THE PARADOXICAL FUNCTION OF IRONIC MYTHIC INTERTEXTS IN JOYCE, FAULKNER, FOWLES AND ROBBE-GRILLET

by

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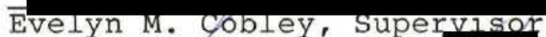

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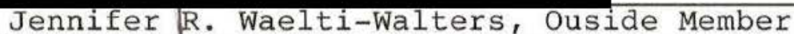

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the function of mythic intertexts in four twentieth century novels, specifically James Joyce's Ulysses, William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, John Fowles's The Magus, and Alain Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes. In these works the mythic intertext employed by the author leads the reader to anticipate an analogy between text and intertext which will help in the interpretation of the text. Because the myth is used ironically, however, it does not serve to establish the meaning of the text; it instead provides an empty frame which encompasses the freeplay of language and structure within the texts. Myth thus functions paradoxically in the works: it is affirmed as a means of "making sense" of the texts and denied when the reader discovers that it fails as an interpretive tool.

Essentially an intertextual study, this paper makes use of the theories of Bakhtin, Barthes and Derrida. The paradoxical articulation of myth is facilitated by the intertextual use of myth and by the dialogic discourse of the novel as a genre. The fact that myth is an intertext in these works is important because the intertext leads the

reader to a point of reference or standard <u>outside</u> of the text. This then allows the freeplay of the signifier <u>within</u> the text. The ironic presentation of a mythic intertext and the dialogic capacity of novelistic discourse deny the absolute status of myth, thus opening up the possibility for a re-ordering of experience according to new relations, principles, conceptions.

Each author uses the mythic intertext differently, if to similar ends. In Joyce the myth functions as an encompassing framework which permits the freeplay of the signifier within the text. This freeplay frustrates the reader's search for an authoritative voice. In Faulkner, the mythic order is affirmed in the narrators' attempts to instill the quality of myth in their own narratives, yet the individual discourses contradict one another and the absence of a controlling authorial voice prevents the reader from being able to identify with one textual voice over the others. In Fowles the myth is affirmed by the structure of the novel which imitates the quest myth, yet myth is also used to disorient the protagonist in a way which will undermine established conventions, the ways in which he has ordered his world. Finally, the most radical denial of absolute meaning is to be found in Robbe-Grillet, who deliberately frustrates the reader's attempts to derive significance from the relation of mythic parallels to the

text, and who inverts the very structure of the myth as well.

This decentering of the mythic intertexts effected by the paradoxical presentation facilitates the introduction of freeplay into the text. The further absolute meaning is banished from the text, the greater the freedom of the signifier. The articulation of the paradoxical function of myths in these texts is therefore a measure of each author's post-modernist tendencies. The paradox is a metaphor for the liberation of language from received literary orthodoxies, from absolute meaning of any kind.

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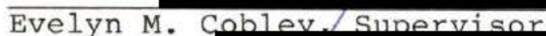

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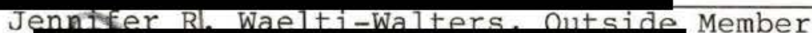

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I

In James Joyce's Ulysses, William Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom!, Alain Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes and John Fowles's The Magus, the mythic intertext employed by the author leads the reader to anticipate an analogy between text and intertext which will help in the interpretation of the text. Because the myth is used ironically, however, it does not serve to establish the meaning of the text; it instead provides an empty frame which encompasses the freeplay of language and structure within the texts. Myth thus functions paradoxically in these works: it is affirmed as a means of "making sense" of the texts and denied when the reader discovers that it fails as an interpretive tool. The paradoxical nature of the mythic intertext is, moreover, contingent on the author's exploitation of novelistic discourse and on his conception of language and literature in general. Each of the four texts consequently expresses the paradox differently according to the degree of free-play in the text, the degree to which the metaphoric axis is privileged, and the extent to which the author is content to banish "meaning", in any absolute sense, from his text.

To the extent to which these four writers may be characterized as either modern or post-modern one may assume they share a certain cohesiveness of viewpoint regarding art in general and literature in particular. As David Lodge points out, modern and post-modern literature manifests an

aversion toward "The fundamental principle of aesthetics before the modern era [which] was that art imitates life" (5). The referentiality between text and "reality" of realist literature has been abandoned by modernists and post-modernists alike, in favour of a privileging of form over content, of signifier over signified. The language of the literature of these two schools draws attention to itself; that is to say, the language is foregrounded. In his article "To Write: An Intransitive Verb?" Roland Barthes discusses the tendency to regard the modernist use of the verb *to write* as somehow intransitive. This is distinct from the pre-modernist or anti-modernist emphasis on writing *something*. For Barthes, the modern usage of the verb is not exactly intransitive. He suggests that the diathetical difference between pre-modern and modern usage of the verb *to write* is not so much between the active and passive voices as it is between the active voice and the middle voice. He says:

> . . . the middle voice does not exclude transivity. Thus defined, the middle voice corresponds exactly to the modern state of the verb *to write*: to write is to make oneself the center of the action of speech, it is to effect writing by affecting oneself, to make action and affection coincide, to leave the *scriptor* inside the writing. . . as agent of the action.
> (*The Rustle of Language*, 18)

It is this self-reflexivity, this proclivity for making fiction the subject as well as the vehicle for one's

writing which distinguishes modernism and post-modernism from realism.

Tony Tanner's discussion of the foregrounding of language suggests that it may also be considered, in itself, a means of reacting against the received literary orthodoxies: "Foregrounding is also a way of demonstrating one's resistance to, and liberation from, other people's notions as to how one should use language to organize reality" (City of Words, 21). The privileging of the signifier reverses the established order of literature, and by virtue of its newness the order introduced in the foregrounding of language appears disorderly. Foregrounding also creates the possibility for constant renewal of the ways one uses language to organize reality precisely because it privileges the signifier, the producer of meaning, rather than the signified, the meaning produced. The arbitrary nature of the signifier renders it limitless as a producer of meaning and hence potentially limitless as a tool for reordering conceptualizations of language and literature. Because of this liberation from established ways of communicating, and because of the high degree of self-reflexivity endemic to foregrounding, the degree to which language is foregrounded decreases proportionally its capacity for communication. When foregrounded, language constantly turns in upon itself, rather than outwards toward

some preconceived notion of reality. The principle of referentiality is thus removed from language, or at least significantly reduced. This in turn reduces the reader's capacity to "make sense" of the text he or she is reading in terms of traditional precepts of textual order.

Jakobson suggests that in literary language, the emphasis falls more on the metaphoric than the metonymic axis: "The poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" ("Linguistics and Poetics", 303). When language is foregrounded to a high degree there occurs a radical or extreme privileging of the metaphorical axis of literary communication. When taken literally, a metaphor becomes incomprehensible. An extreme swing toward the metaphoric axis eliminates the axis of combination (the metonymic axis) which provides the context for the metaphor; removing the context from metaphor renders it literal and hence incomprehensible. The axis of combination indicates the subject matter of the metaphor, providing a kind of commentary which serves to explain the linguistic substitution offered by the metaphor. If, however, one were to remove the commentary, the text would have to be interpreted literally and thus would result in nonsense. Susan Stewart defines nonsense as follows: "language lifted out of context, language turning on itself, language as

infinite regression, language made hermetic, opaque in an envelope of language" (Nonsense, 3); and she asserts that nonsense is "an activity by which the world is disorganized and reorganized" (vii). Nonsense thus has obvious implications for the modernist desire to undermine received literary conventions and to reorganize textual values according to the privileging of the signifier. Yet the nonsense in which these writers engage is neither so absolute nor so categorical as that of which Stewart speaks. The foregrounding of language in these texts privileges the metaphorical axis without succumbing to it entirely. This is distinct from Stewart's position:

> . . . nonsense most often results from what may be seen as a radical shift toward the metaphoric pole, away from a contiguous relationship to the context of "nothing" symptomatic of the use of nonsense in everyday talk. (Nonsense, 33)

The metonymic axis is never entirely removed from fiction, however much the privileging of the metaphorical axis may seem to render the text "nonsensical". Because of the disorganizing and reorganizing function performed by nonsense, and because of the difficulty which foregrounding presents the reader with regard to "making sense" of a text, it is useful to speak of the modernist privileging of metaphor as "nonsense". It is important to bear in mind, however, that this "nonsense" is distinct from the literal nonsense Stewart discusses. For our purposes, "nonsense" is

equivalent to the middle voice if the diathetical congifuration were sense-"nonsense"-nonsense; that is, "nonsense" is less extreme than nonsense, but it is beyond the realm of sense to the degree which "nonsense" defies common conventions for communication.

The "nonsense" of the texts to be discussed here is more concurrent with the notion of play as discussed by Stewart. She states:

> Play involves the manipulation of the conditions and contexts of messages and not simply a manipulation of the message itself. It is not, therefore, a shift within the domain of the everyday lifeworld; rather it is a shift to another domain of reality. (Nonsense, 29)

In other words, play is concerned with the signifier and with the relations between signifiers, and its shift to another domain of reality explains its tendency toward nonsense, or at least the fact that it appears "nonsensical" to a reader. This foregrounding, which leads to structural and linguistic freeplay, is an important means of effecting change. Because it is through language that we conceptualize literature, our use of language must change before we can hope to rid ourselves of received literary orthodoxies.

The four authors to be discussed in this study have a number of things in common.[1] Apart from their status as either modernist or post-modernist, they all employ a mythic intertext in an ironic or parodic fashion. In view of the

endemic modernist desire to tear down or subvert established order, the ironic use of myth, whose primary function is to establish or exert order, is of particular interest. The fact that the myth is used ironically suggests that all four authors use myth precisely because it is representative of order, for the purpose either of subverting that order or at least of demonstrating its artificiality. Using the myth to introduce order into texts where the foregrounding of language produces "nonsense", and using the ironic relations created between "nonsensical" text and mythic intertext to undermine the myth, reveals a distinctively modernist bent. The paradoxical use of myth is akin to the self-reflexive tendency of modernist literature. Susan Stewart says this of paradox: "The paradox fractures the universe of discourse. At one and the same time it is part of the universe and has taken the universe as its subject" (Nonsense, 31). The treatment of myth in these works, then, characterizes modernist writing insofar as it is concerned with the act of writing as subject as well as activity.

Myth is a fairly logical choice for an intertextual representation of an ordering principle. It is itself an order firmly entrenched in society--indeed, in ancient societies it was perceived as sacred--and it is a highly recognizable ordering structure both on a societal and a textual level. Its status as an agent of textual order is

perhaps to be derived from one of the characteristic purposes served by myth, explaining the inexplicable. It has always been a means of "making sense". Reader familiarity with the mythic intertexts is also an important factor in the ironic treatment of myth in these novels. Knowledge of the myths permits the reader to establish the lack of congruency between the myth and its fictional parallels. The incongruent relationship between the text and intertext produces the irony. The reason for the use of irony in the handling of myth on the part of Joyce, Faulkner, Robbe-Grillet and Fowles may be found in Susan Stewart's discussion of the way in which irony operates in a text: "Irony emphasizes the textual, the interpreted, and the cultural, rather than the natural, status of social interaction" (Nonsense, 20). That is, irony emphasizes the artificiality, the constructedness of the myth. Demonstrating that myth is an artificial construct undermines its sacred status and opens the myth up to change; it denaturalizes the myth.

The incongruous relationship between text and mythic intertext in these works contributes to the textual "nonsense", insofar as this relationship is itself "nonsensical". The ironic quality of the relationship in some sense renders the mythic intertext a kind of empty signifier, which is lifted out of context and associated

with the new text in a way which doesn't entirely "make sense". The association of myth with "nonsense" through its ironic relations with the text undermines its absolute status, hence rendering it transformable. Textual reordering is consequently possible. This presence/absence of the ironic mythic intertext (that is, its presence in the text and simultaneous denial by the text) facilitates the subversion of established textual order from within the text itself. Indeed, Jacques Derrida suggests that, since one cannot escape the system of human discourse, the only possibleway of criticizing it is from within ("Structure, Sign and Play", 254).

The irony serves another, albeit related purpose in these texts. Because the foregrounding of language in these novels produces "nonsense", the reader is left with without an established point of entry into the text. Colin MacCabe defines point of entry as "an agreed representational language--an agreed level of truth established between author and reader" (James Joyce and the Revolution of the World, 94). The effort to get away from representational language on the part of modernists and post-modernists in particular, thus obfuscates the point of entry into the text. There is no longer a controlling authorial voice which functions as a standard against which the reader can judge the discourse(s) of the text; there is, in other

words, no readily apparent point of reference in place within the text. There is lacking, in MacCabe's terms, a directive "meta-language" (_James Joyce and the Revolution of the World_, 90). In the four works under consideration here, the mythic intertext functions as this point of entry for the reader in two ways. First of all, the intertext does provide a familiar and hence referential use of language, although the absence of referential value in the ironic usage of myth in these texts renders this point of entry misleading. Secondly, the ironic usage itself functions as a point of entry insofar as irony may be considered a meta-linguistic trope. An ironic phrase implicitly contains a self-directed commentary, as Linda Hutcheon points out: ". . . there is both a division or contrast of meanings, and also a questioning, a judging" (_A Theory of Parody_, 53). Irony at once presents a message and offers a means of judging that message. Thus, as Susan Stewart remarks, "In terms of the work that irony accomplishes . . . we can see irony as a kind of meta-communication, a communication that bears a message about the nature of communication" (_A Theory of Parody_, 67), and is therefore necessarily suitable as a point of entry for the reader. The irony, then, by fostering the reader's awareness of the inapplicability of myth to fiction, engenders an awareness of the apparent lack of order, of the absence of the usual points of reference.

This induces the reader to search for new ways of conceptualizing language and literature: those suggested by the text itself.

II

Since what myth is has a great deal to do with how it functions in an intertextual relationship, it will be necessary to consider the concept of myth itself, as well as the way it functions, in greater detail before moving on to consider each of the four novels individually. In its capacity as meta-language the mythic intertext speaks to the reader first through its status as myth and subsequently through what it does in the text. One recognizes that some sort of ordering principle is needed to "make sense" either of the world or of language. Myth is an ordering principle of the highest degree. Mikhail Bakhtin defines myth as the "absolute bonding of ideological meaning to language" (The Dialogic Imagination, 369). This suggests that a certain conceptualization of the world, a certain way of ordering experience, is expressed in language in a way which precludes questioning and change. It is a discourse which presents but one perspective, which "makes sense" of experience in a single and unified manner. Mircea Eliade describes myth as "a true story which is sacred, exemplary, and significant" (Myth and Reality, 5-6). Its status as an entity which is sacred and exemplary establishes myth as a prescriptive ordering system which not only must be repeated, but which cannot be questioned. Through repetition and its sacred quality, myth comes to be perceived as a completely natural order, a perception which

strengthens the ordering capacity of myth still further. It is, moreover, in providing such an all-encompassing ordering principle--that is, a moral, political, and social directive for how to live--that myth also provides an understanding of, or explanation for the ways of the world, particularly those aspects which seem inexplicable (creation, for instance). In effect, it provides a means of conceptualizing the world. Finally, because the myth is repeatable, it functions as a means for communicating the order it establishes.

The authors studied here use myth in their texts precisely because it seems so absolute and sacred and infrangible. In order to create something new and to establish themselves in contradistinction to what has gone before, they must first tear down the preceding order, or at least demonstrate that it can be torn down. In proving that myth can be subverted, these authors suggest that any order can similarly be questioned, found to be lacking, and replaced with something else. The ironic use of myth functions precisely to this end: it demonstrates that myth is not infrangible or sacred or absolute, thus opening up the possibility for a reordering of the world according to new relations, principles, and conceptions. The presence of myth in these texts also demonstrates that one cannot escape the need or desire for order of some kind. Indeed, the

mythic intertexts in these novels, to the extent that they function as meta-commentary, or points of entry into the text for the reader, exert an order in the texts--they order the "nonsense" of the fiction in a way which renders it digestible. This affirmation of the ordering capacity of myth is, at the same time, denied by the ironic treatment of myth in these novels. This paradoxical presentation of an ironic mythic intertext where myth is at once affirmed and denied as an ordering principle, is thus, once again, a way of subverting the system in which these authors operate. The need for order is affirmed, while the demonstration of its artificiality serves to justify changing that order and introducing a new one.

This ironic presence/absence stance toward myth, moreover, is facilitated by two significant factors in these authors' fictional creations. The first of these factors is the intertextual use of myth. The introduction of an intertext into a given work constitutes a juxtaposition of two different and possibly conflicting contexts. As with juxtaposition of any kind the elements being compared are each transformed to some degree. The intertext both is changed through its relationship with the text and itself effects change upon that very text. The relationship between text and intertext can be either harmonious or inharmonious. The former relationship implies some sort of

complementarity between text and intertext which produces meaning or significance. This complementarity is absent or qualified in an inharmonious intertextual relationship, resulting in irony. The relative lack of complementarity also hinders the production of meaning or sense, and consequently contributes to the production of "nonsense." As indicated, the use of a mythic intertext on the part of the authors in this study can be characterized as ironic or inharmonious. Thus the changes effected upon text and intertext alike as a consequence of this relationship are such that the text and intertext work to undermine one another. It would seem fairly safe to assume, however, that due to the relative predominance or primacy of text over intertext, the text's power to undermine is substantially greater.

The ironic handling of myth in these texts is also facilitated by the kind of discourse endemic to the novel as genre. This is because novelistic discourse is characterized by dialogism, and the preoccupation with language among modern and post-modern novelists appears to result in their exploiting this dialogism to the fullest as a means of resisting received literary orthodoxies. Dialogism, according to Mikhail Bakhtin, arises from heteroglossia, the interaction of ideologically distinct and even opposed elements in a text. Heteroglossia is the

internal division of a language into a variety of differing languages which are often ideologically opposed to one another:

> The internal stratification of any single national language into social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific socio-political purpose of the day, even of the hour . . .
>
> (Bakhtin, 262-263)

Because the language one uses determines the way in which one perceives the world, each of these languages exemplifies an ideological position. The juxtaposition of several elements of heteroglossia in a novelistic text gives rise to a kind of dialogue between or amongst the various ideological positions. It is a dialogue, moreover, which is perpetual because, at least in the works considered in this study, no single language or voice is privileged in such a way that the conflicting positions are resolved. Dialogism, moreover, is an inherent facet of language, for as Bakhtin remarks, "The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction" (Dialogic Imagination, 280). This dialogic capacity of language is exploited most fully in the

novel as a genre and is the primary characteristic of novelistic discourse.

Bakhtin's distinction between novelistic and poetic discourse does cut a rather wide swath through traditional conceptions of literary genre insofar as novelistic discourse is not restricted to what most people would consider to be the novel as genre. It seems safe to assert, however, that it is in the novel as genre that this particular type of discourse, the dialogic, is most highly developed and most fully exploited. What Bakhtin terms poetic discourse, on the other hand, is characteristically monologic; that is to say, there is but one textual voice. Poetic discourse disguises the dialogic capacity of language by providing the reader with only a single-voiced discourse:

> In the majority of poetic genres . . . the internal dialogization of discourse . . . is artificially extinguished in poetic discourse. In the novel, however, this internal dialogization becomes one of the most fundamental aspects of prose style and undergoes a specific artistic elaboration.
>
> (Bakhtin, Dialogic Imagination, 284)

This distinction between novelistic and poetic discourse, between dialogism and monologism, is necessary for the present discussion not only because this study is concerned with novels but because of the way in which dialogism facilitates the ironic presentation of myth in these works.

Dialogism allows the mythic intertext or mythic voice to interact with the other textual voices in a way which permits its simultaneous affirmation and denial. This presence/absence status is not permitted by monologic discourse because in a single-voiced text the mythic discourse must needs become the voice of the text. When there is but one textual voice, there is nothing which can call it into question; denial, consequently, is not possible. Because no single voice is dominant in dialogic discourse, the myth cannot become the voice of the text and can be called into question by the other voices of the text. Bakhtin even suggests that the development of dialogical novelistic discourse and the evolution of the novel as a genre contribute to the diminishment of myth due to the characteristic presentation of a number of ideological positions and the refusal to privilege one over the others:

> The novel begins by presuming a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world, a certain linguistic homelessness of literary consciousness, which no longer posses a sancrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought . . .[which leads to:]. . . the fundamental liberation of cultural semantic and emotional intentions from the hegemony of a single and unitary language, and consequently the simultaneous loss of a feeling for language as myth, that is, an absolute form of thought.
>
> (Dialogic Imagination, 367)

Thus the very discourse employed in the works of Joyce, Faulkner, Robbe-Grillet, and Fowles contributes to the

creation of irony in its juxtaposition with the mythic intertext. The fact that the mythic intertext participates in this dialogism brings it down to the same level as the other textual voices, decentering its absolute status.

Dialogism also facilitates the introduction of "nonsense" into the text, nonsense being that stage which brings about the disorganization and reorganization of conceptions of reality, of language, of literature. In a dialogic discourse one can present a multiciplicity of narrative voices without including a dominant voice which offers the reader a standard by which to judge the others. This is to say, then, that dialogism permits the author, if he or she so desires, to remove the point of entry from the text. Without a pre-established representational language or meta-commentary, the reader is prevented from orientating him or herself in the text, and the discourse consequently appears "nonsensical". Removing the point of entry is, in some sense, tantamount to removing the reader's capacity to make sense of the textual experience. The fact that myth is an intertext in these works is consequently important because the intertext leads the reader to a point of reference or standard outside of the text. This then allows the freeplay of "nonsense" within the text. The old order stands, in some measure, outside of the text, although the

text is able to exert influence on it in such a way as to call this old order into question.

It is, moreover, the ironic handling of the myth which permits this dual focus on the external order and the internal denial of order. This is because irony is intrinsically possessed of a dual focus, and it is also easily adapted to intertextuality because it functions through the juxtaposition of contexts. Linda Hutcheon discusses what she calls the two functions of irony:

> On the semantic level, irony can be defined as a marking of difference in meaning or, simply, as antiphrasis. As such, paradoxically, it is brought about, in structural terms, by the superimposition of semantic contexts (what is stated/what is intended). There is one signifier and two signifieds, in other words.
> (A Theory of Parody, 54)

Thus the mythic intertext can be directed both inwardly and outwardly, articulating two different messages through the same signifier and hence voicing the paradox of the affirmation and denial of an ordering principle. The irony is facilitated by the dialogic nature of novelistic discourse because it is itself double-voiced and consequently implicitly dialogic. Nonsense, like irony, functions through a juxtaposition of incongruous contexts. Susan Stewart remarks: "Nonsense can be seen as an equation, an overlapping, of two or more disparate domains, the difference between these domains being a function of their use in the everyday lifeworld" (Nonsense, 35). It is in

this way, then, that the relationship between mythic intertext and text tends toward "nonsense". Stewart adds, "Just as irony still depends upon an everyday life context for its 'false premise' judgment of A, nonsense depends upon a domain of the impossible context" (Nonsense, 35). Nonsense, that is to say, defines itself by contrast with sense or order. The presentation of "nonsense" in a text is consequently contingent on dialogism, which provides the possibility for juxtaposition and contrast. While contrast can be discussed in a monologic discourse, it cannot be created through the juxtaposition of different discourses and contexts as in a dialogic text. Nor can contrast in a monologic text ever tend toward "nonsense" because there is always an encompassing voice or context which "makes sense" of the contrast in some way or other.

To summarize, then, the ironic presentation of a mythic intertext and the dialogic capacity of novelistic discourse contribute to the creation of "nonsense" within a text. This "nonsense" in turn liberates the language from many of the traditional conceptions as to how literary texts should be ordered. The rejection of established order constitutes a denial of the mythic intertext, while the latter's function as meta-commentary within these texts simultaneously affirms the need for an ordering principle. Joyce, Faulkner, Robbe-Grillet and Fowles all do away with

the point of entry into their respective texts by their deliberate failure to provide a readily recognizable meta-commentary within the text. The mythic intertext serves as this point of entry, and its ironic handling in the text establishes the myth as meta-commentary thanks to the evaluative function performed by irony. The way in which each author removes the point of entry from his work and the purposes for which this is accomplished vary somewhat from author to author, text to text. Similarly, the way in which they use an ironic mythic intertext as a point of entry and as a means of questioning established order differs. Yet one can suggest that certain patterns, certain similarities, do emerge from a consideration of their respective use of an ironic mythic intertext. In order to avoid preempting or anticipating the discussions of the individual authors and their works to follow, an examination of these patterns will be dealt with in the conclusion. Suffice it to say for the present that it would appear that Joyce and Robbe-Grillet are most concerned with clearing a path for change, with the freedom to be gained from subverting the old order; while Faulkner and Fowles place more emphasis on a search for order where none seems possible.

III

The "nonsense" arising from Joyce's foregrounding of language in Ulysses is augmented by the lack of affinity between myth and text. The reader is misled by the title of the work into looking for parallels between the Odyssey and the fiction of the text. The reader becomes caught up in attempting to make sense of the text in this manner, and these attempts are bound to be frustrated. This very frustration gives rise to the reader's awareness of the ironic use of myth, which in turn suggests the tenuous nature of order and which hence functions as an invitation for the reader to become lost in the dialogic play of the text. The mythic parallels contain the textual freeplay structurally and thematically, and this containment serves to orientate the reader, in some manner, vis-à-vis the "nonsense" of the text.

Few readers, it is supposed, come to Ulysses for the first time completely ignorant of its reputed parallels with Homer's Odyssey. The title itself, quite naturally, prompts the reader to look for such parallels, and although the chapter headings which make explicit reference to eighteen episodes from Homer's epic, present in the serialized publication, were excluded by Joyce when the novel was published in book form, critical awareness of these titles or chapter headings must needs influence the average reader. Yet, in the absence of critical awareness concerning these

episodic allusions to Homer, and were the title of the novel not Ulysses, is it likely that the parallels to the Odyssey would be perceived? That is to say, how analagous are the episodes of Ulysses to the corresponding episodes of the Odyssey? It is obvious that Joyce, in choosing "Ulysses" for a title and in including the Greek titles in the original serialization of the novel, wished the reader to bear the Odyssey in mind when reading the work, but how useful are the established parallels for interpreting Ulysses?

Frederic Jameson suggests the parallels are of little or no use in interpretation:

> The Odyssey parallel can then be seen as one of the organizational frameworks of the narrative text: but it is not itself the interpretation of that narrative, as the ideologues of myth have thought. Rather it is itself--qua organizational framework--what remains to be interpreted.
> ("Ulysses in History", 128)

The myth, then, because it interacts with the other narrative materials of the work, can no longer be interpeted as it is in Homer's Odyssey. Indeed, Joyce does not use all of the Odyssey but only select episodes. These are taken out of their original context and placed into a new one, where the elements of myth operate not as the voice of the work, as in Homer's epic, but as one of several voices *in* the work. As such, the mythic elements of Joyce's Ulysses are as much to be interpreted as the other elements of which

the work is comprised. Moreover, what may be termed the questionable analogy between the episodes of the novel and its epic counterpart, in which, for instance, the absence of sexual relations between Bloom and Molly is established as a parallel to the separation of Odysseus and Penelope, constitutes a parodic rendering of Homer's epic. Thus the epic, in the context of Joyce's work, is undermined through its participation in the narrative.

The order expressed by the mythic voice of Homer's epic is transposed in Joyce's Ulysses where the mythic elements do indeed serve an ordering function as Jameson has noted. Yet this ordering function of the mythic intertext is qualitatively different due to its participation in the discourse of the novel. Jameson describes the functioning of myth in the novel as follows:

> What I wanted to suggest about the kind of reading determined by the Odyssey parallel in 'Ulysses' is that this parallelism, and the kind of matching it encourages between the two levels of written and overtext, functions as something like an empty form. Like the classical unities, it offers a useful but wholly extrinsic set of limits against which the writer works, and which serve as a purely mechanical check on what risks otherwise becoming an infinite proliferation of detail.
> ("Ulysses in History", 131)

Precisely because of the emptiness of its form, the order which the myth imposes on the work is implicitly called into question. That is, because the relationship between the mythic intertext and the text is so incongruent, the

resulting irony denies the order imposed on the text by the myth. The very notion of an ordering principle is denied by the proliferation of structural and linguistic play in the text, and thus the juxtaposition of the myth with the "nonsense" of the text calls the myth into question.

The empty mythic framework is nonetheless retained and used to structure the textual "nonsense"; the structure of the myth becomes, in a sense, the structure of the text. Joyce removes the depth or significance from the mythic intertext and engages in freeplay within the remaining shell. In order to illustrate the way the mythic structure interacts with other narrative elements, it is necessary to look in some detail at one of the episodes of the novel. Obviously the orchestration in the novel as a whole of the elements of what Bakhtin would term heteroglossia (that is, the discourses of the various characters, the use of professional jargons, of slang and patois, the pastiche of literary styles, and so forth) exerts its combined force on the elements of myth which comprise the overall structure. We may, however, for the purposes of this paper, confine ourselves to the discussion of the elements of heteroglossia in a single episode. The choice of episode is unavoidably arbitrary, but the Cyclops section seems to offer a fairly wide selection of discourses.

There are at least two narrators in the Cyclops section, one who speaks in the argot of Dublin and who participates in the pub scene which is the focus of this episode, and one who interjects throughout the chapter a variety of stylized discourses ranging from journalistic _reportage_ and legal jargon to the language of epic and romance. Marilyn French designates these two narrators as the "in-scene" narrator and the "off-scene" narrator (_Book as World_, 141 ff.), and it is convenient, for our purposes, to adopt these designations. The multiple modes of discourse employed by the off-scene narrator are ironic, internally undercut either by exaggeration of style, incongruity, or inappropriateness of subject-matter to style. They off-set the crudity and xenophobia of the in-scene narrator and comment upon the various points raised during the pub scene. Each departure from the argot of the nameless Dubliner is triggered by something in the pub conversation and reflects it.

For instance, the scientific explanations of a hanging victim's erection (_Ulysses_, 303) follows upon Bloom's attempt to explain the phenomenon to the men at the pub who marvel at the occurrence. His knowledge is not appreciated by the in-scene narrator, much less his articulation of that knowledge, and the off-scene narrator steps in:

> The distinguished scientist Herr Professor Luitpold Blumenduft tendered medical evidence to the effect that the instantaneous fracture of the

> cervical vertebrae and consequent scission of the spinal cord would . . .
> (Ulysses, 303)

Although the reader's sympathies lie with Bloom, he is mocked in this section by both the in-scene and off-scene narrators. Bloom's pretentions to scientific knowledge are mocked in this scientific report in which sophisticated medical terminology effectively establishes a sharp contrast in comparison with the linguistic capabilities of the men in the pub, Bloom himself included, although he obviously possesses a greater intellectual capacity than most of the others. For this capacity, or more pointedly, for his revelation of this capacity, he is ostracized and ridiculed.

Similarly, a discussion of the resources of Ireland which is capped with mention of the rapid depletion of trees and the need for replanting is counterpointed by the off-scene narrator's parody of the society page of a newspaper, which details the marriage of "the chevalier Jean Wyse de Neaulan, grand high chief ranger of the Irish National Foresters, with Miss Fir Conifer of Pine Valley" (Ulysses, 325). This includes a lengthy list of the attendants and guests, all named for trees, many of which are not indigenous to Ireland. Again the ignorance of the men in the pub is mocked, and Nolan is implicated this time, perhaps because he is alone in defending Bloom from the vicious attacks of the others.

The discussion of the execution is commented upon in various ways by the off-scene narrator. We are given a snippet of a job application letter in which the would-be executioner lists his skills and previous executions in a manner as macabre as it is humorous (301). The subsequent quasi-romantic report of the scene between the condemned man and his beloved is riddled with such incongruities as the handing out of souvenirs and the betrothal of the young woman, apparently overcome with grief only seconds before, to an Oxford student whose presentation of pedigree and bankbook effectively undercuts any pretentions to idealism the situation might possess. The reaction of an onlooking provostmarshal, whose language and crudity of sentiment in the context of what has gone before are entirely misplaced, has the same effect:

> God blimey if she aint a clinker, that there bleeding tart. Blimey it makes me kind of bleeding cry, straight, it does, when I sees her cause I thinks of my old mashtub what's waiting for me down Limehouse way.
>
> (Ulysses, 308-309)

The chapter is replete with such use of stylized discourse as a means of parody and satire. Included is a parliamentary-style debate, an institutionalized mode of discourse which is mocked through the subject-matter--"the slaughter of human animals who dare to play games in the Phoenix park" (Ulysses, 314) (undoubtedly an allusion to the Phoenix Park murders)--and through the use of such names as

"Allfours" and "Staylewit", which are reminiscent of Restoration comedy. There is also a record of a caucus meeting in which the members squabble over the date of Saint Patrick's birth (Ulysses, 306); a review of an exhibition which is marked by the rhetorical quirks of critics, literary and otherwise; and a barrage of newspaper entries ranging from reports of an earthquake to the sports page, the obituaries, the society page, and birth announcements.

What purpose is served by the mélange of discourses evident in this episode of the novel? French suggests that the in-scene narrator, in his use of violent language, increases the aggressivity of the action(s) in the scene, while the off-scene narrator attenuates the immediacy of the violence by formalizing it in various stylized languages, and that the humor arising from this stylization implicates the reader in the violence because our laughter makes us party to it (Book as World, 142). The multiple voices of the text, then, articulate the aggression and xenophobia of the men in the pub in ways which permit the reader to recognize the violence, to laugh at it in spite of him or herself. The articulation of ideologically distinct positions also permits the reader to recognize the wider social implications, for the plethora of social and literary voices adopted by the off-scene narrator extends the aggression and violence of the scene through time, across

cultures and across classes. It is thus appropriate that the Apostle's Creed, the expression of Catholic faith, should here become the expression of a catholic belief in violence:

> They believe in rod, the scourger almighty, creator of hell upon earth and in Jacky Tar, the son of a gun, who was conceived of unholy boast, born of the fighting navy, suffered under rump and dozen, was scarified, flayed and curried, yelled like bloody hell, the third day he arose again from the bed, steered into haven, sitteth on his beamend till further orders whence he shall come to drudge for a living and be paid.
> (_Ulysses_, 327-328)

Not only is the style of this Christian recitation of the faith parodied, the religious and moral order informing it is inverted. Joyce also parodies here the contemporary myth of Jack Tar, a brave and patriotic hero, if less than an upstanding Christian.

More significantly, perhaps, the reader is also implicated through his laughter at such parodies in the freeplay or "nonsense" of the text. Because all of the narrative voices function equally without a controlling voice operating as arbiter the reader cannot remain detached in the same way as he or she can in a realist text, where a directive voice indicates in a much clearer fashion which position is to be followed. Colin McCabe discusses the lack of a single directive voice in the Cyclops section:

> . . . The text works as a montage of discourse, without at any time offering us a meta-language (an author's impersonal voice) which could control

> the riot of language which composes the text. The consequence of this riot is the lack of a standard by which we can judge the correspondence of these discourses to an exterior reality and the consequent expression of incoherence.
> (James Joyce and the Revolution of the World, 90)

The point of entry into the text is hence obfuscated and that suggested by the mythic intertext only leads the reader into the weave of dialogic voices without establishing an orientation or providing an interpretive tool. The degree of freeplay in this section is also quite high, as MacCabe points out: ". . . in Joyce's text there are no possibilities which are excluded [from a given category] and with this overload of sense we fall into nonsense" (James Joyce and the Revolution of the World, 98). Because relations and contexts are established through exclusion, it becomes impossible to establish these categories when all possible combinations are given; that is, when nothing is excluded. The lists of trees, of heroes, and so forth are prime examples of this sort of "nonsense". When it is discovered that the mythic parallels do not assist in "making sense" of the text, and when the freeplay of the signifier obscures meaning further,"Our attention is directed to the way in which writing is acting as a producer of meaning rather than as a picture of an unconstituted reality" (MacCabe, 98). Emphasis is shifted from signified

to signifier, to the upheaval of literary convention, to a new way of "making sense" of the textual experience.

I have suggested that the ironic mythic intertext in its capacity as a structuring device functions as a point of entry into the text for the reader, even if it is somewhat misleading as a meta-commentary. Yet how precisely does the myth function to this end? More specifically, what is particular about Joyce's use of a mythic intertext as a point of entry into the textual "nonsense"? It is perhaps to the irony which characterizes Joyce's use of myth that we must look for the answer to these queries. French's discussion of the in-scene and off-scene narration indicates that the parody of violent situations implicates the reader in the violence through the complicity suggested by his/her laughter. The humour invites the reader's participation in the text, and in a similar fashion the irony stemming from the juxtaposition of text and intertext also requires the reader's complicity. Similarly, the reader is implicated in the order established by the myth through the ironic handling of the mythic intertext since myth's capacity as an ordering principle must be established before it can be criticized. At the same time, the reader implicitly participates in the undermining of the myth through its ironic juxtaposition with the "nonsense" of the text. Thus, the reader becomes aware of both the artificiality of the

order and of the need for order, at least on a textual level. In other words, the reader becomes aware of the articulation of this paradox through his or her implicit participation in it.

How does the reader's awareness of the underlying mythic framework enter into dialogue with the other elements of heteroglossia in such a way as to establish the ironic rendering of the intertext? Attempting to establish connections, on the level of narrative, between this episode of the novel and its Homeric counterpart is anything but straightforward. There are no apparent allusions to the Cyclops section of the _Odyssey_; the patterns of the narrative in the novel are not reflective or even suggestive of the myth. If there is nothing concrete within the chapter itself which is suggestive of the myth, it must be the reader's awareness of both the myth and the reputed connections between the myth and the novel which establishes a dialogue between the myth and other elements of heteroglossia. It would seem to be a dialogue, moreover, which is implied, rather than realized, within the work, a dialogue between the articulated points of view and one which is absent. This is not to say that by virtue of its absence the myth does not affect the work, but rather that the fact that it is absent from the written text but present in the reader's awareness of the text has a very particular

effect on the way in which myth participates in the dialogism of the novel. The fact that the myth is absent from the text suggests that the order which it represents is similarly absent from the world of the novel. The presence of mythic awareness in the reader's consciousness as established by the title of the novel and once-extant chapter headings produces the recognition that the mythic order is absent. The fact, moreover, that the reader's awareness of mythic order is somehow external to the text is important, because in this way the order does not impinge upon the freeplay of the signifier within the text.

It is possible, in the final analysis, to establish a similarity between myth and fiction--it is a similarity of theme and subject matter. The Cyclops episode of the _Odyssey_ is also preoccupied with violence: the aggression and violence of Polyphemus, who holds Odysseus and his men captive, and who eats them, two at a time, for his supper. The Cyclops's single vision and his lack of charity to strangers is also reflected in the bigotry of the in-scene narrator in the corresponding chapter of _Ulysses_. This theme acts as an encompassing category within which the signifier is manipulated. The more detailed parallels which have been worked out by the critics function in the same way: they establish a context against which the textual "nonsense" plays. Thus the Cyclops's proposal to eat

Odysseus and his men becomes "the slaughter of human animals" in Phoenix Park (314), for instance. As Susan Stewart characterizes play as the leap to another domain of reality, so the myth is here the point of departure for the manipulation of language in the fiction of Ulysses. The myth does not direct the reader as to how the narrative voices should be interpreted; it simply establishes a category for their dialogic interaction. In some sense, the mythic intertext functions as the metonymic axis providing the context for the narrative clusters around the metaphoric axis. Thus the ordering influence exerted by the mythic intertext on the narrative actually facilitates the freeplay, the escape from order articulated by the narrative.

IV

The freeplay of the signifier is not as extreme in Faulkner as it is in Joyce. The mythic intertext in Faulkner's Absalom, Absalom! is not denied by the text so much as it becomes representative of the unattainable. The ironic presentation of myth in this text arising from the intertext's inharmonious juxtaposition with the Sutpen legend, the subject matter of the narratives of the text, does not subvert the myth in the same way as Joyce's ironic stance toward myth, which suggests that there is no order, only disorder. Here, the multiple narrators of the work, with the possible exception of Shreve McCannon, seem to strive to attain the mythic quality suggested by, for instance, the biblical allusion made manifest in the title. The narrators cannot, of course, attain the absolute quality of myth in their versions of the Sutpen legend, and this failure augments the irony of the mythic intertext. The narrators use myth to explain those aspects of the Sutpen tale which seem especially difficult to account for, yet the text also provides perfectly logical explanations for the very same aspects. The myth is thus undermined once again. The intertextual participation of myth in the text as a narrative voice, moreover, suggests that the myth itself is not as absolute as it might appear, particularly since in its capacity as a version of the Sutpen legend it is no more

accurate than any of the others. The striving for order in the text, however, affirms the mythic principle of absolute order even as it demonstrates that it cannot be attained.

The irony in this novel, then, is created in two ways: through the incapacity of the various narrators to achieve myth in the fictions they create; and through the failure of the mythic intertext itself to give a "true" account of the Sutpen legend. There are certain fairly obvious parallels between the Sutpen legend as presented by the narrators and the Absalom-Amnon-David myth alluded to in the title. David, like Sutpen, had sons by different wives. One of David's sons murdered his half-brother over an incestuous relationship with their sister. This pattern, too, is repeated in Faulkner's text, albeit with subtle yet significant variations. These parallels cannot be regarded at face value, however, because the disparities between the Sutpen legend and the suggested biblical parallels give an ironic twist to the juxtaposition of narrative with mythic intertext. First of all, Henry kills Bon primarily because of Bon's negro blood (if one accepts the conclusions of Quentin and Shreve in this regard), rather than the fact that a relationship between Bon and Judith would be incestuous: "So it's the miscegenation, not the incest, which you can't bear" (_Absalom_, 356). That Quentin and Shreve are not necessarily right about this issue doesn't

really matter. This suggestion is presented under the auspices of one or more narrative voices which contradicts the mythic voice; no arbiter is present to decide which is right. Perhaps more significantly, Henry kills Bon before he even has a chance to undertake an incestuous act with Judith. Finally, Henry defends Bon and Bon's right to marry Judith for four years and then kills Bon despite his love for the latter. Henry doesn't decide to stop Bon until Sutpen tells him that Bon has negro blood.

The difference between Sutpen and David, too, renders this use of a mythic intertext inharmonious or ironic. Sutpen fails to acknowledge Bon as his son, unlike David, who does recognize Amnon, and who even acknowledges Absalom after he has committed fratricide and betrayed his father: "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!" (2 Samuel 18.33). It is this failure to recognize Bon which dooms Sutpen's design, for it is this which prompts Henry to abjure his birthright and which causes Bon to pursue a marriage with Judith. Even had Sutpen acknowledged Bon, his design would have been ruined in his eyes because it would have been tantamount to the admission of negro blood into the line. Conversely, it is David's recognition of his sons, his forgiveness of Absalom, and his acceptance of blame which constitute his salvation. This is the essential difference between Sutpen and David. Sutpen never considers

the failure of his design to be punishment for his wrong-doings. When he returns home after the war to find his plantation ruined, one son dead, another gone, and a grieving daughter, he does not assign any moral value to his misfortune. "And he not calling it retribution, no sins of the father come home to roost; not even calling it bad luck, but just a mistake . . ." (267). The exemplary quality of David's behaviour is shown to be lacking in Sutpen's attitude toward his sons and his design. It is David's forgiveness, his magnanimity and his love for his sons, which constitutes the moral order to be repeated in the biblical myth. Sutpen simply hasn't the capacity to recognize his faults, let alone to rise above them.

Yet not only does Sutpen fail to measure up to his mythic counterpart, the myth too fails to capture the essence of Sutpen. Because in its capacity as intertext the myth enters into dialogue with the other narrative voices of the text, it implicitly lowers itself to the status (i.e. non-absolute) of those narratives, and can be called into question by them. Each of the narrative voices in this particular text strives to produce a biographical or historical account of a man, Thomas Sutpen, and of the people whose lives he affected. To the extent to which the mythic intertext participates in the text on the same level with the other voices, it is also implicated in the creation

of this history. The fact that the parallels between biblical myth and the Sutpen legend are demonstrably incongruous regarding several key elements undermines the notion of myth as producer of absolute, unquestionable meaning or significance. It is, moreover, the dialogic interaction of myth with the other narrative voices, which provide the information establishing the disparity between the biblical myth and the Sutpen saga, that accomplishes the reduction in the status of myth.

Thus it is the contradictory perspectives of the multiple narrators in the novel, who contribute more imaginative conjecture than "fact" to the tale they relate, which undermine the mythic quality or status of the tale even as they establish its mythic elements. The characters themselves often make comparisons between Sutpen and the figures of classical or biblical mythology. This demonstrates the reverence for myth or at least the need for some sort of order as expressed by the text. Each narrator attempts to impose an order of an absolute nature on his or her own creation; each attempts to arrive at some sort of "truth", even Quentin and Shreve who move beyond mere speculation to conscious fabrication in their versions of Sutpen's story. The mythic allusions also offer a means of communicating in terms of well established relations. Yet these attempts at producing meaning--at least meaning of an

absolute nature--are shown to be as insufficient or inapplicable as the Absalom myth.

The novel begins with Rosa Coldfield's version of the tale as she tells it to Quentin Compson, and the latter is impressed with the biblical nature of Sutpen's design:

> Then in the long unamaze Quentin seemed to watch them overrun suddenly the hundred square miles of tranquil and astonished earth and drag house and formal gardens violently out of the soundless Nothing and clap them down like cards upon a table beneath the up-palm immobile and pontific, creating the Sutpen's Hundred, and Be Sutpen's Hundred like the oldentime Be Light.
> (Absalom, 9)

It is Rosa who infuses her narrative with the mythic qualities which Quentin perceives, but her demonic portrayal of Sutpen in these opening pages--"Out of quiet thunderclap he would abrupt (man-horse-demon) upon a scene peaceful and decorous as a school-prize watercolor, faint sulphur-reek still in hair clothes and beard . . ." (Absalom, 8)--is at odds with the divine qualities suggested by the Genesis allusion. Indeed, the sulphur-reek and the appelation "demon" suggest that Sutpen is nearer, not to the Creator, but to His antithesis, the fallen angel, whose power is destructive rather than creative. This conflicting characterization and the fact that there is a most logical explanation for the way Sutpen acquired the land--purchased from the Indians--and built his house--working side by side with his Haitian slaves--combine to undercut the mythic

attributes even as they are bestowed upon Sutpen. The reader quickly becomes conscious of a rather pointed bias on the part of each of the narrators, a bias which is perhaps most apparent to Rosa. This must needs prompt the reader to be a little skeptical of such attributions of mythical status by the narrator onto his or her creation.

As the reader later discovers, moreover, the nature of Sutpen's creation is anything but divine. Insofar as Sutpen does attempt to create something from nothing, he is imitating the basic mythic pattern of creation or origin. Creation is a sacred act because it imitates the creation of the world. To the extent to which Sutpen's design becomes representative of southern myth, he is at once imitating myth himself and establishing an origin or order for others to imitate. The perverseness of Sutpen's creation, however, is the antithesis of sacred creativity--in effect, parodies it--and the outcome of his design, destruction, is the very reverse of creation. Indeed, Sutpen undermines his design by destroying the possibility for it to be repeated. This he accomplishes in his refusal to acknowledge Bon. Donald Kartinger states:

> In mythic terms . . . Sutpen's rejection of his elder son is a refusal to abide by the law of succession which demands that the tribal god eventually relinquish his rule to that son, who, in turn, may seize the throne only by demonstrating that the present god is no longer fit to guide his subjects.
>
> (The Role of Myth in Absalom", 360)

In refusing to acknowledge Bon, Sutpen takes from him not only his right as Sutpen's successor, but also the right to prove that he, Bon, is worthy to usurp his father. The usurpation of the father is tantamount to discrediting the old order before one establishes a new order, a process which must be followed to ensure the perpetuation, through repetition, of the myth. Sutpen's failure to imitate the pattern of myth in such a way as to lend mythic status to his own creation again conflicts with the divine status Rosa attempts to bestow upon that creation. Thus the diffuse information which cumulates through the dialogic interaction of all the narratives serves to undermine the view of Sutpen propagated by any single narrator, any single textual voice.

The other chief narrators of the novel--Mr. Compson, Quentin Compson, and Shreve McCannon--use allusions not to biblical but to classical figures in their respective attempts to characterize Sutpen. These allusions meet with as much or as little success as the biblical parallels. Indeed, one might suggest that the allusions reveal more about the particular narrator than they do about Sutpen. Mr. Compson, for instance, seems intent upon stressing the heroic qualities in his portrayal of Sutpen, and consequently suggests the Agammemnon parallel. He also suggests that Clytemnestra was misnamed; she should have been called Cassandra (Absalom, 62). Quentin suggests that

Sutpen's brood resembles the off-spring of Cadmus, "that entire fecundity of dragon's teeth" (Absalom, 26). Quentin's evocation of the tragic fall of the House of Thebes is perhaps indicative of his proximity to the Sutpen legend--for him the fall of the House of Sutpen is a tragedy. The suggestion may be that to the degree that Sutpen does create an example or order for others to follow, this order gives rise to the propagation of evil through subsequent generations, in the way of a curse. The heroic-tragic qualities bestowed upon Sutpen by Quentin and his father are undercut by Shreve when, in his version of the tale, he suggests Rosa Coldfield would find in Sutpen, "instead of a widowed Agammemnon to her Cassandra, an ancient stiff-jointed Pyramus to her Thisbe" (Absalom, 177). Just as the narrators constantly qualify, contradict and augment one another's creations throughout the work, so they engage in mutual contradiction with regard to the mythic attributions they bestow on Sutpen. Shreve's position may undercut Mr. Compson's, but there is no voice within the text which affirms any one position over any other.

Because the reader receives the mythic intertext primarily through Rosa, Mr. Compson, Quentin and Shreve, the repudiation of myth as well as the suggestion of its existence may be attributed to them. It is they who, in their telling of the saga provide the reader with the

parallels to the Absalom myth, parallels which their tales also undermine by demonstrating that the version of the Sutpen tale suggested by the title is no more accurate than any other version. It is they who suggest a number of other parallels in their respective versions of the saga, parallels which are similarly at odds with the positions articulated by the textual voices. It becomes clear, through the dialogic interaction of these versions of the tale and through the lack of a meta-commentary offering the "correct" version, that no single version contains the truth. This inability to achieve a true or absolute rendering of the Sutpen tale undermines the status of myth as an ordering principle, yet in some sense the very undermining of the ordering principle by individuals concerned with creating their own order is an affirmation of that very mythic order. Just as the son must demonstrate that the father is unfit to rule before he can fulfill his birthright and assume power, so the narrator(s) wishing to create a new order must demonstrate the insufficiency of the one currently in place. The multiplicity of narrative orderings of the Sutpen tale in this text, including that implicitly offered by the mythic intertext, suggests that any order is more or less as good as any other and that consequently there can be no absolute bonding of ideological meaning to language. Thus while mythic order is affirmed,

the text demonstrates that it cannot be attained.

It seems somewhat curious that this affirmation of mythic order can be conveyed in the face of the ironic presentation of myth in the text. How does the use of an ironic intertext in this work function differently from the ironic presentation of myth in Ulysses, for instance? Or how does the use of an ironic intertext work to serve a different, if related, purpose in Absalom, Absalom!? An examination of the narrative repudiation of myth in this text may help to elucidate this matter. It seems that Shreve McCannon, more than any other narrator, is responsible for the denial of myth in the text. Neither Quentin nor Shreve lived through the experiences they relate, and both consciously fabricate much of what they relate. Yet Shreve represents distancing not only in terms of time but of geography and culture. He is the only narrator who lacks the experience of the South. These factors place him at odds with the other narrators in terms of their relation to their subject matter, and determine that his version of the tale will be different and contradictory. His flippancy and skepticism as well as his conscious effort to demystify the Sutpen tale do undercut the reverence for myth evinced by the other narrators. Yet because no single textual voice posseses the "truth", one cannot accept Shreve's version of the tale as final. His

narrative calls the other textual voices into question, but the matter cannot be resolved within the text due to the lack of meta-commentary.

Not only does the lack of meta-commentary inhibit a reader's entry into the text, it also does away with the exit--the reader is unable to decide which version of the Sutpen tale to take with him or her when the novel is finished. Thus the reader's capacity to "make sense" of the textual experience is severely inhibited. As in Ulysses, it is to the mythic intertext which the reader turns for meta-commentary and hence a point of entry into the text, for the elements of the myth are at least familiar and well-established. The ironic presentation of myth in the novel, which suggests that the Absalom-Amnon-David myth is no more accurate as a version of the Sutpen tale than any other version presented by the text, and which consequently undermines the status of myth, seems to affirm Shreve's stance toward myth. That is, Shreve's denial of the mythic status of the Sutpen legend is confirmed or supported by the meta-commentary presented to the reader in the mythic intertext. The ironic presentation of myth does indeed constitute a denial of myth, but this denial is a result of the juxtaposition of text and intertext, that is of a judgment passed on the text as a consequence of comparing it to a standard outside of the text. The affirmation of myth

within the text is consequently untouched. Shreve's denial of myth occurs within the text, but is confirmed only through reference to an external arbiter. There is no final arbiter within the text and thus the predominant expression of reverence for myth within the text cannot finally be denied--called into question, yes; subverted, no.

In Ulysses there is no affirmation of myth within the text and therefore the ironic presentation of myth arising from the inharmonious juxtaposition of text with intertext succeeds in denying the mythic order. Thus the technique of directing the reader to an external standard or order works toward two different ends in these works. Joyce uses the external referent in order to liberate the text from the traditional constraints of literary and linguistic convention. This enables him to engage in free play, in the fabrication of "nonsense". Faulkner's use of the external referent is directed toward affirming two textual postulates: that myth is invalid and that order is nonetheless desirable. Because this affirmation is external to the text in some sense, the issue is left unresolved, and it is this irresolution, the simultaneous articulation of is/is not, which constitutes Faulkner's textual "nonsense".

V

John Fowles is, perhaps, of the four authors studied here the least comfortable with the freeplay of the signifier. This is evident in Fowles's essential adherence to the realist tradition, despite an evident post-modern concern for the artfulness of his *oeuvre*. This, according to Robert Burden, is characteristically English. He suggests that in England the post-modern novel remains essentially realistic despite its deliberate criticism of that realism ("The Novel Interrogates Itself", 137). The production of "nonsense" in *The Magus* therefore varies from that in the other novels: here it is a result of a constant shifting of context, the constant removal of the frames used to order "reality". Moreover, this "nonsense" does not operate on the reader directly, as in the other works, but is filtered through the protagonist who frantically attempts to "make sense" of his ever-shifting experiences. The protagonist, who is also the first-person narrator of the text, thus functions as a point of entry into the text for the reader. Yet to the extent to which Nicholas Urfe becomes lost in the "nonsense" of the godgame the reader, too, becomes lost because it is through Nicholas that we receive the experiences of the godgame. Nicholas attempts to order his experiences on Phraxos through establishing analogies with myth, identifying himself variously with Orpheus and with Theseus. Yet these analogies do not

explain what is taking place; they are merely analogous situations, familiar entities which give Nicholas the illusion that he is "making sense" of his experiences at Bourani. The familiarity of these mythic parallels does permit them, nonetheless, to function as points of entry for Nicholas (and consequently the reader) into the "nonsense" of his situation. Paradoxically, myth is also used by the creators of the godgame and is therefore implicated in the "nonsense" which engulfs Urfe; it is used in the demonstrations of hazard, of disorder. Finally, the novel itself employs a mythic structure, the quest myth--the descent into the unknown, where learning takes place, and the return to one's point of departure a changed person. Myth in The Magus, then, is used both metonymically and metaphorically: it is metonymic to the extent to which it establishes analogies, and hence contexts, for the ordering of experience, and metaphoric to the extent to which it escapes these contexts and renders them "nonsensical".

The tri-partite structure of The Magus fairly evidently follows the pattern of the quest myth. The first section tells of the life of the protagonist, Nicholas Urfe, up to and including his relationship with Alison and his departure for Greece. The second deals with Nicholas's participation in the godgame: he enters unfamiliar territory, where the principles according to which he has ordered his life no

longer apply or are invalidated--figuratively this physical and temporal removal can be interpreted as a descent into the unconscious, the protagonist's own heart of darkness. The third and final section of the novel deals with his return to England and with his gradual adaptation to the changes brought about during his sojourn in Greece. There are references to the process of individual transformation represented in this structure throughout the work, particularly in the second, most important section. Immediately upon his arrival in Phraxos Nicholas receives the impression that Greece is hostile toward him, that he will be put to the test here:

> When that ultimate Mediterranean light fell on the world around me, I could see it was supremely beautiful; but when it touched me, I felt it was hostile. It seemed to corrode, not cleanse. It was like being at the beginning of an interrogation under arc-lights; already I could see the table with straps through the open doorway, already my old self began to know that it wouldn't be able to hold out.
>
> (The Magus, 51)

This passage of course foreshadows much of what is to come in the vortex[2] section of the work. The shaking up which Nicholas's beliefs will undergo is facilitated by his removal to a new environment. Nicholas senses soon after his arrival that English standards do not apply here:

> It [Greece] made English notions of what was moral and immoral ridiculous; whether or not I did the socially unforgiveable seemed in itself merely a matter of appetite, like smoking or not smoking a new brand of cigarette--as trivial as that, from a

> moral point of view. Goodness and beauty may be separable in the north, but not in Greece.
> (The Magus, 59)

This loosening of Urfe's sense of convention opens up the possibility for change.

The role that myth plays in this change, moreover, is intertesting because rather than creating order or functioning purely as structure in the way of the quest myth, the myths operating within the vortex section work to undermine established order. Here, all of Nicholas's conventions are overturned, and his attempts to use the mythic elements to order his experiences fail. Phraxos, Bourani in particular, thus participates both in the vortex myth as the locale for the transformation of the individual, and as the transforming agent. The ordering principle of myth is therefore expressed paradoxically: it is affirmed in the quest structure and denied insofar as the other mythic elements of the novel work to undermine order. The assertion, then, that Bourani is "sublimely peaceful, as potential as a clean canvas,a site for myths" (The Magus, 61) must be read ironically, for although it is accurate, the word "myth" is directed toward two different and opposing signifieds.

The structural pattern of the quest myth is reflected in the first passage marked in the book which Nicholas finds

on the beach at Bourani. The excerpt from Eliot's "Little Gidding" reads:

> We shall not cease from exploration
> And the end of all our exploring
> Will be to arrive where we started
> And know the place for the first time.
> (The Magus, 71)

The final line is echoed at the end of the work when Nicholas meets with Alison. He has returned to the point at which the novel began, but he is not the same person, and thus "the place" is new to him; he knows it for the first time. The suggestion that Greece is like a mirror from which one learns (The Magus, 107) is suggestive of the descent into the unconscious characteristic of the mythic pattern, and the trial which Nicholas undergoes at Bourani likewise imitates the vortex segment of the quest myth.

William Palmer discusses the imagery in the novel which is suggestive of the vortex myth, but suggests that it can do little in the way of explaining the text. He states:

> The vortex myth is but a part, a rather small part, in our understanding of the structural complexity of Fowles'[sic] novel, in our divining of the nature of Fowles' creative act. "Fascinating. But it explains nothing."
> ("Vortex as Myth, Masque and Metaphor," 67)

The quotation Palmer takes from the original version of The Magus (Little, Brown and Co., 1965, 232). That myths are fascinating but explain nothing is a realization which Nicholas comes to in the course of his experiences. Although the remark is removed in the revised edition, its

applicability remains. Nicholas may not be aware that myths do not explain anything--at least not immediately--because he constantly tries to order his experiences with the help of myth. The reader, however, becomes aware that these analogies do not lead to anything conclusive.

The suggestion that Nicholas and Alison are a modern-day Orpheus and Eurydice is a recurring one in the work. Yet it only serves to order their relationship; it does little to order Nicholas's confusion regarding Bourani. Indeed, the parallel is applicable to the experiences of Bourani only insofar as Alison becomes implicated in those experiences. It is Alison, moreover, who takes the part of Orpheus--it is she who walks away from Nicholas, and unlike Orpheus, Alison does not look back. Yet while this analogy is interesting it, too, remains to be interpreted. One might suggest that Alison's walking away reveals that she loved Nicholas enough to give him his freedom, but it is not the mythic parallel which prompts this suggestion so much as the note Alison sends to Nicholas when he first arrives in Greece.

Perhaps the most fitting mythic parallel Nicholas adopts to conceptualize his experiences is that of Theseus and the labyrinth. During his first weekend he is gripped with:

> . . . The strangest feeling . . . of having entered a myth; a knowledge of what it was like physically, moment by moment, to have been young

> and ancient, a Ulysses on his way to meet Circe, a Theseus on his journey to Crete, an Oedipus still searching for his destiny.
>
> (The Magus, 160)

This suggests an identification with heroes embarking upon an adventure, the outcome of which is as yet unknown. When he later becomes enmeshed in the tumultuous events of Bourani he identifies himself most closely with Theseus, lost in the maze, and looks upon Lily as his Ariadne:

> I had also a return of that headlong, fabulous and ancient sense of having entered a legendary maze; of being infinitely privileged. There was no one in the world I wanted to change places with, now that I had found my Ariadne.
>
> (The Magus, 215)

Ironically, of course, Lily-Julie-Vanessa only leads Nicholas further into the maze rather than out of it. This attempt to order chaos of Bourani is thus misguided, and although the labyrinth analogy might be appropriate, it explains nothing.

Elements of classical and totemistic mythology are also used to disrupt established orders in The Magus, and Bourani, the "site for myths" is the chief locale for this disruption. The appearance of figures like Anubis, Apollo, Artemis wisk Nicholas into a world of mystery and lead him into seeking explanations for both the appearance of these figures (he immediately assumes they are actors) and for their significance in the mask. The Priapus in the garden, and the doll Nicholas finds hanging in the woods after he

has been trapped in the underground hideout contribute to the mystification, rather than to an understanding of what is happening. Similarly, the Tarot figures of the magician or Magus and the fool, as well as the other mythical figures in the procession that precedes the trial participate in the godgame, in the "nonsense" of the text.

As is evident from the preceding discussion of Nicholas's identification with mythic figures like Theseus, he is given to attempting to order or to "make sense" of the world around him. As testimony to this the reader has the example of his adherence to a kind of pseudo-existentialism in college. Urfe remarks of the protagonists of French existentialist novels:

> We tried to imitate them mistaking metaphorical descriptions of complex modes of feeling for straightforward prescriptions of behaviour. We duly felt the right anguishes. Most of us, true to the eternal dandyism of Oxford, simply wanted to look different. In our club, we did.
> (*The Magus*, 19)

There is no real rebellion against received ideas here; there is simply a trendy posturing *en masse*. Order isn't questioned and the complexities which render order precarious if not impossible are ignored. An artificial order is adopted without the realization that it is artificial. Although Nicholas comes to recognize the folly of this stage of his life, he persists in his search for simple explanations for complex occurrences. He is not

content to accept his experiences at Bourani as mysteries; he is consistently incredulous, unwilling to suspend his disbelief. He tells Conchis, after the episode with Apollo, Artemis and the satyr: "I'd enjoy it all more if I knew what it meant" (The Magus, 189). Indeed, Urfe admits that it is not the suggestion of the supernatural in the goings-on at Bourani which disturbs him, "But a fear of the inexplicable, the unknown . . . " (The Magus, 146). The analogies which Conchis sets up between his past, his youth and Nicholas's present suggest the possibility for transformation in the latter. Conchis reveals that he, too, had sought explanations for everything around him, had attempted to order all aspects of experience. The episode with Gustav Nygaard at Seidevarre changes this:

> Up to this point of my life you will have realized that my whole approach was scientific, medical, classifying . . . I thought in terms of species, behaviours, observations. Here for the first time in my life I was unsure of my standards, my beliefs, my predjudices.
>
> (The Magus, 314)

It is this uncertainty that Conchis wishes to instill in Nicholas, an uncertainty that will perhaps lead to the recognition that ". . . all our explanations, all our classifications and derivations, our aetiologies, suddenly appeared to me like a thin net" (The Magus, 314).

The events at Bourani, then, are an attempt at the upheaval of order. And Nicholas's persistent ordering of

these experiences has the effect of adding yet more walls to the maze he has entered, for the masque must then tear down the newest order which he has established to "make sense" of the chaos in which he finds himself. Urfe's fear of the unknown renders his participation in the upheaval of established order disquieting indeed: ". . . my fear came from a knowledge that anything might happen. That there were no limits in this masque, no normal social laws or conventions" (The Magus, 204) Nicholas is tossed from experience to experience without a guide, and the Ariadne's thread which he finds becomes itself a means for subverting order as it too is snatched from his grasp. Just as Nicholas begins to feel sure of himself, the maze takes a new and unexpected turn. Nicholas is returning to the school after a midnight tryst with Julie, thinking about Conchis, and he decides:

> In spite of all his gnomic cant he was like so many other Europeans, quite unable to understand the emotional depths and subtleties of the English attitude to life. He thought the girls and I were green, innocents; but we could outperfidy his perfidy, and precisely because we were English; born with masks and bred to lie.
>
> (The Magus, 378)

His smugness is shortlived, however, as he is immediately swept into the next episode of the godgame which gives his newly found confidence a severe shaking. This episode is, of course, the Nazi capture of the Greek resistance fighters during the second world war, and even more importantly,

Nicholas discovers that "[the] masque had moved outside the domaine" (The Magus, 379). The "nonsense" which Nicholas could "make sense" of while within the bounds of Bourani, over which he could feign some control, overruns its context, its limits. Nicholas is consequently at a loss once again as to how to conceive of his experiences because the interpretive frame of Bourani has been removed.

Conchis's description of his experiments on Phraxos as a kind of "meta-theatre" is at once, like the myth, a means of conceptualizing what is otherwise "nonsensical", and a means of clouding the issue, of contributing to the "nonsense". This is because the term "meta-theatre" establishes a category or classification for the events which permits Nicholas to "make sense" of the apparent chaos. However, the nature of the meta-theatre is such that it defies classification for it has no limits. Conchis tells Nicholas, "My plans are whatever happens" (The Magus, 415), and confirms that the meta-threatre "is above all an attempt to escape from such categories" (The Magus, 416). Nicholas finally comes to realize that he is bereft of all standards by which to judge his experiences because everything which Conchis had told him, and more significantly for Nicholas, everything which Lily-Julie-Vanessa had told him was double-voiced, inherently self-contradicting: "Fragments of things they had

said kept on coming back, with dreadful double meanings; a constant dramatic irony" (The Magus, 501). This irony removes the interpretive framework--"And it was not only a denial of my world; it was a denial of what I had come to understand was Conchis's world" (503)--, leaving Nicholas without an apparent point of entry into the "nonsense" of his experiences.

To the extent to which Conchis's discussions of hazard correspond to the author's own articulations on this subject as set out in The Aristos, one would expect that Nicholas or at least the reader might use him as a point of entry, a standard within the text by which to measure and organize the ensuing "nonsense". Nicholas, however, has no idea of when to trust Conchis because he speaks ironically. The first-person narration more or less determines that the reader receives no more information than Nicholas and consequently has no more idea of when to trust Conchis. Although the reader can remain sufficiently detached to compare Nicholas's responses with what Conchis says, the ensuing dialogue implicates rather than extricates the reader from the "nonsense" of the godgame. Nicholas is persistently sceptical of Conchis, and although the scepticism may appear to be warranted, it only embroils Nicholas further into the maze because this very scepticism causes him to erect rationalizations and explanations along

the way which must themselves be torn down at the next turn in the labyrinth. Furthermore, although what Conchis says appears to be ironic, we have no standard against which to judge the irony due to the constant changing of the rules in the godgame. The reader becomes caught up in Nicholas's scepticism and as a result is also at the mercy of the Magus. His discussions of hazard are appropriate in view of the nature of the godgame, but they do not explain Nicholas's experience at Bourani so much as describe them.

The concept of hazard is introduced during Nicholas's first visit to Bourani when Conchis asks if the former is elect. He tells Nicholas, "Hazard makes you elect. You cannot elect yourself" (The Magus, 89). It is not explained at this point what "elect" means, but it becomes evident toward the end of the novel that Conchis refers to a kind of Sisyphean triumph over absurdity through consciousness of hazard, and to the responsibility which this awareness carries. Conchis is very careful to stress the elements of hazard in his own life. When talking of his discovery of Bourani he tells Nicholas:

> On my last day I had a boatman take me round the island. For pleasure. By chance he landed me for a swim at Moutsa down there. By chance he said there was an old cottage up here. By chance I came up.
>
> (The Magus, 111)

Yet Conchis's air contradicts the hazard of which he speaks. Urfe remarks, "I had come to detect an air of

stage-management, of the planned and rehearsed" (The Magus, 111). This prevents Nicholas (and consequently the reader) from accepting what Conchis says about hazard for some time. Yet Conchis persists. He offers this as explanation when Nicholas seeks the reasoning behind the activities at Bourani: "Why everything is, including you, including me, and all the gods, is a matter of hazard. Nothing else. Pure hazard" (The Magus, 190). The concept of destiny which suggests that one's life is completely ordered, predetermined, is inverted in Conchis's view of the world: ". . . destiny is hazard: nothing is unjust to all though many things be unjust to each" (308). This concept of hazard is used in the novel to undermine Nicholas's views and values, to overturn established order. It is also proposed as the principle according to which the world is organized. The artificiality of conventions is revealed through hazard, but as Lily de Seitas tells Nicholas, these conventions are nonetheless necessary:

> That doesn't mean that in our ordinary lives we think such conventions should be swept away. Far from it. They are necessary fictions. But in the godgame we start from the premise that in reality all is fiction, yet no single fiction is necessary.
>
> (The Magus, 638)

The purpose of the godgame, then, and the principle of hazard, is to instill in Nicholas an awareness of the artificiality of any order despite the necessity for order

on a daily basis. This awareness is at once a freedom and a responsibility, and it is only once Nicholas recognizes and accepts his responsibility that his relationship with Alison has a chance of succeeding.

It is on the articulation of the notion of hazard in the novel that the function of the mythic intertexts is predicated. The participation of the elements of myth in the hazard of Bourani, the failure of the mythic analogies Nicholas adopts to explain his situation, and the encompassing structure of the vortex myth which serves as the locale or the vehicle for the disorder or hazard, all contribute to the expression of hazard in the novel. The extent to which the quest myth structures Nicholas's experiences as well as the fiction at hand imposes a limit on the hazard without denying its presence or prohibiting its fluctuations. The notion that hazard is limited, moreover, is in keeping with Fowles's notion of it. In his discussion of mankind as a state of being Fowles states:

> It is the best possible for us because it is an infinite situation of finite hazard; that is, its fundamental principle will always be hazard within bounds. A hazard without bounds would be a universe without physical laws: that is, a perpetual and total chaos.
>
> (The Aristos, 20)

Thus myth in the novel functions like Conchis's meta-theatre: it supplies a category or classification by which to order hazard, depicted here as the "nonsense" of

Nicholas's experiences at Bourani; and in its participation in this "nonsense" and its failure to provide Nicholas with an adequate means of making sense of his experiences, it contributes to the hazard.

Fowles's use of the vortex structure, moreover, affirms the notion of a limitation on hazard. The fact that this particular mythic structure is compatible with existentialist self-realization, moreover, is significant: while the principle of order is affirmed in a relatively straightforward manner, it is an existential order which does not deny hazard. Fowles remarks of existentialism that "It is a theory of relativity among theories of absolute truth" (The Aristos, 124). Thus one can see that it is the absolute status of myth which is called into question here. An order is needed which recognizes contingency, hazard, its own artificiality. Myth is consequently affirmed as an ordering principle and denied as an absolute order. It is to this end that myth is used both to structure the novel and is revealed to be inadequate as a means of explaining it.

VI

In Robbe-Grillet's Les Gommes the mythic intertext comes to function as an empty established order which is deliberately subverted by the "nonsense" or freeplay of the text. The very evident lack of conventionality in the texts of Robbe-Grillet can make them seem "nonsensical" to the reader. The reader is therefore obliged to reorder his or her conceptions of language and literature in order to "make sense" of the use of language in the texts. Robbe-Grillet deliberately sets out to remove the prescribed point of entry into the text for the reader. In Les Gommes the Oedipus myth sets itself up as this point of entry, but it is deliberately deceptive. Attempting to match the mythic parallels with the detective story makes "no(n)-sense"; that is, the parallels do not lend depth or significance to the detective story. Robbe-Grillet uses the identity theme, the search for a murderer, the circularity of the Oedipus myth, in order to explode the notion of a depth of meaning in a literary text. Not content to engage in freeplay within the mythic structure as is Joyce, Robbe-Grillet manipulates the structure as well. Having carefully chosen a myth which itself is a kind of detective story, he manipulates this detective paradigm, inverting simultaneously both mythic and literary conventions.

In an article entitled "Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction" Robbe-Grillet discusses the difference between what

he terms "established order" and "created order" (3). The first may be described as accepted conventions, whether social or literary. Myth would fall into this category. The created order is that which an artist imposes on a work he or she creates and which, due to lack of conventionality, may appear to be disorder. The kinship between established order and myth is articulated in Robbe-Grillet's description of ideology:

> In sum, ideology is established order which is masked as natural order, which pretends to be not a creator of the society but, on the contrary, a sort of divine law dictated, so to speak, by God . . .
> ("Order and Disorder in Film and Fiction", 4)

Myth, too, is an absolute ideological construct which is masked as natural order, which appears to be God-given divine law. Robbe-Grillet's contempt for "les vieux mythes de la 'profoundeur'" (Pour un nouveau roman, 22), for established "meanings" and metaphysical formulations, expresses itself, in Les Gommes, as a clever and playful manipulation of myth which effectively frustrates the reader's search for depth. The central elements of a standard detective or mystery story are present, but in a confused succession; and the parallels which the author sets up between the Oedipus myth and the detective story are deliberately empty.

The title, Les Gommes, is particularly apt with regard to Robbe-Grillet's plan to foil the reader's search for

significance. The special agent, Wallas, spends almost as much time searching for a particular kind of eraser as he does attempting to find the assassin, but we are never told why he wants this eraser. It is unrelated to the detective story in which he is involved, but it does establish a connection with the Oedipus myth since the two middle letters of the six that form the brand name of the eraser are "di" (the first two and last two letters have been worn off), the central letters of "Oedipe". Because it has nothing to do with the role which Wallas plays as detective, however, the establishment of a mythic parallel through the eraser is without significance. Ironically, of course, Wallas's search for the assassin is similarly a kind of semantic red herring because there is no assassin until the end, when Wallas himself kills Dupont, the "victim" of the crime. B.G. Garnham elaborates on the appropriateness of the title to the workings of the novel with regard to the lack of correspondence between the myth and the detective story:

> . . . the myth and the detective story in Les Gommes pull against each other, effecting a subtle form of "gommage", whereby the potential significance, or order, suggested by one is cancelled, or erased, by the network of meanings associated with the other.
> (Robbe-Grillet, Les Gommes et Le Voyeur, 22)

One might suggest that the "meaning" of Les Gommes is precisely the lack of meaning to be found as a result of

Robbe-Grillet's deliberate effort to subvert "les vieux mythes de la 'profondeur'"--that is, meaning, in this novel, is under erasure.

The reader is immediately alerted to the possibility that things are not what they seem in this novel. A regular patron of the cafe in which the action opens reports that a certain Albert Dupont has been assassinated. The owner corrects him; it was Daniel Dupont. Then even this information is contradicted: "D'abord personne n'a été assassiné" (Les Gommes, 17). We have, then, a detective story which opens with the information that a crime has not been committed. In keeping with this reversal of the usual order of things, the identity of the would-be assassin is revealed to the reader, as well as the unsuccessful results of his attempted crime. The reader is also told that this man is the same one who inquired after Wallas at the cafe earlier on:

> Cet homme s'appelle Garinati. C'est lui qu'on vient de voir entrer au Café des Alliés pour demander ce Wallas qui ne s'y trouvait plus. C'est également lui l'assassin maladroit de la veille, qui n'a fait que blesser légèrement Daniel Dupont.
>
> (Les Gommes, 20)

Thus, before the mystery story has scarcely begun, all the mysteries are solved for the reader in a very matter of fact tone, with the exception of the identity of Wallas, who

ironically is, of course, the detective appointed to solve the mystery.

This disparity between appearance and reality is sustained throughout the work. The difference is never resolved; rather the gap becomes ever greater and meaning is dissipated. Signifier and signified are divided and not permitted to come together. The reader is consequently confronted with Wallas's meaningless, if dogged pursuit of a gomme-savon; with the knowledge that "Dupont n'est pas vraiment mort à l'heure fixée" Les Gommes, 100), despite the apparently almost universal desire to believe that he was; with Wallas's indefatigable pursuit of an as yet non-existent assassin (for Garinati has not succeeded in committing the crime). The gap between signifier and signified is revealed perhaps nowhere so well as in the first riddle posed to Wallas by the drunk who frequents the cafe. When Wallas gives in and asks what the difference is between a railway and a bottle of white wine he receives this response: "La différence . . .Ben, elle est énorme, la différence . . . Le chemin de fer! . . . C'est pas du tout la même chose . . ." (Les Gommes, 119). The expectations of the reader are played upon here, just as they are throughout the novel. The convention of the riddle leads the reader to expect a humorous analogy to be drawn between apparently disparate entities. When no analogy is made, however, the

humour is derived from the subversion of expectations. The riddle may be perceived as a metaphor for the entire textual experience of <u>Les Gommes</u>. The attempt to establish a significant parallel between disparate entities is here exploded, suggesting perhaps that the attempt to draw deep significance from the parallels between the Oedipus myth and the detective story will prove equally fruitless.

In the identification of Wallas with the assassin an inversion of the usual detective paradigm is effected. Indeed, the usual chronology is not only interrupted, it is suspended for a period of twenty-four hours. The "natural" order is done away with, a new created order introduced in its place. The reader's first encounter with Wallas includes the information that his watch "s'est arrêtée hier soir à sept heures et demie" (45), at the exact time of the attempted murder. We later discover, when Wallas investigates the scene of the crime, that the clock in Dupont's study has similarly stopped at 7:30 (<u>Les Gommes</u>, 95). This is of course appropriate as it is Dupont's life, or rather his death, which is held in suspension during the course of the novel. The correspondence between the stoppage of Wallas's watch and the suspension of Dupont's life links Wallas to the murder not in the capacity of detective, but of assassin.

This confusion between detective and would-be assassin is maintained and developed through the repeated suggestions that Wallas is himself the assassin, which of course ends by being the case. Indeed, the possibility that Wallas has committed the crime is introduced very early on, in his first interview with the commissioner general, Laurent. While sorting through several possibilities, Laurent points out that Wallas's proximity to the place of the crime, the fact that he hasn't yet declared himself to the local authorities, the fact that his revolver is the same calibre as the murder weapon and that it is missing one bullet, all suggest Wallas as a prime suspect. Even Wallas's assertion that he can prove he was one hundred kilometers away at the time of the supposed assassination is discarded by Laurent as insignificant: "Evidemment! Les bons assassins n'ont-ils pas toujours un alibi?" (Les Gommes, 76). Ironically, after Wallas does end by killing Dupont, he loses his return ticket, "la seule preuve de l'heure exacte de son arrivée dans la ville" (Les Gommes, 260). He can no longer prove that he was away from the city when the first murder attempt was made; he loses his alibi once he establishes himself undeniably as the murderer. Further confirmation of the possibility that Wallas could step into the shoes of the assassin (furnished before he actually does become the assassin) is offered in the oblique comment: "Il n'est

jamais trop tard. L'acte manqué revient de lui-même à son point de départ pour la seconde échéance . . ."(Les Gommes, 103) In this fiction anything is possible. Established chronology does not apply, is immaterial.

The physical resemblance between Wallas and Garinati confirms the confusion between detective and assassin. Madame Bax, whose apartment overlooks Dupont's residence, describes a man in a raincoat and felt hat leaving the home of the would-be victim, pursued by the drunk. The drunk "recognizes" Wallas and demands to know why the latter had ignored him the previous evening. The clerk at the poste restante wicket of the post office also "recognizes" Wallas even though his attire varies from that of Garinati insofar as it is in better condition and a different colour. Later, when Wallas leaves the cafe and passes in front of the garden gate of Dupont's residence, the drunk pursues him precisely as he pursued Garinati the previous evening, without distinguishing between them. When Wallas enters Dupont's study to await the arrival of whom he supposes is the assassin he makes the same observation as Garinati about the light switch, but Wallas remedies the mistake which prevented Garinati's success (Les Gommes, 244). It is interesting that not only does Wallas step into the shoes of the assassin in his killing of Dupont, but that Dupont also becomes confused with Garinati through the disguise which he

consents to adopt in order to retrieve his papers from his study without being recognized. The disguise fits the description given of the would-be assassin. In addition to a long overcoat, "Il porte un chapeau de feutre à larges bords qui dissimule entièrement le front. Il a même accepté des lunettes noires . . . dont une des verres est très foncé et l'autre beaucoup plus clair . . ." (247). He thus resembles the assassin Wallas is expecting to encounter in the study, and he enters the room at precisely 7:30, the agreed-upon time of the murder. For a time, victim and detective both become the assassin; and Garinati also assumes the role of detective in his search for Wallas. This confusion of roles complements the disruption of chronology, and it is only once Dupont is finally killed that Wallas's watch resumes ticking and the telephone is similarly restored to order.

The inversion of the detective-story paradigm is only part of the way Robbe-Grillet sets about subverting established order. He also frustrates the reader's attempts to draw significance from a much older, more firmly entrenched order, the Oedipus myth. This is accomplished through the parallels which the text sets up between the myth and the detective story: as the detective story is disrupted in the text, so the myth is subverted by association. Oedipus also acts the role of a detective in

his search for clues concerning his father's murderer, only to discover that it was he who killed Laius. Chronology is also an important factor in the establishment of identity in the Oedipus legend, just as it is in the detective story of the text. The confusion between the past, present and future regarding the prophecies of the Delphic oracle, between what has happened, what is happening and what will happen, must be sorted out before Oedipus can determine that it was he who murdered Laius and that Laius was his father. The parallels are significant only insofar as they permit the text to subvert both mythic and detective paradigms at once, and insofar as they permit Robbe-Grillet to carry his freeplay over into the domain of textual structures. The establishment of parallels does not serve to reveal any deep significance in either the text or the intertext. Bruce Morrissette's treatment of _Les Gommes_ (_Les Romans de Robbe-Grillet_,38-74; and "Oedipus and Existentialism") is admirable for its valiant attempt to glean psychological insights into Wallas's character from the persistently vacuous parallels set up by the author. On the basis of the information that Wallas once visited the city previously in search of his father, Morrissette draws the parallels between Wallas and Oedipus closer than they should be. A close look at a number of the proposed similarities between

myth and detective story serves rather to emphasize their differences.

The image of a sphinx which Garinati sees in a clump of debris floating in the canal is possibly one of the best examples of the way in which myth is used in the text. It is made very explicit in this passage that although the debris does appear to take on the shape of a sphinx, it could just as easily be seen as something else:

> . . . on dirait à présent comme une figure humaine, avec le bout de pélure d'orange qui fait la bouche. Les reflets de mazout complètent un visage grotesque de clown, une poupée de jeu de massacre.
>
> Ou bien c'est un animal fabuleux: la tête, le cou, la poitrine, les pattes, de devant, un corps de lion avec sa grande queue, et des ailes d'aigle . . . [et ensuite] Il ne reste plus, à la surface du canal, qu'une vague carte de l'Amérique; et encore, avec de la bonne volonté.
>
> (Les Gommes, 37)

The mythic allusions, then, have no established significance in this text. The suggestion that these elements could "mean" any number of things robs the myth of its ordering power. As this passage reveals, the signifiers shift at will; their attachment to a pre-established signified is consequently loosened.

Apparent allusions to the Oedipus myth are sown here and there throughout the text, but none are cultivated, let alone permitted to bear fruit. Wallas looks up at a window and sees a baby being fed at the teat of a sheep: "deux bergers se penchant avec sollicitude sur le corps d'un

nouveau-né" (Les Gommes, 108). What this has to do with his investigations is never revealed, and the scene is never mentioned again. The second riddle offered by the drunk is unintelligible, but sounds like "enfant trouvé" (121). Again, no further relation between this possible allusion to the child Oedipus and Wallas is ever established in the text. Among a collection of statuettes on a mantelpiece is one of a "vieil aveugle guidé par un enfant" (Les Gommes, 217), suggestive of Oedipus as an old man being led by one of his children, possibly Antigone. Yet again, however, the appearance of this reference in the text seems gratuitous. The most explicit reference to the Oedipus myth in the novel is of course the drunk's riddle: "Quel est l'animal qui est parracide le matin, inceste à midi, et aveugle le soir?" (Les Gommes, 234). It is significant that no one responds to his riddle, because while Oedipus is the obvious answer to the query, Oedipus has no real place in this text. The structure of this riddle is the same as that posed by the sphinx, but the emptiness of the form is revealed when the drunk jumbles the elements when he tries to repeat the riddle: ". . . parracide le matin, aveugle à midi. . . Non. . . Aveugle le matin, inceste à midi, parracide le soir" and still later, "Sourd à midi et aveugle le soir?" (Les Gommes, 234). As with the image of the sphinx, the parts of the riddle are interchangeable and hence meaningless. Finally,

the closest association of Wallas with Oedipus comes at the end of the novel, when the detective-assassin realizes his feet are swollen. But his podiatal ailment is not from being shackled and abandoned on a mountain as a child; it is simply due to the fact that he has been walking all day, all over town: ". . . ses pieds sont enflés à force de marcher" (Les Gommes, 256). The parallels reveal little about Wallas or the story of the text; they are without deep significance.

A.R. Chadwick and V. Harger-Grinling offer this assessment of the inter-relationship between myth and detective story:

> This presence/absence of the Oedipus myth serves to structure Les Gommes in a dynamic manner. The framework of Les Gommes--Prologue, five chapters, Epilogue--is an obvious analogue of Greek tragedy. Yet the framework is empty since the progression of dramatic action in traditional statements of the myth follows a chronological order, whereas in Les Gommes it is precisely the confusion of chronological order which is present.
> ("Mythic Structures in Les Gommes", 103)

Not only is the mythical framework empty, the allusions themselves are at once present and absent in the text: present by virtue of their appearance from time to time throughout the novel, and absent through their lack of significance or correspondence to the detective story. The window display in which a mannequin paints a scene depicting the ruins of Thebes while using as model an enlarged photograph of the Dupont residence, and the subsequent

reversal of this in Wallas's mind at a later point, illustrate the incongruous relation between myth and detective-story in the text. The window display enacts a visual non-sequitor. There is no resemblance between what the painter sees and what he paints, whether he paints Dupont's home from a Greek setting or the ruins of Thebes from the photo of Dupont's house. Any attempt on the part of the reader to make a connection between myth and fiction which goes beyond the establishment of mere parallels toward finding some sort of "meaning" or significance is deliberately frustrated. The "meaning" of this novel is precisely that there is no meaning. In this way Robbe-Grillet is able to undermine simultaneously the "established order" represented by the myth, and the expectations of the reader who seeks to follow established order in search for deep and hidden meanings.

The fiction in this novel is very self-conscious, stressing the preferred status of created order. We begin and end the novel with the manager in his cafe. In the opening passage we are given the impression that he is preparing the stage for a performance which is about to begin. At the end the owner is reflecting on himself, trying desperately to establish or affirm his identity: "Le patron, c'est moi. Le patron c'est moi. Le patron c'est

moi le patron. . . le patron. . . le patron. . . " (263). Dramatic language is strewn throughout the text, calling the reader's attention to the fictive nature of that which he or she is reading. Yet the opening passage not only signals the fictive quality of what is to follow, it introduces the concepts of established and created order. In setting his cafe to rights in the wee hours of the morning, the patron is following an established order:

> De très anciens lois règlent le détail de ses gestes, sauvés pour une fois du flottement des intentions humaines; chaque seconde marque un pur mouvement: un pas de côté, la chaise à trente-et-un. Trente-deux. Trente-trois. . . Chaque seconde à sa place.
>
> (Les Gommes, 11)

The regularity and precision of this operation is very comforting, and lulls the perpetrator into a false sense of security. This is not to be the order which governs the text to follow: "Bientôt malheureusement le temps ne sera plus le maître" (Les Gommes, 11). This is a fiction and here creative order is to reign supreme, as disquieting as that may be for the reader accustomed to a more traditional presentation. For him or her what follows will seem to be "un jour, au début de l'hiver, sans plan, sans direction, incompréhensible et monstrueux" (Les Gommes, 11). After this disruption the owner is left bewildered, struggling to reaffirm his sense of himself, the old order.

Created order is not a lack of order, it is simply one which rejects stasis, apathy, complacency. Similarly, Robbe-Grillet's use of empty mythic allusions and structures is not gratuitous, even when the presence of these elements in the text seems to be precisely that. Olga Bernal suggests that it is Robbe-Grillet's purpose to rid his texts of these "anciens lois", these "vieux mythes de la 'profondeur'", and he accomplishes this by pointing to their vacuity:

> Le sens du titre est le sens littéral de "gommer", d'éffacer cet héritage devenu hérédité, cette loi, ce livret, ces formes préscrites dont parle le roman. S'il en est ainsi, le roman devient une pantomime ironique qui mime le cérémonial culturel, les conventions littéraires, pour en démasquer l'inanité.
>
> (Le roman de l'absence, 57)

His subversion of established order as represented by myth, effected by the lack of order and absence of meaningful parallels in the detective story, functions through the complicity or participation of the reader. The reader is invited, through the deliberate introduction of myth into the text, to search for a significance which isn't there to be found. The reader learns through frustrated attempts to instill meaning in, or extract meaning from the established order that this order is empty, and that it is to the created order that he or she must turn.

VII

The works discussed in this study, although disparate in many respects, do have in common their use of myth. In each of these works the mythic intertext functions paradoxically: the ordering principle which the myth represents is both affirmed and denied. The effect of this paradoxical treatment of myth is two-fold. It decenters the myth in a way which dispels its absolute status, and it facilitates the introduction of freeplay or "nonsense" into the text. In order to compare the articulations of the paradox in these works, one must focus on these two elements, the decentering of the myth and the play.

These two elements translate into an oscillation between play and "deep meaning" in the texts. It is the opposition of play to "deep meaning" which brings about the irony in the intertextual use of myth, since myth is, in some sense, representative of "deep meaning" and play implicitly calls this kind of significance into question. Indeed play is very explicitly concerned with contexts and categories rather than with messages or content. This notion of "deep meaning" (_profondeur_), of absolute meaning in Bakhtin's terms, may be equated with what Derrida terms the "transcendental signified". Because the transcendental signified can be defined only relationally, that is, in terms of a given context, its absolute quality is lost when there is a shift of contexts. Play therefore defies the

transcendental signified and, in a reciprocal manner, the absence of the transcendental signified facilitates freeplay. Thus Derrida defines discourse as:

> . . . a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum.
> ("Sign, Structure and Play", 249)

When contexts are shifted in such a way as to obfuscate or remove established relations, and when there is no absolute authority, no deep or absolute meaning can be found and the play of the signifier is consequently unlimited.

The use of myth as representative of absolute meaning by Joyce, Faulkner, Fowles and Robbe-Grillet facilitates the introduction of play into their texts because the ironic presentation of myth demonstrates the "absence" of absolute meaning, of the transcendental signified. The paradoxical status of myth in these texts, the simultaneous "is/is not" articulation of the order established by the intertext, conveniently places the unified meaning outside of the text. The paradoxical articulation of myth consequently creates the basis for freeplay in the texts:

> Freeplay is the disruption of presence. The presence of an element is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences and the movement of a chain. Freeplay is always an interplay of absence and presence, but if it is to be radically conceived, freeplay must be conceived of as a presence or absence

> beginning with the possibility of freeplay and not the other way around.
> (Derrida, "Sign, Structure, Play", 263-264)

The presence/absence of the myths in these texts is at once a point of departure for the freeplay (or "nonsense"), and a consequence of the "presence" of play in the texts, for it is at least partially the freeplay or "nonsense" which calls the myth into question and which therefore relegates the ordering principle of myth to a position outside of the text. The freeplay, in order words, expels absolute meaning from the text.

The paradoxical affirmation and denial of myth in these works is geared toward the reader's penchant for order. The reader is given a unified meaning in the myth and may even use it as a means of "making sense" of the text, but this order is not permitted to control the text itself in such a way as to inhibit textual play.

The decentering of the mythic intertexts in these works affects and is affected by the freeplay. Since the play has to do with movement between contexts, from one domain of order to another, it is inherently intertextual. Play may be considered an exploitation of the intertextual capacity of language, for as Stewart points out, intertextuality is an intrinsic feature of human discourse:

> . . . language is also characterized by its intertextual dimension; its detachability from a context of origin or immediate situation and relocation into other situations within the same

> domain of reality or into whole other domains of reality.
>
> (Nonsense, 27)

The intertextual relationship obtaining between the myths and the fiction in these works is therefore in itself a major factor of the play engaged in by these authors. All of these authors play on the reader's need for order and belief in authority, but they all do so in rather different ways. The way myth is decentered in each of these works, and the range of the ensuing freeplay, serve as a basis for comparison.

In _Ulysses_ the lack of obvious mythic parallels in the text, apart from those suggested by the title and by the critical awareness of the correspondence of the sections of the novel to certain sections of the _Odyssey_, accomplishes the decentering of the myth. It is, moreover, the reader's awareness of the reputed parallels and his or her familiarity with the mythic intertext which affirm the myth in such a way that it exerts a framing order on the text. And it is equally the reader's awareness of the parallels which denies the myth because the parallels are not realized in the text in a way which produces meaning or which helps to interpret the text. Thus the manipulation of the reader's need for order is especially strong here. The myth is decentered in terms of textual significance and becomes instead an external structure through the reader's awareness

of the reputed parallels despite their apparent absence from the text.

The play in Ulysses takes place under the auspices of the in-scene and off-scene narrators. The montage of dialogic discourses stemming from the off-scene narrator in particular, because of the apparent lack of meta-commentary, obfuscates the point of entry for the reader and frustrates his or her search for an authoritative voice. The wide range of discourses--journalistic writing, pastiches of literary styles of various periods, the slang of the Dubliners themselves--in combination with apparent lack of order renders interpretation a very difficult and highly arbitrary process. Because each mode of discourse represents a particular ideological standpoint, each is potentially in conflict with every other textual voice even if they nominally deal with the same subject matter. Each ideological position carries its own interpretive frame, so the reader cannot move from one voice to another without crossing frames or contexts. The overlapping of interpretive frames, the movement within the text from context to context, creates "nonsense" or textual freeplay because the signifier can define itself according to a potentially limitless number of contexts.

In Absalom, Absalom! the title of the novel again prompts the reader to search for parallels as a means of

interpreting the work. This time there are explicit mythic parallels present within the text, but because the myth is demonstrably inaccurate as a version of the Sutpen legend, the absolute status of myth as a producer of meaning is lost. Because the mythic order is not attained within the text, the reader is obliged to look outside of the text for the absolute ordering principle. Indeed, the loss of absolute status on the part of the myth within the text automatically decenters the myth, for it retains its absolute status only in the reader's familiarity with the myth outside of its intertextual relation with the text at hand. Although the mythic order is affirmed in the attempts of three of the narrators to instill the quality of myth in their own narratives, it is denied and consequently decentered by Shreve's repudiation of myth, and by the failure of the intertext itself to approximate the Sutpen saga.

In Absalom, Absalom! the varieties of discourse are less numerous and less ideologically disparate than in Ulysses and the myth is not so far removed from the text. As a consequence, the play or "nonsense" stemming from the interaction of the four narrators is less extreme than in Joyce's text. Each of these narrators focus not only on the subject matter, but also on instilling his or her fiction with some sort of order. The attempt to achieve a unified

meaning in itself orders their discourses in a clearer fashion, and the search for order is one for which the reader has sympathy. Yet the individual discourses remain ideologically distinct, and once again the absence of a controlling authorial voice prevents the reader from being able to identify with one textual voice over the others. Each version of the Sutpen legend contradicts elements of all of the others. No absolute meaning is present within the text because the overlapping of multiple contexts prevents the defining of any absolute meaning.

In The Magus the myth is affirmed by the structure of the novel which imitates the process of the quest myth. Yet myth is also used to disorient the protagonist in a way which will undermine established conventions, the ways in which he has ordered his world. This very disordering process is a part of the vortex or quest myth and thus myth is not decentered here to the degree it is in the other works I have examined. It is decentered only to the extent that Nicholas is shown, through his experiences at Bourani, that no absolute meaning can exist. Each attempt he makes at finding an all-encompassing explanation for what he undergoes is consequently subverted. The reader, too, is caught up in the mystery and is never really given a satisfactory explanation, and thus the reader's penchant for order is ultimately not satisfied.

In this novel the freeplay is also more limited than in the other works. The myth is affirmed even as it is decentered in the Bourani section of the novel, which is structured according to the night journey segment of the quest myth even as the text strives to deny the possibility for a transcendental signified. The reader is given a point of entry into the text through the protagonist, and Nicholas's striving for explanations and order reflects the reader's own need for order. Yet in the ever-shifting contexts of the godgame the reader and Nicholas both are deprived of this order. The possible interpretations of what Nicholas undergoes, and of what lies behind the godgame, are limitless. Indeed, Nicholas runs through a number of possible interpretations himself in the course of the novel and each is shown to be of as little value (or as much) as the next. In some sense Fowles's post-modern rejection of a unified meaning is depicted, rather than realized, within the text.

The most radical decentering of unified meaning may be found in Les Gommes. No "deep meaning" is to be permitted in this text. As a consequence, the attempts of the reader to derive significance from the relation of the mythic parallels to the text are deliberately frustrated. Similarly, the reader's penchant for order is denied as Robbe-Grillet undermines the structure of the myth as well

as its status as unified meaning. The structure of the myth is virtually identical to that of the detective story. When the latter is subverted through the role reversals and the inverted chronology (the detective commits the crime at the end of the novel), the mythic structure is likewise undermined. Thus Robbe-Grillet not only removes the absolute status from myth with respect to signification, he also decenters the structure or context from which the "meaning" is derived.

Just as the decentering of the myth finds its most radical articulation in this novel, so too does play. The reader's expectations are here manipulated to an even greater degree, for not only is the search for authority denied, the penchant for order is mocked as the very structure on which the novel rests is overturned with the myth. While multifarious interpretations are facilitated by the play in the other novels, here the attempt to find "meaning" of any kind is skillfully eluded. The signifiers in this text may consequently mean anything or nothing at all.

We see, then, that the decentering of the myth is directly linked to the play in these works. The further absolute meaning is banished the greater the freedom of the signifier. The articulation of the paradoxical function of myths in these texts is therefore a measure of each author's

post-modern tendencies. It is entirely conceivable that ironic mythic intertexts would function the same way in other post-modern novels, because intertextuality, a phenomenon exploited by freeplay, is an inherent capacity of language. This intertextual capacity is artificially disguised in language which privileges a transcendental signified, but the decentering of the transcendental signified liberates the signifier and realizes the capacity of language for play. The paradoxical affirmation and denial of myth in these novels is thus a metaphor for the liberation of languages from received literary orthodoxies, from absolute meaning of any kind.

Notes

1. The similarities among these authors, particularly with regard to the works considered here, will become more evident as the paper progresses, and particular attention will be given to this issue in the conclusion.

   Apart from the affinities among these authors with respect to their use of myth, we may demonstrate the influence which they have had on one another. The influence of Joyce and Faulkner has spread far beyond the reaches of the English language novel; Robbe-Grillet explicitly acknowledges their influence on him in _Pour un nouveau roman_ (26, 32, 115-116). Robbe-Grillet himself, due to the highly innovative character of his fiction, and to his articulateness as a critic, has established a reputation as a kind of spokesperson for the school of the _Nouveau Roman_. Fowles acknowledges his debt to Robbe-Grillet (_The French Lieutenant's Woman_, 80, 137); and because English post-modernism remains distinctively English despite its indebtedness to the French counterpart, we must turn to the work of someone like Robbe-Grillet for uses of language and structure in literature which are unique to the French school.

   For discussions of influence, see articles by Simonton, Albérès, Bleikasten, and Olsen.

2. William Palmer discusses the vortex myth at some length in his paper "John Fowles' _The Magus_: The Vortex as Myth, Masque and Metaphor". He suggests that the abundance of vortex imagery in the novel, while interesting, is but a small part of the work as a whole and is consequently of little use in explaining the text. His discussion seems to suggest that the vortex myth is more or less synonymous with the quest myth, although he places most emphasis on the night journey segment, on the descent into the underworld or the unconscious.

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The Paradoxical Function of Ironic Mythic Intertexts in Joyce, Faulkner, Fowles and Robbe-Grillet

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