THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CIRCLE
AN EXPLORATION OF THE POST-ENCYCLOPAEDIC TEXT

By

PETER DUNCAN WILKINS

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Department of **ENGLISH**

The University of British Columbia  
1956 Main Mall  
Vancouver, Canada  
V6T 1Y3  

Date **December 8, 1984**
Abstract

Any text which criticizes, undermines and/or transforms the encyclopaedic ideal of ordering and textualizing the world in a closed, linear fashion can be defined as a post-encyclopaedic text. This thesis explores both theoretical and artistic texts which inhabit the realm of post-encyclopaedism.

In the past, critical speculation on encyclopaedism in literature has been concerned with the ways in which artistic texts attempt to live up to the encyclopaedic ideal. In some cases, this effort to establish an identity between the artistic text and the encyclopaedia has led to an ignorance of the disruptive or even deconstructive effects of so-called fictional encyclopaedias. Once we recognize the existence of such effects, we must begin to examine the techniques and possibilities of post-encyclopaedism.

Hence we can see post-encyclopaedic qualities in the condensed meta-encyclopaedism of Jorge Luis Borges' "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", the disrupted quests for encyclopaedic revelation in Herman Melville's Moby Dick and Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow, and the principle of textualized world as fugue in Louis Zukofsky's "A"-12.

In addition, we can create a theoretical space for the post-encyclopaedic text by weaving together Mikhail Bakhtin's
ideas on the novel as opposed to the epic, Michel Foucault's notion of restructuring the closed circle of the text through mirrored writing, Jurij Lotman's theory of internal and external recoding in texts, and Umberto Eco's concept of the open text.

By combining an investigation of theoretical and artistic texts which lend themselves to post-encyclopaedism, we can create a generic distinction between texts which attempt to be encyclopaedic in themselves and texts which disrupt and/or transform the encyclopaedic ideal.
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Preface

The aim of this thesis is to explore the theoretical possibilities for a post-encyclopaedic text, which disrupts the encyclopaedic ideal of a complete circle of knowledge. Such a text would not be in complete opposition to the concept of the encyclopaedia, but rather would inhabit and transform the structure of the encyclopaedia so that it would no longer be closed and circular, but open, indeterminate and multiplanar.

The thesis involves an analysis of various theories which propose an alternative to the conventional notion of the encyclopaedia and literary texts which comment upon and transform the encyclopaedic ideal. It is more of an exploratory work than one which progresses towards a definite conclusion; hence its development is more paradigmatic than syntagmatic in nature. Ideally, the segments which comprise the thesis could be read in any order, although I have attempted to make some logical connections between them. For the most part I have simply juxtaposed segments which seem compatible in some way. Thus an analysis of a theory may be followed by an analysis of a literary text, though the latter may neither confirm, nor develop the former. Throughout the thesis I have tried to treat literary texts as theories, which I believe they are, and not necessarily as works which must support, or be supported by, theories external to them.
To keep the complexity of the thesis at a reasonable level, I am using a very basic definition of the encyclopaedia. For the most part it derives from the definitions listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

1. The circle of learning; a general course of instruction

2. A literary work containing extensive information on all branches of knowledge, usually arranged in alphabetical order.

3. An elaborate and exhaustive repertory of information on all the branches of some particular art or department of knowledge; esp. one arranged in alphabetical order.

We can say that some encyclopaedias attempt to account for the sum of human knowledge, while others deal with specific areas within that sum. The relativity of the term is in evidence from the start. An encyclopaedia may be about one thing, or all things depending upon where its compilers decide to draw boundaries. What links all encyclopaedias, however, is the notion of totality. Whether its domain is all subjects or one subject, the encyclopaedia theoretically accounts for "all branches" of that domain. The ultimate aim of the encyclopaedia is to be perfectly co-extensive with its subject; to exhaust the subject so that it may be said to be complete.

Of course, any suggestion that a book can contain a totality...
is illusory, since no book could ever say all that could be said about any subject, never mind all subjects. However inclusive the compilers of the encyclopaedia seek to be, their project must always give way to necessary limitations in order that the work be published. For any subject, or aspect of a subject holds the potential for infinite writing. The inherent paradox of being limited in order to present a totality thus makes any encyclopaedia a philosophically problematic text.

To be an encyclopaedist is to be an illusionist, since encyclopaedizing is a process of packaging information in a distributed order that appears to be complete even though it can never be so. In this respect, how an encyclopaedia includes its information is just as important as its contents. The form of the encyclopaedia must rule its content so that the illusion of a finite totality is preserved.

The predominant method of formalizing an encyclopaedia is alphabetizing. The alphabet is a finite system; nothing comes before A, nor after Z. Since the name of any subject must be spelled, all subjects must fit into the predetermined system of the alphabet. The alphabetic system is completely arbitrary, for there is no rationale, other than orthography, to justify the juxtaposition of subjects. Thus the alphabetized encyclopaedia forfeits a logical linearity for a perfect distribution of information. To proceed through the letters from A to Z is to participate in the illusion of beginning at an origin and ending at a point where no further expression is possible. Even though
what lies between the origin and the end is potentially infinite, the alphabetically determined proximity of juxtaposed subjects helps make the encyclopaedia appear to be a sealed work.

Although alphabetizing is the most efficient and popular method of formalizing the encyclopaedia, it is certainly not the only way of doing so. Subjects can be placed in any number of categories and hierarchies, but all encyclopaedic structures work towards the same end of reflecting the world as a finite totality which can be comprehended in a textual structure.

What follows in this thesis is an examination of different ways of disrupting the encyclopaedic illusion of totality, in order to critique its conceptual flaws and to explore alternate methods of relating texts to what is knowable and unknowable about the world.

1. Bakhtin: Novelizing the World

In The Dialogic Imagination, M.M. Bakhtin defines the novel in opposition to the epic, which has certain affinities with the basic concept of the encyclopaedia, particularly in the way Bakhtin sees its conceptual use of the past:

the epic past is absolute and complete. It is closed as a circle; inside it everything is finished. There
is no place in the epic world for any openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy....Absolute closedness is the feature of the temporally valorized past. 

(Bakhtin 16)

This closure and circularity is not limited to the epic’s treatment of the past; it extends to the form of language that the epic employs. According to Bakhtin, epic language has a single voice of authority which pervades the work, disallowing the intrusion of other voices which might threaten its position or disrupt its illusion of perfection. In all its characteristics, the epic displays a closed attitude towards the world. It creates for itself a valorized past which is severed from the inconclusiveness and change of the present, and inscribes this past in the language of the epitaph. We can view Bakhtin’s conception of the epic as an enactment of the encyclopaedic ideal: it is an absolute, circular work, delivered in an authoritative voice.

In contrast to the epic, Bakhtin suggests that the characteristics and tendencies of the novel reflect "a new world in the making" (Bakhtin 16), as the novel disrupts and transforms the epic’s perception of the world and language. He ascribes to the novel the following three characteristics which define it, not so much as a specifically delineated genre, but as a stylistic attitude:

(1) its stylistic three dimensionality, which is linked with the multi-languaged consciousness realized in the novel;
(2) the radical change it effects in the temporal co-ordinates of the literary image;

(3) the new zone opened by the novel for structuring literary images, namely the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality) in all its openendedness.

(Bakhtin 11)
Against the single voice of the epic, the novel opposes a "multilanguaged consciousness"; against temporal closure, an openendedness; and against static form, a radical "new zone."
Thus the novel is the antithesis of the encyclopaedic ideal represented by the epic. Although Bakhtin comes to describe the novel as a kind of encyclopaedia, it is so opposed to any form of closure that post-encyclopaedia would seem to be a more appropriate term.

According to Bakhtin, the radical nature of the novel is such that it has a particularly elastic position in relation to other literary genres. Operating from this position, the novel demands a reevaluation of traditional genre theory as defined by the poetics of the nineteenth century, which Bakhtin says are: eclectic, [and] descriptive; their aim is not a living and organic fulness, but rather an abstract and encyclopaedic comprehensiveness.... Of course these poetics can no longer ignore the novel--they simply add it to already existing genres (and thus it enters
Bakhtin refuses to accept that the novel is one genre added to the rest. As a form, the novel is too flexible to be slotted into an encyclopaedic structure; it is too slippery to be so determinately categorized. In Bakhtin’s system, the novel occupies no position in one sense, and all positions in another. It runs alongside the other genres and is capable of intersecting any or all of them in a disruptive way:

- it exposes the conventionality of [other genres’] forms and language;
- it squeezes out some genres and incorporates others into its own peculiar structure, reformulating them and reaccentuating them.

(Bakhtin 5)

The novel circulates and acts upon the encyclopaedia of genres by virtue of its formal elasticity. In this sense, the novel is thoroughly post-encyclopaedic.

From the perspective of the unnovelized system of distinct genres and privileged literary language, the novel is a marginal form: "associated with ...unofficial language and unofficial thought..." (Bakhtin 20). Yet by virtue of its "unofficialness" the novel is able, somewhat paradoxically, to work its way into the heart of literary endeavor, because its unrestrictedness allows it to insinuate itself into other genres, which consequently become novelized: "[it] sparks the renovation of all the other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness" (Bakhtin 7). The result of this process, which
has come to its fruition in the past few centuries, is an era of the novel that dissolves generic boundaries and transforms the structure of the closed circle which literature once used to recode the world.

Bakhtin describes the attitude of the novel as parodic and travestying, yet at the same time intensely analytical. It analyzes things by laughing at them:

Laughter has the remarkable power of making an object come up close... where one can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, inside out...take it apart, dismember it...examine it freely and experiment with it.

(Bakhtin 23)

In the broadest terms, the "object" which the novel analyzes is the literary construction of the world, or the world as a text conceived by man. The laughter of the novel is a Nietszchean form of laughter, which "demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world..."(Bakhtin 23); a kind of Derridean play. In fact, Bakhtin's conception of how the novel functions is akin to a brand of deconstruction. The parody of the novel is not destructive or flippant. Rather, it inhabits old structures and recodes them in new ways through an analytics of laughter.

The novel also involves a certain relationship between language and the world. It manifests what Bakhtin calls heteroglossia and polyglossia, reflecting the language of the world in which it exists. Heteroglossia refers to the novel's
recognition and incorporation of various "other" languages operating within a national language system besides the privileged literary voice. The incorporation of heteroglossia brings about a "verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world" (Bakhtin 367) of any given national consciousness. Ultimately, it "denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language" (Bakhtin 366). The true novelist in the Bakhtinian sense understands the multiplicity that exists within his/her own national language and proceeds to play upon it as though it were a musical scale.

The incorporation of heteroglossia reflects the internal opening up of a language. It disrupts the encyclopaedic/epic ideal from within, since the "other" languages within a national system must not only be taken into account, but actually deployed. This deployment cannot occur within the "closed circle" framework, because this structure requires a privileged language to contain it. Heteroglossia facets the language of a national culture, disrupting any "official" voice that might presume to be an encyclopaedic voice.

Just as heteroglossia represents the internal opening of a national culture's language, polyglossia represents an outward opening up of language beyond the boundaries of ethnocentrism. While the novel recognizes the multiplicity within any given language, it also recognizes other national languages besides its own. In a polyglot system, one's own language is no longer envisioned as the center around which the speaking world
Radiates. Rather, it is simply one among others. Bakhtin says that the novel reflects:

A very specific rupture in the history of European civilization: its emergence from a socially isolated and culturally deaf semipatriarchal society, and its entrance into international and interlingual relationships.

(Bakhtin 11)

Once these relationships are established, different languages begin to "interilluminate" each other. The novelist participates fully in this interillumination. This does not mean that all novels are Finnegans Wake, but that the novelist as Bakhtin envisions him/her is at least conscious of the interaction between his/her own language and others, and thus is aware of the destabilized and decentralized position from which s/he writes. The polyglot consciousness of the Bakhtinian novel is a celebration of the post-Babel state, as it explores the bonds and disjunctions between separate languages. It does not pretend that its language is pure and untouchable. The novelist's mother tongue does not operate imperialistically, as though it could comprehend the totality of the world from its perspective, and hence cannot posit itself as a proper encyclopaedic voice.

Although heteroglossia and polyglossia are of structural import, they do not constitute structures in themselves. They are rather the conditions for the existence of dialogism, Bakhtin's most important structural principle. Dialogism derives from the idea of the dialogue, in which two people exchange
ideas, belief systems and opinions in conversation. Bakhtin adapts this principle of exchange to the interaction of different systems within a given work. The dialogic work has a double, or split, voice, one side acting as a foil to the other. Although the concept seems strictly binary, Bakhtin writes that its manifestation is complex, and that the two voices of the work cannot be distinguished with absolute certainty:

internal dialogism...which grows organically out of a stratified and heteroglot language, cannot fundamentally be dramatized or dramatically resolved (brought to an authentic end); it cannot be fitted into the frame of any manifest dialogue, into the frame of mere conversation; it is not ultimately divisible into verbal exchanges possessing precisely marked boundaries.

(Bakhtin 326)

The dialogic system resists closure. If the voices within it could be completely distinguished, or the struggle between them resolved, the system would lose its dynamics. Dialogism is like a positive schizophrenia which thrives on its own complication and disruption.

The most important implication of dialogism concerning encyclopaedic structures is that it makes expressions within the text indeterminate. No statement can be taken at face value, for it must be considered in the light of the "other" which shadows it and is essentially inextricable from it. We can perceive dialogism as a pervasive irony which potentially affects every
word. It is not a conventional irony, whereby one says something to mean something opposite to it, but rather a kind of irony which activates both possibilities at once, without any form of cancellation. Thus dialogism is the basis for polysemy.

In Bakhtin's dialogic structure, conflict and struggle take place within language itself; they are no longer things which language objectifies from an untouched perspective. Dialogic language is not a medium for the authoritative distribution and categorization of knowledge. It does not allow for the discernment of perfect divisions and paradigms. This is not to say that dialogic language lacks rigour or constitutes a confused mass of information. Rather, it is a structured heterogeneity, a rigourous complication which tests each word. As Bakhtin writes, the word enters "a complex play of light and shadow" (Bakhtin 277). Metaphorically, Bakhtin likens words in a dialogic system to rays of light:

[the] play of colors and light on the facets of the image that [the word] constructs can be explained as the spectral dispersion of the ray-word, not within the object itself...but rather as its spectral dispersion in an atmosphere filled with alien words, value judgements and accents through which the ray passes on its way toward the object....

(Bakhtin 277)

In this play, any equivalence between words and objects is secondary to the "spectral dispersion" of the word.
Consequently, the dialogic novel, which enters into the complexities of heteroglossia and polyglossia, inaugurates the language oriented work:

the central problem for a stylistics of the novel may be formulated as the problem of *artistically representing language*, the problem of representing the image of a language.

(Bakhtin 336)

Although the novel may operate with traditional structural elements, such as plot and character, these are secondary to the dynamic faceting and interaction of languages that disrupts "a mythich and magical attitude to language and the world" (Bakhtin 369). Bakhtin suggests that the language of the novel is aware of the dissociation between language and intention, thought and expression. It becomes fully self-reflexive. The image of language that the novel creates is that of language listening to itself as it reflects a heteroglot and polyglot world.

The *Dialogic Imagination* opens a dialogue in itself between the structure of the already finished closed circle, which I am identifying with the encyclopaedia, and an alternative structure, which transforms the image of the closed circle into something else, and disrupts the notion of language as a container that can effect a closure. There is no doubt that Bakhtin idealizes the qualities of the novel, and that it would be difficult to find a text which does all the things Bakhtin suggests. Nevertheless, Bakhtin's definition of the novel is flexible enough that we can understand it as a mode, or stylistic direction, and not as a
specific genre. Thus some works which have conventionally been called "novels" lose their novelness in Bakhtin's scheme, while other works which have been attributed to other genres can easily become novels in a Bakhtinian sense. Over the course of the thesis, I wish to show that texts like *Moby Dick*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, and "A" are more ontologically aligned with Bakhtin's concept of the novel than with the conventions of the epic or the encyclopaedia.

2. Mistaken Identity

In their efforts to discern an identity between certain literary works and the encyclopaedia, Ronald Swigger in "Fictional Encyclopedism and the Cognitive Value of Literature" and Edward Mendelson in "Gravity's Encyclopedia" do not consider how these works might disrupt encyclopaedic closure. They take the conventional encyclopaedia for granted, assuming that it is an ideal text, which fictional texts can only aspire to equal in terms of range and inclusiveness. Both Swigger and Mendelson fail to address the possibility that the texts they discuss may be doing something different from simply attempting to live up to the encyclopaedic ideal. If we are to conceive of a post-encyclopaedic text, we must question the presuppositions of these critics.
As the title of Swigger's article suggests, he is concerned with the "value" of literature. He proposes that encyclopaedic fiction best illustrates the worth of literature as a medium for expressing knowledge and putting it in perspective:

[this paper's] aim is to propose to critics that literature be studied in terms of its use of and aspirations towards knowledge, and to propose that one way of orienting oneself to these problems is to consider the ways in which encyclopedism continues to be the ambition of literature.

(Swigger 351)

Swigger contends that although the texts he chooses to exemplify his position parody the totalizing efforts of encyclopaedists, the attitudes they display towards the "gusto of learning and expert elaboration" (Swigger 353) still have a positive value.

Swigger's concept of encyclopaedism comes from Northrop Frye, particularly from "Frye's suggestion that encyclopedism is a symptom of literature's inveterate attempt to establish itself as a total order of words" (Swigger 355). Swigger sees the supposed encyclopaedic gesture of literature as one which brings the diversity of human knowledge and culture into one field. Such a field would make us see the connectedness of knowledge, revealing and opening epistemological possibilities for the reader who wishes to apprehend the vast structure of learning.

The problem with Swigger's concept of a holistic vision is that the works of Borges, Flaubert and Queneau that he uses to
support his vision actually deconstruct it. This much is evident from his own admission of their parodic nature, which he tries to revise in order to fit his scheme. For instance, he writes:

Bouvard et Pécuchet should not be taken as a cynical dismissal of the mind's enterprises. Encyclopedism is satirized, demonstrating that the organization of knowledge is inevitably arbitrary and conventional.... But the belief that the intellect can be sharpened and refined, and that the mind can free itself of error, is definitely not abandoned by Flaubert.

(Swigger 358)

Sharpening and refining the intellect, however, are far from any unified vision embraced by a total order of words. Nevertheless, Swigger maintains that the ways in which the texts he uses disrupt the notion of the encyclopaedia are only secondary:

for all the stress on parody and satire, Flaubert, Borges and Queneau and many modern writers whose work can be associated with encyclopedism, all show, by their intellectual capacities and their imaginative versatility, that literature still does claim a place at the center of man's symbolic efforts.

(Swigger 363)

In Swigger's scheme, parody and satire threaten the "value" of an identification between literature and the encyclopaedia. Thus he must de-emphasize the existence of these issues, and virtually ignore their function in order to maintain his theoretical position. From a post-encyclopaedic perspective, however, we cannot push aside parody and satire as Swigger does. As Bakhtin
informs us, they are two of the means by which texts may act upon the encyclopaedia in order to disrupt and transform its structure.

Swigger also skirts the problem of actually defining the formal encyclopaedism of fictional texts by dealing only with works that are more overtly about the process of encyclopaedizing than they are encyclopaedic in themselves. They thus provide a mediated view of encyclopaedism. Yet Swigger does not consider this mediation as a factor in his theory. While he writes about the possibility of literature establishing a total order of words, he does not distinguish between the encyclopaedic text, which attempts to enact that order, and the meta-encyclopaedic text, which is fundamentally different from that order in its objectification of encyclopaedic processes. Thus Swigger fails to understand Borges' point in his prologue to the first half of Ficciones:

The composition of vast books is a laborious and impoverishing extravagance. . . . A better course of procedure is to pretend that these books already exist, and then to offer a resume, a commentary.

(Borges 15)

Borges' use of the *mise en abyme* of The First Encyclopaedia of Tlön in the story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" distinguishes him from the author who pursues the "laborious and impoverishing" task of writing vast books.

Once we recognize the difference between the meta-
encyclopaedic text, which is essentially post-encyclopaedic, and the conventionally encyclopaedic text, establishing an identity between the texts Swigger uses and the encyclopaedia becomes tenuous. In trying to create a simple correspondence between a dubiously defined type of artistic text and the encyclopaedia, Swigger fails to address the most fundamental issue of "fictional encyclopaedism": the effect that a given text may have on the concept of the encyclopaedia.

In "Gravity's Encyclopedia", Edward Mendelson establishes certain groundrules for what he calls "the encyclopedic narrative" in order to give Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow a generic context:

its companions in this most exclusive of literary categories are Dante's Commedia, Rabelais's five books of Gargantua and Pantagruel, Cervantes's Don Quixote, Goethe's Faust, Melville's Moby Dick, and Joyce's Ulysses

(Mendelson 161)
The primary criterion for membership in this "exclusive" category is cultural pre-eminence:

Each major Western national culture, as it becomes fully conscious of itself as a unity, produces an encyclopedic author....

(Mendelson 161)

In Mendelson's terms, an encyclopaedic narrative not only has to be somehow formally encyclopaedic, but also must occupy a singularly important position in its author's national culture.
Like Swigger's use of texts which have fictional encyclopaedias written into them, this criterion seems to be a method of creating certain boundaries for the genre, in compensation for the potential amorphousness of the term encyclopaedia. It gives Mendelson something to fall back upon when the formal classification of encyclopaedic narratives becomes difficult. It also seems unduly restrictive and entirely subjective. For example, cultural position may sometimes overrule form completely, as when Mendelson claims that England has no single encyclopaedic narrative, but divides the encyclopaedic role between the tales of Chaucer and the plays of Shakespeare. He writes: "the only unified encyclopedic narratives in England thus arrive too late to fulfill a central cultural role..." (Mendelson 161). But why should we stop at the canonical figures of Chaucer and Shakespeare? If the encyclopaedic role of a culture can spill out of the boundaries of one book into others, then surely we can say it is spread throughout all the literature of that culture. If a culture can become conscious of itself as a unity, a questionable assertion in itself, then all its books must constitute its literary encyclopaedia.

Mendelson has read Bakhtin, and uses some of his ideas in establishing a position for the encyclopaedic narrative. There is an unresolved contradiction, however, in Mendelson's incorporation of Bakhtin's concepts of decentralization and destabilization and his own ideas of cultural unity and centrality. Having already established that the encyclopaedic
narrative must be a canonical text within a specifically delimited national culture, Mendelson uses Bakhtin's theory to suggest that the encyclopaedic narrative occupies an "illegal" position, "at the edge of a culture" (Mendelson 178). But he forgets that encyclopaedias are usually very legal texts, often state-sanctioned and state-controlled. He makes no attempt to define the encyclopaedic narrative in relation to these conventional, legal encyclopaedias, beyond establishing an identity through names. Thus he does not consider the effect of the illegality of the encyclopaedic narrative on the legality of its non-fictional counterpart.

I do not want to go into Mendelson's ideas on *Gravity's Rainbow*, which tend to stray from the theoretical issue of encyclopaedism, but a few comments on his perception of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s position in his scheme of encyclopaedic narratives helps illuminate the arbitrariness of his theory. First, he admits that the status of Pynchon's novel as an encyclopaedic narrative is only a matter of prediction. It is too early to see whether it can join the "exclusive" genre. Second, he proposes that *Gravity's Rainbow* is not a national encyclopaedic narrative but an international one:

Because encyclopedic narratives appear near the beginning of a culture's or nation's sense of its separate existence, and because Melville has already fulfilled the encyclopedic role in North America,
Pynchon's international scope implies the existence of a new international culture....

(Mendelson 165)

Thus *Gravity's Rainbow* requires a special status which seems to defy all the generic rules which Mendelson has set up. Making this text the literary encyclopaedia of a "new international culture" gives it a position which it cannot possibly fill. Although *Gravity's Rainbow* is open to polyglossia in the Bakhtinian sense, it does not have the linguistic capacity to encyclopaediaze an international culture. The book is no *Finnegans Wake* (a text that Mendelson appears to have conveniently forgotten). A truly international encyclopaedic narrative would have to incorporate the languages of the world in a way that no single person could manage. Therefore, it seems that Mendelson is simply making space for *Gravity's Rainbow*, without considering the implications of that space.

To a degree, my thesis is a reaction to the views of Swigger and Mendelson which ignore the potential disruption of encyclopaedic forms in literary texts. By establishing a simple identity between certain texts and the encyclopaedia, Mendelson and Swigger privilege the encyclopaedia as an untouchable form; they do not allow for the potential alternatives to a conventionally encyclopaedic textualization of the world.
3. **Perfect Circles/Transformed Networks**

In his essay "Language to Infinity" Michel Foucault conceives of a kind of writing which is erected against death; "which borders death, but is also poised against it" (Foucault 54). One of the oldest tasks of writing, he suggests, is to write so as not to die, to achieve a virtual immortality within the depths of a mirrored and mirroring writing. This kind of writing has a crucial relationship to the encyclopaedia, which, in its closure, is an inscribed death.

Foucault writes that prior to the end of the eighteenth century, "a work whose only meaning resides in its being a self-enclosed expression of its glory" (Foucault 60) was the primary method of fending off death through writing. It existed as a perfect form held against death:

> the work placed the infinite outside itself--a real and majestic infinity in which it became a virtual and circular mirror, completed in a beautifully closed form.

(Foucault 60)

We can perceive this kind of work as another version of Bakhtin’s description of the epic, or as the epitome of the circular encyclopaedic form. No work can place the infinite outside itself so effectively as the closed A-Z format of the encyclopaedia.

But the encyclopaedia has a problem in this respect, in
that its completion signifies not only perfection, but also
death. It cannot escape the fact that it aspires to be the last
book, beyond which nothing else happens; an epitaph to knowledge
and the world. The only way the encyclopaedia can counteract its
identification with death is to add supplements, which diminish
its perfection. The supplement is the most paradoxical feature
of the encyclopaedia, as Vincent Descombes writes in his article
"Variations on the Subject of the Encyclopaedic Book":

On the one hand, the name of the Encyclopaedia
excludes the supplement, for this title announces that
the book is meant to have a comprehensive coverage of
its subject from A-Z. On the other hand, in order to
be what it claims and means to be, the Encyclopaedia
must allow for the possibility of a supplement... if
the book lacks a supplement... it will be unworthy of
its name.

(Descombes 56)

In effect, the supplement is the price the encyclopaedia must pay
for its closed design. It is perhaps also a sign that the self-
enclosed glory of the encyclopaedic design is no longer viable in
writing's struggle against death. We must also remember that
artistic texts rarely have supplements, which means if we are to
identify them with encyclopaedias, they have only their self-
enclosed perfection to stave off death. This perfection is
ineffective, however, as it signifies the death that it attempts
to fend off.

In opposition to the self-enclosed work, Foucault describes
an alternate method of writing so as not to die. He suggests that after the epistemic shift at the end of the eighteenth century, "writing...has moved infinitely closer to its source" (Foucault 60). This movement has inaugurated a new kind of work: the design, in a systematically transformed network, of all the branchings, insertions and overlappings which are deduced from the human crystal in order to give birth to great, sparkling, mobile, and infinitely extendable configurations.

(Foucault 61)

I believe that what Foucault describes here is a more effective ontological classification for works like Moby Dick and Gravity's Rainbow which heretofore have been identified with encyclopaedias. Foucault's "transformed network" replaces the notion of the work as a closed mirror with that of a virtually infinite "extendable" mirror of many facets. Instead of closing in on itself, the work seeks "the limits of the possible" (Foucault 61) in its mirroring capacity.

The initial move in this mirroring process involves a recognition of the inherent reduplication in phonetic writing: writing...automatically dictates that we place ourselves in the virtual space of self-representation and reduplication; since writing refers not to a thing but to speech, a work of language...calls forth the double of this already doubled writing....

(Foucault 56)

In its reference to speech rather than things, phonetic writing
is capable of an infinitely extendable self-reference. There are two fundamental ways in which a text can relate to this doubling within language. On the one hand, a given work can act against it, effectively pretending that words do in fact refer to things, so that language can fix the world into place encyclopaedically. On the other hand, a text can exploit this reduplication. Instead of despairing of the slippage between letters, sounds and things, such a text can find an infinite play in the spaces that the slippages engender. This is one of the fundamental differences between the encyclopaedic text and the post-encyclopaedic text. The former makes a futile attempt to fix language, while the latter explores the potential infinity which the absence of fixity allows.

Beyond this language consciousness, Foucault suggests that a text may show its entrance into the space of mirrors by certain structural signs, which may be imperceptible or unintentional. These signs "manage to present themselves as faults at the surface of a work" (Foucault 57). We might take the word "fault" here to mean a kind of geographical fault, a space into which the text might fall, by accident or on purpose. It is possible that a "slight imperfection" may expand to consume the work and regenerate it. As an example, Foucault cites The Arabian Nights which includes one night where Scheherazade tells the story of her story:

And in this privileged night... a space is opened which seems to be that in which it merely forms an
insignificant aberration, and it reveals the same stars in the same sky.

(Foucault 58)

As Foucault says, "the work holds out a mirror...where it appears like a miniature of itself and preceding itself..." (Foucault 58).

Again, we can relate the encyclopaedic supplement to Foucault's argument. Just as the mirror night in *The Arabian Nights* is one night too many, the supplement of the encyclopaedia is one volume too many. Since the binding of the encyclopaedia does not allow for the insertion of new information, the supplement must become a miniature mirror of the encyclopaedia, proceeding from A through Z all over again. As Vincent Descombes writes:

What, finally, does the encyclopaedic book lack? The articles published in the supplement are not missing, since they are, precisely, published. What is missing is manifestly the space which would permit their insertion in their place. Complementary articles are added in a place which is supplementary according to the order.

(Descombes 57)

Thus the encyclopaedia is bound to go on mirroring itself. Although the contents of the supplement may be different from the original encyclopaedia, their order manifests a perfect mirror of the original. But the mirror image of the supplement is a stop-
gap, operating antithetically to the possible infinity of a displacing mirror of language.

The operation of mirror structures in texts does not have to be confined to this endless production of closed miniatures characterized by the encyclopaedic supplement, or the Moebius Strip function of the internal mirroring of *The Arabian Nights*. The mirror can also disrupt closure by providing distorted reflections of its object. The best way to conceive of this kind of mirroring is in the terms Douglas R. Hofstadter uses in *Gödel, Escher, Bach*, where he describes recursive structures as nesting and variations on nesting. The concept is very general. (Stories inside stories, movies inside movies, paintings inside paintings, Russian dolls inside Russian dolls (even parenthetical comments inside parenthetical comments!)—these are just a few of the charms of recursion.)

(Hofstadter 127)

Hofstadter uses the terminology of Artificial Intelligence to describe the processes of recursion. To "push" is to enter into a new structure, while suspending operations on the original structure which contains the new one. Pushing can go on indefinitely as one can push from the new structure into an even newer one (cf. the Russian doll analogy). To "pop" is to reverse the process of pushing. The accumulation of internalized structures creates a "stack." The stacks engendered by recursive processes can be disorienting in nature, and can be so complex that we might forget our point of departure. To exemplify the
potential complexity of stacks, Hofstadter refers to Bach's *Little Harmonic Labyrinth*

in which he tries to lose you in a labyrinth of quick key changes. Pretty soon you are so disoriented that you don't have any sense of direction left-- you don't know where the true tonic is, unless you have perfect pitch, or like Theseus, have a friend like Ariadne who allows you to retrace your steps.

(Hofstadter 130)

We can describe the mirroring effect of certain texts in the same way. They take you into a funhouse of mirrors that becomes a post-encyclopaedic labyrinth. We will explore this kind of structure in an analysis of Borges' story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius."

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i. Borges: The Encyclopaedia in the Mirror

I owe the discovery of Uqbar to the conjunction of a mirror and an encyclopaedia.

(Borges 17)

Thus begins the narrator of Borges' story "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", a story which usefully unites the Foucauldian concept of mirror play and a critique of encyclopaedism. The story is a series of textual aberrations and anomalies which open
an ever-expanding mirror space between texts which happen to be encyclopaedias.

The first aberration is a slight one created by the reflection of one encyclopaedia in another:

the misleading encyclopaedia goes by the name of *The Anglo-American Cyclopaedia* (New York, 1917) and is a literal if inadequate reprint of the 1902 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. (Borges 17)

The paradoxical phrase "literal if inadequate" suggests that the AAC is a marginally distorted reflection of the Britannica; it is the same but different, for reasons that the narrator does not divulge. The distortion is crucial, however, because it is the first opening into the alternate world of Tlön. We must remember this initial slippage, for it has important implications when the story reaches its conclusion.

The second aberration compounds the first. At the beginning of the story, the narrator and his dinner guest, Bioy Cesares, are discussing mirrors. Cesares recalls an article he has read in the AAC which mentions a statement of one of the heresiarchs of Uqbar, concerning the subject. They check Cesares' reference in a copy of the encyclopaedia they have on hand, only to find that the supposed article on Uqbar is missing:

In the final pages of Volume XLVI, we ran across an article on Upsala; in the beginning of Volume XLVII,
we found one on Ural-Altaic languages; but not one word on Uqbar.

(Borges 17)

It turns out that only Cesares' copy of the encyclopaedia contains the problematic article. In the ordinary scheme of the encyclopaedia, Uqbar is not only missing, but it is lost in the space between one volume and another; a conspicuous non-place which the encyclopaedia is supposed to have sealed off. In this story, the space between volumes is like a vacuum, which, once pierced by the mysterious article, must fill up. Clearly, Borges perceives the space between volumes of an encyclopaedia to be susceptible to intrusion. The intrusion of Uqbar is made more mysterious by the fact that Cesares' index does not include it. In conjunction with the barely perceptible slippage between the AAC and the Britannica, the transformation of encyclopaedic non-space into a place of fictional exploration slowly opens a vista on an alternate encyclopaedic realm.

In the anomalous article, the narrator and Cesares find a reference to Tlön:

the literature of Uqbar was fantastic in character ...
its epics never referred to reality, but to the two imaginary regions of Mlejnas and Tlön....

(Borges 19)

Although it is merely mentioned in the article, Tlön becomes the focus of the story when the narrator comes across Volume XI of The First Encyclopaedia of Tlön by accident. This discovery
takes us into the illusory depths of the mirror space between
Volume XLVI and Volume XLVII of the AAC.

Although this volume is written in English, and is arranged
alphabetically, like a conventional encyclopaedia, its contents
suggest that it is not of this world:
I had in my hands a substantial fragment of the
complete history of an unknown planet... all clearly
stated, coherent, without any apparent dogmatic
intention or parodic undertone.
(Borges 22)

In keeping with its otherworldliness, the entries in the volume
are sufficiently fantastic as to defy the conceptions of the
universe one might find in conventional, earthly encyclopaedias.
For the inhabitants of Tlön, "the world is not a concurrence of
objects in space, but a heterogeneous series of independent acts"
(Borges 23). There are no causal relationships in Tlön, only the
"association of ideas"(Borges 23). Scientific enquiry is not
considered valid, and metaphysics is classed as a "branch of
fantastic literature" in search of "a kind of amazement" (Borges
25). Although this encyclopaedia has no parodic undertone in
itself, it does seem to be undermining encyclopaedias like the
one from whose gaps it arises. Its otherness has an effect on
the way we perceive encyclopaedias of this world. Its alternative
universe disrupts the closure of those encyclopaedias, even
though that universe may be fantastic.
In fact, the theories of Tlön seem to deny the possibility of the encyclopaedia in spite of the fact that they exist in one: They know that a system is nothing more than the subordination of all the aspects of the universe into some one of them. Even the phrase "all the aspects" can be rejected, since it presupposes the impossible inclusion of the present moment, and of past moments.

(Borges 25)

Even the apparently innocent system of alphabetization is a case of the impossible subordination of the universe. Thus Tlön emphasizes its illusoriness as an encyclopaedia. Ultimately, this illusoriness transfers to the "real" encyclopaedic system of the AAC and consequently to the Britannica.

Eventually, the mystery of this fantastic encyclopaedia's existence is resolved, but the effect of its intrusion on the real world is irreversible. We find that Tlön is the work of a secret society, under the guidance of "the millionaire ascetic, Ezra Buckley" (Borges 31). In part, it is a reaction to the Britannica:

The twenty volumes of the Encyclopaedia Britannica were then in circulation; Buckley suggested a systematic encyclopaedia of the imaginary planet... Buckley did not believe in God, but nevertheless wished to demonstrate to the nonexistent God that mortal men were capable of conceiving a world.

(Borges 31)

Thus Tlön is a human construct like any other encyclopaedia, with
the exception that it is not an attempt to reflect God's grand design of the world, but rather the construction of a world antithetical to divine design; hence the strangeness of Tlönist theories.

Tlön is merely a prelude to a greater work which would be even more removed from conventional encyclopaedias: "this time written, not in English, but in some one of the languages of Tlön" (Borges 32). This work would bear the title Orbis Tertius and would represent the complete dissociation of this secular encyclopaedia from the supposedly divine order of other encyclopaedias.

Prior to the discovery of the other volumes of Tlön, certain elements from the imaginary world it depicts intrude upon the real world. A compass from Tlön is discovered in a crate "stamped all over with international markings" (Borges 32). The narrator finds a shining metal cone beside a dead boy:

Those small and extremely heavy cones, made of a metal which does not exist in this world, are images of divinity in certain religions of Tlön.

(Borges 33)

These minor intrusions are but premonitions of the thorough subversion of the world which occurs when the full encyclopaedia turns up in a Memphis library. The thinkers of the world grow obsessed with the encyclopaedia; the more they study it, the greater its effect on reality grows:

Manuals, anthologies, summaries, literal versions,
authorized reprints and pirated editions of the Master Work of Man poured and continue to pour out into the world. Almost immediately, reality gave ground on more than one point.

(Borges 34)

The real world that the story posits disintegrates to the point where the narrator predicts that with the arrival of The Second Encyclopaedia of Tlön, "The world will be Tlön" (Borges 35).

We can only realize the full implications of this takeover of the real world by an imaginary encyclopaedia if we reverse the mirroring process which produced it. We must retrace the transformative steps, which the story takes, back to the Britannica whose presence, from its initial reflection in the AAC, hovers over the entirety of the story. The necessity of this retracing is suggested by the narrator's final statements on the nature of Tlön:

Tlön may be a labyrinth, but it is a labyrinth plotted by men, a labyrinth destined to be deciphered by men.

(Borges 34)

At the same time, the narrator asserts that the true order of the universe is beyond the encyclopaedic structures of man. That order, if indeed it is an order, is governed by "inhuman laws--which we will never completely perceive" (Borges 34). The design which the encyclopaedia orchestrates "is the discipline of chessplayers not of angels" (Borges 34). These statements apply not only to Tlön but to the Britannica as well. The order of the world which one finds in the Britannica is just as illusory and
man-made as the the fantastic order of Tlön. It is a supplementary artifice which stands instead of "truth" that is beyond the comprehension of man. If we believe in encyclopaedias, we are seduced by symmetries of our own design:

Ten years ago, any symmetrical system whatsoever which gave the appearance of order... was enough to fascinate men. Why not fall under the spell of Tlön and submit to the vast evidence of an ordered planet? (Borges 34)

If we trace the mirroring of Borges' story, it becomes evident that the world is a kind of Tlön, insofar as we submit to encyclopaedic orders.

In "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius", Borges places The Encyclopaedia Britannica in front of a transforming mirror, in order to both critique its project and to explore the possibilities that the mirroring process might engender. We should not mistake The First Encyclopaedia of Tlön and its fantastic theories for an end result, or the fulfillment of the mirroring process. It is but one of many conceivable reflections that are possible, once we realize that encyclopaedizing is a chessgame that can be multiplied by taking advantage of the space between volumes of encyclopaedias.
4. A Justification of the Vast Work

In contrast to Borges' condensed form of meta-encyclopaedism, some writers transform the concept of the encyclopaedia by constructing vast textual systems which intersect with encyclopaedism in a more developed manner and inhabit encyclopaedic forms more fully. To these writers, the composition of vast works is not something to be avoided, but something necessary to the disruption of encyclopaedic closure. Two such writers are Herman Melville and Thomas Pynchon, whose texts, *Moby Dick* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we will look at in this section.

Both *Moby Dick* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* have been identified as encyclopaedic narratives by Edward Mendelson and others. We can understand such an identification in the sense that both books bear many of the characteristics of encyclopaedic forms. They contain vast amounts of information on the subjects they cover, and the notion of exhausting these subjects in an encyclopaedic manner is certainly a concern for them. This apparent exhaustiveness is paradoxical, however, for the further one proceeds through them, the more their exhaustiveness is illusory. These books may reflect encyclopaedias in a sense, but they turn the comprehensive, circular scheme of the encyclopaedia inside out, in that they draw more attention to the gaps in their systems than to the information they present. They tend to be more like negative images of the encyclopaedia, as they inscribe the concept of the encyclopaedia in a more uncertain and
indeterminate ontological structure. In doing so, they make us consider our perceptions of the textualized world.

i. "Moby Dick": Whales, Books, Comprehensiveness and Teleology

In the "Cetology" chapter of Moby Dick, Ishmael offers a rational encyclopaedic structure that supposedly "comprehends" the totality of whales. It incorporates information under logically ordered headings, forming a totalizing system. Ishmael's encyclopaedia uses two ordering principles. First, he orders the whales in terms of size, proceeding from largest to smallest. Second, in order to create an appropriate structure of headings that will divide the system into classifying sections, he maps the whales onto a structure of books:

According to magnitude I divide the whales into three primary BOOKS (subdivisible into CHAPTERS) and these shall comprehend them all, both small and large.

(Melville 130)

The nature of this system in itself, and in the way it relates to the text as a whole illustrates the primary way in which Moby Dick plays with the concept of the encyclopaedia.

The first thing to consider is Ishmael's assertion of the comprehensiveness of the system in conjunction with his admission of its incompleteness. He says:

My object here is simply to project the draught of a
Ishmael's system is thus a blueprint which anticipates an ultimate cetological encyclopaedia. In fact, the completion of the system might be considered a sign of its failure, a sign that it is not equal to its ambitions:

But I now leave my cetological System standing thus unfinished, even as the great Cathedral of Cologne was left.... For small erections may be finished by their first architects; grand ones, true ones, ever leave the copestone to posterity.

A "grand" "true" system must be ongoing, continually augmented, as though its completion were to signify death.

At the same time, however, the system is completely comprehensive, from Ishmael's point of view, as he says of his categories, "these shall comprehend them all." The discrepancy between the complete system and the comprehensive system is crucial to any notion of encyclopaedism. A comprehensive system is one into which all appropriate things will fit, even though the totality of those things may not be known at the time the system is drawn up. Thus Ishmael says:

If any of the following whales, shall hereafter be caught and marked, then he can readily be incorporated into the system....

(Melville 129)

(Melville 139)

(Melville 138)
It is the nature of such encyclopaedic efforts to presume that the unknown can be comprehended by a pre-existing system at the point of its discovery.

In such a system, the implications of the word "comprehend" are important. For the act of comprehension implies both containment and understanding. The inherent link between the two ideas suggested by this act adequately sums up the encyclopaedic project. To comprehend is to circumscribe knowledge within a system in order to understand it. The comprehension of a thing is not so much an understanding of the properties it possesses unto itself as a knowledge of how it relates to other entries in the system. In a sense, it is the system itself which "understands" that which it circumscribes. Since it circumscribes all that is appropriate to it, known or unknown, Ishmael's "comprehensive classification" is a closed one even though it is not complete.

The comprehensiveness of Ishmael's cetological system is played against the figure of Moby Dick. For the white whale resists incorporation into the scheme; he is essentially incomprehensible. Moby Dick is set apart from other whales by his whiteness and his virtually supernatural status among whalers. His identity is established by the features which make him different from the general class of sperm whales:

it was not so much his uncommon bulk that so distinguished him from other sperm whales, but, a
peculiar snow-white wrinkled forehead, and a high pyramidal hump.

(Melville 174)

But it is not the fact that Moby Dick is physically different from other sperm whales that places him outside the encyclopaedia. For peculiarities such as the white forehead and the pyramidal hump make him simply a blip in the system, a slightly anomalous sperm whale. These features are merely symptomatic of a more profound difference which defies the rational structure of the encyclopaedia.

Although Ishmael continually reminds us of the inherent difficulties of cetological investigation, it is possible to define and classify whales according to their physical natures, as "Cetology" shows. The question "what is a sperm whale?" is easily answered. The question "what is Moby Dick?", however, cannot be answered by the mere discernment of his features. The classification of other whales is determinate, whereas Moby Dick is indeterminacy itself. He is a different entity to different people. The most salient of the different perceptions of Moby Dick belongs to Ahab:

The White Whale swam before him as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious feelings which some deep men feel eating in them... He piled upon the whale's white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down....

(Melville 175)
As John T. Irwin writes in *American Hieroglyphics*, "The qualities attributed to Moby Dick... are simply the projected attitudes of his pursuers..." (Irwin 287). This form of projection, which makes Moby Dick a shifting signifier, places him outside the comprehensive scheme of the cetological encyclopaedia as there is no distinct position that he might fill.

Therefore it is not surprising that Moby Dick's whiteness is the attribute which primarily distinguishes him from the rest of the whales. This whiteness is the whiteness of the movie screen, upon which different films might be projected, or the whiteness of the blank page which accepts writing yet resists it at the same time. When Ishmael attempts to grasp the nature of this whiteness in order to better understand Moby Dick, he is frustrated. To Ishmael the whiteness conveys a "vague nameless horror" that is "mystical and well-nigh ineffable" (Melville 178). Although people like Ahab may project ideas onto Moby Dick's whiteness, the essence of the whiteness itself is virtually uninscriptable; no particular writing or coding will stick to it. Ishmael's discourse strays from the whale's whiteness in particular, to a philosophical consideration of whiteness in general. He discusses whiteness as potentially signifying that which is most positive: "the innocence of brides, the benignity of old age" (Melville 179) and that which is most negative: "there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes... panic to the soul" (Melville
Whiteness can be a shroud which veils the truth of the world lying beneath it, or the underlying essence of "a colorless, all color atheism from which we all shrink" (Melville 186). What begins as a discussion of a particular feature of Moby Dick evolves into a pondering of ultimate metaphysical problems, as whiteness becomes everything and nothing.

With the discussion of whiteness, Ishmael's discourse becomes speculative and paradoxical, in contradistinction to the more strictly informational segments of the book. It opens interpretive possibilities instigated by Moby Dick, yet not confined to him. In contrast to the other whales that fill particular spaces within the cetological scheme, Moby Dick opens a different, interpretive space, which overrides any position he may have in the encyclopaedia. When we consider that Ishmael has divided the whales up into books, we might say that Moby Dick constitutes a different sort of text from the other books/whales that make up the cetological encyclopaedia.

The bibliographic structure which Ishmael uses to classify the whales gives rise to further considerations of Moby Dick's otherness. First, however, we must think about the implications of this textualization of whales in and of itself. For in this structure, the books and chapters which comprehend the whales are intended to become coextensive with the whales they contain. In short, Ishmael perceives whales as texts.

Reading is the most important activity in *Moby Dick*. Moby
Dick's whiteness, Quequeg's tattooed body, the hieroglyphs on the sperm whale's skin and many other elements within the text are presented as texts in their own right. By thus textualizing things, Ishmael tends to follow the Medieval tradition of perceiving the world as a book, especially the Paracelsian view as described in Ernst Curtius' book, European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages: "Finally, the whole earth is a book or a library... which must be used 'pilgrimly'" (Curtius 322). In Ishmael's systematization, whales form their own library or bibliography within the grand library of the world. The whales are texts in and of themselves, entering the realm of the written prior to Ishmael's writing about them. To know them is to read them. According to their sizes, the different kinds of whales fit into three textual formats: Folio, Octavo, and Duodecimo. An equivalence is established between whale size and page size, emphasizing the coextensiveness between whales and books.

The most important implication of this equivalence of whales and books is that Moby Dick is also both whale and book. As a proper name, Moby Dick signifies both the white whale and the novel itself. If he were simply one sperm whale among others, Moby Dick could be assimilated into Book I, Chapter I of the cetological encyclopaedia. Given his unusualness, however, Moby Dick forms a book of his own. This book escapes the bibliography of whales, while at the same time incorporating that encyclopaedic structure in a chapter. This situation subjects the cetological encyclopaedias to a hall of mirrors kind of
distortion, as that which ought to be comprehended escapes the comprehensive system, only to incorporate that system. Given that Moby Dick's whiteness makes him an indeterminate, incomprehensible text, the interiorizing of the comprehensive, comprehensible encyclopaedia within such an indeterminate structure amounts to a displacement of the totalizing scheme and its claims to comprehensiveness.

Moby Dick's difference from other whales is symptomatic of the dual structure of Melville's novel. The structure which the cetological encyclopaedia characterizes is determinate comprehending and comprehensible. It is the text's structure of general linguistic information, presenting knowledge of the kind that is fixed in an encyclopaedia. The structure that Moby Dick characterizes is indeterminate and paradoxical. It is the structure of the post-encyclopaedia, of all the things that the encyclopaedia cannot comprehend. Moby Dick's whiteness, that endlessly interpretable, yet ultimately inconclusive whiteness, epitomizes the structure. To use M.M. Bakhtin's terms, the comprehensive and incomprehensible structures interact dialogically. They are wound around each other inextricably.

As I have said, the comprehensive structure has the aura of a conventional encyclopaedia. It is a series of essays on various aspects of whales and whaling, each of which could easily be an entry in an encyclopaedia. It is full of lists and minutiae. In part, this information is trivial, and it is not surprising that digests and children's versions of the novel
excise much of it in their efforts to convert Moby Dick into a plot-oriented adventure story. At times the information it contains is reminiscent of the two sections which preface the novel, "Etymology" and "Extracts" provided by the "threadbare in coat, body and brain" usher and the "poor devil" of a Sub-Sub Librarian, which are compilations of dead information. If we look at the comprehensive structural elements without care, they seem pedantic and dull, a potential nightmare of boring scholarship. In the light of the counter-structure of the novel, however, the parts of the text in which general linguistic information dominates assume an indispensable structural importance, especially in places where the incomprehensible structure infiltrates them.

Throughout the comprehending sections of Moby Dick, Ishmael tells us of the difficulties of attaining absolute truth concerning whales. He even doubts the validity of his own project, since he considers learning about whales in books, or through any mediated form of representation, inadequate. He tells us that the only way we can get "even a tolerable idea" (Melville 251) of the whale is to go whaling ourselves. Thus Ishmael's "reading" of whales is always under erasure because of its ultimate indeterminacy: "how may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the Awful Chaldee of the Sperm Whale's brow?" (Melville 323). In this sense, the unreadability of Moby Dick's whiteness pervades the whole work, so that even the most straightforward of Ishmael's dissertations is subject to openness and doubt. For every readable text in Ishmael's system there is an unreadable
one, threatening to undermine his encyclopaedic gesture. The larger his collection of knowledge grows, the more apparent it becomes that something crucial is missing from it.

Since Moby Dick is the epitome of indeterminacy and unreadability, he becomes the focus of the doubt that runs through the book. Consequently, Ahab's quest for the white whale becomes all the more important for Ishmael's system. When Ishmael tells us, "Ahab's quenchless feud seemed mine" (Melville 169), it is because Ahab's desire to break through the whiteness of the whale is representative of an attempt to see beyond an ultimate indeterminacy to a revelation of the world:

"All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks.... If man will strike, strike through the mask! How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the White Whale is that wall, shoved near to me. Sometimes I think there's nought beyond. But tis enough."

(Melville 157)

Ahab's teleological quest, in contrast to Ishmael's discursive collection, gets straight to the heart of the matter:

The path to my fixed purpose is grooved to run. Over unsounded gorges, through rifled hearts of mountains, under torrents' beds unerringly I rush! Naught's an obstacle, naught's an angle to the iron way!

(Melville 161)

Thus, in conjunction with the dual structure of comprehensiveness and incomprehensibility, another dual structure which involves
Ishmael's discursive, perhaps periphrastic, working around problems and Ahab's monomaniacal quest for the ultimate solution to the ultimate problem of understanding what lies behind the pasteboard masks that constitute the visible world, also runs through the text.

Ishmael is so tied with Ahab's quest because its completion would validate his collection of information. His assemblage of knowledge would then have some relationship with the revelation of ultimate meaning, making it more than just empty trivia. From another perspective, however, the revelation of what lies beyond Moby Dick might make Ishmael's work unnecessary. That work would simply be a scaffolding which could be thrown away, replaced by a shining revelation and a true sense of completion without indeterminacy. Yet again, since completion equals death, the world might simply come to an end with Ahab's success. Since Ahab's quest fails, and Moby Dick escapes capture, the imperfect edifice which Ishmael constructs, is simply a supplement for what might have been; a structure built around a non-existent revelation which might have made the structure truly encyclopaedic.

At the end of the novel, when Ahab and the rest of the crew have drowned in the confrontation with Moby Dick, Ishmael remains "floating on the margin of the ensuing scene" (Melville 521). His position sums up that of himself and his project throughout the novel. All that he writes is marginal to the impossible encyclopaedia, rather than encyclopaedic in itself. Like Borges'
narrator, Ishmael simply points out that the true encyclopaedia is beyond human comprehension. As readers of the world we are in a position not much better than that of Quequeg and his tattooed body:

And this tattooing, had been the work of a departed prophet and seer of his island, who, by those hieroglyphic marks, had written out on his body a complete theory of the heavens and the earth, and a mystical treatise on the art of attaining truth; so that Quequeg in his own proper person was a riddle to unfold; A wondrous work in one volume; but whose mysteries not even himself could read, though his own heart beat against them.

(Melville 441)

ii. "Gravity's Rainbow": Encyclopaedic Paranoia

As a post-encyclopaedic text, Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow is markedly similar to Moby Dick in that it also dialogically interrelates a structure of general information and a teleological structure. The analogous "Moby Dick" of Pynchon's book is the A4 00000 Rocket, which serves as the object of many quests for revelation. The narrative of this novel is not as
focussed on particular characters as *Moby Dick*. It is an extensively recoded work, jumping from perspective to perspective in order to refract the ontological and teleological problems that it addresses. The quest for what lies behind the Rocket is distributed among several figures and groups who have different positions in relation to the Rocket and the system which forms around it. *Gravity's Rainbow* is also fundamentally different from *Moby Dick* in that the quests for the Rocket do not take place on the "profound unbounded sea", but thoroughly within the context of human systems, political and otherwise. The problem the novel presents is not so much the creation of a system as dealing with already constructed systems in which one lives and trying to discover the nature of them. The problem is living inside what *appears* to be an encyclopaedic system which refuses to reveal itself in any holistic manner.

For purposes of identification, I will call the system which surrounds the Rocket the war system. The "war" in *Gravity's Rainbow* extends beyond the temporal boundaries of World War II in which the novel is set; "war" simply defines the state of modern humankind. The way the war system functions forms the crux of the encyclopaedic problem of the novel:

The war needs to divide...and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The war does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even the sort the Germans have
engineered, ein Volk ein Führer--it wants a machine of many parts, not a oneness but a complexity....

(Pynchon 131)

We can perceive the war system as a perverse encyclopaedia. It disguises itself as a unity, yet it is actually opposed to unification. It is a kind of totalizing structure, as a "machine of many parts," but it totalizes paradoxically by being dispersive and disjunctive. In a sense the encyclopaedia in Gravity's Rainbow is already disrupted; yet we must contend with the illusion of unity.

The war system is a transformation of the vision of encyclopaedic unity. The transformation occurs with the technological and political movements of a humanity bent on increase and, ultimately, self-destruction:

Kekulé dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the world....The Serpent that announces "The world is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally returning," is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to violate the Cycle.

(Pynchon 412)

The system demands that "'productivity' and 'earnings' keep on increasing with time" (Pynchon 412), at the expense of the world's natural balance: "Living inside the System is like riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide..." (Pynchon 412). The system must die by its own hand.
On its way towards ruin, it establishes a labyrinth which reflects its violation of the cycle.

The Rocket is the primary manifestation of the war's "machine". The "A" in its serial number stands for "aggregate"—a sum total, an assemblage of many parts. The Rocket is a grand design of such complexity that no one knows how the whole thing works, not even the technicians who devise and construct it, as each only knows his specific part. Knowledge of the Rocket is comprised of separate synecdoches for an unknown and unknowable whole. The many quests for the Rocket work in the hope that its discovery will somehow reveal the system by containing it metonymically. The wholeness and symmetries of the Rocket would localize the system as an analyzable totality. Finding the Rocket, however, proves to be a hopeless task, for the process of its discovery involves participating in the dispersive labyrinth of the war system.

As a product of technology, the Rocket is representative of the progress of mankind:

Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of loveable but scatterbrained Mother Nature

(Pynchon 324)

It is not only technological, but phallological; manmade in every sense of the word. This fact tells us something about the nature of its system. In all respects the Rocket and the war system are
unnatural. The problem of reading the world mutates in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. We are no longer concerned with the natural world as a text, but with the text that man has superimposed on nature, or "won away" from nature by manipulating nature’s chemistry to produce things like rockets. Thus there is always the sense that those who seek the Rocket in order to understand the world are pursuing the wrong text, as Enzian, one of the Rocket seekers, suggests:

"well we assumed--naturlich-- that the holy Text had to be the Rocket...its symmetries, its latencies, the cuteness of it enchanted and seduced us while the real Text persisted somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness...."

(Pynchon 520)

The projection of the world onto the Rocket directs attention from the "somewhere else" of the "réal Text" that is the same as the somewhere else in "Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius" and *Moby Dick*. The Rocket encyclopaedia, like the whale encyclopaedia, and the encyclopaedia of Tlön, is a diversion from something other, a supplement.

The technology versus nature opposition is one of several oppositions which work in a similar manner throughout the book. One of the most useful of these in defining the structure of *Gravity’s Rainbow* appears in a dialogue between Tyrone Slothrop, the quasi-hero of the novel, and the Argentine anarchist Squalidozzi. This dialogue opposes an anarchic openness to labyrinthine complexity in terms of land use. Squalidozzi says:
"It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that openness: it is terror to us. Look at Borges. Look at the suburbs of Buenos Aires."

(Pynchon 264)

The complexity of the Argentine labyrinths is fundamentally analogous to the complexity of the war system. Both reflect a drive which Slothrop calls progress: "you, you can't have open range forever, you can't just stand in the way of progress" (Pynchon 264). This progress, however, is not step by step or linear in any way. It is more like what the beginning of the novel describes as "a progressive knotting into" (Pynchon 3). It is a movement towards overcoding, towards "stacked density" (Pynchon 264).

In an important metaphor, Squalidozzi textualizes the Argentinian dilemma: "'In the days of the gauchos my country was a blank piece of paper'" (Pynchon 264). For Squalidozzi, the blank piece of paper is an ideal state. He also suggests that, in spite of the complexity that they impose on the land, the constructors of the labyrinths also desire the blank page: "'the Argentinian heart, in its perversity and guilt, longs for a return to that first unscribbled serenity...'" (Pynchon 264). In fact, the spectre of this blankness haunts the Argentinians, reminding them of their once unwritten country:

--but even into the smokiest labyrinths, the furthest
In effect, the blankness still exists, but it has been distributed throughout the inscribed complexity. It is inherent to the complexity, since it cannot be eradicated, or completely written over.

The war system is also a metaphorically inscribed labyrinth, emphasized by the fact that the Rocket is so often perceived as a text. It too has distributed gaps and blanknesses and desires to return to "unscribbled serenity". The Rocket is a tool of destruction, which ultimately will wipe clear the complex sytem that has produced it. It will bring everything back to zero, so that although its system has an everincreasing complexity, it is also self-effacing.

Meanwhile, the war system seduces people by partially exposing itself to those who seek to understand it. It is even suggested to be a Masonic plot:

Non-Masons stay pretty much in the dark about What Goes On, though now and then something jumps out, exposes itself, jumps giggling back again, leaving you with few details but a lot of Awful Suspicions.

(Pynchon 587)

The fragments which jump out presume an underlying whole which can somehow be pieced together. Conceptually, the human world of Gravity's Rainbow is divided in two; those who supposedly
generate the system and understand it, referred to as the "elect" or, more often, simply "Them", and the "preterite" who are enmeshed in "Their" system. Only the latter, however, are manifest in the text, while "They" remain as invisible as their system.

As readers of the novel, we are cast along with the preterite and the Non-Masons, as we attempt to piece together the narrative. At one point, the text addresses us, telling us we are:

kicking endlessly among the plastic trivia, finding in each Deeper Significance and trying to string them all together like terms of a power series hoping to zero in on the tremendous and secret Function....

(Pynchon 590)

We never reach the "secret Function" and the trivia does not coalesce into a perfect encyclopaedia. We can only participate in the dispersal of information.

Thus we cannot identify Gravity's Rainbow with the encyclopaedia in any way that is not antithetical. It denies the coherent vision of the encyclopaedia by making all knowledge peripheral to "What Goes On". The characters in the novel always perceive themselves to be outside of any possible encyclopaedia:

[Slothrop] will never get further than the edge of this meta-cartel which has made itself known tonight,
this Rocket-state whose borders he cannot cross....

(Pynchon 566)

On the other hand, they are inside the system which perpetuates the illusion of the encyclopaedia. The more these characters attempt to pursue a holistic vision, the more they knot themselves into the complex labyrinth, effectively moving themselves further and further from any holistic system. In Gravity's Rainbow the accumulation of knowledge does not unite that knowledge; it drives it apart.

The teleological problem which knots people like Slothrop inextricably into the system is one of zeroing in. Any attempt to zero in paradoxically results in a movement outwards. This is particularly evident in the realm of language. Slothrop's discovery of a seeming connection between "Blackwords" illustrates the difficulty of zeroing in through language:

Is there a single root, deeper than anyone has probed, from which Slothrop's Blackwords only appear to flower separately? Or has he by way of language caught the German mania for name giving, dividing the creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named, even to bringing in the mathematics of combination, tacking together established nouns to get new ones, the insanely diddling play of a chemist whose molecules are words...?

(Pynchon 391)

When the "mathematics of combination" and chemistry become
associated with language, there is no way to discover the "single root". Trying to use language as a tool for zeroing in is counter-productive, as language always seems to involve a moving away from points of origin. Like the war system, language is always dividing and subdividing in a potentially infinite manner. While the dividing process creates a sense of connection between words, it also creates gaps with each divisory move.

Chemistry and language have a particular relationship in *Gravity's Rainbow*. At different points in the text, each is seen in the light of the other. "'How alphabetic is the nature of molecules,'" says one character:

"These are our letters, our words: they too can be maculated, broken, recoupled, redefined, co-polymerized one to the other in world wide chains that will surface now and then over long molecular silences, like the seen parts of a tapestry."

(Pynchon 355)

Hence there is a technological/linguistic link in the novel. The human control over chemistry, which produces synthetics such as the Imipolex G which covers the Rocket, reflects the control over language and vice-versa. Yet for all the manipulation involved in establishing world wide chains of chemistry and language, there remain the silences, like the blank spaces in the Argentine labyrinths. Language and synthetic chemistry may proliferate, but they are never complete, nor do they cover the world completely. Pynchon sets world wide chains against the molecular silences, creating a tapestry that has both seen parts and, at
least conceptually, unseen, showing how the proliferation of human systems not only creates and structures knowledge, but also structures the ignorance inherent in the blank spaces of these systems. Ignorance and knowledge interact, so that while the seen elements suggest an interlocking whole, the unseen elements undermine that presumption of complete inter-connectedness.

Perhaps the best way to describe the effect that Pynchon creates in *Gravity's Rainbow* is as encyclopaedic paranoia. The illusory connectedness that the war system engenders has the characters and readers of the text always perceiving themselves to be on the edge of revelation. But that perception is always held in check by the opposite perception of being on the edge of nothing:

> If there is something comforting—religious if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long.  

(Pynchon 434)

The text keeps us flipping back and forth, between overcoded fullness, and absolute emptiness. It plays on our desires for "religious" meaning and encyclopaedism, and our most nihilistic fears. Such desires knot us into the labyrinth of the war system, whose frustrating powers of dispersal push us towards nihilism.

The characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* become simply functions of the system in which they are enmeshed. They are often referred to as chess pieces; indeed, Slothrop carries a chess
piece in his pocket as he pursues the Rocket through the "Zone" of post-World War II Germany. The characters can only speculate blindly as to what position they occupy. One of these speculations makes an appropriate reference to the alphabetizing scheme of the encyclopaedia:

"Schwartzgerät, Schwartzkommando. Scuffling: suppose somewhere there were an alphabetical list,... But suppose that on this list, the two names, Blackinstrument, Blackcommand, just happened to be there, juxtaposed. That's all, an alphabetical coincidence. We wouldn't have to be real, and neither would it, correct?"

(Pynchon 363)

Besides parodying the arbitrary unreality of the alphabetical encyclopaedic scheme, this speculation articulates the position of the person who must inhabit any kind of system. If one is an entry in a system, juxtaposed with other entries, viewing the system _in toto_ is impossible. Elsewhere, Slothrop realizes:

That the Zone can sustain many other plots besides those polarized upon himself...that these are the els and busses of an enormous transit system here in the Raketenstadt, more tangled even than Boston's....

(Pynchon 603)

He feels that if he can just ride the system long enough, making the right transfers, that "this network of all plots may yet carry him to freedom"(Pynchon 603). He never realizes this freedom; his personality disperses in the face of the labyrinth.
"Plots" is a pun here, referring both to the conspiratorial plots of the war system, and to the plots of the text itself. *Gravity's Rainbow* itself sustains many plots as it probes its own paranoid transformation of the encyclopaedic vision of unity and connectedness. The transformation it enacts is bleak, but intellectually stimulating in that it challenges our perceptions of order by placing them in the context of a perverse labyrinth which makes them paranoid and dispersed.

5. Allegory and the Open Text: A Reading Strategy for the Post-Encyclopaedic Work

Works like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Moby Dick* which disrupt the encyclopaedic ideal require a different reading strategy than conventionally encyclopaedic texts. Encyclopaedias, whether they are "real" or literary works presuming an identity with the encyclopaedia involve a reading pattern of digestion. If one had a perfect memory, one could incorporate them fully. Post-encyclopaedic texts, however, not only defy a holistic perspective philosophically, but also pragmatically in terms of the reader's perception of them. In order to help define the reader's project for these works, we can turn to some of the ideas of Umberto Eco, Jurij Lotman and Maureen Quilligan.

In *The Role of the Reader* Umberto Eco discusses certain
kinds of musical compositions as helpful analogues to literary compositions which he defines as "open":

in listening to Scambi the auditor is required to do some of the organizing and structuring of the musical discourse. He collaborates with the composer in making the composition.

(Eco 56)

The open work is one which we can call, "finite in one sense, but in another sense... unlimited" (Eco 54). It contains finite data, but that data can be re-structured in a potentially unlimited number of ways. In terms of musical composition, the composer will leave the arrangement of aspects of the piece up to the performer. Thus the completion of the work (if completion is the word) relies greatly upon the way the performer chooses to order notes, the length of time the performer wishes to give to the sounding of those notes and so on. The composition can be played in virtually limitless variations while remaining the same composition. Eco maintains that this process of the performer/reader playing with variables in the composition also works in certain literary texts.

The openness of any given work is, of course, relative. There is no absolute way in which we can separate open works from closed ones. There can only be works which are more or less open than others. For the purposes of his argument, however, Eco must use the binary opposition of open:closed. The closed work more or less determines the performer/reader's progression in a semantically linear fashion:
Those texts that obsessively aim at arousing a precise response on the part of more or less empirical readers...are in fact open to any possible "aberrant" decoding.

(Eco 8)
The closed work does not include in itself the possibility for the aberrant reading, or the reading which is not the "correct" one, but in its linear determinacy actually allows its reader to be "immoderately" off base. Only a text which allows the reader to master it by providing such a clear semantic progression can provide the reader with the opportunity to impose any interpretation s/he likes.

The open work, on the other hand, disavows the prescription of a linear progression, while it imposes requirements upon the reader. Eco maintains that while the closed work implies an open reader, the open work prescribes its reader as a part of its textual strategy: "An open text outlines a 'closed' project of its Model Reader as a component of its structural strategy" (Eco 9). The open work actually has aberrations written into itself, thereby disallowing the reader of any further aberration: "An open text, however 'open' it may be, cannot afford whatever interpretation" (Eco 9).

This homology of closed text/open reader:open text/closed reader may seem paradoxical, since the open text would seem to allow the reader both more and less freedom at the same time. But if we can understand that the open text prescribes its
reader's freedom, working its openness and prescriptiveness in a dialectic, then we can appreciate the concept of the open work as a game which makes up its rules as it goes along:

An author can foresee an "ideal reader affected by ideal insomnia"...able to master different codes and eager to deal with the text as a maze of many issues. But in the last analysis, what matters is not the various issues in themselves but the maze-like structure of the text. You cannot use the text as you want, but only as the text wants you to use it.

(Eco 9)

We can perceive a definite power structure in Eco's theory. The closed text requires that we master it. Its author, in having determined a certain semantic path, must trust the reader to follow that path, thereby submitting to the reader, who may choose to follow that path or not. The open text, however, works in the opposite manner. The semantic pathway is unclear, inviting the reader to find his/her own way, but at the same time making the reader submit to the labyrinthine codes of the text.

Post-Encyclopaedic texts like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Moby Dick* are examples of works which defy aberrant readings in the sense that they have already encoded aberrance. They present themselves as infinitely variable and indeterminate misreadings of the world. The only foreseeable way of misreading these texts is to mis-misread them, i.e. to suggest that there is a determinate reading for them (or "whatever interpretation" as Eco would have it). Perhaps more than any other kind of text, the
post-encyclopaedic text engages the reader in a performance. The reader must pursue in them the same tasks as the characters or voices, but on a purely textual level, whether it be searching for the meaning of whiteness through language as Ishmael does, or pondering the dispersal of seemingly connected words like Slothrop's "Blackwords." The text becomes an endlessly playable game, because the rules by which the work plays do not define a stopping point; their indeterminacy keeps them from bottoming out.

In *The Structure of the Artistic Text* Jurij Lotman makes a claim similar to Eco's when he discusses the inexhaustibility of the "artistic" text:

> An artistic model is always broader and has greater vitality than any interpretation attributed to it...when we recode an artistic system into a non-artistic language, we are always left with an "untranslated" remainder, that "suprainformation" which is possible only in an artistic text.

(Lotman 68)

For Lotman, artisticness in a text is correlated with the interpretive possibilities that the text affords: "A text which lends itself only to a limited number of interpretations comes close to being a non-artistic text" (Lotman 68). Lotman's claims may be hyperbolic in their distinction between art and non-art, but they certainly apply to the post-encyclopaedic work, which we might re-define in Lotman's terms as a hyper-artistic text. Following Lotman, I suggest that the encyclopaedic work is the
epitome of the non-artistic text. It does not allow "the intrusion of disorder, entropy, or disorganization into the sphere of structure and information" (Lotman 75). Lotman calls this intrusion "noise", and it is the project of the encyclopaedic text to be a specifically unnoisy work, whereas the post-encyclopaedic text thrives on enfolding noise into its structure. By introducing noise in this way, the post-encyclopaedic text can endlessly reformulate the problem of its being, while the encyclopaedic text would render those problems dead. Post-encyclopaedic works are only finishable in the sense that one may reach the final pages of them; intellectually, however, they remain unfinishable. They always await further performances.

The notion of allegory plays a distinctive part in Eco's distinction of open and closed works, as it does with encyclopaedias. For the encyclopaedia's perfection lies in its ability to be brought back to the world as a metonymy of that world. The traditional conception of allegory posits that a given work can be interpreted on various other levels than on the literal; specifically, the moral level, the allegorical level, and the anagogical level. Eco suggests that this multi-leveled reading is relatively closed, despite its apparent potential for openness:

The meaning of allegorical figures and emblems which the reader is likely to encounter is already
prescribed by his encyclopaedias, bestiaries and lapidaries.

(Eco 51)

Thus, there is always a definite correspondence between the text's symbols and the levels of meaning which can be derived from them. Eco suggests that this correspondence is determined by a general medieval world view of an "ordered cosmos, a hierarchy of essences and laws" (Eco 52). Eco asserts that modern "open" allegories, exemplified by the works of Kafka, represent a radical departure from the fixed conception of medieval allegory:

in Kafka there is no confirmation in an encyclopaedia, no matching paradigm in the cosmos, to provide the key to the symbolism.

(Eco 54)

In his works, Kafka provides symbols and patterns for which there is no definite, prescribed interpretation. He gives us one half of the allegorical equation, leaving the other half open:

The work remains inexhaustible insofar as it is "open," because in it an ordered world based on universally acknowledged laws is being replaced by a world based on ambiguity, both in the negative sense that directional centers are missing and in a positive sense, because values and dogma are always being placed in question.

(Eco 54)

Like the works of Kafka, post-encyclopaedic works are
imperfectible allegories; no imposition of external laws will close the text.

A post-encyclopaedic work incorporates what would be after the fact activity for conventional allegory, in that the texts are always reading themselves in an operation that Maureen Quilligan calls "allegoresis" in her book *The Language of Allegory*. Quilligan suggests that the linking of symbolic patterns in a work with "other" meanings outside the work is actually antithetical to what allegory is:

The "other" named by the term *allos* in the word "allegory" is not some other hovering above the words of the text, but the possibility of an otherness, a polysemy inherent in the very words of the page; allegory therefore names the fact that language can signify many things at once. It does not name the many other things language means, or the disjunction between saying and meaning, but the often problematical process of meaning multiple things simultaneously with one word.

(Quilligan 26)

Quilligan's description of allegory, running against the stream of conventional thought as it does, opens the way for an ontological perception of the post-encyclopaedic work as a pushing of allegory to its limits.

The reading strategy which one must adopt in engaging the post-encyclopaedic work as a text that is open and infinitely allegorical, echoes Foucault's notion of writing in order not to
die; one reads such a text against encyclopaedically prescribed
death, becoming involved in a polysemic performance that has no
viable conclusion.

6. Working Toward the Literary Fugue

In *The Structure of the Artistic Text* Jurij Lotman distinguishes between two forms of recoding which create meaning in texts: internal recoding "in which meaning is formed not by the convergence of two chain structures, but immanently within one system" (Lotman 35), and external recoding, in which "equivalence is established between two chain structures of different types, and between their individual elements" (Lotman 36). The problems this distinction raises, such as understanding the relationship between the inside and outside of a system, and being able to tell the difference between one system and "chain structures of different types" are important for our exploration of the post-encyclopaedic text.

Internal recoding is particularly notable with regard to encyclopaedic texts, for Lotman says that it is particularly evident in those secondary semiotic systems which lay claim to universality, an exclusive
world outlook, to the systematization of all human reality.

(Lotman 37)

Although Lotman uses literary Romanticism as his primary example of such an immanent hermetic system, it is obvious that any straightforward encyclopaedic enterprise must participate in this kind of recoding as well. Any system which attempts to circumscribe an "all" of some kind has to contain its structure of relations in a way that does not allow for the intrusion of other systems that would disrupt the perfection of the primary system. To use Bakhtin's terms, such a system is monologic.

To help define internal recoding, Lotman uses non-referential algebra and absolute music as examples. If we consider the algebraic formula a=b+c without giving any of the variables numerical value, the equation still forms its own internal meaning: "Their meaning will be relational: it will express the relation of some elements in the system to others" (Lotman 36). Of absolute music, Lotman says: "we can imagine, however conditionally, a strictly musical meaning formed by relations of sound series without extra-musical bonds" (Lotman 36). Imagining such a strictly internal formation in a verbal work is of course a different matter, since it would seem to be impossible to stop words from operating in ways other than those determined by immanent structuring. Internal recoding is also problematic when we consider the inherent allegorical and metonymical functions of texts. We must remember that internal recoding is a "re" coding of something else and therefore the
internally recoded text must relate to its "allos."

We can formulate a possible answer to these problems, by considering that the internally recoded work structures its outside, or the ground against which it is a figure, in a way that makes it perfectly compatible with the text's internal structure. It helps here to recall Eco's ideas on medieval allegory and Foucault's notion of the work that places the infinite outside of itself. These are cases of conceptually perfect metonymy, in which there is an undisrupted exchange between the world and the text which acts as its metonym; in other words, the encyclopaedic perception of the world.

In the externally recoded system, however, that which is "outside" is different from the corresponding component of the internally recoded system. "Outside" is not that which the text perfectly reflects, but the structures that run alongside and intersect at any given juncture in the work. That which is "external" is not necessarily external to the text itself. It is simply external from the perspective of any of the different systems operating in the text. Diverse elements are mapped onto each other to create certain effects:

we must stress that the plurality of external recoding means different things in different structures. In some it can take a series of subjective points of view which, when projected upon each other, reveal a common content--reality....But the opposite is also possible...repeated recoding [may confirm] the absence
of reality. Reality disintegrates into a large number of interpretations...it is imaginary.

(Lotman 39)

Like Bakhtin's dialogism, external recoding is a means of bringing into play various systems within the confines of a single work, so that the ground of a work becomes as faceted as its figure. For our purposes, the notion of the disintegration of reality through external recoding is the most interesting, since the books we are looking at are concerned with the imaginariness of encyclopaedic reality.

Although it may seem paradoxical, we should consider how internal recoding and external recoding may co-exist in a textual system. Lotman himself admits this possibility: "We should not forget that theoretically disparate systems of meaning formation often co-exist..." (Lotman 39). But at the same time he says:

Most often one type of meaning predominates. The stricter the organization of one of these systems, the more loosely the other will be constructed within the given structure.

(Lotman 49)

In order to prepare ourselves for Louis Zukofsky's "A"-12, however, we must be able to conceive of the rare case where internal and external recoding do not function to each other's detriment.

For this purpose, we can look to a few of the ideas of Douglas Hofstadter, whose statements on fugues in Gödel, Escher,
Bach open the possibility for the co-existence of internal and external recoding within a given system. Before dealing with fugues, Hofstadter defines the canon, from whose basic structure the fugue develops:

The idea of a canon is that one single theme is played against itself. This is done by having "copies" of the theme played by the various participating voices.

(Hofstadter 8)

The basic theme can be played against itself in several ways, the most fundamental of which is to stagger the voices in time, so that the copies of the theme enter the piece after specific time delays, creating an interaction of melody and harmony:

In order for a theme to work as a canon theme each of its notes must be able to serve in a dual (or triple, or quadruple) role: it must firstly be part of a melody, and secondly it must be part of the harmonization of that same melody...each note in a canon has more than one musical meaning....

(Hofstadter 8)

Besides temporal staggering, other means which can achieve this multiplicity of musical meaning include playing the copies in different pitches, playing them twice as quickly, or twice as slowly, and inverting the theme: "which means to make a melody which jumps down wherever the original theme jumps up..."

(Hofstadter 8).

Strictly speaking, the canon is internally recoded in the sense that it never goes out of the system of the basic theme.
But it manipulates this theme in a way which produces a paradigmatic as well as a syntagmatic recoding. The way in which a canon plays its theme against itself to produce a multiplicity of musical meanings makes the internal recoding begin to work in the manner of an external recoding system. Different versions of a certain musical content are mapped onto each other, but the immanence of the structure is not lost. In one sense the structure is hermetic, while in another it is open; especially when its rules are somewhat relaxed:

Sometimes it is desirable to relax the tightness of the canon form. One way is to allow slight departures from perfect copying.... Also, some canons have "free" voices--voices which do not employ the canon's theme, but which simply harmonize agreeably with the voices that are in the canon with each other.

(Hofstadter 9)

Thus the canon represents the development of freedom within the limits of an internal recoding system.

The fugue expands the horizons of the canon in terms of musical freedom. Although it is fundamentally based on the canon, its rules are considerably less restrained, as Hofstadter says:

When all the voices have "arrived" then there are no rules. There are, to be sure, standard kinds of things to do-- but not so standard that one can merely compose a fugue by formula.

(Hofstadter 9)
What is most inviting about the fugue from a literary point of view is the way it plays against itself in the musical equivalent of dialogism, as well as of Foucault's mirroring principle, in order to produce what is effectively an "externally" recoded system out of an internally recoded one.

For the post-encyclopaedic work, the notion of the fugue provides a good structural metaphor. For writers like Melville, Pynchon and Zukofsky, the notion of externality is not feasible since it suggests a deluded objectivity. In their systems, it is impossible to transcend the self or the processes in which the self is enmeshed. By logical extension, it is also impossible to transcend the text allegorically. However, such transcendence is the key to encyclopaedic works, which, although they are immanently recoded, presume an external, objective perspective: a supreme viewpoint that is fundamental to the encyclopaedic text's monologic, authoritarian voice. What the post-encyclopaedic text achieves is a kind of fugal "inwreathing", to use Zukofsky's terms; an expansion of the textual system from an internal perspective.

To call Moby Dick and Gravity's Rainbow textual fugues would be to stretch the point, but they do have certain fugal characteristics. Zukofsky's "A"-12, however, overtly models itself on a fugal framework as it generates a post-encyclopaedic inwreathing of an individual perspective.
In some respects, Louis Zukofsky’s "A"-12 is what Lotman would call an internally recoded, "Romantic" system. At the same time, however, it is an "open" text in Eco’s terms, a novelistic text in accordance with Bakhtin’s theory and a "transformed network", which enacts Foucault’s notion of positing the infinitude of writing against death. Zukofsky’s use of a fugal structure makes possible this dual position. "A"-12 plays the concept of the individual voice which circumscribes the text against itself, making it multifaceted: "Have your odyssey/ How many voiced it be..." (Zukofsky 128). The text continually addresses itself and questions itself, as it generates an assemblage of possible positions concerning the problem of textualizing the world. It is thus a thoroughly post-encyclopaedic work.

"A"-12 strives towards a musicality, asserting that the order of music is the most universal form of order:

The order that rules music, the same
controls the placing of the stars and the feathers
in a birds wing.

(Zukofsky 128)

In Prepositions, Zukofsky states that the task of writing is to "approach a state of music wherein the ideas present themselves sensuously and intelligently" (Prepositions 18). Approaching this state is complicated by the necessity that writing must deal
with "facts", which are not necessarily truth values, but rather units of linguistic information, statements and assertions that commit language to the production of meaning. These facts may function discordantly in relation to others, so that the written work is

Continually encountering facts which in the making seem to want to disturb the music and yet the music or movement cannot exist without the facts, without its facts.

(Prepositions 18)

The problem of constructing a "musical" system in language thus involves working with elements that threaten to make the system unmusical by their discordant contradictoriness. What "A"-12 constitutes is a system which allows contrasting facts to interact without subordinating them to a hierarchical order by letting them play by means of fugal inwreathing. The word fugue form serves as a structured heterogeneity which transforms the noise of contradictory "facts" into communication, or "music".

If we perceive "the order that rules music" in the terms of Eco and Hofstadter, we can say that Zukofsky's assertion of its "control" is less determinate than it may initially appear. Clearly music has no single distinct order. The order of any piece of music is constituted by the rules to which it submits itself. Thus the order of music is tautological, self-reflexive and fundamentally indeterminate. This is particularly the case with both the fugue, which Hofstadter says is not conceivable in formulaic terms, and with "A"-12 which is "not so hard set as a
paradigm" (Zukofsky 215). Thus what we must deal with in this text is the functioning existence of a fluid system:

For all inwreathed
This imagined music
Traces the particular line
Of lines meeting
By chance or design.

(Zukofsky 189)

The illusory determinacy of the phrase "the order that rules music" is symptomatic of "A"-12's post-encyclopaedic structure. It fields a number of seemingly encyclopaedic assertions which it proceeds to undermine and transform.

Every affirmation of "fact" which "A"-12 produces is subject to erasure once it is put into play with the other affirmations of the system. In this respect it is similar to Ishmael's subverted attempts to establish an encyclopaedic order in Moby Dick. Early in the work, the text asserts that "Unfinished is against the laws of the spirit" (Zukofsky 130) and later claims that it represents a self-contained whole. But like Ishmael's "comprehensive" cetological system, these claims interrelate dialogically with counter statements: "Nothing is ever finished/Complete" (Zukofsky 181). Further disrupting the wholeness of the work, Zukofsky lists a number of incomplete projects which represent sippages in the text's aspirations of completeness:

These are some things I wanted
To get into a poem,
Some unfinished work
The inclusion of this "unfinished work" is a supplementary gesture which functions paradoxically. If Zukofsky's project in "A"-12 is to present a personal encyclopaedia, as at times he claims it is, it cannot be complete unless it includes even his incomplete works, which only serve to render the entire project incomplete: the idea of the personal encyclopaedia self-deconstructs.

"A"-12 makes certain assertions which seem to ally its conception of the world with that which Bakhtin posits for the epic: "The Great World/ Is closed/ So that nothing can leave it" (Zukofsky 171); "You cannot take out of the circle--what was in it" (Zukofsky 173). In spite of these assertions, however, "A"-12 does not draw a circle around itself in an effort to represent an encyclopaedic reflection of the "Great World". It does not presume a vantage point from which the world can be totally circumscribed.

While the suggestion of a closed universe with a circular geometry has transcendental implications, the text itself allows no transcending. The situation in "A"-12 is roughly analogous to that of Gravity's Rainbow, albeit in less paranoid terms: one cannot perceive the world encyclopaedically while one participates in it:

It is not easy.
To exceed the circle
One's hand in it.
Fish that fly out of the ocean
Flying fish
   go back to it.

(Zukofsky 199)

Consequently, the presumption of a closed world can never be more than an unproveable speculation among other speculations which may be equally as likely or unlikely. If the text chooses to confine itself to the possibility of one configuration of the world, it blinds itself to other configurations. This is something which "A"-12 does not do.

From this non-transcendental perspective, we can understand the difficulty of classifying "A"-12 in terms of internal and external recoding structures. The concepts of inside and outside are not really applicable in this work. Instead, the text suggests that it cannot break out of its own structure, yet at the same time it cannot contain itself. Thus the use of multiple points of view and multiple voices does not represent a movement "outside" a privileged perspective, but rather a faceting which establishes a field with indeterminate boundaries. In one sense, this field is restricted to a self-reflexiveness:

Like the sea fishing
Constantly fishing
   Its own waters.

(Zukofsky 215)
In another sense, however, the field is unlimited in that the "fishing" can proceed indefinitely, and the boundaries of the waters are not fixed. We can view this paradox in the light of Eco's conception of the open text, which allows for an unlimited interpretation, but whose maze-like structure disallows transcendental mastery. If we explore some specific examples of the text's faceting of its field, we can understand more fully how "A"-12's disruption of encyclopaedic gestures evolves into a word fugue.

"A"-12 begins by addressing the problem of the genesis of the world, as if it were an encyclopaedic history:

So goes: first shape
The creation--
A mist from the earth,
The whole face of ground;
Then rhythm--
And breathed breath of life,
Then style....

(Zukofsky 126)

But what appears to be a serial development and a hierarchical order beginning with "shape" is soon disrupted by alternate beginnings which place this particular genesis under erasure. Other elements enter the structure to vie for the position of "first", but none of them can occupy that position. Rather, these possible beginnings are unfixed, as the possibility of an affirmed origin is displaced by a question:

Before the void there was neither
Being nor non-being; 
Desire, came warmth, 
Or which, first?

(Zukofsky 143)

Thus "A"-12 defies the hierarchy of a system which develops seamlessly from a definite origin to a definite end. The issue of beginning is deferred: "To begin a song/ If you cannot recall,/ Forget." "A"-12 is not an encyclopaedic memory system, but a mosaically arranged assortment of strings of information which must coexist in a perpetual starting over from the void of forgetfulness.

In another encyclopaedic gesture, "A"-12 attempts to establish a fixed set of "simple" categories and terms which it can use to recode the world. But like the other encyclopaedic moves which the text makes, simplicity becomes untenable. Simplicity cannot be mistaken for truth, nor can it be an end in itself:

Everything shoud be as simple as it can be, 
Says Einstein, 
But not simpler.

(Zukofsky 143)

The primary problem with establishing a system of simple elements is that those elements must be put into play, which inevitably brings about a complexity:

Between the simple 
And therefore 
is a chasm.
"A"-12's system cannot help but move towards the indeterminacies and complexities of the "therefore". Consequently the "chasm" inaugurated by this movement engulfs the simple encyclopaedic system and deconstructs it.

In yet another approach to the encyclopaedic problem, Zukofsky establishes a possible relationship between the "eye of sky" (a potentially encyclopaedic eye surrounding the world) and the "eye of mind" via the eyes of the body. Sight consequently becomes the most likely encyclopaedic sense:

Seeing seems at any moment complete.
It does not lack anything--
Like coming into being--
To complete it.

But seeing only establishes a finite field, and can never be equivalent to a complete perception of the world:

If what rolls between
My eyelashes
Could receive all the world
I should indeed
Be struck blind.

In "A"-12's system, the world can only be thought in the way it can be seen, as an assemblage of fields established from a multitude of perspectives, which will not add up to "all the world" nor present themselves in a linear continuum. Zukofsky
reminds us that "There are places out of sight/ Filled with voices" (Zukofsky 167), which the system cannot account for but must acknowledge.

In addition to the inherent restrictions on seeing, the fact that the eyes operate as a part of the body's sensory network limits sight's encyclopaedic capability:

    nor do eyes
    Know the nature of things,
    Do not accuse the eyes
    Of this fault of mind.
    Can reason sprung from false senses
    Speak against them?
    Unless they are true
    Reason is false.

(Zukofsky 166)

The interdependence of the senses means that none of them can be privileged as the perceptor or producer of a true reason. Rather, the interaction of the senses produces a form of polyglossia. The senses interilluminate each other, producing a multiplicity of false reason, removed from any complete or true understanding of the world. Thus the notion of "sense" in "A"-12 operates antithetically to the conventional equation of linguistic sense with reason. Sense is simply the functioning of the sensory network which processes the world fugally; each sense operating as a kind of "voice".

Instead of an encyclopaedic structure of containment, "A"-12
posits a structure of exchange among the diverse elements of its system. It pursues the problem of encyclopaedism from so many angles that it renders itself post-encyclopaedic. It textualizes the distorted and multifaceted reflections of the world that writing may process in accounting for "facts". It inwreathes these reflections fugally so that facts are no longer truth values which fix the world into place, but rather unfixed, unprivileged voices that interrelate dialogically and in an open ended fashion:

As thought, extended,
As body, minded,
With countless effects of
The same infinite
Not infinite
As affected by
One of us
Actual as he is
But only in so far
As it is affected
By another
As actual
And still another
And so on
To infinity....

(Zukofsky 200)
Works Cited


