, etc..<sup>261</sup>

The ‘world-system’ provides Deckard a way of understanding *2666*’s totalising scale, but does not afford a means for reflecting on the limitations of that representation of totality. This is my key divergence from Deckard, and it is in this context that I propose that the term ‘encyclopedic’ does productive critical work for the novel.

For Deckard, *2666* is not encyclopaedic because it ‘refuses the *jouissance* of paradigmatic overflow and heteroglossia,’ and as such ‘does not strive to take the whole world into itself, enfolding whole fields of knowledge.’<sup>262</sup> Yet, as we have already seen with Joyce and Silko, such aesthetic tropes and impossible volumes of content are not prerequisites for engagement with encyclopaedic thought. It is not possible for novels to enfold whole fields of knowledge; what they can do, however, is mine the operations of thought on which our sense of totality depends—to find, like Ansky, everything within everything, or to generate, like Barry Seaman, an ‘idea of the world’ from ‘*The Abridged French Encyclopedia*’ (244). As Deckard notes, Bolaño’s conception of a fictional totality diverges from that of the *boomistas*, and from Vargas Llosa in particular, by demonstrating no ‘interest in creating an illusion of coherence and autonomy that supplants the *infinito vertigo* of reality.’<sup>263</sup> It is this ‘*infinito vertigo*’

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<sup>259</sup> Ibid, p. 367.

<sup>260</sup> Ibid, pp. 366–7.

<sup>261</sup> ‘[los análisis de Deckard y Villalobos] reifican lógicas culturales orgánicas al propio capitalismo tardío: la noción de centro y periferia, la reducción de Latinoamérica a una historia general de utopía caudillista fallida y de sujeción geopolítica, la anulación absoluta de lo político en el contexto global, la supermacía de dichos vectores globales de dominación que convierten a los objetos literarios en dispositivos de significación mundial, etc.’ Zavala, p. 149; my translation.

<sup>262</sup> Deckard, p. 369.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid, p. 368.

that is the salient point of the novel: it is the ‘unknown’ to which the paradigm of a ‘world-system’ addresses itself with inappropriate confidence, but against which, as we have seen with *Ulysses* and *Almanac of the Dead*, the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought has a lot to say.

## 4.2 Gestalt Encyclopaedism

Bolaño’s interest in encyclopaedism is conspicuous from the publication of *Nazi Literature in the Americas* (1996), which Chris Andrews has described as inaugurating his ‘later fiction.’<sup>264</sup> *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, a catalogue of fictional right wing writers from across the Americas does indeed provide a useful starting point in identifying and characterising 2666’s own approach to encyclopaedic thought. Although it is not entirely accurate to describe *Nazi Literature in the Americas* as a fictional encyclopaedia in itself, since it purports to be a catalogue of specific writers rather than a totalised system for all knowledge, encyclopaedism is evidently one of its guiding concerns.<sup>265</sup> Yet rather than focusing on a specific, historical encyclopaedism, like Joyce and Silko do with the *Britannica* and *Las Casas*, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* is guided by an encyclopaedism that has not yet arrived: its assortment of writers and their ‘profoundly mediocre, forgotten, ignored and, of course, non-existent literary corpus’<sup>266</sup> mark discrete dots whose connection would create a unified, totalising semblance that could occupy or colonise reality—that is, a Nazi encyclopaedism. In Bolaño’s critique of encyclopaedic thought, the concern is less with an inherited encyclopaedism than with the potentially inherited one, immanent to, yet deferred by, the contemporary.

This is not to say, however, that Bolaño’s interest in encyclopaedism is merely speculative—rather that, in his reading, the possibility of a Nazi encyclopaedism manifests itself as consistent with the trajectory of history. Indeed, as Rory O’Brien writes, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* ‘significantly postpones the dialectical synthesis of [its] stories to a moment that lurks ominously as a not too distant possibility but one that remains postponed,

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<sup>264</sup> That is, his work since *Nazi Literature in the Americas*. Chris Andrews, *Roberto Bolaño’s Fiction: An Expanding Universe* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2014), p. xii.

<sup>265</sup> Critics have tended to label it offhandedly as encyclopaedic or pseudo-encyclopaedic; see, for example: Ignacio Echevarría, ‘Historia particular de una infamia,’ in *Roberto Bolaño: la escritura como tauromaquia*, ed. by Celina Manzoni (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2002); Gareth Williams, ‘Sovereignty and Melancholic Paralysis in Roberto Bolaño,’ *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, 18.2-3 (2009), p. 129; Hoyos, p. 36.

<sup>266</sup> Williams, p. 130.



deferred, yet to come.<sup>267</sup> In the dots *Nazi Literature in the Americas* provides, Bolaño enables the reader to piece together the outline of an encyclopaedism that lies within the culture of the Americas—a totalising whole that is more than its collection of displaced Nazis. The question the text explores is the extent of that immanence, and the action that would be required to transform its scattered parts into a whole. In this, the entry on Willy Schürholz is instructive. Schürholz is born and raised in a secretive community called ‘Colonia Renacer’:

At first glance it seems to be a large estate like many others in the region. A closer look, however, reveals a number of significant differences. To begin with, Colonia Renacer has its own school, medical clinic, and auto repair shop. It has established a self-sufficient economic system that allows the colony to turn its back on what Chileans, perhaps over-optimistically, like to call ‘Chilean reality,’ or simply ‘reality.’ [...] A final differentiating trait, perhaps the most trivial but also the first to strike those who have caught a glimpse of the colony’s interior and the few who have crossed its perimeter, is the ethnic origin of its inhabitants: they are all, without exception, German. [...] Every so often the national newspapers report their activities, or describe the mystery in which they are enveloped. There has been talk of pagan orgies, sex slaves and secret executions. [...] It has also been said that Eichman, Bormann and Mengele were hidden there. [...] After the coup in 1973, Colonia Renacer disappeared from the news.<sup>268</sup>

In this introductory description of ‘Colonia Renacer,’ Bolaño locates Schürholz in a very loosely fictionalised version of the infamous Colonia Dignidad, a small colony founded in an isolated part of central Chile by Paul Schäfer, a former Nazi and fugitive from child sex abuse charges, that Pinochet’s regime used for detention and torture. This fictionalising move—arguably an early proto-type for 2666’s fictionalising of Ciudad Juárez as ‘Santa Teresa’—enables Bolaño to locate Colonia Dignidad and its history as simultaneously within the remit of historical fact and beyond the historical imagination of ‘Chilean reality.’ Just like the ‘rebirth’ indicated by its name, ‘Colonia Renacer’ re-imagines the possibility of an evil that ‘Chilean reality’ hubristically distinguishes from itself. Historical consciousness, Bolaño suggests, may want to separate itself from ‘evil,’ but in doing so risks making itself blind to the rebirth of that very same evil. It is in this context that Schürholz’s ‘withdrawn, stubborn and strangely self-confident’<sup>269</sup> poetry makes itself understood at once as an artefact of totalising Nazism and a miserable cry for help.

Schürholz’s first poetry ‘combined disconnected sentences and topographic maps of Colonia Renacer,’ and leads to a ‘series of poetic experiments’ in the literature department at

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<sup>267</sup> Rory O’Brien, ‘Writing with the Ghost of Pierre Menard: Authorship, Responsibility, and Justice in Roberto Bolaño’s *Distant Star*,’ in *Roberto Bolaño, A Less Distant Star*, ed. by Ignacio López-Calvo (New York, NY: Palgrave, 2015), p. 18.

<sup>268</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, trans. by Chris Andrews (London: Picador, 2008), pp. 99–101.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 101.

the Catholic University, comprised of huge maps ‘which took some time to decipher, on which verses giving further instructions for their placement and use had been written in a careful, adolescent hand.’<sup>270</sup> When his colleagues realise that the maps are of Nazi concentration camps, Schürholz’s poems are discreetly removed in case of scandal—yet he goes on to publish several books in the same style: ‘maps of concentration camps superimposed on a map of Colonia Renacer, or a particular city (Stutthof or Valparaíso, Maidanek or Concepción), or situated in an empty, rural space.’<sup>271</sup> Towards the end of his career as a poet, Schürholz finds himself ‘catapulted to the very summit of notoriety by a group of local and North American impresarios,’ who provide him a team with which to dig ‘the map of an ideal concentration camp into the Atacama desert,’ and again ‘in the Arizona desert and a wheat field in Colorado.’<sup>272</sup>

In the support that he receives from both ‘the avant-garde poetry scene, who were generally opposed to the military regime’ and the military historians at the fictional ‘*Review of Thought and History*,’ Bolaño emphasises the flexibility of Schürholz’s work to numerous, even contradictory, interpretations.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, as Andrews astutely notes, this is a move typical of Bolaño’s ‘fiction-making system’:

The point that Bolaño is making is that even if there is a statistical correlation between avant-garde aesthetic practice and progressive politics...the two are not causally related. Artistic experimenters, like Schürholz and Ramírez Hoffman, may be advocates or agents of conservative revolutions.<sup>274</sup>

That said, Schürholz’s life-size maps are also, I propose, an explicit reference to Jorge Luis Borges’ ‘On Exactitude in Science’—and a significant one for discerning the encyclopaedic possibility Bolaño uses the story to figure. Just like Schürholz’s later maps, in Borges’ fragment an empire’s cartographers are described as having ‘struck a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it.’<sup>275</sup> It is significant, that the ‘Tattered Ruins’ of Borges’ cartographers’ map, which is discarded by succeeding generations as ‘Useless,’ shares an imagined space with Schürholz’s maps: ‘the Deserts of the West.’<sup>276</sup> Moreover, their shared fictional space can be used to discern a temporal trajectory: for if Borges’ fragment, ‘purportedly from...1658,’ attests to a time in the distant past when an empire’s cartography totalised and occupied reality, Bolaño’s

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, p. 102.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, p. 103.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, p. 104.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid, pp. 101, 241–3.

<sup>274</sup> Andrews, p. 50.

<sup>275</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘On Exactitude in Science,’ *Collected Fictions*, trans. by Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 325.

<sup>276</sup> Ibid, p. 325.

Schürholz draws plans for the cartography of a Nazi empire were it to expand west, as if that possibility persists for the distant future. Indeed, Bolaño gives Schürholz's date of death as '2029,' indicating that the text is narrated from the future, and as such secretes greater knowledge about that currently-deferred possibility. Invoking Borges in Schürholz's narrative, Bolaño enables us to perceive the immanence, temporal distance notwithstanding, of a potential Nazi encyclopaedism that lies waiting to seize reality.

Bolaño's ethical strategy, as Celina Manzoni observes, is something like an ultimatum: 'If history cannot formulate suitable questions or is incapable of finding answers in the silence of the disappeared, poetry can become its ally.'<sup>277</sup> In the fictionalised oblivion of a character like Schürholz, Bolaño works to articulate something about history and its potential that history itself seems unable to grasp fully—perhaps because Schürholz's history is emblematic of that which makes itself easily overlooked and hard to discern, truth and reconciliation notwithstanding. As Bolaño notes, of Schürholz's unexpectedly popular foray into children's writing, he 'idealize[s] a childhood that was suspiciously aphasic, amnesic, obedient and silent,' the aim of which seems to be 'Invisibility,' as if for Schürholz his survival has depended on society's blindness to him.<sup>278</sup> *Nazi Literature in the Americas* does the opposite of Schürholz's children's book, working to make visible that to which history is blind.

The widely-noted structural debt of *Nazi Literature in the Americas* to Borges' *A Universal History of Iniquity* is instructive in this regard:<sup>279</sup> indeed, if Borges works to 'restore such evil to Enlightenment discourses of "universal history" that construe history, as Hegel does, in terms of the emancipatory, truth-disclosing dialectic of rational consciousness,'<sup>280</sup> then Bolaño makes the restored evil, immanent to those discourses, visible to his readers. This is particularly clear in *Nazi Literature in the Americas*' 'Forerunners and Figures of the Anti-Enlightenment,' one of whom makes a conspicuously ham-fisted intervention in the history of encyclopaedic thought:

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<sup>277</sup> 'Si la Historia no puede formular las preguntas adecuadas o es incapaz de encontrar respuestas al silencio de los desaparecidos, la poesía puede convertirse en su aliada.' Celina Manzoni, 'Biografías mínimas/ínfimas y el equívoco del mal,' in *Roberto Bolaño: la escritura como tauromaquia*, ed. by Celina Manzoni (Buenos Aires: Ediciones Corregidor, 2002), p. 30; my translation.

<sup>278</sup> Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, p. 105.

<sup>279</sup> Manzoni, pp. 21, 25; O'Bryen, pp. 17–18; Zavala, pp. 81–2; Borges, *Collected Fictions*, pp. 1–64. While the Borges text is clearly the key intertext, it is also worth noting his debt to Marcel Schwob's *Imaginary Lives* (1896), Fray Mocho's *Vida de ladrones célebres de Buenos Aires y sus maneras de robar* (1887), Alfonso Reyes' *Real and Imagined Portraits* (1920), and Juan Rodolfo Wilcock's *El estereoscópico de los solitarios* (1972) and *The Temple of Iconoclasts* (1972). Bolaño himself mentioned debt to all but Mocho in a 2005 interview with Eliseo Álvarez. Manzoni, pp. 19, 25; Roberto Bolaño, *Roberto Bolaño: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*, trans. by Sybil Perez (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2011), p. 86.

<sup>280</sup> Manzoni, pp. 17–32; O'Bryen, p. 18.

In 1925...[Luis] Fontaine da Souza published *A Refutation of Diderot* (530 pages), followed two years later by *A Refutation of D'Alembert* (590 pages), thus establishing himself as the country's leading Catholic philosopher.<sup>281</sup>

Fontaine da Souza's refutations do not merely state his position against the famously liberal founders of *l'Encyclopédie*, but tacitly suggest that the humanistic elements of the Enlightenment can be rejected while the framework and categories it developed to perceive reality 'objectively' can be retained. Indeed, in his subsequent pamphlet on '*The Jewish Question in Europe Followed by a Memorandum on the Brazilian Question*,' which 'explained the threats that widespread miscegenation would pose to Brazilian society (disorder, promiscuity, criminality),' da Souza universalises as objective an idea of the world that is contingent on the Enlightenment's racial categories.<sup>282</sup> Moreover, da Souza's classification as either a forerunner or figure of the 'Anti-Enlightenment' inscribes him, just like Schürholz, from a distant vantage point, at which something called the 'Anti-Enlightenment' may have achieved a form of synthesis—as if from a point at which a Nazi encyclopaedism built on refuting Diderot and D'Alembert has been articulated. While Borges' *A Universal History of Infamy* affirms and elaborates on the 'infamy' of figures unincorporated from encyclopaedic sources like the *Britannica*, *Nazi Literature in the Americas* imagines the capacity of that same infamy, incorporated or not, to figure its own encyclopaedism.

It is important to note, however, that Bolaño's American Nazism is not merely a local coda to Borges' universal infamy; as Manzoni notes:

If *A Universal History of Infamy* seems an immediate part of Bolaño's lineage, both texts also recognise a zone of interchange, of chiasmus, or inversion, in, on the one hand, the journey from 'history' to 'literature,' and, on the other, location, where the universality of the Borgesian text looks limited, in Bolaño, to America. Ultimately, and in a different sense, not of opposition but of similarity, 'infamy' and 'Nazi' can be read as a corresponding pair: where it says 'Nazi,' read 'infamy' (or vice versa); another method for presenting the figure of the double that, with diverse but always worrying variations, is unfolded in this and other texts by Bolaño.<sup>283</sup>

The dialogue between the two texts does not create the opposition or difference of a local-global binary, but correspondence and doubling: Nazism is not just a particular manifestation

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<sup>281</sup> Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, p. 49.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid, pp. 49–50.

<sup>283</sup> 'Si la *Historia universal de la infamia* parece inmediata en el linaje de Bolaño, también lo es que ambos textos reconocen una zona de cruce, quiasmo, o inversión, en, por una parte, el desplazamiento que va de 'historia' a 'literatura,' y por otra, en la localización, donde la universalidad del texto boregano parece limitada en Bolaño a América. Por último y en sentido diferente, no de oposición sino de semejanza, 'infamia' y 'nazi' puede ser leídos como un par que se corresponde: donde dice 'nazi,' léase 'infamia' (o al revés); otra modalidad de presentación de la figura de doble que con variantes diversas, aunque siempre inquietantes se despliega en este y otros textos de Bolaño.' Manzoni, p. 24; my translation.

of universal infamy, but also a universal outfit for the progress of infamy—after all, as Hoyos notes, Nazism in itself is unarguably of European origin and has become, in *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, ‘a displaced figure of globalization.’<sup>284</sup> As such, Bolaño’s American Nazis are agents of infamy, and their deferred encyclopaedic possibility their tool for achieving universality. What is important about the synthesis of that possibility into an actual Nazi encyclopaedism, however, is the emphasis it places on the reader and their agency—as the entry on Harry Sibelius makes manifestly clear.

Sibelius’ epic *The True Son of Job* transforms, uproariously, the lessons of ‘universal history’ into a chronicle of Hitler’s conquest of the Americas:

The structure of the book is modeled on [Arnold J. Toynbee’s *Hitler’s Europe*]....Sibelius, of course, is animated by intentions of an entirely different nature. In the final analysis, the British professor’s aim is to testify against crime and ignominy, lest we forget. The Virginian novelist seems to believe that ‘somewhere in time and space’ the crime in question has definitively triumphed, so he proceeds to catalogue it.<sup>285</sup>

The suggestion is, in Sibelius’ reading and subsequent use of Toynbee, that the moral compass of any document, and therefore of any period of time, can be oriented towards infamy, or Nazism, given the right context. Just as Pierre Menard’s reading of *Don Quixote* animates ‘the plurality of virtual interpretations lying unactualized within any text,’ as well as ‘the power to lay bare the excess of virtual interpretations over the present moment of any concrete enunciation,’ so does *The True Son of Job* abuse the interpretative openness of writing as such in order to figure universal Nazism.<sup>286</sup> In this, Bolaño dispenses definitively with the assumption that any cultural output could be opposed to evil in and of itself; and in so doing responsibility for the dialectical synthesis of his text’s Nazi encyclopaedism is placed with a reader active and motivated enough to enable it. That is to say, if *The True Son of Job* can appropriate Toynbee as an outfit for the dialectical synthesis of Nazi encyclopaedism, then as a text it is in search of an audience of collaborators or accomplices sufficiently monstrous and cunning to collaborate in the intellectual work of joining American Nazism’s dots into its idea of the world. And in this *Nazi Literature in the Americas* leads us straight to 2666: for not only is the number 2,666 the page count of *The True Son of Job* doubled, but its bibliographic addenda, ‘Epilogue for Monsters’ [‘Epílogo para monstruos’], implicitly

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<sup>284</sup> Hoyos, p. 26.

<sup>285</sup> Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, p. 131.

<sup>286</sup> O’Byrne, p. 19.

suggests that all that is required is a monstrous readerly genius to join the dots of Nazi literature into its totalising semblance for reality.<sup>287</sup>

The importance of such readerly genius is not lost on Óscar Amalfitano, who, wrestling with his own sanity, finds himself remembering a book by ‘a certain Lonko Kilapán, published in Santiago de Chile in 1978,’ sent to him by ‘a wiseass of long standing’ (216):

This Kilapán presented himself with the following credentials: Historian of the Race, President of the Indigenous Confederation of Chile, and Secretary of the Academy of the Araucanian Language. The book was called *O’Higgins is Araucanian*, and it was subtitled *17 Proofs, Taken from the Secret History of Araucania*. Between the title and the subtitle was the following phrase: Text approved by the Araucanian History Council. (216)

Amalfitano notes that there are plenty of curious and suspicious things about the book, such as its date of publication, ‘1978, in other words during the military dictatorship’ (223). From this Amalfitano imagines how one could ‘deduce the atmosphere of triumph, loneliness, and fear in which it was published,’ and perhaps even picture the cringeworthy scene in which Kilapán, an obsequious ‘gentleman of Indian appearance, half out of his head but hiding it well’ (223), persuades Editorial Universitaria to publish his tract at a discount. But he immediately notes that by way of a particular approach to reading, ‘it was possible to imagine’ other, less patronising scenarios:

...the active reader—the reader as envisioned by Cortázar—could begin his reading with a kick to the author’s testicles, viewing him from the start as a straw man, a factotum in the service of some colonel in the intelligence services, or maybe of some general who fancied himself an intellectual, which wouldn’t be so strange either, this being Chile, in fact the reverse would be stranger [...] And if Kilapán hadn’t written the book, it might be that Kilapán didn’t exist, in other words that there was no President of the Indigenous Confederation of Chile, among other reasons because perhaps the Indigenous Confederation didn’t exist, nor was there any Secretary of the Academy of the Araucanian Language, among other reasons because perhaps said Academy of the Araucanian Language never existed. All fake. All non-existent. Kilapán, from that perspective, thought Amalfitano...might easily be a nom de plume for Pinochet, representing Pinochet’s long sleepless nights or his productive mornings...But there was no reason to get too excited. Kilapán’s prose could be Pinochet’s, certainly. But it could also be Aylwín’s or Lagos’s. Kilapán’s prose could be Frei’s (which was saying something) or the prose of any right-wing neo-Fascist. Not only did Lonko Kilapán’s prose encapsulate all of Chile’s styles, it also represented all of its political factions, from the conservatives to the Communists, from the new liberals to the old survivors of the MIR. (224-5)

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<sup>287</sup> Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, pp. 130, 227. Significantly, the Spanish ‘monstruos’ carries connotations not just of monstrosity but of phenomenal genius; *Diccionario de la lengua Española* (DLE): ‘6. masculino. Persona que en whichever actividad greatly exceeds typical qualities and skills.’ [‘6. m. Persona que en cualquier actividad excede en mucho las cualidades y aptitudes comunes.’]. Real Academia Española and Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, ‘Monstruo,’ *Diccionario de la lengua española* (Real Academia Española) <<http://dle.rae.es/?id=PiY3lWL>> [accessed 5 November 2016].

While *Nazi Literature in the Americas* imagines that the activation of immanent Nazi potential is dependent on certain monstrous active readers, *2666* suggests that active reading can be used inversely too, to deduce the traces of evil where it makes itself least visible. As such, just as *The True Son of Job* is an active reading of *Hitler's Europe*, in search of an audience of readers active enough to collaborate in its construction of a Nazi totality, active reading of *O'Higgins is Araucanian* reveals its commensurability with a totalising fascism. In this, the importance of Bolaño's intellectual debt to Julio Cortázar, who Amalfitano mentions specifically, is conspicuous; indeed, Cortázar's concept of the 'active reader' ['lector activo'], which he also refers to as the 'reader-accomplice' ['lector cómplice'], is, I propose, essential to understanding the vital agency of the reader in Bolaño's conception of encyclopaedism.<sup>288</sup>

Cortázar's theory of the 'active reader,' which is in many ways an exploration of what has since become known as 'reader-response' theory,<sup>289</sup> is posited in the 'Expendable Chapters' of *Hopscotch* (1963), as part of a series of notes belonging to an experimental writer named Morelli. Morelli, in much-criticised terms that make explicit the unquestioning misogyny on which *Hopscotch* is premised, defines the 'active reader' through its distinction with the 'female-reader' ['lector hembra'].<sup>290</sup> As E. Joseph Sharkey glosses:

the *lector-hembra* reads a book passively, a mere witness to the creative production of the author; the *lector activo*, by contrast, consciously participates in the creation of the novel he reads.<sup>291</sup>

<sup>288</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, trans. by Gregory Rabassa (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), pp. 396, 398.

<sup>289</sup> That is, the type of transactional reader-response theory typically associated Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser, in which the reader participates in the production of textual meaning. Wolfgang Iser, 'The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,' *New Literary History*, 3.2 (1972), 279–99; Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, 5th edn (New York, NY: Modern Language Association, 1995). For discussions of *Hopscotch* in relation to 'reader-response' theory, see: Anthony Percival, 'Reader and *Rayuela*,' *Revista Canadiense de Estudios Hispánicos*, 6 (1982), 239–55; Cynthia Stone, 'El lector implícito de *Rayuela* y los blancos de la narración,' in *Los Ocho Mundos de Cortázar: Ensayos*, ed. by Fernando Burgos (Madrid: Edi-6, 1987), pp. 177–84; E. Joseph Sharkey, '*Rayuela*'s Confused Hermeneutics,' *Hispanic Review*, 69.4 (2001). For a more general overview of 'reader-response theory,' see: Jane P. Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980).

<sup>290</sup> Cortázar has, more or less, accepted the criticism levied at him for the inherent sexism in the term; his apology in an interview with Evelyn Picon Garfield is often cited: 'I ask you women to forgive me for having used such a "machista" expression so typical of Latin American underdevelopment... I did it innocently and I have no excuses; but when I began to hear opinions of my friends who are women readers, who insulted me cordially, I realized that I had done something stupid. I should have written "passive reader" and not "female reader," because a woman doesn't have to be continually passive; she is in certain circumstances, but not in others, the same as a "macho."' Evelyn Picon Garfield, 'A Conversation with Julio Cortázar,' *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, 3.3 (1983) <<http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/a-conversation-with-julio-cortazar-by-evelyn-picon-garfield/>> [accessed 3 December 2016].

<sup>291</sup> Sharkey, p. 424. While it would only be following Bolaño's lead in his interviews and essays to conclude, like Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat for example, that *Hopscotch* was 'a novel Bolaño unconditionally admired,' it is more convincing, given *2666*'s critique of misogyny, to look for the ways in which the novel simultaneously incorporates Cortázar's influence while complicating its assumptions. Zavala begins this work, arguing in his study that Liz Norton embodies 'negates...the supposed superiority of the active reader, which is revealed in the actions of Pelletier and Espinoza as the most conventional of all, and even more, as insincerely avant-garde' ['Norton cancela...la supuesta superioridad del lector cómplice, el cual se revela en las acciones de

For Morelli, and by extension Cortázar, the distinction is vital for a theory of a novel that can go beyond the subjective limits of the author and represent something like the *'imago mundi'* or 'mandala' over which Morelli and *Hopscotch's* protagonist, Horacio Oliveira, obsess.<sup>292</sup> It is worth unpicking exactly how Cortázar figures the relationship between active reading and the envisioning of a world picture:

An exceedingly pedantic note by Morelli: 'To attempt the *roman comique* in the sense in which a text manages to hint at other values and thus collaborates in that anthropophany that we still consider possible. It would seem that the usual novel misses its mark because it limits the reader to its own ambit; the better defined it is, the better the novelist is thought to be. An unavoidable detention in the varying degrees of the dramatic, the psychological, the tragic, the satirical, or the political. To attempt on the other hand a text that would not clutch the reader but which would oblige him to become an accomplice as it whispers to him underneath the conventional exposition other more esoteric directions. Demotic writing for the female-reader (who otherwise will not get beyond the first few pages, rudely lost and scandalized, cursing at what he paid for the book), with a vague reverse side of hieratic writing.'<sup>293</sup>

For Morelli, traditional novels, like the *roman comiques* with which he specifically associates *Ulysses*, are ultimately invested in the possibility of holistic, objective representations of reality—anthropology [antropología] with the clarity and momentousness of an epiphany [epifanía], as he indicates in his portmanteau 'anthropophany' [antropofanía].<sup>294</sup> Yet just as Morelli's 'anthropophany' recalls anthropophagy [antropofagía], or cannibalism, such traditional novels limit themselves to themselves—that is, they are built primarily on the authority of the author, and as such rely on the idea of narrative as 'a pretext for the transmission of a "message."'<sup>295</sup> For Morelli, 'there is no message, only messengers, and that is the message,'<sup>296</sup> which means that the 'anthropophany' which traditional novelists 'still consider possible' is ultimately self-indulgent illusion; as he proclaims, in 'Another apparently complementary note':

'In general every novelist hopes his reader will understand him, by participating in his own experience, or that he will pick up a determined message and incorporate it. The romantic novelist wants to be understood for his own sake or

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Pelletier y Espinoza como el más convencional de todos, y más aún, como un falso lector vanguardista']. While I do not disagree with Zavala's reading of Norton, I think that, when considered alongside *Hopscotch's* 'idea of the world,' 2666's relationship with it becomes more complicated than straightforward refutation. Ricardo Gutiérrez-Mouat, *Understanding Roberto Bolaño* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2016), p. 185; Zavala, p. 162.

<sup>292</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, pp. 469, 402, 427.

<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 396.

<sup>294</sup> Julio Cortázar, *Rayuela* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1963), p. 314.

<sup>295</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, p. 397.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid, p. 397.



that of his heroes; the classical novelist wants to teach, leave his trace on the path of history.<sup>297</sup>

For Morelli, this is facile, gratifying only to the passive ‘female-reader’:

‘As for the female-reader, he will remain with the façade and we already know that there are very pretty ones among them, very much *trompe l’oeil*, and that in front of them one can keep putting on in a satisfactory way the comedies and the tragedies of the *bonnête homme*. With which everything turns out happily, and as for those who protest, they can go soak their heads.’<sup>298</sup>

For Morelli, then, the traditional novel is merely ‘content in a closed order’ and, serious authors should oppose this, and search instead ‘for an opening,’ which he finds in the appeal to ‘active readers.’<sup>299</sup> Indeed, in a different note Morelli confesses that the only character that interests him is ‘the reader, to the degree in which something of what I write ought to contribute to his mutation, displacement, alienation, transportation.’<sup>300</sup> This, of course, necessitates that traditional narration be jettisoned, ‘[cutting] the roots of all systematic construction of characters and situations,’<sup>301</sup> and Morelli’s description of a demotic text with a ‘vague reverse side of hieratic writing’ is a provocative image of what such a text might look like. But to what end all this literary radicalism? What mark exactly does Morelli see the traditional novel’s ‘anthropophany’ missing, such that the demotic counter-written by the hieratic is the antidote? Towards the end of the ‘exceedingly pedantic note,’ Morelli is explicit about why traditional novels written for ‘female-readers’ miss their anthropophanical mark:

“The strange self-creation of the author through his work. For out of that magma that is a day, the submersion in existence, we wish to raise the power of values that announce anthropophany as their end, what can be done then with pure understanding, with haughty reasoning? From the time of the Eleatics until today dialectical thought has had more than enough time to give us its fruits. We are eating them, they are delicious, they are seething with radioactivity. And when the feast is over, why are we so sad, brothers of nineteen hundred and fifty something?”<sup>302</sup>

Ultimately, ‘the author’ alone will always be locked in a pattern that re-states the history of reasoning, providing a blithe illusion of anthropophany—self-defeating cannibalism derived from the refusal to open up to other subjectivities. The cultivation of active readers is nothing less, then, than an attempt to move beyond the limits of subjectivity and explore reality in

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<sup>297</sup> Ibid, p. 397.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, p. 398.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid, p. 396.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 437.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 396.

<sup>302</sup> Ibid, p. 397.

the absolute objectivity inconceivable on an individual basis; as Morelli explains in a different note:

I still thirst for the absolute as much as when I was twenty years old, but the delicate twitching, the avid and biting delight of the creative act or of the simple contemplation of beauty, no longer seem to me to be a prize, an access to absolute and satisfactory reality. There is only one beauty which can still give me that access: the one that is an end and not a means, and which is so because its creator has identified in himself his sense of the human condition with his sense of the artist's condition. On the other hand, the merely aesthetic plane seems just that to me: merely. That is the best way I can explain it.<sup>303</sup>

To move beyond the merely aesthetic plane, then, it is necessary to '[make] an accomplice of the reader':

'Simultaneize [the reader], provided that the reading will abolish reader's time and substitute author's time. Thus the reader would be able to become a coparticipant and cosufferer of the experience through which the novelist is passing, *at the same moment and in the same form*.'<sup>304</sup>

It is in the co-participation and co-sufferance of author and reader, available only to an author willing to write a text 'that is out of line, untied, incongruous, minutely antinovelistic (although not antinovelish)'<sup>305</sup> and an active reader, that the possibility of envisioning the absolute emerges. The connection between a Morellian author and an active reader is the space in which a novel would do more than create illusion. Indeed, Morelli asserts that such a novel would:

'not deceive the reader, not mount him astride any emotion or intention at all, but give him rather something like meaningful clay, *the beginning of a prototype, with traces of something that may be collective perhaps, human and not individual*. Better yet, give [the reader] something like a façade, with doors and windows behind which there operates a mystery which the reader-accomplice will have to look for (therefore the complicity) and perhaps will not find (therefore the cosuffering). What the author of this novel might have succeeded in for himself, will be repeated (becoming gigantic, perhaps, and that would be marvelous) in the reader-accomplice.'<sup>306</sup>

Between the Morellian author and the active reader emerge the conditions for 'becoming gigantic,' articulating the absolute totality of humanity. Little wonder, then, that Wong describes the first book he reads by Morelli as seeming like 'the Great Tortoise turned on its back.'<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> Ibid, p. 475.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid, p. 397; emphasis in original.

<sup>305</sup> Ibid, p. 396.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 398; emphasis added.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid, p. 440.

Morelli's/Cortázar's theory of the active reader is, as such, constructed out of both the desire to envision the world in its objective, absolute totality, and the belief that such a goal is achievable through collaboration. Just as Morelli thirsts to dispense with the mere aesthetic and perceive the absolute with the help of his reader-accomplices, Harry Sibelius' *The True Son of Job* consists of hundreds of disconnected stories 'that intersect willy-nilly' narrated without 'any principle' but 'produced by the sovereign power of chance unleashed, operating outside time and space, at the dawn of a new age, as it were, in which spatio-temporal perception is undergoing transformation and even becoming obsolete,' and so calls out for active readers to collaborate in its construction of a Nazi absolutism whose semblance of totality could conquer the world.<sup>308</sup> Indeed, for Cortázar as for Bolaño, it is only the active reader who can use a semblance to develop an idea of the world as 'everything in everything.'

Morelli's final image for what such a novel could look like is essential for understanding how Bolaño uses Cortázar's 'active reader' theory to develop *2666*'s critique of encyclopaedic thought. In Morelli's own writing, Cortázar's narrator explains, the reader is presented with 'narrative incoherencies,' with Morelli maintaining in his notes that 'the life of others, such as it comes to us in so-called reality, is not a movie but still photography.'<sup>309</sup> Moreover, Morelli insists:

there was nothing strange about his speaking of characters in the most spasmodic way possible; giving coherence to the series of pictures so they could become a movie (which would have been so very pleasing to the reader he called the female-reader) meant filling in with literature, presumptions, hypotheses, and inventions the gaps between one and another photograph. [...] Morelli thought that the existence of those pictures, which tried to present all that with the most acuity possible, must have placed the reader in conditions ripe for taking a chance, for participating, almost, in the destiny of the characters.<sup>310</sup>

For Morelli, the suggestion is that the active reader could reassemble anything into an image of totality—just like the monsters for whom Bolaño provides the epilogue of *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, or like Amalfitano as he perceives Pinochet's totalising imagination in *O'Higgins in Araucanian*. Morelli goes on to provide an idealised image for what the relationship between the Morellian author and the active reader would look like: such a book, he reflects, would have to be 'something like those sketches proposed by Gestalt psychologists, and therefore certain lines would induce the observer to trace imaginatively the ones that would complete the figure.'<sup>311</sup> Just like looking at a Gestalt drawing, Morelli's

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<sup>308</sup> Bolaño, *Nazi Literature in the Americas*, p. 133.

<sup>309</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, p. 468.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid, p. 468.

<sup>311</sup> Ibid, p. 469.

active readers will join the discrete dots of his text into a world picture—in exactly the same way in which a reader of an encyclopaedia could use its discrete entries to reassemble its image of the world.

Of course, although it was easy to get the impression ‘that Morelli had hoped that the accumulation of fragments would quickly crystallize into a total reality,’<sup>312</sup> it is unsurprising to find that he is resistant to the idea of a typical Gestalt image, of the type that coheres into something recognisable. For Morelli:

coherence meant basically assimilation into space and time, an ordering to the taste of the female-reader. Morelli would not have agreed to that; rather, it seems, he would have sought a crystallization which, without altering the disorder in which the bodies of his little planetary system circulated, would permit a ubiquitous and total comprehension of all of its reasons for being, whether they were disorder itself, inanity, or gratuity.<sup>313</sup>

As such, in Morelli’s idealised vision, the Gestalt image would manifest itself as:

A crystallization in which nothing would remain subsumed, but here a lucid eye might peep into the kaleidoscope and understand the great polychromatic rose, understand it as a figure, an *imago mundi* that outside the kaleidoscope would be dissolved into a provincial living room, or a concert of aunts having tea and Bagley biscuits.<sup>314</sup>

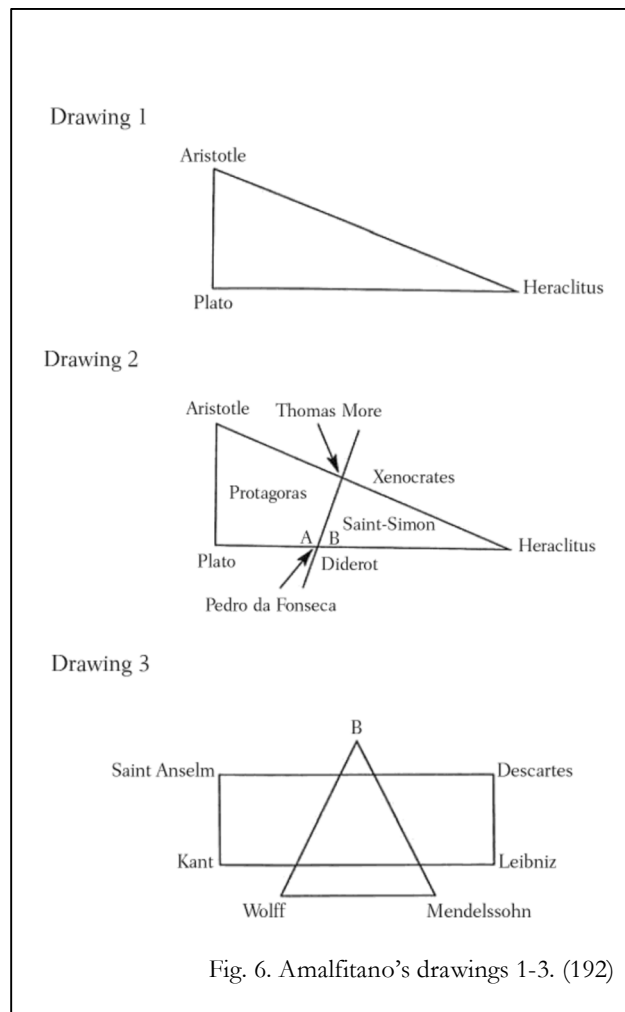
For Morelli, the active reader ought to be able to envision the absolute idea of the world from a Gestalt image at least as complex as the inside of a kaleidoscope.

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, p. 469.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, p. 469.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 469.



This image necessitates two major conclusions when read in relation to 2666.<sup>315</sup> Firstly, that Amalfitano's ability to read *O'Higgins is an Araucanian* actively, and deduce the fascist *imago mundi* on which it is premised, indicates that a key element of creating a totalised idea of the world is the construction of blind-spots—known-unknowns to which such an idea of the world can refuse to acknowledge. If *O'Higgins is Araucanian* truly is commensurable with the Pinochet regime, as Amalfitano suspects, then it is only so by virtue of its concealing and obscuring that same regime—that is, by insisting on blindness to those features Amalfitano detects in Kilapán's 'cadences':

the butchery of Patricio Lynch, the endless shipwrecks of the *Esmeralda*, the Atacama desert and cattle grazing, the Guggenheim Fellowships, the Socialist politicians praising the economic policy of the junta, the corners where pumpkin fritters were sold, the *mote con huesillos*, the ghost of the Berlin Wall rippling on motionless red flags, the domestic abuse, the good-hearted whores, the cheap housing, what in Chile they called grudge holding and Amalfitano called madness. (225)

Secondly, and relatedly, Morelli's image suggests that, although the encyclopaedia is in its nature Gestalt, requiring an active reader to join its dots together, its insistence on coherence makes it suitable only for Morelli's passive and facile 'female-reader.' Such coherence depends, as Amalfitano's revelation reading Kilapán indicates, on a blindness directed by the power doing the cohering. In this, the significance of active reading, for Bolaño, comes to be in its ability to reveal those blindnesses on which ideas of the world depend.

Amalfitano's drawings earlier in his section anticipate this revelation, and speak suggestively to it as a critique of the encyclopaedic imagination. After Amalfitano hangs

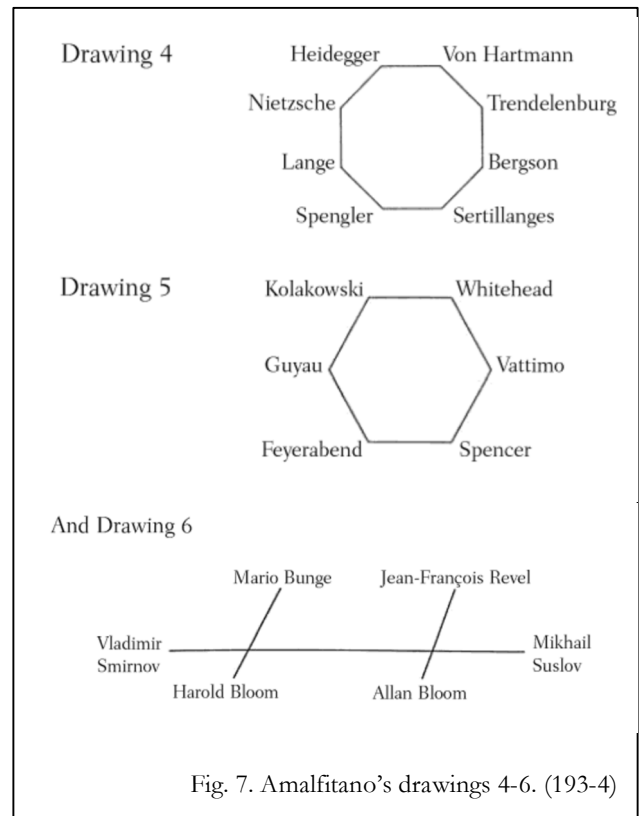
<sup>315</sup> Although, of course, Cortázar's invocation of Gestalt drawings also speaks suggestively to Juan García Madero's drawings at the end of *The Savage Detectives*.

Rafael Dieste's *Testamento geométrico* on the clothesline in his garden, he develops the unconscious habit of drawing simple geometric shapes and writing the names of various thinkers at each vertex (Figs. 6, 7). Among the numerous ways of reading these images, I would add, in light of the text's engagement with *Hopscotch*, that they can be interpreted as filled-in Gestalt drawings. In the same way that one mentally joins the discrete elements of a Gestalt drawing to piece together its totality, Amalfitano's unconscious tries to piece together the vertices of each shape according to the intellectual

tradition he knows, as if to try to make that very tradition cohere. Yet the drawings are, as Amalfitano notes, 'something like a joke': 'There had to be something funny about it, but whatever it might be he couldn't put his finger on it, no matter how hard he tried' (194).

While Bolaño certainly gets a metafictional laugh out of the conspicuous 'B' in drawings 2 and 3, which Amalfitano reckons 'could be God or the existence of God as derived from his essence' (193), it is also important to note that the drawings' selection of thinkers is ostentatiously androcentric, including not a single woman. Conspicuously, Amalfitano draws 4-6 while talking to Silvia Pérez about the way the police 'were carrying out the investigation' of the crimes against women and girls in the city, as if Amalfitano's unconscious is trying to make the world cohere to an androcentric, phallogocentric tradition, without acknowledging his intellectual blindness to women. Little surprise, then, that Amalfitano's final drawing (Fig. 8) is simply a wall of men's names, obscuring any kind of guiding shape or pattern, making one blind to its ignorance by swamping the entire field of representation. It is as if Amalfitano's unconscious has absorbed one of the drafts Cortázar gives for the ending of Morelli's novel:

The page contains a single sentence: 'Underneath it all he knew that one cannot go beyond because there isn't any.' The sentence is repeated over and over for the whole length of the page, giving the impression of a wall, of an impediment. There are no periods or commas or margins. A wall, in fact, of words that illustrate the meaning of the sentence, the collision with a wall behind which there



is nothing. But towards the bottom and on the right, in one of the sentences the word *any* is missing. A sensitive eye can discover the hole among the bricks, the light that shows through.<sup>316</sup>

Morelli and Cortázar allow for *Hopscotch* to require an eye sensitive to merely anomaly; for Bolaño, however, this is no longer enough. In Amalfitano's list of names, the missing element required to join the dots is that which has been rendered invisible, whose presence has been, like the face Amalfitano has just drawn and erased, 'obliterated' (207). In this, Bolaño presents simultaneously his critique of encyclopaedic thought and his challenge to his 'active readers': to develop an idea of the world, a blissful and radical vision of everything in everything, with an eye sensitive to that to which it is blind.

It is in this light that Barry Seaman's aforementioned ownership of *The Abridged French Encyclopedia*, which sticks in the mind of Oscar Fate, though 'he'd never heard of, in college or ever' (244), ought to be read. Taking up the challenge to see through one's blindness, Seaman's encyclopaedia, as laughable as it seems in and of itself, becomes a fundamentally liberating idea: a total encyclopédie, complete with missing parts (and a conspicuous

Pico della Mirandola	Hobbes	Boecio
Husserl	Locke	Alexander of Hales
Eugen Fink	Erich Becher	Marx
Merleau-Ponty	Wittgenstein	Lichtenberg
Bede	Lull	Sade
St. Bonaventure	Hegel	Condorcet
John Philoponus	Pascal	Fourier
Saint Augustine	Canetti	Lacan
Schopenhauer	Freud	Lessing

Fig. 8. Amalfitano's list of names (207)

counterpoint to the totalising refutations of Luis Fontaine da Souza). As Seaman explains in his sermon, 'You have to know how to look even if you don't know what you're looking for' (251).

### 4.3 Florita Almada beyond the Labyrinth of Solitude

The importance that Bolaño's critique of encyclopaedic thought attributes to that which goes unseen returns us to his theory of semblance: for if a gestalt, or abridged, encyclopaedism is necessarily a semblance of totality that can be used to piece together an idea of the world, then it follows that its gaps, or blind spots, or unknowns (both known- and unknown-), which constitute the bulk of its vision, take on tremendous significance. The gaps between the dots are the negative space that give shape to ideas of the world, which

<sup>316</sup> Ibid, p. 370; emphasis in original.

makes looking for them—even though it is difficult to know what they are—so important for Barry Seaman. Indeed, the reason that the Americas' Nazi literature requires readers ingenious and monstrous is because the spaces between the dots it provides are so vast. Yet while *Nazi Literature in the Americas* has its fun with those 'monstruos' and their non-existent corpus, 2666's theory of semblance, as espoused by Ansky and interpreted by Reiter, makes the importance of those gaps between its own idea of the world's various dots its most salient element.

Reiter's reflections, immediately after the war, on Nazism as semblance provide a critique of that ingenious and monstrous Nazi imagination, which clarify the salience of the gaps or blind-spots or unknowns in reality:

He began to think about semblance, as Ansky had discussed it in his notebook, and he began to think about himself. He felt free, as he never had in his life, and although malnourished and weak, he also felt the strength to prolong as far as possible this impulse toward freedom, toward sovereignty. And yet the possibility that it was all nothing but semblance troubled him. Semblance was an occupying force of reality, he said to himself, even the most extreme, borderline reality. It lived in people's souls and their actions, in willpower and in pain, in the way memories and priorities were ordered. Semblance proliferated in the salons of the industrialists and in the underworld. It set the rules, it rebelled against its own rules (in uprisings that could be bloody, but didn't therefore cease to be semblance), it set new rules.

National Socialism was the ultimate realm of semblance. (741)

For Reiter, Ansky's theory of semblance enables him to formulate the broad ideological operations of Nazism as the totalising of reality. In this, that which is unknown or unrecognisable or invisible to Nazism is either homogenised in line with its core ideas, like the '[rebellions] against its own rules' incorporated as support, or rendered non-existent, placed genocidally at the bottom of its order of 'memories and priorities.' As Reiter realises, it is as if for Nazism the incommensurable and the unknown are at best aberrations in reality and at worst ontological impossibilities. The Nazi semblance of totality shapes everything into its self-referring 'realm' by colonising and homogenising agency and reality, 'willpower and pain,' and as such makes blindness central to its operation: it indoctrinates its subjects with an idea of the world premised on a semblance that is unable to see anything that is not already comprehensible to its parameters, whether it is ideologically incompatible or simply unknown—as if the coherence of Nazism's world picture, afforded by blithe certainty in its values, were more than merely an epistemology premised on willed ignorance, a semblance that exists as an ends in itself rather than a means to reality.

The only thing, for Reiter, that is outside of Nazism's semblance is Ansky: 'Only Ansky's wandering isn't semblance, he thought, only Ansky at fourteen isn't semblance' (741). This



is significant because Ansky is, as a Communist and a Jew, exactly the category of human whose reality Nazism's semblance of totality negates: the notebooks of Ansky, in their author's identity as much as in the theories they espouse, teach Reiter that reality can only be perceived by way of that to which the dominant power insists its subjects must be blind. By approaching Nazi reality through Ansky, one of Nazi reality's enforced blind spots, Reiter is able to identify Nazism's operation as semblance, and disentangle himself from it:

He also remembered that in those days he had ceaselessly read and reread Ansky's notebook, memorizing each word, and feeling something very strange that sometimes seemed like happiness and other times like a guilt as vast as the sky. And he accepted the guilt and happiness and some nights he even weighed them against each other and the net result of his unorthodox reckoning was happiness, but a different kind of happiness, a heartrending happiness that for Reiter wasn't happiness but simply Reiter. (742)

By seeing reality both *through* the blindness Ansky represents and *with* the blindness he theorises as semblance, Reiter is able to return not to that which *seems* like Reiter but that which simply *is* Reiter. The implications of this for 2666 are major: for, if the suggestion implicit in Ansky's theory of semblance is that 2666's idea of the world ought to be built dialectically on Arcimboldo's optimism in the *Four Seasons* and his pessimism in *The Roast*—that is, that it should create a semblance of totality that returns us to a world that really *is* while simultaneously acknowledging both the predetermined limits of our eyes and their susceptibility to ethical blind spots—then the exact *way* in which our eyes' credulity is handled becomes key. For Bolaño as for Reiter, the only method for picturing the world with a bolder ethics, beyond the limits of 'one's eyes' and the 'grime of the familiar,' is to try to see *by way of* our blindness—both *through* and *with* it—in order to identify that which we cannot see and to read it as such (686). Indeed, as El Cerdo describes Reiter/Archimboldi to Norton as having:

‘the eyes of a blind man. I don't mean he couldn't see, but his eyes were just like the eyes of the blind, though I could be wrong about that.’ (127)

For 2666, by transforming our blindness into sight we can reconceive our idea of the world in relation to that which we are, for whatever reason, currently unable to see.

Developing an idea of the world both *through* and *with* our blindness is the central challenge of 'The Part about the Crimes,' which is given its structure by Santa Teresa's unfolding femicide—an open secret to which all involved, including most of those responsible for investigating it, seem committed to making themselves blind. Using the herbalist Florita 'La Santa' Almada, who 'had been granted the gift of sight' (427) in her old age, Bolaño explores how the culture's willed blindness to femicide must be seen both *through*

and *with*—and in this ‘blind-seeing,’ he suggests, our idea of the world can be reconceived beyond an epistemology of strategic ignorance that normalises misogyny and sexual violence by making it invisible. Florita is introduced to the novel as having achieved a small but significant following among Santa Teresa’s residents, due to her appearances on *An Hour with Reinaldo*, a Sonoran TV chat show, and her rumoured ability to see the crimes in her mind. Yet even before her dramatic first appearance on the show, Bolaño introduces her in conspicuous terms. Florita, we learn, is ‘experienced in the care of the sightless,’ having been born to a blind mother and married to a livestock dealer who, ‘by the miraculous laws of symmetry,’ also eventually went blind (431). Although Florita is capable of taking up her husband’s work, she finds that ‘a certain sensibility was required’ for buying and selling livestock that she ‘in no way possessed’: ‘a certain propensity to blindness’ (431). Indeed, what makes Florita a seer, she says, is simply being ‘someone who sees’—a talent she demonstrates when she first goes beyond her village ‘to see the world’: ‘Every hundred feet the world changes, said Florita Almada. The idea that some places are the same as others is a lie’ (427, 430). Florita’s ability to see and discern the differences in amidst the complexity of reality enables her to teach herself, since, as she comments, ‘When you know something, you know it, and when you don’t, you’d better learn’ (429). Indeed, in a significant metaphor, which reaches into the section’s 110 scenes of disinterment,<sup>317</sup> Florita likens her ability to learn something from each book that she reads to finding ‘a doll lost and found in a heap of somebody else’s trash’ (431): if *2666* seeks to reimagine the world according to that to which we are made blind, Florita’s metaphor insists that such a vision must incorporate the disposed girls and women of Santa Teresa. As Florita eventually explains to Sergio González, when asked about her ability to ‘see the deaths that had taken place in Santa Teresa,’ in terms that foreshadow those of Entrescu:

Sometimes, like anybody, she saw things, and the things she saw weren’t necessarily visions but things she imagined, like anybody, things that sprang into her head, which was supposedly the price you paid to live in modern society, although she believed that anybody, no matter where they lived at certain moments *saw* or *pictured* things, and all she could picture recently, as it happened, were the killings of women. (571; emphasis in original)

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<sup>317</sup> The traces of many of the fictionalised facts in ‘The Part about the Crimes,’ and the sources for each of the murdered girls and women, can be found in the journalist Sergio González Rodríguez’s as-yet untranslated account of the femicide in Ciudad Juárez, *Huesos en el desierto* [*Bones in the Desert*]. See: Roberto Bolaño, *Between Parentheses: Essays, Articles and Speeches, 1998-2003*, trans. by Natasha Wimmer (London: Picador, 2004), pp. 231–2; Sergio González Rodríguez, *Huesos en el desierto*, 3rd edn (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 2010). For a breakdown of the victims of the crimes in *2666* in relation to their sources in *Huesos en el desierto*, see: Andrews, pp. 205–29.

Florita's dramatic first appearance on the show establishes a series of connections with other moments in the novel which are key for apprehending the productive power that blind-seeing undertakes in *2666*. Reinaldo, a loyal client of and devotee to Florita, finds a spot for her when she reaches out to him with a 'message she'd like to make public' (434). Following Reinaldo's interview with a ventriloquist, Florita begins her segment by speaking about the visions she has been having of 'dead women and dead girls' (435), clearly alluding to Santa Teresa's femicide. As Florita tries to explain herself 'as exactly as possible,' she realises that she is going to go into a trance:

She was afraid to speak, because sometimes the first thing to be seized was her tongue. And even though she wanted to, because it would have been a great relief, she was afraid to close her eyes, since it was precisely when they were closed that she saw what the spirit possessing her saw, so Florita kept her eyes open and her mouth shut (though curved in a pleasant and enigmatic smile). (435, 436)

In an unintuitive twist, which clarifies Bolaño's commitment to harnessing rather than simply trying to dispel blindness, Florita's visions beyond subjectivity come when she closes her eyes, not when she opens them. By seeing without the limits imposed by her physical eyes, Florita enables herself to be possessed by a spirit that can show her that which she cannot see—she looks *through* her blindness by looking *with* her blindness. As such, Florita reaches:

the moment of revelation, unsolicited and afterward uncomprehended, the kind of revelation that flashes past and leaves us with only the certainty of a void, a void that very quickly escapes even the word that contains it. [...] Poor things, she thought, they must be feeling so sorry for me. And then she couldn't help it and she went into a trance. *She closed her eyes.* She opened her mouth. Her tongue began to work. She repeated what she had already said: a big desert, a big city, in the north of the state, girls killed, women killed. What city is it? [...] It's Santa Teresa! It's Santa Teresa! I see it clearly now. (436; emphasis added)

In this, Florita's trance manifests something like an allegory for reading: with a text in front of the eyes, readers shut themselves off from the physical world only to open themselves to possession by spirits from beyond their village and the grime of the familiar, just like Florita.

Yet, though this allegory is evident and noteworthy, Florita's blind-seeing does more than model the novel's ideal reader. Indeed such blind-seeing yields, for both Florita and the reader, 'revelation'—a term that carries particular weight in a novel whose inscrutable title showcases the infamous 'number of the beast' from the Book of Revelation.<sup>318</sup> In this reference to 'revelation,' Florita's trance is connected directly to the discussion Oscar Fate overhears between criminologist Albert Kessler and his Mexican chaperone at a restaurant

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<sup>318</sup> For a helpful discussion of the use of the number 666, see: Boe Birns, pp. 67–8.

on the highway from Tucson to Santa Teresa. Indeed, just as Florita achieves her visions by gazing through closed eyes, Kessler is praised by his chaperone for his 'power to hold a gaze':

Then he removed his hands from his face and with shining eyes he said: I don't mean a natural gaze, a gaze from the natural realm, I mean a gaze in the abstract. (265)

Kessler's assent to this compliment, and the idea of a 'gaze in the abstract,' is appended by a discourse on how such a gaze must see beyond words:

In the nineteenth century...society tended to filter death through the fabric of words. Reading news stories from back then you might get the idea that there was hardly any crime, or that a single murder could throw a whole country into tumult. We didn't want death in the home, or in our dreams and fantasies, and yet it was a fact that terrible crimes were committed, mutilations, all kinds of rape, even serial killings. [...] Everything was passed through the filter of words, everything trimmed to fit our fear. What does a child do when he's afraid? He closes his eyes. What does a child do when he's about to be raped and murdered? He closes his eyes. And he screams, too, but first he closes his eyes. Words served that purpose. (266)

For Kessler, this is an effect of modernity's relationship with human nature, which has produced 'archetypes of crime' (266) in line with the hierarchies of the dominant classes of society. In this, Kessler notes that 'crime' is implicitly defined as an affliction solely of those within 'polite society,' whereas similar wrongs inflicted on those in 'the outer fringes of society' would simply not count:

In the seventeenth century, for example, at least twenty percent of the merchandise on every slave ship died. By that I mean the dark-skinned people who were being transported for sale, to Virginia, say. And that didn't get anyone upset or make headlines in the Virginia papers or make anyone go out and call for the ship captain to be hanged. But if a plantation owner went crazy and killed his neighbor and then went galloping back home, dismounted, and promptly killed his wife, two deaths in total, Virginia society spent the next six months in fear, and the legend of the murderer on horseback might linger for generations. Or look at the French. During the Paris Commune of 1871, thousands of people were killed and no one batted an eye. Around the same time a knife sharpener killed his wife and his elderly mother and then he was shot and killed by the police. The story didn't just make all the French newspapers, it was written up in papers across Europe, and even got a mention in the New York *Examiner*. How come? The ones killed in the Commune weren't part of society, the dark-skinned people who died on the ship weren't part of society, whereas the woman killed in a French provincial capital and the murderer on horseback in Virginia were. (266-7)

To count means to be recognisable and observable within society; unlike the thousands killed during the commune or the millions in the transatlantic slave trade, culture 'batted an eye' at the provincial French woman and the Virginian murderer on horseback. To not count, then,

means that culture's un-batted eye will see right through you, un-seeing any shared humanity and vulnerability. For Kessler, this reveals something vital about how 'polite society' polices its boundaries with its 'outer fringes':

What happened to [the provincial French woman and the Virginian murderer on horseback] could be written, you might say, it was legible. That said, words back then were mostly used in *the art of avoidance, not of revelation*. (267; emphasis added)

If the 'polite society' of those who count is able to determine whose lives are legible, then it follows that the language it uses to narrate those legible lives ultimately reinforces that legibility at the expense of those who are not 'part of society.' That is to say, the legibility of 'polite society' becomes a realm of semblance: the ends of society's imagination, or how it wants reality to *seem*, rather than its means to imagining the world as it really *is*—of avoiding the world rather than revealing it.

For Kessler, who in 'The Part about Fate' is speaking about five years after his state-sponsored trip in 'the Crimes,' this is precisely what is happening in Santa Teresa: 'everyone living in that city is outside of society, and everyone, I mean everyone, is like the ancient Christians in the Roman circus' (267). Santa Teresa and its femicide are, according to Kessler's abstract gaze, a willed blind spot of international capitalism—and that enforced invisibility is manifestly obvious throughout the 'Crimes.' The narrative constructed around Klaus Haas, Santa Teresa's alleged serial killer,<sup>319</sup> provides a succinct example of how this willed blindness works at the same discursive level highlighted by Kessler. Following the arrest of Los Bisontes, a gang accused of being in league with Haas, a short passage describing the response in mass public discourse is given:

The best Christmas present, read the headline of the story in *La Voz de Sonora* describing the capture of the five pachucos. True, there were deaths. A longtime thief whose stage of operations was the city center was stabbed to death, two men with ties to the drug trade died, a dog breeder died, but no one found any women who had been raped and tortured and then killed. [...] There were the usual deaths, yes, those to be expected, people who started off celebrating and ended up killing each other, uncinematic deaths, deaths from the realm of folklore, not modernity: deaths that didn't scare anybody. The serial killer was officially behind bars. His imitators or followers or hirelings were, too. The city could breathe easy. (540)

Bolaño's free indirect discourse makes ironic the pretensions of *La Voz de Sonora* ['*Sonora's Voice*'] to give voice to 'the city.' Just like the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century organs Kessler cites, *La Voz de Sonora* imagines its readership and the community of Santa Teresa as coterminous, with those outside of the society it has pre-determined not just left out but

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<sup>319</sup> Haas is a loose fictionalisation of Ciudad Juárez's Abdul Latif Sharif Sharif; see: Rodríguez.

consigned to the ‘realm of folklore,’ as if their existence takes place in a timeless space with no bearing on Sonoran ‘modernity.’ Just as Kessler suggests, language becomes for Santa Teresa’s ‘polite society’ a tool for avoidance rather than revelation of reality—with the discovery, in the following weeks, of multiple bodies in advanced stages of decomposition soon after both quashing any suggestion that ‘The city could breathe easy’ (545-9). *La Voz de Sonora* seems, when read alongside Kessler’s theory of language, to be enforcing blindness to the crimes, darkly foreshadowing Leo Sammer’s instruction to the men he tasks with digging a mass grave for Greek Jews: ‘Remember the idea isn’t to find things, it’s to *not* find them’ (764; emphasis in original). And of course, as Yolanda Palacio, at Santa Teresa’s Department of Sex Crimes, explains to Sergio González, such discursive blindness has consequences:

Do you know how many women are the victims of sex crimes in this city? More than two thousand a year. And almost half of them are underage. And probably at least that many don’t report being attacked, which means we’re talking about four thousand rapes a year. In other words, every day more than ten women are raped here, she said, gesturing as if the women were being assaulted in the corridor. [...] Sergio didn’t know what to say. Do you know how many people work here in the Department of Sex Crimes? Just me. (563)

For the Department of Sex Crimes, working with the unreported, or invisible, is essential. Yet in the realm of polite society’s discursive blindness, it is preferable to let provision for such work remain equally invisible.

If Kessler’s theory of language used by ‘polite society’ as ‘the art of avoidance, not of revelation’ [‘más en el arte de esconder que en el arte de develar’] provides the framework for understanding blindness to the crimes, Florita’s talk-show revelation [‘revelación’] traces a route to perceiving those outside of society and their human vulnerability.<sup>320</sup> As such, Florita’s revelation is one that eludes language as such, leaving ‘only the certainty of a void, a void that very quickly escapes even the word that contains it’ (436)—as if the only possible articulable language that a revelation that connects ‘polite society’ with its ‘outer fringes’ could take would be one that gazed into the void or abyss of death, the only destiny shared by the entirety of humanity.<sup>321</sup> Significantly, in this Joyce-like vision of the world ‘upon the

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<sup>320</sup> While the connection between these two passages is more conspicuous in Wimmer’s decision to translate both ‘develar’ and ‘revelación’ as ‘revelation,’ the original Spanish words share as their etymological root the verb ‘velar,’ linking each moment through connotations of unveiling. Bolaño, 2666, pp. 339, 546.

<sup>321</sup> As Farred has convincingly argued, 2666 tasks itself with revealing ‘the necropolitics of desubjection,’ which he defines as ‘the politics of life as, in and (only) death.’ While Farred’s focus on Bolaño’s necropolitics is an essential component in understanding 2666’s ethical spine, my argument here engages with death’s universal inevitability, rather than its politico-economic use to create what Melissa Wright memorably describes as ‘disposable women.’ Farred, p. 698; Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006).

incertitude of the void,<sup>322</sup> Florita is specifically recalling her vision of Benito Juárez, whose wanderings as a shepherd boy inspired her own wanderings throughout Sonora as a herbal healer. Florita, by way of a poem she half-remembers, figures Benito Juárez's thoughts as an imagined dialogue with the moon:

What does this enormous solitude portend? And what am I? And also: This is what I know and feel: that from the eternal motions, from my fragile being, others may derive some good or happiness. And also: But life for me is wrong. And also: Old, white haired, weak, barefoot, bearing an enormous burden, up mountain and down valley, over sharp rocks, across deep sands and bracken, through wind and storm, when it's hot and later when it freezes, running on, running faster, crossing rivers, swamps, falling and rising and hurrying faster, no rest or relief, battered and bloody, at last coming to where the way and all effort has led: terrible, immense abyss into which, upon falling, all is forgotten. And also: This, O virgin moon, is human life. (432)

Just as Florita imagines a solitary Benito Juárez figuring death as an abyss ['abismo'], the 'unsolicited' void ['vacío'] that is fleetingly revealed to her as she envisions Santa Teresa's 'dead women and dead girls' incorporates a fleeting vision of the mass death beyond the reach of everyday language; indeed, it is as if Florita's blind-seeing enables her to achieve Amalfitano's 'make-believe ideas' about jet lag, through which one can '[turn] the pain of others into memories of one's own,' transforming our enormous, portentous solitude into communion (435-6, 188-9).<sup>323</sup>

Florita's blind-seeing takes her beyond the limits of subjectivity and the language of 'polite society,' and towards a vision of reality as defined in relation to humanity's shared destiny, against which her, and our, idea of the world can be reconceived. In this focus on 'the absolute' beyond the visible, Florita begins to seem a little like a latter-day version of Cortázar's Morelli. Yet, if Morelli is content with a gestalt image of the inside of a kaleidoscope, free from 'female' coherence, Florita is aware that coherence is a political strategy, and that the absence of coherence from the narrative of Santa Teresa's femicide in itself speaks volumes about the extent of the misogyny by which it is underpinned. Florita offers instead, on her second appearance on *An Hour with Reinaldo*, a way of seeing the crimes through and with our blindness to them, in an image in implicit contradistinction to Morelli's gestalt kaleidoscope:

I'm talking about visions that would take away the breath of the bravest of brave men. In dreams I see the crimes and it's as if a television set had exploded and I keep seeing, in the little shards of screen scattered around my bedroom, horrible scenes, endless tears. (459)

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<sup>322</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 17.1014–5.

<sup>323</sup> Bolaño, *2666*, pp. 541, 546.

The challenge Florita poses, then, is for ‘lucid eye[s]’<sup>324</sup> to make the political choice to see *through* and *with* their blindness—to reconceive the world in relation to the ‘endless tears’ of those outside of society by joining the dots provided by those ‘little shards of screen.’ Indeed, Florita asks her audience what it might mean if Sonora’s civic leaders are not working to do exactly this:

Why do they cover their eyes, I ask? Have they been up all night studying how to help the country advance, how to promise workers greater job security or pay raises, how to fight crime? Maybe so. It’s not for me to say otherwise. Maybe that’s why they have circles under their eyes. But what would happen if I went up to one of them and took off his glasses and saw that he *didn’t have* circles under his eyes? It frightens me to imagine. It makes me angry. (458; emphasis in original)

Bolaño provides more than a few examples of those circle-free eyes across *2666*, not least the Negrete twins, who twin the university and the police—but the most pertinent to my argument here is General Humberto Paredes, a ‘former police chief of Mexico City’ who meets Sergio González and his colleague Macario López Santos at his ‘walled castle in Colonia del Valle’ to discuss the snuff industry in Santa Teresa (536). General Paredes’ very name, which translates literally as ‘walls’—as if to suggest that he is both in name and nature sealed off from the unknown, a solitary police chief of the infinite space in his own ‘walled castle’—sets him up as an object lesson in willed blindness. When Macario López asks General Paredes for his thoughts on the snuff films, he insists that their existence is unlikely, and made even less likely by the fact that he ‘never saw one, when [he] saw and was informed of everything’ (536). This, of course, could not be possible, and his insistence that evidence does not exist because he has not seen it is outrageously arrogant. Bolaño makes this critique legible in the way General Paredes uses his eyes when interacting with Macario López and Sergio González—as, for example, when he makes an indulgent joke about his age while ‘eyeing the reporters’ (536) for laughter. For General Paredes, only that which is determined by his desires is visible to him. The ramifications of the General’s propensity to blindness are at their fullest when the journalists push him on the snuff industry, suggesting that perhaps the industry only reached its current horrors after the General retired:

The general begged to differ: according to him, pornography had reached its fullest flowering slightly before the French Revolution. Everything you might see today in a film from the Netherlands or a collection of photographs or a dirty book had already been *set* before the year 1789, and for the most part was a repetition, a filip on an already-gazing gaze. (536; emphasis in original)

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<sup>324</sup> Cortázar, *Hopscotch*, p. 469.



In this, General Paredes' tacit argument is that nothing could exceed either that which occurred before the Enlightenment or that which he has already seen—and as such, he wilfully blinds himself to the unknown, denying its possibility or potentiality in the contemporary and future. Indeed, before the journalists leave, he insists once again to Macario López that he 'saw everything' (537) as if such a thing were possible.

In a wry and backhanded compliment, Macario López tells General Paredes at one point that he talks 'just like Octavio Paz,' and asks him whether he is currently reading him. The General replies that 'the only thing he'd read by Paz, and this was many years ago, was *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, and he hadn't understood a single word' (536). In this curious reference to Paz's famous essay on Mexican identity, Bolaño builds around his walled General yet another series of walls: Paz's metaphorical labyrinth. To simplify Paz's argument crudely, the Mexican's residence in a 'labyrinth of solitude' is an effect of having been 'expelled from the center of the world' by the violence of conquest, which has estranged Mexicans from both their Spanish and Indigenous heritages.<sup>325</sup> In this, Mexicans 'are condemned to search for [the center of the world] through jungles and deserts or in the underground mazes of the labyrinth,' but are each alone in the solitude that accompanies 'a break with one world and an attempt to create another.'<sup>326</sup> Bolaño suggests that the General is blithely alone in a labyrinth, restating his walled solitude—solitude that Macario López observes extends to an unusual absence of bodyguards in his 'walled castle.' For Paz, the Mexican's solitude is ultimately neither final nor absolute, and is open to different uses; nevertheless, he concludes his analysis with a stark warning against what he perceives as modernity's hubristic and self-defeating rationalisations for solitude:

Modern man likes to pretend that his thinking is wide-awake. But this wide-awake thinking has led us into the mazes of a nightmare in which the torture chambers are endlessly repeated in the mirrors of reason. When we emerge, perhaps we will realize that we have been dreaming with our eyes open, and that the dreams of reason are intolerable. And then, perhaps, we will begin to dream once more with our eyes closed.<sup>327</sup>

For Paz as for Florita, communion can only be achieved with closed eyes that gaze through solitude and beyond the 'mirrors of reason,' or semblances, that only reify solitude. For General Paredes, conversely, solitude is an opportunity to proclaim oneself exceptional, even in the face of the death that makes equals of us all; indeed, as he insists to Macario López, even though:

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<sup>325</sup> Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, trans. by Lysander Kemp (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 209.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid, p. 209.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid, p. 212.

if you lose you die and if you win sometimes you die too, which makes it hard to keep up a sporting attitude....*some of us* try to fight the good fight. (537; emphasis added)

General Paredes, alone in his walled realm of semblance, demonstrates at once the overlap between Paz's vision of solitary Mexicans and their 'wide-awake thinking' and the strategically blind that Florita imagines with eyes free of circles. Just as for Paz modern Mexicans can move beyond the solitude of semblances of 'reason' by learning to dream with their eyes closed, Florita insists that we move beyond our solitude by learning to look beyond the limits of the visual. Once again, Benito Juárez is pivotal in Florita's thinking here—for if General Paredes uses his solitude to think himself exceptional, Benito Juárez is only able to achieve that glimpse into the abyss of death by working with his solitude, 'facing boredom head-on,' and bearing witness to those 'terrible things' on the other side of boredom (433). And indeed, while General Paredes uses his solitude to cultivate circle-free eyes with which to dismiss contemporary reality as simply 'a filip' on a centuries-old gaze, Benito Juárez's gaze leads him, and Florita, to two conclusions: 'First, not to cheat people, and, second, to treat them properly. Beyond that, there was room for discussion' (536, 433). For Florita, seeing both *through* and *with* our blindness in order to reimagine the world means confronting the death which transforms life's solitude into communion—and for her, to come away from such a confrontation with anything other than an ethics that builds on the fundamental equality of all humanity before death would be as worrying as being a politician without circles around their eyes.

Florita's blind-seeing becomes a means to reconceiving the world in relation to a fundamental ethics beyond the semblances, or labyrinths of solitude, that occupy it. Indeed, in her final words in the novel, which she says while 'fix[ing]' Sergio González 'with her gaze,' Florita clarifies that her visions of femicide are not about who is 'beyond the law': rather her vision, she insists, 'has nothing to do with the law' ['aquí no tiene nada que ver la impunidad'] (572).<sup>328</sup> For Florita, the law is just another totalising semblance occupying reality that, if used exclusively to perceive it, blinds one to that which really *is*.

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<sup>328</sup> Bolaño, 2666, p. 715. Of course, the Spanish idiom for 'nothing to do' translates literally as 'nothing to see,' implying Florita's sight *beyond* the semblance of the law.

#### 4.4 An Oasis of Horror upon the Void

In spite of everything, Florita is ‘at peace with the world,’ even though ‘Everything in this world...no matter how big, was the tiniest spec compared to the universe’ (456). As she explains to her TV audience, dreaming can help you to re-situate yourself in the world:

Well, that was the way it was in dreams. There were dreams in which everything fit together and other dreams in which nothing fit and the world was like a creaky coffin. (457)

Foreshadowing the differences Ansky attributes to Arcimboldo’s *Four Seasons* and *The Roast*, Florita observes that the world can seem just as comprehensible, commensurable, and blissful as it can inexplicable, incommensurable, and terrifying.<sup>329</sup> If 2666 asks whether the optimism of ‘Everything in everything’ as visualised in the *Four Seasons* and the pessimism of *The Roast*’s vision of bloodthirsty horror are anything more than incompatible images of totality—whether they can be used dialectically to generate ideas of the world that allow us to see what really *is* with as much optimism as pessimism—then for Florita, the answer seems to be that it can. Between her images of the world ‘in which everything fit’ and ‘in which nothing fit’ exists for Florita the possibility to see *through* and *with* our blindness in order to act ethically and responsibly—a feeling she associates with a ‘small and shining inner peace’ (457).

Central to this dialectic is peace with incompleteness and inconsistency—as if the only way to move beyond the extremes of optimism and pessimism is by acknowledging the implicit failures in the respective visions of each. For 2666, this is summed up by the line from Charles Baudelaire’s ‘The Voyage’ that Bolaño uses as its epigraph: ‘An oasis of horror in a desert of boredom.’ If the *Four Seasons* is an oasis and *The Roast* is horror, it is only with both that we can see through our millennial boredom—to be able to perceive the desert in which we find ourselves, and the death by which we are surrounded. Only in this way can a new idea of the world, conceived by bolder ethical steps, be generated. Indeed, as Bolaño provocatively suggests in his reading of ‘The Voyage’ in his essay ‘Literature + Illness = Illness’:

An oasis is always an oasis, especially if you come to it from a desert of boredom. In an oasis you can drink, eat, tend to your wounds, and rest, but if it’s an oasis of horror, if that’s the only sort there is, the traveler will be able to confirm, and this time irrefutably, that the flesh is sad, that the day comes when all the books have indeed been read, and that travel is the pursuit of a mirage. All the

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<sup>329</sup> Indeed, Bolaño’s Spanish ‘ataúd lleno de chirridos’ [‘coffin full of squealings’] adds a horrifying depth to Wimmer’s translation. Ibid, p. 572.

indications are that every oasis in existence has either attained or is drifting toward the condition of horror.<sup>330</sup>

The critics Norton, Pelletier, and Espinoza approach the world without this dialectic, allowing their Eurocentric semblance to register that which is real as simply unreal or non-existent—and the example they set is worth unpicking, to get a sense of precisely the extent to which Bolaño's idea of the world aims to reshape epistemology fundamentally. On reaching Santa Teresa, 'an environment whose language they refused to recognize,' the critics' inability to think without Eurocentrism is laid bare:

At the hotel they found a note from Augusto Guerra, the dean of the Faculty of Arts and Letters. The note was addressed to his 'colleagues' Espinoza, Pelletier, and Norton. Dear Colleagues, he had written without a hint of irony. This made them laugh even more, although then they were immediately sad, since the ridiculousness of 'colleague' somehow erected bridges of reinforced concrete between Europe and this drifters' retreat. It's like hearing a child cry, said Norton. (112)

In a vision of Eurocentrism that is, like so much of the critics' behaviour, crude but not unfamiliar, the possibility of Europe's commensurability or even co-existence with as abject and infantile a place as Santa Teresa is both laughable and depressing—a binary that looks a lot like optimism and pessimism filtered through a Eurocentric semblance of the world. That their patronising and arrogant behaviour is premised on their ability to picture the world is made explicit in the invocation of Heidegger when describing their initial response to Amalfitano:

The first impression...was mostly negative, perfectly in keeping with the mediocrity of the place, except that the place, the sprawling city in the desert, could be seen as something authentic, something full of local color, more evidence of the often terrible richness of the human landscape, whereas Amalfitano could only be considered a castaway, a carelessly dressed man, a nonexistent professor at a nonexistent university, the unknown soldier in a doomed battle against barbarism, or, less melodramatically, as what he ultimately was, a melancholy literature professor put out to pasture in his own field, on the back of a capricious and childish beast that would have swallowed Heidegger in a single gulp if Heidegger had had the bad luck to be born on the Mexican-U.S. border. (114)

It is not simply that the critics are Eurocentric, though they are evidently continuing in the tradition of Bartolomé de Las Casas by categorising the Americas as essentially barbaric. Rather, as the image of Amalfitano achieving what Heidegger would allegedly be incapable of—survival where he ought to be eaten for breakfast—Bolaño suggests that the critics'

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<sup>330</sup> Roberto Bolaño, *The Insufferable Gaucho*, trans. by Chris Andrews (New York, NY: New Directions Books, 2010), p. 138.

European theories for envisioning the world as a whole—specifically, Heidegger’s ‘world picture’—take on a new life in the Americas, gaining a new consciousness with their new context that makes them toxic for those applying them blindly.<sup>331</sup> Indeed, it is as if in the Americas European epistemology becomes exponentially more uncertain, and the agents of their blind application become devoured by an analysis of reality with diminishing returns. As such, for Espinoza and Pelletier, content to dwell within their blindness, Amalfitano is ‘a failed man, failed above all because he had lived and taught in Europe’ (114). Conversely, for Norton, whose nascent awareness of the ‘unreal or at least logically ungraspable’ foreshadows her decision to abandon the critics’ futile quest and join Morini, Amalfitano is simply a ‘sad man whose life was ebbing swiftly away’ (113, 114).

Morini is the obvious exception among the critics, more in his last-minute refusal to join the others on their quest for Archimboldi than in his physical disabilities—though, in light of the text’s investment in blind-seeing his ‘mild attack’ (35) of blindness near the beginning of the novel is auspicious. Inspired by the ‘revelation’ of Marcel Schwob—that our heroes live inside us and there is not usually any need to invade their privacy—Morini finds himself, after pulling out of the trip to Santa Teresa, unconsciously embarking on a different kind of voyage:

a voyage that would end not at the grave of a brave man but in a kind of resignation, what might be called a new experience, since this wasn’t resignation in any ordinary sense of the word, or even patience or conformity, but rather a state of meekness, a refined and incomprehensible humility that made him cry for no reason and in which his own image, what Morini saw as Morini, gradually and helplessly dissolved, like a river that stops being a river or a tree that burns on the horizon, not knowing that it’s burning. (106, 107)

Just like in Baudelaire’s voyage, Morini finds himself, albeit unconsciously, on a quest to apprehend or understand modernity—and for Morini, the ‘new experience’ that the voyage reveals to him is that of being humble, meekly resigned to both his solitary subjectivity and eventual communion in death. This moment is fundamental for understanding how 2666 functions as an ‘oasis of horror’: for it is not just that Morini’s ‘revelation’ is bluntly restated to Amalfitano, Kessler, and Archimboldi as the advice that they ‘[get] used to it’ (211, 578, 890), but that the image of the burning tree ‘not knowing’ that it is on fire—but presumably knowing other things—comes to stand for the wilfully blind Eurocentric epistemology, or tree of knowledge, in which Morini is trained and situated. Just as Heidegger and his ‘world picture’ would be devoured by the *frontera*, Morini comes to realise that, like a tree of

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<sup>331</sup> Heidegger, ‘Age of the World Picture,’ in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. by Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 57–85.

knowledge that could not diagnose its own conflagration, Eurocentric eyes could not even reveal the end of the world as it happened. Indeed, in a significant parallel, Bolaño historicises this tendency: during his division's campaign in Ukraine, Reiter observes 'woods that suddenly burst into flames as if by means of a mysterious process of combustion, woods like dark islands in the middle of endless wheat fields' (700). As Anksy or Reiter might put it, Eurocentric epistemology is a realm of semblance; and for *2666*, the challenge is to make that epistemology self-aware, open to its inconsistency and incoherence—as if only through consciousness of failure can any epistemology seek to be more than a facile refuge for 'the fearful' (722).

If, as Fate recalls being told, 'the secret of the world' (348) is hidden in the femicide of Santa Teresa, it is the kind of open secret inarticulable as such by those involved in the secret—not legible, only avoidable. Just like the tree of knowledge unaware that it is on fire, the only way, Bolaño suggests, to articulate that secret, and to reimagine the world in line with its horror, is by thinking without semblance, allowing for multiple and competing ideas of the world to illuminate our blind spots, even if they render the dots that we join to trace our subjective ideas of the world incomplete or incoherent. Only in so doing, Bolaño suggests, can the dialectic through which we could take a bolder ethical stance to the world be enacted, and can the horror be felt as an oasis.

## 5. Conclusion: Towards a Theory of Literary Totality

Bend down the tree of knowledge and you'll unroost a strange bird.

Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)<sup>332</sup>

When reviewing the critical scholarship on fictional encyclopaedism, I proposed that the field's origins in the work of Edward Mendelson had led to a tendency to overemphasise and conflate authorial 'mastery' with ethnonational 'greatness,' while at the same time encouraging an ahistorical conception of encyclopaedic thought and practice.<sup>333</sup> While it is certainly possible to argue that *Ulysses*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *2666* are 'great Irish/Native American/Latin American novels,' it is clear that to do so is to miss the point of their scope. These are not texts that aim simply to encapsulate their 'national culture,' as Mendelson might suggest, or even to negate and overwrite the 'real world' with their authors' own mastery, as might Leo Bersani.<sup>334</sup> Rather, these are texts that make specific critical interventions in the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought—and in doing so insist on the radical potential of fiction to reconceive our sense of the world. Indeed, to develop Ronald T. Swigger's argument, focusing on how encyclopaedism in fiction opens up the way 'a field which speaks for and sums up the possibilities of knowledge open to humans'<sup>335</sup> can be re-purposed through a literary approach to the totalising imagination—an approach that enables one to imagine at a totalising level without seeking to create a totality as such. Indeed, while Joyce casts his Odysseus in a relationship of cruel optimism with the Imperial status quo by way of his desire for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, in doing so he relativises the Imperial status quo's totalising imagination by subjecting it to both Stephen's critique of totality and Molly's gynocentric last word. *Ulysses* becomes a totality that invites readers to move between different totalities—to find in its 'mocking mirrors' the world's obscure soul.<sup>336</sup> Very similarly, Silko sees the totalising imagination of pan-American settler colonialism proscribing and negating those deemed 'different'—and in this, *Almanac of the Dead* sets itself up as a de-totalising space, that can conceive the reality 'variously.'<sup>337</sup> For Bolaño, although the synthesis of a totalising imagination can feel like it is yet to occur, our blindness to the horror on which our lives are built necessitates a form of literary thinking that makes us see

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<sup>332</sup> Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006; repr. 2014), p. 138.

<sup>333</sup> See: '1.2 From Swigger and Mendelson to Saint-Amour and Barrenechea,' pp. 20-2.

<sup>334</sup> Mendelson, 'Encyclopedic Narrative,' p. 1268; Bersani, pp. 1-4.

<sup>335</sup> Swigger, p. 356.

<sup>336</sup> Joyce, *Ulysses*, 2.159.

<sup>337</sup> Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*, p. 574.

through and with our ‘propensity to blindness’—and *2666* itself becomes a totality built from those things to which totalising imaginations cannot see.<sup>338</sup>

Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño all exhibit totalising imaginations—but between *Ulysses*, *Almanac of the Dead*, and *2666*, completion, consistency, coherence, singularity, and certainty do not emerge as the contingent features of their imagined encyclopaedisms. Rather, what their engagement with the history and practice of encyclopaedic thought demonstrates is that they share a sense that thinking through fiction reveals something about encyclopaedism that is otherwise contextually inaccessible: that the way whole epistemologies are built requires imaginative leaps of faith that leave us both blind to reality and vulnerable to being placed in totalised realities that oppress us. For Joyce, Silko and Bolaño, *fictional* encyclopaedism is the manifestation of a peculiarly *literary* approach to the totality: if encyclopaedism aims towards totality, or Mortimer Adler’s complete, consistent, coherent, singular, and certain ‘universe of discourse,’<sup>339</sup> then fictional encyclopaedism creates a different kind of totality, that makes incompleteness, inconsistency, incoherence, multiplicity, and uncertainty an integral part of its argument. As discussed in the introduction to this study,<sup>340</sup> this manifests a sort of ‘totality-without-totality,’ not dissimilar from Jacques Derrida’s ‘messianism-without-messianicity’—but, as fiction is the route, we could perhaps begin to talk of *literary* totality.

In the context of the scholarship of fictional encyclopaedism, Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño tell us least two things. Firstly, they demonstrate the yield of comparative and historicising approaches to encyclopaedism in fiction, vindicating Swigger over Mendelson. Secondly, and more generally, their examples jointly suggest that fictional encyclopaedism is about creating a space within which our sense of the world can be evaluated, without at once normalising that totality. Indeed, if, to recall the study of Lindsay Fullerton and James Ettema, the editing of *Wikipedia* is a process both ‘cognitive *and* normative,’<sup>341</sup> a fictional encyclopaedia makes the space for the type of epistemic evaluation that can reconceive both how we think and how we know what is normal—our senses and our worlds. When Djuna Barnes’ Dr Matthew O’Connor says that by ‘Bend[ing] down the tree of knowledge...you’ll unroost a strange bird,’<sup>342</sup> he encapsulates the spirit of this idea: fictional encyclopaedism contorts the epistemology of the status quo and examines the work it is doing to support the strangeness of the world we live in.

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<sup>338</sup> Bolaño, *2666*, p. 431.

<sup>339</sup> Adler, p. 5.

<sup>340</sup> See: ‘1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms,’ pp. 13–6.

<sup>341</sup> Fullerton and Ettema, p. 198; emphasis in original.

<sup>342</sup> Barnes, p. 138.



## 5.1 The Path to Bowling Green

What makes fictional encyclopaedism important, then, is its capacity to construct a totality without the elements that make totality pyrrhic, or toxic, or mere semblance. A short journey along one of *Wikipedia*'s lately-forked paths provides an instructive example of how and why this remains vital. On 29 January 2017, Kellyanne Conway, U.S. Counselor to the President, cited in interviews with *Cosmopolitan*, *TMZ*, and *Hardball with Chris Matthews* 'the Bowling Green massacre' as justification for the Trump administration's hastily implemented Muslim ban:

I bet it's brand new information to people that President Obama had a 6 month ban on the Iraqi refugee program after two Iraqis came here, to this country, were radicalized, and then were the masterminds behind the Bowling Green massacre. I mean, most people don't know that because it didn't get covered.<sup>343</sup>

Conway's two 'brand new' facts—that there had been a massacre in a place called Bowling Green and an executive order temporarily banning the Iraqi refugee programme in response—were gross distortions of two facts old and uninteresting enough to have been scarcely reported: that in 2011 two Iraqi citizens living in Bowling Green, Kentucky were prosecuted for attempting to send weapons to insurgents in Iraq, and that the Iraqi refugee programme's background checks were thereafter made more extensive, slowing it down. Conway's promulgation of the type of lie that she had previously described as 'alternative facts' was widely descried, and led to her perfunctory claim that it was an 'honest mistake'.<sup>344</sup> But what Conway's statement reminds us is that the relationship between fact and fiction is not straightforwardly binary: 'brand new information' that is fictional can assume all the effects of information that is factual if it is performed as real. Indeed, Jorge Luis Borges' Dr Yu Tsun, in 'The Garden of Forking Paths,' prophesies as much:

I foresee that mankind will resign itself more and more fully every day to more and more horrendous undertakings; soon there will be nothing but warriors and brigands. I give them this piece of advice: *He who is to perform a horrendous act should imagine to himself that it is already done, should impose upon himself a future as irrevocable as the past.*<sup>345</sup>

Tsun and Conway both know that it is not truth at stake in 'alternative facts,' but power. It matters less whether 'the Bowling Green massacre' happened than the assumption that it

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<sup>343</sup> 'Kellyanne Conway Cites "Bowling Green Massacre" To Defend Refugee Ban,' *Hardball with Chris Matthews* (U.S.A.: MSNBC, 2017) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-w16cyQ8wQ>> [accessed 9 April 2017].

<sup>344</sup> Joe Coscarelli, 'Kellyanne Conway Admits "Bowling Green Massacre" Error,' *The New York Times*, 3 February 2017 <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/03/us/politics/bowling-green-massacre-kellyanne-conway.html>> [accessed 9 April 2017].

<sup>345</sup> Borges, 'The Garden of Forking Paths,' *Collected Fictions*, p. 121; emphasis in original.

might have—just as Tsun murders Dr Stephen Albert to communicate the name ‘Albert’ to his superiors via the newspaper headlines, Conway promulgates an imagined massacre to communicate to her potential allies her anti-Islam white supremacy.

If you search for information on ‘the Bowling Green massacre’ on Google, the first hit is the event’s *Wikipedia* entry: ‘The Bowling Green massacre is a fictitious incident.’<sup>346</sup> As discussed in the introduction to this study,<sup>347</sup> the encyclopaedia does not mediate the boundary between fact and fiction: it reifies legitimate and normative reality. For *Wikipedia*, this is formalised through its ‘General Notability Guideline’: ‘If a topic has received *significant coverage* in *reliable sources* that are *independent of the subject*, it is *presumed* to be suitable for a standalone article or list.’<sup>348</sup> It is clear how ‘the Bowling green massacre’ presents ethical problems for an encyclopaedia compiled according to notability: the topic has indeed ‘received significant coverage’ but only because it is untrue. Is one of the effects of devoting a page to Conway’s ‘fictitious event’ not to deliver her goal of imagining the ‘horrendous act...already done’? Does the fictitious event’s ‘notability’ not normalise Conway’s willed ignorance of and bad faith against Islam?

These issues are not lost on the editors, whose discussion is logged on the article’s ‘talk’ page (Fig. 9). In the context of this project’s argument,

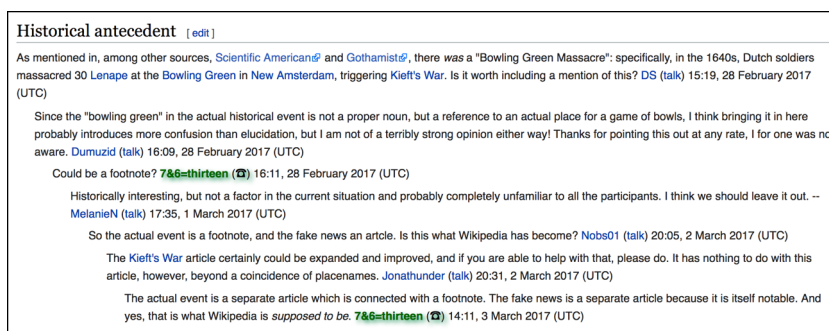


Fig. 9. ‘Talk:Bowling Green Massacre.’ *Wikipedia*. 2017. (Web. 9 April 2017).

one particular disagreement is conspicuous: the historical antecedent presented by the massacre in 1643 of refugee Lenape and Wappinger Algonquians, at what is now Jersey City, New Jersey, by Dutch colonists, who were based at what is now Bowling Green, New York. The massacre, which brought about Kieft’s War (1643-5), is typically referred to as either the ‘Pavonia Massacre’ or ‘the Slaughter of Innocents.’<sup>349</sup> Nevertheless, *Wikipedia*’s editors find

<sup>346</sup> ‘Bowling Green Massacre,’ *Wikipedia*, 2017

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bowling\\_Green\\_massacre&oldid=773950721](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Bowling_Green_massacre&oldid=773950721)> [accessed 8 April 2017].

<sup>347</sup> See: ‘1.1 Imagined Encyclopaedisms,’ pp. 6-8.

<sup>348</sup> ‘Wikipedia:Notability’; emphasis in original.

<sup>349</sup> William Christie Macleod, *The American Indian Frontier* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1928; repr. 2013), pp. 224–5; Carl Waldman, *Encyclopedia of Native American Tribes*, 3rd edn (New York, NY: Checkmark Books, 2006), pp. 144, 312; Nicholas J. Santoro, *Atlas of the Indian Tribes of North America and the Clash of Cultures* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2009), p. 410.

themselves in an awkward position when they are obliged to prioritise the ‘fictitious event’ over the historical antecedent, as the exchange between Nobs01 and 7&6=thirteen makes clear:

So the actual event is a footnote, and the fake news an article [*sic*]. Is this what Wikipedia has become? Nobs01

[...]

The actual event is a separate article which is connected with a footnote. The fake news is a separate article because it is itself notable. And yes, that is what Wikipedia is *supposed to be*. 7&6=thirteen<sup>350</sup>

‘Fake news’ overwrites ‘actual event,’ reifying the reality of Conway’s ‘alternative fact’—implicitly presenting the fiction as more notable, and therefore more real, than the fact. Just as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*’s ‘Great American Indian Leaders’ exhibition resourced an encyclopaedic idea of the world defined from the standpoint of compulsory tribal absence, *Wikipedia* provides little room for optimism about the possibility of decolonial justice and study of history within an encyclopaedic framework.

This is less a criticism of *Wikipedia* than a critique of encyclopaedic form—and a negative demonstration of what it is that makes fictional encyclopaedism so radical, and of such enduring significance. In the works of Joyce, Silko, and Bolaño, it is not necessary to make the type of judgement required by a ‘General Notability Guideline’: the history of encyclopaedic thought and practice reveals the contingency of ‘notability’ on structures of power, and a literary totality enables understanding from more than one standpoint. Far from accepting the ‘irrevocable future’ with which ‘notability’ threatens to totalise the contemporary, fictional encyclopaedism understands that the discipline of encyclopaedism is not transcendent—neither divine nor unquestionable—but ultimately the discipline of humans.

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<sup>350</sup> ‘Talk:Bowling Green Massacre,’ *Wikipedia*, 2017

<[https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Bowling\\_Green\\_massacre&oldid=774263942](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Talk:Bowling_Green_massacre&oldid=774263942)> [accessed 8 April 2017]; emphasis in original.

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