THE MACHINIC ASSEMBLAGE: DISMANTLING AUTHORSHIP

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The author as he is understood today is produced by a desire for transcendent mastery over the text. For this reason, texts are frequently limited to readings that investigate the author himself. This kind of reading is severely limiting, since, because the author is nothing other than a product of the text, this figure has no more influence than other textual commentary. Searching for the author in order to gain textual perspective interrupts the reader’s own influence over the text—a power of rewriting as influential as the author’s. However, because textual commentary has just as much effect as the author himself, it is not enough simply to stop looking for the author. The author becomes written into the text by its readers, and often in a manner that rids the text of nuanced meaning.

To begin, chapter one focuses on the manner in which an ideology of transcendence produces an approach to the text only in terms of authenticating the author’s presence within it. Kafka’s *The Trial* is a poignant example of this type of reading, because it is typically considered a reflection of Kafka’s state of mind. This reading is confirmed by the highly influential commentary of Max Brod, whose control over the interpretations of this text arise from the fact that he knew Kafka well—and would therefore be in a greater position to analyze Kafka’s intentions. Brod suggests that this text illustrates a transcendental guilt, imposed by the strict bureaucracy the text
represents, a bureaucracy that makes the law inaccessible. However, Deleuze and Guattari in *Toward a Minor Literature* argue that a critical reading of this text dismantles Brod’s argument almost instantly, because K does not respond to the guilt supposedly inflicted upon him. He does not attempt to prove his innocence to the courts, an effort that would only confirm that he is a subject of their authority: instead, he mocks everyone, even his judges. Therefore, because the transcendental guilt is clearly not functional, it is clear that Kafka prioritizes this illustration of transcendent power only in order to critique it. In this manner, Brod reduces this highly political text to a discussion of Kafka’s persona, rather than an investigation of transcendent authority itself. In fact, *The Trial* investigates the manner in which power is not a transcendental presence, but, as this chapter will argue, the product of a machine, which prescribes collective desires that are performed immanently. The text is a machine of desire that produces the author, limiting his authority to a textual effect.

Next, chapter two extends the critique of the transcendental because, despite the realization that the author is a product of the text, there still exists a hierarchy between reader and authorial commentary. The desire for transcendent authorial meaning reads textual representation as a medium of connection to the author, and thus, a manner of solving the text. However, the concept that the author controls representation is nothing but a value produced by the notion of transcendence I will critique here. The author as an effect of the text does not exert control over other forms of representation, and neither is this presence able to limit them. In fact, the reader produces representations, whose effect over the text is equal to any authorial commentary. However, if the reader
designates representation as merely an exercise in locating the author, this commentary actually engenders figures of the author out of desire alone. Rather than representation being a medium that recalls the author, it is instead engendered by the reader: that is, the reader recreates the author himself. Or rather, the reader creates textual personifications that become attributed to this imaginary individual. Representation, understood thus, reaffirms not the author himself, but the paradigm of transcendental control that limits the text to a single authorial voice. However, because the reader actually produces a divergent understanding of the text, it is clear the reader’s voice can write the text simply by reading it. For this reason, it is impossible to limit the text to the voice of the author: without being read, and thus rewritten, it would cease to exist. Moreover, because the text has been recreated by its readers, even if the pristine origin of the authorial voice did exist, its relevance to the text would be negligible. For this reason, continuing to write representation as an affirmation of the author not only creates classifications that do not correspond to the individual named, but seeks an understanding of the text which would contain little relevance to its current recreation. Instead, it furthers the paradigm of mastery by suggesting that the role of readers is one that is subject to authorial commentary—a concept that masks the equal influence reading has in producing the text.

Finally, chapter three qualifies the previous chapter: although it is irrelevant and unfortunate to search for the author, it is not sufficient simply to discontinue with this preoccupation. This is because the authorial presence has been written into the text by the reader’s endeavor to make irrational elements of texts into rational ones. This form of reduction is one that Derrida terms both ‘violent and impotent’ in its contortion of
functional textual elements that become written as secondary or even trivial: often, these elements are the most important ones in a text. One text that has been read solely in terms of rationalizing the irrational is Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*. J. Hillis Miller critiques this traditional, Aristotelian reading of this text, a reading that argues that the catharsis this play produces is in the act of resolution—when finally at the end, the rationalization of seemingly irrational events occurs. However, Miller argues that this play is actually fundamentally about the irrational, and that attempting to impose a rational meaning upon it would destroy the sense of catharsis it produces. In fact, given the circumstances under which this play would have been performed, the audience would already know the basic plot elements, including the resolution: further, the play does not consist of plot-heavy action elements. Instead, this play captivates its audience from the use of dramatic irony, which is *not* resolved at the end. Oedipus blinds himself when he realizes what he has done, but it is still unclear to him why it has happened, and why he has been punished. Instead, the audience undergoes a catharsis because Oedipus is constantly making claims with ironic double meanings that he does not comprehend. The audience, however, because they *know the outcome*, understands these double meanings and are filled with the fear that they too cannot control their pronouncements—a lack of control that results in self-inflicted blindness. Therefore, a reading of the play that seeks to rationalize these linguistic choices is one that endangers the textuality of the play by removing the very cause of catharsis, which Aristotle deems so important. What Miller terms “Aristotle’s Oedipus Complex” is not one that masters *Oedipus Rex*. On the contrary, Aristotle exposes his argument to a host of logical fallacies by attempting to rationalize a play that
is about the irrational. What this means, however, is that Oedipus is presented with a very similar situation to K in The Trial: both are being punished without having committed any known crime by an inscrutable authority. Further, their reaction is very telling: they both attempt to solve what is fundamentally irrational, unaware that the act of solving is an act of subjecting themselves to a transcendent authority. In the same manner, Aristotle’s rationalization is one which causes him to be mastered by what is irrational, inflicting the same blindness upon his argument.

Thus, the impulse of solving the text is nothing but a remnant of a paradigm of authorial transcendence, a paradigm that subjects to this transcendence the very reader who pursues this solution. Both Oedipus and K assume that by rationalizing what is happening to them, they will manage to gain control over their situations. Oedipus is nothing if not rational: in fact, he is too rational. In a similar manner, although K mocks his authorities and ignores the accusation as a mistake, he too attempts to rationalize what is happening to him by locating the source. In fact, despite each of these characters’ rational skill, neither questions how it is that he is being oppressed. Both question representatives as to the location and design of the single, controlling individual who has repressed him—failing to understand that the manner in which they both respond is an affirmation of their own subjection by fulfilling this role of one repressed. K wastes his ability to enact influence by searching for this single figure in a machine of collective immanence; Oedipus, obsessed with rationalizing the inscrutable, performs the curse by trying rationally to avoid it. Ultimately, both Sophocles and Kafka are authors who create the impulse of solving at the same time as they dismantle its effectiveness. Indeed,
it is not coincidence these texts both are subjected to readings that fall victim to this impulse they meant to dismantle. This drastic misreading is one of collective desire, voicing a paradigmatic preference for subjugation rather than confusion.
CHAPTER II

AUTHORSHIP AS A PRODUCT OF PRESCRIBED DESIRE

As demonstrated in Toward a Minor Literature, Deleuze and Guattari posit that Kafka’s The Trial, rather than illustrating the law as an abstract machine of transcendent, hierarchical authority, instead characterizes a machinic assemblage. Specifically, the machinic assemblage refutes the possibility of a transcendental law that imposes its presence absolutely upon its subjects. Instead, the machine produces power itself, in the form of prescribed immanent desires that are carried out collectively. This production means that the subjection of individuals occurs through their own desire, rather than a powerful presence. In the same manner, authorship is a concept produced out of immanence, as a theological power structure that acts to repress. Although the author seems to impose his presence absolutely on the text, this presence is revealed to be merely an effect the text—the manner in which writing is feared. If writing is not governed by a transcendental authority, and the law as production of power is nothing but a collective desire, then the bureaucratic triangulation of control and limitation does not function. Instead, the immanence is illustrated as a linear corridor that branches into a labyrinth. Because this structure is more problematic than the concept of a negative theology, the author function is produced from immanence to make the author seem more than simply an effect of the textual machine. As an effect, his reappearance is analogous to a return from the grave; within his ability is only the power to revise. As a ghost, he is
a reproduction of an oppressive figure that can no longer assert control. Indeed, the presence of the ghost reflects an immanent desire for subjugation that is prescribed by the machine. The author’s production reveals very clearly a power paradigm in which subjugation is less a cause for fear than the intractability of collective, emergent desire carried out in a rhizome.

To begin, although *The Trial* has been classically interpreted as an illustration of transcendental law assigned by a strict bureaucracy, Deleuze and Guattari, in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, instead question whether the text supports this model at all. A major proponent of this pervasive interpretation is Kafka’s “eminent friend, Max Brod” (Steiner xi) who posits that central to the text is the concept of an “ineradicable existential guilt” (Steiner xi), a reflection of the author’s fixation. Brod presents what Deleuze and Guattari term a “negative theology (or the theology of absence)” (Deleuze and Guattari 43), defined by “the transcendence of law, the prioriness of guilt […] [which presents] law as pure and empty form without content, the object of which remains unknowable […] the law can only be expressed through a sentence […] no one knows the law’s interior” (Deleuze and Guattari 43). However, the negative theology model is not only dysfunctional within the text, but highly restrictive, in that it has largely contained textual commentary to an investigation of Kafka himself, and the manner in which his personal, ineradicable guilt is imposed upon the text. Instead, Deleuze and Guattari argue that the text has a larger function: to investigate the manner in which this model qualifies power structures in the political reality. However, in order to read *The Trial* as a political commentary on power itself, this structure of power must be critically examined, as well
as the mimicking structure of authorship that has limited the text to an investigation of Kafka as an individual. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the three presuppositions this model relies on: power as a transcendental presence, a hierarchical structure of enforcement, and the inaccessibility of the law. In order for the text to be interpreted politically, these three presuppositions must be dissembled.

1. Transcendence of Guilt and Power as Presence

Firstly, The Trial is a text that dismantles the presupposition of power as a transcendental presence that imposes the law on its subjects absolutely. As this work is typically read, the central premise is the manner in which an opaque theology of absence (which is the same as an absolute presence) masters its subjects by exacting indelible guilt upon them. However, the assumption of transcendental guilt as a theme is a large oversimplification concerning the actual purpose of The Trial. When critically investigated, guilt is not imposed as a motivating force: not only does K not respond as one affected by guilt, he does not become the subject of legal authority. Because this theme does not actually function in the text, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that, rather than the text having absorbed Kafka’s own guilt imposed through the unshakeable presence of Judaist doctrine, this work investigates the manner in which these power structures function in the real. Deleuze and Guattari state that “law, guilt, interiority—Kafka has a great need for them as the superficial movement of his work” (Deleuze and Guattari 45), illustrating that the transcendental law so prevalent in the text functions only to demonstrate the façade of any power structure that claims to impose its presence.
inherently upon any subject. What the predominance of this theme is supposed to investigate, therefore, is the manner in which power is not a possessed presence that imposes subjection, but instead a fabrication reflective of socio-political paradigms. One manifestation of this understanding of power is in the construction of authorship, which suggests an absolute, inherent presence within the text. The structure of the author as a negative theology is one that mirrors the ideological, patriarchal production of a religious presence of law that authenticates and validates a text by reflecting himself absolutely within it. Indeed, the presence of the author suggests the imposition of certain themes to which the text is restricted (as Kafka’s unfortunate, looming presence has undoubtedly restricted *The Trial*), just as the textual model acts to impose upon its subjects a sense of guilt, enforcing its authority. In fact, this oversight concerning the actually dysfunctional theological presence within this text arises because the restrictive function of the author is arranged within these same paradigmatic assumptions—that power is a transcendental presence. In contrast, what is demonstrated through *The Trial* is not the predominance of a transcendental law that can impose guilt, but the dismantling of the assumption that power is a presence; rather, it is a production based on the specific societal structure it maintains.

To begin, the assumption of power as a transcendence presence of law requires that the law be manifested inherently in *the entirety* of subjects it exerts control over—a requirement the text refutes. In order for an absolute transcendence to function as a power model, it is crucial that the law acts as the source of an a priori imperative. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the aspect of transcendence demands “a certain necessary
connection of the law to guilt” (Deleuze and Guattari 44) ensuring guilt is absolutely able
to master its subjects, “guilt must be the a priori that corresponds with transcendence, for
each person or for everyone, guilty or innocent” (Deleuze and Guattari 44). However,
this is not an imperative that functions under a critical investigation: instead, the text
depicts a highly problematic discrepancy in the form of its protagonist, K. Indeed, K
represents the dysfunction of this imperative to the point of absurdity: he is entirely
unaffected by guilt—his manner is almost cavalier. Deleuze and Guattari note, “it is
strange to see the degree to which K doesn’t feel any guilt and doesn’t feel fear and
doesn’t flee; he is completely audacious” (Deleuze and Guattari 46). Upon being told by
a barrage of people to hire not one but numerous lawyers, and constantly to attempt
interaction with the judges, he does not follow their instruction: in fact, he fires his
lawyer. Neither does he follow up on any of the many methods presented for appeasing
the judges, who he consistently annoys rather than placates. Further, K does not fear his
superior officials out of the guilt he is supposedly afflicted with, but rather “willingly
aligns himself with the strong side and the executioners; he prods Franz who is being
whipped; he terrorizes an accused person by seizing him by the arm; at the lawyer’s he
makes fun of Block” (Deleuze and Guattari 46). K clearly feels blameless—in fact, he
feels he is the victim of a mistake. The absurd malfunction of the a priori assertion of
guilt upon all subjects is undermined through K’s behavior: as its single, catalogued
discrepancy, it is clear the law is not a transcendent imposition of guilt. K represents a
dysfunction that underscores the impossibility of an inherent presence as a power model,
absolutely asserting itself over any given group of subjects—a structure that authorship, mimicking, also claims to be endowed with.

Just as telling in the dysfunction of the a priori imperative of guilt is K’s indifference to asserting his innocence. Guilt and innocence function in the same manner within this imperative: that is, as a reflection of authority. If K were forced into subjectivity, a righteous obsession of innocence would be equally affected: either way, his attempt to escape would validate his subjection. The fact that K is as unconcerned with proving his innocence as he is of purging guilt illustrates that he is not subjected by an authority. The subject of such a transcendence would be caught in a permanent attempt to escape, indefinitely oscillating between asserting his innocence, and the inevitable relapse of guilt from this constant, theological presence. This is the structure of that Brod posits K as inhabiting, unable to escape the affects of guilt and innocence. Indeed, this oscillation appears in *The Trial* as K is presented with two options: indefinite postponement or ostensible acquittal (Kafka 159). The former is simply the constant barrage of guilt; the latter, an impossible escape attempt, means that the trial is temporarily cleared, but can be reexamined at any dictated time. Thus, the subject caught under this mechanism will switch between periods of innocence when the trial is dropped and then the ensuing guilt at each new arrest (Kafka 159). Such an escape is an affirmation of the authoritative presence, since it expresses dire concern over the assertion of innocence, and the fact there is a presence to escape from. However, K’s reaction of mockery and indifference is diametrically opposed to these options he is given. He scorns the process of escape outlined for both ostensible acquittal as well as
the indefinite postponement. K is so certain of no wrongdoing that he thinks he is the object of a foolish blunder that will be righted at any moment. Rather than being subjected to guilt or the necessity of pleading his innocence, he is frustrated when called in for questioning and does not validate himself to his authorities. In fact, he does not take his trial or the authorities seriously, but mocks them, rather trying to prove how incompetent they are to have called him in at all. Therefore, the mockery K displays toward his judges and advisors refutes the concept of an absent theology that imposes inescapable subjection as remotely crucial to *The Trial*. As its protagonist, he portrays a central discrepancy that discredits the functionality of guilt through his utter indifference; he is meant not to demonstrate, but to refute an understanding of power as a transcendental presence. The power structure of a transcendental figure, such as the author, is mocked through the scorn K expresses at what he assumes can only be an absurd oversight of legal articulation, rather than a masterful authority.

Therefore, because the transcendence of legal power is utterly dysfunctional, a position that K confirms by treating its expression as a blunder, the prevalent theme of a transcendentally absent law is only surface. Resulting from this realization, Deleuze and Guattari reach a conclusion antithetical from Brod’s: that *The Trial*, in fact, practices a “dismantling”, colluding to investigate power structures concerning the transcendence of law, a technique that articulates in a “much more effective way than a critique would have done” (Deleuze and Guattari 47). This allows *The Trial* to become a critical examination of this power structure in an entirely political manner. The text, hardly a limited but intriguing “interpretation or social representation of Kafka”, must instead be
examined as “an experimentation, a socio-political investigation. Since [this] [structure] functions really in the real, the question becomes: how does it function? What function does it have?” (Deleuze and Guattari 49). The Trial reveals that power cannot be understood as a presence that subjects anyone to anything. Instead, The Trial examines what underlying assumptions construct power as a presence in spite of its unfeasibility. In this manner, the power structure of authorship that restricts the text to the presence of this figure is one of the locations onto which this political understanding is reflected. There is no theological figure that imposes will upon the text. Moreover, the only reason Brod’s interpretation is so pervasive is because it depends on the concept that Kafka is a transcendental author in the same way that the law is transcendental in this work. If both Kafka and the law are examined as causes of transcendentally imposed guilt, then the text and K would react as subjects to a structure that expresses power in terms of possession and presence (Kafka possesses guilt and as an absolute presence of an author he subjects the text to these themes). However, in an examination of these effects, it is clear that power is not assumed or distributed in this manner at all. Power articulated as a presence concerning textual understanding is historically and ideologically constructed; the assumptions that fabricate this structure are entirely dysfunctional.

In fact, the structure that fabricates the power of the author/law as a presence is one that is rooted historically in the construction of religious authority that controls and authenticates subjects/texts. Foucault, in his essay “What is an Author”, discusses the manner in which this manufacturing of power is genealogically valued: occurring in all actuality, it is mirrored in the text through what he terms the “author-function”, which
specifically constructs the author under these power assumptions. The author-function essentially accounts for the overshadowing presence of Kafka that has occurred and allowed this decidedly political work to be read only as an investigation of its absent author. Specifically, in order to avoid the absolute presence of an author that saturates the entirety of the text, the term, ‘work’ has been designated as a manner of propagating the author’s disappearance. However, as in *The Trial* itself, this sudden absence is nothing but a modified presence. Foucault argues how the decisiveness behind designating an authored text as a ‘work’ simply circumvents the word “author” but operates through a “transcendental anonymity” (Foucault 104) that does nothing but necessitate its relation to him, “retranslating in transcendental terms both the theological affirmation of its sacred character and the critical affirmation of its creative character” (Foucault 104). Essentially, removing Kafka absolutely from the text places him once more as the religious figure that answers and characterizes, within the same structure of power as a presence that imposes subjection, relying on the same “inalterable and yet never fulfilled tradition” (Foucault 105) of an a priori power construction. The author function, in removing the author, necessitates a sole priority of ensuring the continuity between these texts as produced by one individual, which specifically relies on a transcendental answerability by locating stylistic similarities, eliminating what is unnecessary or irrelevant. In this manner, Foucault notes that the author function is constructed genealogically through the valuation of religious authority as a power structure. The assumptions of determining a work are radically similar to the manner in which the “Christian tradition authenticated (or rejected) the texts at its disposal”
(Foucault 110) by “trying to prove the value of a text by its author’s saintliness” (Foucault 110). The power construction displayed here specifically accounts for the overshadowing of this work by Kafka’s own presence, a structure that masks the true political organization of this work and is entirely dysfunctional within and without the text. This power structure, while subjected to K’s mockery of its underlying assumptions in a political reality, has been affirmed through interpretations that follow Brod’s, which enforce the structure within the text simply because the concept of the author is entrenched in the same paradigm, confirming the possibility of power as a religious presence. In this way, the author function is used to affirm themes of presence and mastery, premises that are meant to be dismantled and politically investigated.

2. Immanence as a Desire for Repression Produced from the Machine

Therefore, because The Trial dismantles transcendence, the crisis of this work can be interpreted as an investigation of the manner in which power actually functions. Deleuze and Guattari argue that Kafka posits, rather than a negative theology, a mechanic production that prescribes immanent desire, stating, “the transcendence of law was an abstract machine, but the law exists only in the immanence of the machinic assemblage of justice. The Trial is the dismantling of all transcendent justifications” (Deleuze and Guattari 51). Most importantly, if the law is not distributed from a presence on high but itself produced through a machinic assemblage, this refutes the second of Brod’s assumptions that power is appropriated through a select bureaucracy. Deleuze and Guattari posit that “The Trial is an interminable novel” (Deleuze and Guattari 51)
because it is not reducible to transcendental law appropriated hierarchically from the
origin. Instead of an “infinite transcendence” of guilt, *The Trial* rather depends on “an
unlimited field of immanence” (Deleuze and Guattari 51) that is generated out of the
machine. Therefore, law is shown not to be hidden and hierarchized but a manifestation
of collective ideology enacted as a juridical performative. Deleuze and Guattari
illustrate how the machine as generating immanence displaces the law as an origin/cause,
“where one believed there was the law, there is in fact desire and desire alone […]
justice is desire and not law […] [and] everyone is a functionary of justice” (Deleuze and
Guattari 49). The production of immanent desire replacing a selectively known law
allows a limited personal agency; however, because the desires are immanent, they are
assumed automatically from what the machine prescribes. Justice is enacted not by a
presence that owns the law, but through immanence, in which each person is a
functionary, performing the law through the desire the machine produces. In this way, it
is clear that the law is actually only a desire for justice, which is executed emergently:
this structure does not allow for the control of a bureaucratic hierarchy.

Then, because the law is not dictated by a presence but enacted collectively
through desire the machine prescribes, the hierarchical bureaucracy that carries out the
law does not function. If the law is simply immanence, it does not exist prior to its
enactment. In the same way, there is no originary presence from which the law is
conveyed, but rather, the law simply emerges in the engagement of the text. The
origin/law/author of the text is simply the result of immanent desire produced through the
machine. This concept of law as an emergent immanence is one that Miller explicates in
Reading Narrative. Upon examining the presence of the Delphic Oracle in *Oedipus Rex*, the prophecy seems to be edict, delivered through the god Apollo, imposing its secret meaning upon Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta. However, Miller argues that the oracle does not reflect this hierarchy at all: the oracle does not contain a hidden law but an emergent suggestion. It predicts the fate of Oedipus and fulfills itself not because these characters are subjected to a secret law from on high, but because of their effort to avoid its fulfillment—it is entirely based on immanent desire that they perform. Miller argues that it is obsessive engagement in the so-called ‘truth’ of the oracle that allows the prophesy to be fulfilled, “if the oracles are not fulfilled, then the validity of those laws will be put in doubt […] on the other hand, as the play shows, if the oracles are fulfilled, the gods have treated men and women […] in a way whose reason and justice are inscrutable” (Miller 17-18). What this reveals is that the law does not come from the gods—this inscrutable justice is simply a performative that Oedipus and Jocasta fulfill by simply giving it validity. While it is true that the correct reading of the oracle cannot be known to its subjects, this is not because it has a hierarchical origin, but rather that the origin is displaced through the immanence of Laius and Jocasta, who, by trying to prevent the oracle, stop it from being forgotten and cast into doubt. It is rather that Laius and Jocasta took an interest in this pronouncement from the gods and fulfilled it themselves: as participants in aligning their fate with the oracle, they are fundamentally both causes and effects of their destruction. In the same manner, the machine prescribes desires that are enacted through interest. This same structure governs the author, who is enacted through
the collective desire to produce the text in a masterable way: the laws he imposes are simply immanent methods of understanding a text.

Therefore, in *The Trial*, the hierarchical division of power assigned to repress certain individuals does not function in that everyone assumes this subjected role out of their own immanent desire, “all the gears, which are in fact equivalent despite appearances, and which constitute the bureaucracy as desire, that is, an exercise of the assemblage itself. The divisions of the oppressor and oppressed, repressor and repressed, flow out of each state of the machine, and not vice versa” (Deleuze and Guattari 57). In other words, K would assume the role of a repressed individual and enact the desires produced by the machine. This gives him the agency to question and mock this repression, but he does not question that he is being repressed. A close reading of the text reveals that K himself is also a judge, and a lawyer; he is not subordinated forcibly but fulfills his role as prescribed, with limited agency. K attempts, at his first hearing, to contest the logic of the judge, as well as embarrass him in front of the jury and those gathered—he removes the lawyers from the equation and attempts to clear himself, performing the actions of a lawyer and jury upon himself. The bureaucratic figures only seem to occur by “triangulation” (Deleuze and Guattari 54), as hierarchically prioritized extensions of the law, privy to knowledge based on rank. This certainly seems plausible initially, as the inspector and the two warders come to initially arrest K (Kafka 9), of whom, the inspector seems to be of a higher rank. However, as soon as these terms are distributed in segments (police, lawyer, judge) (Deleuze and Guattari 55), this logic immediately becomes suspect: these functionaries “lose their double or triangular form,
[they] [...] don’t appear or don’t appear only as the hierarchized representatives of the law, but become agents, connective cogs of an assemblage of justice, each cog corresponding to a position of desire, all the cogs and all the possibilities communicating with each other through successive continuities” (Deleuze and Guattari 55). Because hierarchy is dysfunctional, it is instead indicative of the manner in which the machine produces power as effect that appropriates oppression by prescribing an immanent desire in its subjects, which they assume and enact through their own agency.

Furthermore, the machinic production of power that prescribes immanent desire is a structure that is critical to the author, who supposedly distributes the law hierarchically. The author cannot be understood as a cause that is hierarchically secret and realized only through the ownership of themes in the text: rather, the machine produces themes, not from the origin but as an effect of the text. Deleuze and Guattari argue, “there isn’t power as if it were an infinite transcendence in relation to slaves or the accused. Power is not pyramidal as the law would have us believe; it is segmentary and linear, and it proceeds by contiguity, not by height and farawayness” (Deleuze and Guattari 56). The physical structures Kafka posits in The Trial also confirm this: rather than a castle or vertical structure (hierarchy), K is instead faced with endless, linear hallways. Whereas a castle would impose a limiting structure upon the text, the hallways are unlimited and identical. In the same way, the author has supposedly distributed the law, imposing upon the text a limiting structure. Power as produced by a machine is also related to the structure of the author, who emerges from the machine. The author, far from being an edict of law, is instead a socially produced effect of his writing, desired through emergent
immanence. The structure of ownership is rather projected upon the text as a result of social desire, which necessitates the role of a present author imposing law to be filled, refusing to accept the text without it. Therefore, this repressive figure appropriating ownership is enacted by the reader, who willingly positions himself as a subject.

In a similar manner, Derrida in *Dissemination* discusses how the author, as an effect produced through the machine, is merely desire—a desire that posits a patriarchal, repressive presence. The association of the author with the origin and law is one that is proposed erroneously: these things cannot be equated. Indeed, the origin is dismantled by the emergence of the author. While the author is produced out the emergent desire to authenticate and qualify the text, this figure is validated by his equation with the origin of the work itself, knowing and possessing the secret from the text’s creation. The origin traditionally is structured under a patriarchal system associating “Pater”, with the following concepts, “the chief, the capital, the good” (Derrida 81), which, again, suggests ownership. Further, this system “assigns the origin and power of speech, precisely of logos to the paternal position […] [that] sets up the whole of Western metaphysics in its conceptuality” (Derrida 76), so that speech is related to the father because it is supposedly directly present, and not estranged from its origin. This paternal structure, on the other hand, positions writing as a break from the origin, structuring writing as an orphan who is “nobody’s son at the instant it reaches inscription, scarcely remain[ing] a son at all and no longer recognizes its origins […] in contrast to writing, living logos is alive in that it has a living father […] a father that it is present […] living logos recognizes its debt, lives off that recognition” (Derrida 77). This “estrangement from
origin” means that writing can only repeat without knowing (Derrida 74), a fear that creates the immanent desire for the author as a powerful presence. This structure essentially sets up the hierarchy that is contrived in The Trial, wherein the author assigns law hierarchically: writing, as representation estranged from the origin, although it does not know the interior of the law, still incessantly repeats it. This sets up the construction through which the author is secretly reflected in what writing repeats, so a valuable examination of the text would be one in which this origin is substantiated. However, the attempt to discover the remnants of the presence of the author in the estranged text reveals that the origin is replaced by the machinic assemblage. The attempted rediscovery of the origin through an emergent mechanic production announces its destruction; it is only a re-telling, reproducing the origin through an emergent desire.

In fact, engaging the author function fulfills its own prophetic destruction: it confirms that the origin does not exist, in trying to rediscover it. The author is the result of the writer having produced the text. In this manner, the writer, producing the text as its law and origin, is displaced through the assemblage of writing; after its completion, the author becomes merely an effect, not acting as an origin but as a representative who is only an immanent desire. The author, in being a kind of re-telling, is instead a confirmation that the text is an utter displacement of the origin supposedly imposed upon it. The writer is displaced through the machine—what the son’s presence really reveals is that, as he repeats himself mechanically, he is a premonition of the absence of the origin did not ever really exist. The originary father’s identity is suspended as well: the question of “what is the father?” can be reduced to “what is”, which is nothing but a
circular logic: even the legitimate son *logos* can only *represent* the father (Derrida 146). This positions the author of the finished text as able to fulfill the role of unlimited representations—that there is no way of reaching the origin, because the emergent author is not identical to the writer. This shows that writing specifically is a machinic assemblage that has no origins—the author is created from immanent desire that longs to find the hidden law of the origin. In this way, it is revealed the manner in which the machine produces the desire for an oppressive figure that seems to impose subjection, but in fact, this subjection is self-imposed by the produced immanence.

The author as reproduced figure of repression that confirms the dismantled origin gives rise to Derrida’s interpretation of writing as a grave (Derrida 103), from which the author emerges as a ghostly presence. Just as a ghostly figure, the author announces the originary writer’s disappearance. He is also ghostly in the sense that he is a reproduction of an oppressive figure that can no longer subject anyone. This is illustrated explicitly through the Johnson’s concept of prosopopoeia, as the “voice-beyond-the-grave” (Johnson 21), which specifically shows the author as an effect produced by the machine, and not as an origin or cause of law. In the case of the ghost, the author does not clarify with explanatory law: rather, he affects a confusing revision. In *The Wake of Deconstruction*, Johnson considers an entirely literal speaking-beyond-the-grave situation concerning Paul de Man. Johnson claims that “Paul de Man died twice, two very different deaths. First there was his death from cancer in 1983, accompanied by a large number of publications about him, in his memory” (Johnson 20). However, the discovery in these publications of anti-Semitic essays completely transformed the conception of de Man’s
life posthumously so that he “no longer belonged to the academy, but to history. And not as a hero, but as a villain. The temptation for anyone who admired and mourned de Man lay in transforming the trauma of de Man’s past into mourning for the loss of the idealized de Man” (Johnson 21). It is this voice from beyond the grave that condemns de Man to the confusion of being judged over what responsibility he bore for the Holocaust (Johnson 22); also, it is not clear “which de Man [we are] judging” (Johnson 22).

Moreover, this confusion always inhabits the author, whether dead or alive, “the ‘voice’ of the author [is] always ‘the fiction of the voice-from-beyond-the-grave’ […] there are two no-win models of authorship here: an interactive editorial process through which a ‘living’ author participates in the progressive erasure of her own words and a textual respect that can only occur if the author is dead” (Johnson 42). The author is produced after the text is completed, and thus, he has the power of the voice from beyond the grave: to revise only. This power hardly attests to his origins and possession of secret law, but merely creates a specter to imitate his presence that did not exist in the first place. As K’s mockery of the transcendent law, the ghost of authorial presence looks foolish. Its existence reflects the same immanence in *The Trial* through which the machine produces a desire for a presence that subjects and owns power. Instead, there is only the immanence that enacts these emergent desires, fearing confusion more than subjugation.

3. Collectivity of Emergent Desire
The desire to revive an oppressive authority arises from the overwhelming difficulty of understanding the production of power without it. This problem involves the third proposition of Brod’s, which posits the law as having a secret, inaccessible interior. This presupposition hardly requires a weighty investigation, since interiority is entirely reliant on the already dismantled presuppositions of hierarchy and transcendence. Specifically, if there is only an emergent immanence, it refutes the possibility of a hidden and inaccessible interior inhabited by the law. An emergent justice enacted through immanence is necessarily not restrictive or distinct, but shared broadly by a certain population. Instead, what is revealed is not an inaccessible barrier, but merely a maze-like collectivity of desire. What this means, however, is that the immanent desire is completely intractable, since it is enacted by a collective population independently of an authority that poses a definite law. Deleuze and Guattari illustrate how the text graphically depicts this with the structure of physical buildings. Specifically, Kafka composes a “contiguity of offices, the segmentalization of power replaced the hierarchy of instances and the eminence of the sovereign” (Deleuze and Guattari 51). Kafka’s officials are not a tightly closed cabinet of judges and lawyers: everyone from the maids to Titorelli the painter abets the law; each person is a functionary. Deleuze and Guattari qualify, “if the ultimate instances are inaccessible, and cannot be represented, this occurs not as a function of an infinite hierarchy belonging to a negative theology but as a function of *contiguity of desire* that causes whatever happens to happen always in the office next door” (Deleuze and Guattari 50). This structure is what Deleuze and Guattari term a rhizome, one that is characterized by unlimited linear hallways, opening to a
burrow-like labyrinth of doors in all directions: while not a secret, the collective desire forms in a rhizoid quality that does not allow immediate, tractable interior.

In this manner, it is not that the opening of doors is prohibited, but instead, the linearity simply extends in segments beyond the imminently traceable, an infinite regression of collective desire through the machine. Rather than a hidden interior causing its inaccessibility, difficulty in understanding the law results because it is constantly in the process of occurring. Deleuze and Guattari note that the law “remains unrecognizable because it is always denuded of any interiority: it is always in the office next door, or behind the door, on to infinity […] in The Trial everything happens in the ‘room next door’” (Deleuze and Guattari 45). Further, the process of justice as a machine allows the quality of being not instantly accessible because, even though the hallways are linear, they are broken up in segments,

Itself a continuum, but a continuum made up of contiguities […] the contiguous is not opposed to the continuous—quite the contrary, it is a local and definitely prolongable version of the continuous. Thus it is also a dismantling of the continuous—always an office next door, always the contiguous room […] certain rooms are only part of the whole, for there are barriers behind which there are more rooms. Not that [one] is actually forbidden to pass the barriers…and you mustn’t imagine that these barriers are a definite dividing line…There are barriers [one] can pass, and they’re just the same as the ones [one] never yet passed’. Justice is the continuum of desire, with shifting limits that are always displaced. (Deleuze and Guattari 51)
In this manner, it can be seen that, far from the doors being barriers or limits that allow the marginalization of the rhizome, they instead mark the collectivity of immanence that is produced: further, since the law is emergent, the collectivity evolves as a living performative. These doors are not a prohibition but rather symbolize the impossibility of discovering how precisely the law is operating. Each representative signifies a single cog of a collectively produced desire, as well as a delay in reaching the next. Clearly, it is impossible to discover the entirety of desire, which means understanding the machine is impossible. This accounts for the revival of a repressive figure that subjects those who revive it: the rhizome of collective immanence presents an impossibility to envision the production of desire. The author, then, is a collective reaction to this impossibility, as is the prevalence of Brod’s interpretation, and assumptions of political power in the real.

What the inability of the authorial power to impose a law suggests, then, is that the significance of any literary text is constantly being revaluated in terms of this emergent immanence. In the essay “What is Literature”, Eagleton discusses the collective intrusiveness of ideological claims (i.e., immanence) as they are not only shared and non-distinct, but frequently, they are unconsciously made. Firstly, Eagleton problematizes the distinction between value statements and facts—a statement that he satirically notes is utterly ideological itself “the claim that knowledge should be value-free is itself a value-judgment” (Eagleton 12). He uses the example of a factual claim of dating cathedrals, and that this supposedly factual organization is completely value-ridden: this system could be organized by the geographical direction they face. Therefore, axiomatically, he asserts, “no factual pronouncement I can make can escape
them. Statements of fact are after all *statements*, which presumes a number of questionable judgments; that those statements are worth making, perhaps more worth making than certain others” (Eagleton 11). The belief in the possibility of an objectively factual statement is a valued desire, unconsciously and immanently made. Moreover, these embedded, unconscious values are specifically related to the “power structure and power relations of the society we live in” (Eagleton 13). Eagleton elaborates,

> I do not mean by ‘ideology’ simply the deeply entrenched, often unconscious beliefs which people hold; I mean more particularly those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power […] such beliefs are by no means merely private quirks. (Eagleton 13)

In other words, these values are not only unconscious, but at the same time, specific to a certain power structure. As has been demonstrated, the author and the negative theology occur in a power paradigm extolling patriarchal repression over the unmasterable. However, the problem of dealing with unconscious and collective immanence is staggering. Although less absolute than a transcendent theology, it is a far more problematic issue to trace such a rhizome than merely to deal with an abstract, isolated figure. However, this prejudice certainly explains the pervasive interpretation of Brod’s that is technically incorrect in its main assumptions. Eagleton notes that because of these unconscious and collective desires, works are “‘rewritten’, if only involuntarily, by the societies which read them” (Eagleton 11). However, the concept of re-writing based on
unconscious, emergent values only further presents a crisis for determining or limiting the meaning of literary texts such as *The Trial*.

In conclusion, the rhizoid nature of the collective, emergent desire makes the limiting of meaning for any given text impossible. As visually depicted, the structure Kafka illustrates is not a castle or a building but linear, limitless hallways full of functionaries just through the next door. This chain is “segment[ed], which is more or less distant on this unlimited straight line […] such that each block segment has an opening or a door onto the line of the hallway—one that is usually quite far from the door or the opening of the following block—it is also true that all the doors have back doors that are contiguous […] [so that] two diametrically opposed points bizarrely reveal themselves to be in contact” (Deleuze and Guattari 73). It is not that the doors are locked or guarded but that each door leads in an unpredictable direction, to a new functionary with an only immanent knowledge. There is no chain to follow because the desire is collective and emergent, not restricted. In this way, it is seen how Kafka, in postulating not an abstract origin but a machinic assemblage, by inhabiting themes such as the a prioriness of guilt, colludes rather the dismantling of the transcendental, the hierarchy of cause and effect, and the linearity of power. Moreover, this structure can be seen as axiomatic for the crisis of writing itself as dismantling the author from his perch as the transcendental origin, to the mere effect as one among many representatives in a rhizome.
CHAPTER III

THE READER AS AN AUTHOR

By understanding the text as a machine that produces the author, the hierarchical division between authorial and reader commentary should have been dissolved. Instead, because the paradigm of the author manufactures the desire for mastery, the impulse is to read textual representation as a medium that connects to the author, enabling the text to be limited to his recalled voice. However, the suggestion that the author controls all textual representations is more reflective of the reader’s desire for mastery than the actual presence of the author. The author as an effect of the text does not have control over textual commentary, and neither is it possible to limit representation to an affirmation of his lost presence. Rather than representation being a medium that connects the reader to the authorial voice, it is instead engendered by the design of the reader: it is a product of reading that affects influence just as pervasively as any commentary of the author himself. However, if the design of the reader is restricted to recreating the author, representation is engendered simply to mimic this lost figure. Indeed, the personas of the author engendered through representation have little to do with the actual individual who wrote the text. Instead, these representations simply create a set of classifications that become attributed to the author’s persona. The reading of representation as a medium, therefore, masks the reader’s influence by limiting the text to this imaginary personified voice. However, because the reader has the power to reconstruct textual perception, it is
clear that there is no delineation between reading and writing the text. For this reason, it is impossible to limit the text to the voice of the author. The exclusion of representations that rewrite the text in a divergent manner from the original voice is the exclusion of reading, which, hardly preserving the text, instead would cause it to become extinct. Further, this original voice, if it could survive the rewriting of representation, would hardly be relevant to the current, divergent version of a work. Indeed, the desire to write representation as affirming the origin is not only a perspective that would be highly irrelevant to subsequent understandings of the text; moreover, it subjects commentary to a set of textual classifications attributed to the author figure, a presence of mastery the reader himself continues to resurrect.

1. Representation as Masking the Voice of the Reader

Firstly, the approach of reading representation as a medium connecting to the lost origin functions so as to interrupt the reader’s influence by making representation solely a function of transferring the author. Contrary to this clear delineation, Derrida in *Dissemination* comments that the effect of a medium is to hide a site of chiasmic confusion. Derrida illustrates this illusion of the medium through his discussion of the hymen, which seems to separate and yet transfer between the opposing states of desire and satisfaction. However, Derrida argues that these states are not actually differentiable at all, and are only relatively opposed though an unstable, temporal distinction. Derrida shows that the hymen “produces the effect of a medium (a medium as an element enveloping both terms at once, a medium located between the two terms). It is an
operation that *both sows* confusion between opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites at once [...] the hymen ‘takes place’ in the [...] spacing between desire and fulfillment” (Derrida 212). In the same manner, representation as a medium would connect between the pristine origin of the text and its demarcated current version, transferring to the reader the author’s intentions. On the contrary, however, Derrida argues that the medium only seems to create this clear delineation by standing between these states of the text, giving the illusion that they are polar opposites. The effect of the medium in positioning them apart is all that makes them seemingly clearly delineated. Derrida shows how the hymen is actually a site of “fusion, [...] within [which] there is no longer any distance between desire and satisfaction. It is not only the difference (between desire and fulfillment) that is abolished, but also the difference between difference and nondifference. Nonpresence, the gaping void of desire, and presence, the fullness of enjoyment, amount to the same” (Derrida 209). In the same manner, there is no functional distinction between these two states of the text: instead, the origin and the current text are only relatively, and unstably, opposed. Therefore, representation is not restricted to simply transferring from the demarcated origin. If these two states of the text are not delineated, there is no manner of separating the reader’s influence from the text: the medium merely gives the illusion of interruption between the text and the reader. Representation, therefore, is hardly a medium restricted to transferring the authorial voice: neither is it unaffected by the reader.

Therefore, representation is dependent on the reader’s reaction to the text: that is, the immanence of the reader. On this topic, Derrida argues that although representation
appears to be a transfer from the lost, authorial voice, representation, it is actually the recreation of the author through this textual reaction. Derrida illustrates this confusion through the concept of the mime, a figure that is typically understood as one who recollects a memorized act, and then illustrates it in the present—like the concept of the medium. However, Derrida argues that the mime does not remember, but engenders his performance. Derrida avers, baldly, that the mime cannot recollect—he “imitates nothing” (Derrida 194)—in fact, “he doesn’t imitate. There is nothing prior to the writing of his gestures” (Derrida 194). Whatever he has planned to perform, he re-creates it, inaugural: the mime, Derrida assays, “breaks into a white page” (Derrida 195). As a result, the mime produces “mimicry […] a double that doubles no single, a double that nothing anticipates, nothing at least that is not itself already double. There is no simple reference […] [it] alludes without breaking the mirror, without reaching beyond the looking-glass” (Derrida 206). Far from the origin being recollected through a series of representations, the author is rather engendered through the reader’s perceptions of the text. Therefore, representation is hardly a medium restricted to the voice of the author; instead, representation is the reader’s recreation of this figure—illustrating representation as the reader’s design. Unfortunately, if this design focuses on locating the author for the purpose of solving the text, it is the reader who recreates the paradigm of authorial control, creating a demarcation between his own immanence and its influence over the text.

In the same manner, Foucault in “What is an Author” notes how representation is indeed nothing other than the reader’s reaction to the text; however, it is one
unfortunately focused on locating the author, and therefore, recreating this elusive transcendental presence. Far from recreating the authorial voice, however, the reader rather personifies a set of textual classifications that become attributed to this individual. This focus of representation, therefore, is one in which the reader recreates not the author, but a vague persona of textual limitation. Foucault uses the example of how the name ‘Aristotle’, seems to recall the original author’s characteristics, in epithets such as the ‘founder of ontology’. However, far from being reflections of the authorial voice, these epithets are instead artificial forms of categorizing the text that have nothing to do with the individual they supposedly represent. Indeed, Foucault notes that these descriptions actually function as classificatory nomenclature that suggests between differing texts, a relationship of “homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others, reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization” (Foucault 107). Not only are these recollections not affected by the individual named, but Foucault further notes that these descriptions are not even recollections: they are textual personifications. Foucault specifies that the descriptions, which seem to be recollections from the grave, instead evolve as varying perceptions of the text surfaces—entirely out of the author’s control. Unlike a proper name, which refers to a single individual, the descriptions conjured with the authorial name continually adapt depending on new insights concerning his work. This means two things: first, these traits are entirely the influence of the reader, and second, they are not traits of an individual so much as personified limitations. Indeed, Foucault notes that the descriptions the reader personifies do not have anything to do with the author, but rather, are textual constraints, “in more or less psychologizing terms of the
operations we force the texts to undergo, the connections that we make, the traits we establish as pertinent, the continuities we recognize, the exclusions that we practice” (Foucault 110). Therefore, the reader’s immanence designs representations, which do not locate an individual but personify exclusions. These projections speak to the reader’s obsession to control the text by solving it—even by masking his own voice within the text. Since the reader has the power to influence the text with representation, the desire to locate the author merely reinforces the paradigm of transcendental control upon the text by subjecting the voice of the reader to a presence he creates himself. Therefore, this understanding of representation is one that attempts to limit the text, excluding all voices that do not reflect this engendered personification of mastery.

2. Representation as Rewriting

However, the attempt to classify the text based on this single, original voice is an impossibility. If representation is read not as a medium but as a mime that engenders, then the distinction between the author and the reader is blurred. If textual representation is just as much a voice of the reader as it is the author, this suggests that the reader is a kind of author—one that has the power to revise the text. Typically, the original voice of the author would have supreme power, whereas commentary written afterward would have a secondary influence. However, it has already been demonstrated that the location of the author does not remain pristine, nor is representation a transfer. Instead, the reader throws the origin into chaos and produces representation through immanence, directly influencing the text. This suggests both that representation is a confusion of voices—
between different readers and the author—as well as the fact that there is no difference between reading and writing. However, it also refutes the possibility that representation countenances the origin. Instead, representation usurps the origin and rewrites it—and, moreover, continually rewrites it as readings of the text accrete commentary. The origin, therefore, is neither lost nor pristine: it is continually revised in a manner that rejects recollection through the accumulation of representations. Instead, the origin is disseminated.

To begin, the assumption that the authorial voice representing the text is distinct from the reader, whose immanence also creates representation, is an assumption that Derrida heavily critiques. Derrida reviews this delineation in which only the author has the privilege of writing principally through his discussion the entity/concept of Thoth. As an archetypal character from Ancient Egyptian myth, he is assumed to fulfill the role as a subordinate representative of Ammon-Ra, the sun god. Because Ammon-Ra is the absolute creator of all entities, the most primordial origin of the Egyptian gods, he represents the absolute authorial voice. His status as the creator of everything defines Thoth as the embodiment of representation because he exists entirely in terms of Ammon-Ra: Thoth is merely an ancillary reflection. Derrida shows how Thoth is defined by his occupation of “a somewhat subordinate position: ‘I will cause you to send (hob) greater ones that yourself’—and thus was born the Ibis (hib), the bird of Thoth” (Dissemination 89). Derrida describes how Ammon-Ra is displayed a bird, having originated from an egg, “the sun, then, was at first carried in an eggshell. Which explains a number of Ammon-Ra’s characteristics: he is also a bird, a falcon […] in his capacity
as origin of everything, Ammon-Ra is also the origin of the egg” (Derrida 87). In stark contrast, Thoth mirrors him as the moon, representing the sun god in his absence. In addition, because Ammon-Ra is the origin and chief god, he is also associated with the original word—essentially, speech. Further, Thoth, the ibis, is depicted as a scribe; this reflects the subordinate relationship of writing to speech, where writing is only an ancillary function used in the absence of the speaker. Derrida avers that “language, of which [Thoth] is depositary and secretary, can only thus represent, so as to transmit the message, an already formed divine thought, a fixed design. The message is not in itself, but [recollects], the absolutely creative moment. It is a second and secondary word. And […] Thoth is concerned with the spoken word, rather than the written word […] he is never the absolute author” (Derrida 89). Thoth, as axiomatic for the reader’s position as representation, only preserves the text: he does not create anything of his own. From this relationship, Thoth would seem to be one side of a strict dualism, the opposition of day/night, king/vizier speech/writing, and one that is entirely subordinate. As a representation of the author, he is both distinct from the actual author and therefore, able to successfully and subordinately preserve the text in its author’s absence.

However, Derrida argues this is a relationship proposed through naivety. The suggestion that the authorial representation is both distinct and more powerful than the reader’s ancillary commentary is absurd. Derrida shows how this delineation is dysfunctional because Thoth—supposedly juxtaposed—is actually required to be a replica of Ammon-Ra. This means, therefore, that there is barely any distinction between them—or their levels of influence upon a text. Derrida explicates what he terms an
“original kind of logic” that positions these figures as opposites but simultaneously and contradictorily requires Thoth to be Ra’s mirror image. Thoth is "opposed to its other (father, sun, life, speech, origin, or orient etc.) but that which at once supplements and supplants it […] [he] extends or opposes by repeating or replacing” (Derrida 90). Derrida illustrates that this role of substitution prescribes for Thoth a radical similarity to Ammon-Ra, “doubling for the king, the father, the sun and the word, distinguished from these only by dint of representing, repeating, and masquerading, Thoth was also capable of totally supplanting them and appropriating their attributes. He is added as the essential attribute of what he is added to, and from which almost nothing distinguishes him. He differs from speech or divine light only as the revealer from the revealed. Barely” (Dissemination 90). Further, upon a close examination, Thoth has no cohesive identity at all: he is able to supplant Ra because he becomes Ra, “Thoth takes shape and takes its shape from the very thing it resists and substitutes for. But it thereby opposes itself passes into its other, and this messenger god is truly a god of the absolute passage between two opposites […] he is precisely the god of nonidentity […] he is the father’s other, the father, and the subversive movement of replacement” (Dissemination 92-3). The opposition between Ra and Thoth is no longer at all justifiable, because it is Thoth’s lack of distinction that allows him to represent Ammon-Ra, acting as his imperfectly reflected image. Further, Ammon-Ra’s distinct interior is critical as well. If he is able to be substituted for, neither does Ra possess a stable identity; the ability to be replaced signifies a lack of absolute uniqueness. The contradiction of conceptually juxtaposing Thoth, who is posited—at the same time—only to reproduce Ra reveals a flawed logic.
Axiomatically, the reader’s voice is not distinguishable from the authorial voice in representation. Therefore, reading does not add distinct commentary so much it actually reproduces the text—that is, representation is clearly a role of re-writing. Because the voice of the author is not demarcated from the reading of the reader, the addition of textual representation does not produce an accretion of supplementary material, but a modified rewriting to the ‘nth’ degree. Further, this aspect of revision necessitates the dissemination of the origin, rather than a pristinely buried event. Therefore, the approach of controlling the text by locating the speaker is not only a distraction—it is entirely unfeasible. Textual representation is not a production that is singularly specified to the original voice—which is not so original, because it can be replaced.

In fact, limiting the text to the original voice is problematic even prior to the rewriting of representation that disperses the origin, because the authorial voice has already rewritten itself. Hardly a single, unified voice, the author undergoes self-modification before reader commentary exists: in fact, the authorial voice is only a representation of itself. Derrida explains this axiomatically through the creation of Ammon-Ra, which presents the typical religious conundrum of how the primordial origin becomes engendered. Derrida answers this simply—the the only answer is that in creating everything, Ammon Ra also engenders himself, from himself. Derrida writes,

The sun […] is conjugated in what could be called the history of the egg or the egg of history. The world came out of an egg. More precisely, the living creator

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1 Deleuze in Fiction and Repetition postulates the theory that repeating an event does not create a “second or third copy, but carries the first time production to the ‘nth’ power, a “repetition that interiorizes and thereby reverses itself […] Monet’s first water lily repeats all the others (Deleuze 1).
of life of the world came out of an egg: the sun, then, was first carried in an eggshell. […] He is designated sometimes as the bird-sun born from the primal egg, sometimes as an originary bird, carrier of the first egg. […] [Moreover,] it would make no sense here to ask the at once trivial and philosophical question of ‘the chicken or the egg’, of the logical, chronological, or ontological priority of cause over effect. This question has been magnificently answered by certain sarcophagi: ‘O Ra, who art in thy egg’. (87-88)

What this clearly displays is that Ra is not his own origin because he is the creator of everything—including himself. Ammon-Ra, in creating himself, engages in a self-modification before he has even created Thoth, who modifies him—he represents and reproduces his own origin. The sense of chronological priority colludes to hide the phenomenon of an already divided and unwhole original voice, which could belong to either an egg or another bird. The authorial voice—like representation—is embodied with divergences. Reading, therefore, is a confusion of voices that ultimately rewrite the text.

Therefore, because the text creates a confusion of voices adverse to the paradigm of authorial control, the impulse is to exclude the voices that do not reflect the original, authorial voice. Presumably, this would limit the voices that overwhelm the author, thereby halting dissemination of the origin. However, Foucault illustrates that desire to exclude these competing voices is an impossible one, as they are an inevitable development in almost any mode of discourse, including mathematics. Further, these voices are not merely “a pure and simple reconstruction made secondhand from a text
given as passive material” (Foucault 111). That is, the confusion of voices in textual representation is not limited to operating outside of the text: these voices are also produced within the text through grammatical signs indicative of several individuals, some of whom coincide with the author. Foucault notes that this tendency of exclusion is especially strong in authored works because the text produces individuals, such as a “first person pronoun [or] the present indicative” (Foucault 112) that often reflect the author’s “spacio-temporal coordinates” (Foucault 112). However, Foucault argues that it is completely erroneous to equate the author with these voices within the text, which are not guaranteed to remain constant. In fact, Foucault notes that the text produces alter egos even within a single speaker, whose “distance from the author varies, often changing in the course of the work” (Foucault 112). Foucault then shows how these personas are limited not by the author assuming them, because such an act would merely cause a scission into more personas; instead, the author function attempts to cause their dispersal (Foucault 113). This is certainly shown in the skewing of Thoth, who, when representing Ammon Ra, revises him; the author function, then, seeks to limit this scission by attributing Thoth as opposite and simply ancillary. In fact, Thoth/representation is often posited by the author function as wholly unnecessary. However, because the text itself engenders this confusion of voices even prior to authorial or reader commentary, Foucault certainly denies the possibility of preserving the text from the competing voices that disseminate it.

Further, the desire to exclude the competition that representation creates is a strategy akin to the writing of Heraclitus, who remarks that this exclusion is not only
impossible, but foolish. Commenting predominately as a cosmologist, Heraclitus’ theories of relativity concerning the natural world are particularly applicable to the aforementioned confusion of voices, since he firmly believed that discordance was necessary for ensuring balance in the universe. Heraclitus insists, like Foucault, that containing the divergence these voices undergo is unfeasible. Long before post-Hegelian criticism refutes the concept of synthesis, Heraclitus remarks how this concept is absurd, “two made one are never one. Arguing the same we disagree. Singing together, we compete. We chose each other to be one, and from the one we soon both diverge” (Heraclitus 39). However, he argues further that limiting discordance would have consequences far more devastating than the instability this tension creates: it would yield the destruction of the kosmos. Heraclitus posits repudiation for stability that the exclusion of tension would cause, instead positing the process of becoming and fading as a necessity. Axiomatically, this process reflects the necessity for textual modification due to the confusion of representative voices that rewrite it. In fact, Heraclitus overtly names this process a destructive exigency. Heraclitus describes the warring process of becoming and fading (rewriting) through the simile, “one thunderbolt strikes through everything” (Heraclitus 19). This thunderbolt, representing necessary contestation, exacerbates the assumed stability of the origin by rewriting it incessantly—an exacerbation Heraclitus argues is inevitable, but also, fortunate. Heraclitus is not at all diffident in expressing his disgust for Hesiod and Homer, considering their desire to abolish Strife and Discord entirely thoughtless. He specifically writes, “Homer I deem worthy—in a trial by combat—of a good cudgeling, and Archilochos the same”
(Heraclitus 83). In fact, the thunderbolt strike as the refutation of stability is a symbol to which Heraclitus attributes the concept of harmony—even though the thunderbolt causes blight. Heraclitus stipulates that “war, as father of all things, and king, names a few to serve as gods, and the rest of the rest makes those men slaves, those free” (Heraclitus 29).

It is also interesting that Heraclitus posits war in the place of father/king, as these terms have metaphysically corresponded to law/order/origin, and have depended exigently on the exclusion of war. Therefore, privileged position of war as the father suggests the pertinence of the destructive modification simulated with the thunderbolt. It also suggests that these warring processes, while unpleasant, enable the best possible harmony. Thus, the discordant voices that disseminate the text are an exigent process, and their containment is not only impossible, but absurd.

Heraclitus explains that absurdity of excluding war by illustrating dysfunction of stativity. The concept of the thunderbolt is not meant to simulate a purely destructive force, but one of necessary tension. Heraclitus explains the necessity of the cosmological tension by using the bow as an allegory, stating, “the cosmos works by harmony of tensions, like the lyre and the bow” (Heraclitus 37). Moreover, this fragment is related to the following, similar epithet, “the living, when the dead wood of the bow springs back to life, must die” (Heraclitus 43). With these fragments, Heraclitus illustrates the necessity of tension, specifically exemplified through these instruments, which require tension in order to produce extant sound. Analogously, for the text to be extant, it requires the

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2 Nietzsche specifies, characterizing Heraclitus’ thunderbolt as “the affirmation of passing away and destroying, […] saying Yes to […] war, becoming, along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of being” (Nietzsche 205), a process that is both harmonious, and fundamentally arising from, specifically, war.
tension of voices in representation that revise and ultimately disseminate the stability of
its origin. Furthermore, in the second fragment, Heraclitus specifies the tension aspect of
the bow through a pun on the word ‘bow’ itself: in Greek, the words for ‘bow’ and ‘life’
are written nearly identically as, bios, differentiated only by accentuation. The bow is a
site of warring tension between life and death; further, the removal of either death or life
from the concept of “bios” in order to remove tension makes the bow entirely
dysfunctional. This is meant to demonstrate the manner in which the tension of the
thunderbolt is crucial to the proper functioning of the universe. Unlike the idealistic
Homer and Hesiod, Heraclitus critiques the concept of a static, natural state without
disruption. Then, axiomatically, the tension of divergent voices within representation is
necessary to the survival of the text.

In fact, dissemination is the only manner of preserving the origin at all—hence,
the best possible harmony is one of contestation. Commenting on instability in much the
way Heraclitus does, Derrida specifies that the exclusion of contestation, in preventing
palpable harm to the origin, would simultaneously cause the asphyxiation of the text.
Derrida argues that removing the discordance of representation would restrict the text to
what he calls “a certain inside [which] can be terrible”: a static state of the text without
differance (basically, the formation of modified forms of a text that representation
affects). Derrida explicates the consequences excluding differance—asphyxiating
stativity—through the medicinal concept of the pharmakon. Derrida describes the
pharmakon as a drug able to partake “in both good and malady as to its treatment; is
[differance] in itself. It partakes in good and ill, of the agreeable and disagreeable. Or
rather, it is within its mass that these oppositions are able to sketch themselves out” (Derrida 99). Essentially, the *pharmakon* is a microcosm of representation being inhabited with warring tensions that produce revisions of the text. Like the contesting voices within the text itself, the *pharmakon* is imbibed with differance even before it causes these effects,

The *pharmakon* is the “movement, the locus, and the play: (the production of) difference. It is the differance of difference. It holds in reserve [...] the opposites and differends that the process of discrimination will come to carve out.

Contradictions and pairs of opposites are lifted from the bottom of this diacritical, differing, deferring, reserve. Already inhabited by difference, this reserve, even though it preexists difference as effects, does not have the punctual simplicity of a *coincidentia oppositorum* [...] the *pharmakon*, without being anything in itself, always exceeds them in constituting their bottomless fund [...] it is this store of deep background that we are calling the *pharmacy*. (Derrida 127)

Moreover, Derrida illustrates the manner in which representation and the *pharmakon* are not merely coincidentally related. Indeed, in Plato’s *Phaedrus*, this connection is explicitly made, since both endanger the pureness of speech and rational medicine (both related to the origin) by being imbibed with difference, whose effects are dissemination. For this reason, Plato sets up the entire history of metaphysics that attempts the exclusion of differance from the authorial origin, a process that (if it were functional) would not preserve the text, but cause asphyxiation.
Derrida explains that Plato attempts to exclude the concept of writing as the pharmakon through the process of scapegoating, or the placing-outside of evil in order to keep the city unharmed. At the same time, however, Derrida notes that this practice is embedded with blatant contradictions and cannot function. Derrida displays the manner in which the Platonic exclusion of writing would “restore the original purity of logos” (Dissemination 128) by “recounting the origin, going back to the eve of the pharmakographic aggression—that to which the pharmakon should not have been added like a literal parasite […] in order to cure the [voice] of the pharmakon and rid it of the parasite [it] is thus necessary to put it outside and back in its place” (Dissemination 128). Derrida likens this exclusion to the ceremonial rite of the pharmakos, or scapegoat (whose linguistic similarity to the pharmakon is not coincidental), a practice through which the interior of the city is purified by excluding those who were deemed parasitic. The act of purifying the city was to expel the most unsightly individuals as a purification to remedy the suffering city (Dissemination 133), thus “reconstituting its unity, clos[ing] around the security of its inner courts, gives itself back to the word […] violently excluding from its territory the representative of an external threat or aggression” (Dissemination 133). In this manner, Plato attempts to exclude writing because it is embedded with the differance that causes the dissemination or poisoning of the origin. However, Derrida notes that this exclusion contradicts itself, undergoing what he terms a “kettle-logic” by simultaneously maintaining both the “exteriority of writing and its power of maleficent penetration, its ability to infect what lies deepest inside”
(Dissemination 110). Derrida criticizes this specific brand of illogic by the comparison to Freud’s “kettle-logic” discussed in *Traumdeutung*:

In an attempt to arrange everything in his favor, the defendant piles up contradictory arguments: 1. The kettle I am returning to you is brand new; 2. The holes were already in it when you lent it to me; 3. You never lent me a kettle anyway. Analogously: 1. Writing [pharmakon] is rigorously exterior and inferior to living memory and speech, which are therefore undamaged by it. 2. Writing is harmful to them because it puts them to sleep and infects their very life which would otherwise be intact. (Dissemination 111)

In effect, despite these Platonic efforts (as well as a chain of followers, aka Rousseau, Saussure etc.) this “supplementary parasite” cannot be “excluded by maintaining the boundary or, let us say, the triangle” (Dissemination 102). In essence, the threat of representation cannot be naively excluded from the text, since this would remove all but the single authorial voice (which does not either exist without representing itself), creating a terrible inside that, far from preserving the origin, causes asphyxiation. Because reading is writing, excluding representation would prevent the text from being read, thus causing extinction. It is clear this exclusion would cause disease and decay, creating a deathly inside of an incestuous line. In this manner, representation’s incessant modification that disperses the origin through a myriad of divergent personas is not only unavoidable, but the best possible manner to ensure the text’s survival.

3. The Origin’s Irrelevance: The Asymptomatic Progress of Substitution
Finally, because representation does not build upon, but rather disseminates the original author, the attempt to locate this voice as a form of controlling the text is not only a dysfunctional approach, but further, it is irrelevant to issues concerning the live text. Because reading does not accrete representations that support the origin but instead continually revises the text through a myriad of voices, the text as a living machine forbids a pristine origin and negates its usefulness by definition. Because representation is a genesis and not a recollection, its creation produces the greatest possible deviation from the ‘original’ 3. Further, because representation disseminates in unpredictable directions, there is no manner of perceiving the entirety of changes the text has undergone, but only single modifications at separate instances. Subsequent modifications of the text would therefore have the greatest difference between the origin and itself, and so the authorial voice would be neither perceptible nor relevant to this current revision.

To begin, Foucault discusses the irrelevance of the original voice by exemplifying how discourses develop in an expansive manner such that the foundation is extraneous to an understanding at any subsequent reading. In his argument, Foucault opposes this structure to the manner by which a literary genre develops, which is to understand the subsequent readings in terms of the original founder. However, since representation is a rewriting that nostalgically engenders an origin rather than reflecting it, this opposition

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3 Deleuze explicates how each representation creates “the most strict repetition has as its correlate the maximum of difference” (Deleuze xxii). He illustrates, “art does not imitate, above all because it repeats; it repeats all repetitions, by virtue of an internal power […] even the most mechanical, the most banal, the most habitual and the most stereotyped repetition […] is always displaced in relation to other repetitions, and is subject to the condition that a difference may be extracted from it and for these other repetitions” (Deleuze 293).
does not seem entirely valid. While there may be a distinction in that a literary text suggests a *need* to return to its foundation, while a discourse does not, the return to the origin is not so much a remembrance as it is a recreation, given that reading implies a modification. Therefore, this distinction notwithstanding, Foucault’s commentary is highly relevant as any form of literary text becomes dissociated with the origin. He specifies in example psychoanalytic discourse, whose circulation has demonstrated that the “initiation of a discursive practice is heterogeneous to its subsequent transformations” (Foucault 115). The expansion of this practice has not occurred with nor allowed the preservation of its formal homogeneity, but rather requires the expansion of its relevance: necessarily, the accretion of appropriating channels, and modification. Moreover, Foucault insists that in the case of discourse, it would be highly unproductive to attempt the isolation of the “founding act [to] an eventually restricted number of propositions or statements” (Foucault 116). In this manner, because discourse is not limitable to its origin, and therefore does not have “intrinsic structure and ‘normativity’” (Foucault 116), the origin is not a reference point for understanding current developments. However, neither is it eliminated: instead, it is determined either ‘prehistoric’ or ‘inessential’, to modern developments, which continually adjusts how the origin is perceived. This return is typically to underscore how it is outdated in comparison to its current usage, and to rectify those prehistoric elements with modern improvements. Therefore, in returning to the origin (Foucault 116) for reference, this divergent understanding of its importance “never stops modifying it” (Foucault 116). While Foucault distinguishes this practice as specific to discourse and divergent from literary
texts, which are based on the similarity of the origin and the necessity to refer to it, it is clear that this distinction cannot be entirely upheld. It is not singular to a discursive practice that the return to the origin always rewrites it, with a current perspective entirely divergent from the author’s understanding. What is divergent between a discourse and a literary text is simply the perceived need to reference the textual origin as a normative structure, a need that is not manifested in the case of a discourse. However, what this illustrates is that a textual perspective at the foundation is understood from an entirely divergent perspective when it is subsequently revisited. In fact, revisitation increases difference. Because this return is not revisiting the authorial voice but rewriting it, the location of the actual authorial voice (if it did exist un tarnished) is highly irrelevant to understanding the text in its current perspective.

In this manner, it is clear that the perceived necessity of returning to the origin—essentially, locating the author—that Foucault attributes specifically to literary texts is hardly a cycle that builds off of this original event. Instead, it is a reoccurrence that continually varies without any structure of normativity—a mad sequence of substitutions⁴, all of which contain a divergent understanding of the origin, to which any actual origin would not be remotely pertinent. There is no such thing as a whole literary text which can be classified under one founding event and therefore perceived all at once. Instead, this single event cyclically reoccurs in variations, a process that is imperceptible not only because there is no repetition or limitation on these variations, but also because

⁴ Derrida describes, “this process of substitution, which functions as pure play of traces or supplements, or, again, operates within the order of the pure signifier which no reality […] can come to limit, bound or control; this substitution, which could be judged ‘mad’ since it can go on infinitely […]; this unleashed chain is nevertheless not lacking in violence” (Dissemination 89)
this process of revisiting does not progress coherently. In order for the process of variation to form a logical progression, it would need the normative structure denied to it (whose existence would necessitate reading is only reading, and not a discordant set of voices which revises the origin). Instead, these variations manifest as an asymptomatic function, which does not advance in a logical direction—its entirety is not perceptible on a graph. In the same manner, in an introduction to the collected epithets of Heraclitus’ Fragments, Hillman depicts the Heraclitus’ view on the snapshot quality of perception, and how this is a problem for comprehending anything in entirety, “the snapshot, the apercu, reveals things as they are: ‘The eye, the ear, the mind in action, these I value’ (13). To speculate about the lost book distracts from the power of the fragments and message: […] the world is revealed only in quick glances. There can be no completion […] because [things] cannot be fixed into the comprehensive formulations of the book. No sooner known and explained, the event has changed. Therefore, ‘the known way is an impasse”’ (Hillman xvii). What this posits is the impossibility of perceiving the whole, but not because perception is limited; rather, it is because these variations are rewritten asymptotically at each subsequent perception. Fundamentally, perception only allows

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5 Miller in Reading Narrative discusses the necessity of variation through different mathematical graphs, one example of which is a tangent graph. The graph of a tangent is appropriate because it is defined by an equation producing a fractional value (as a division of material, not a whole number as produced through a rational function) as the slope of the function: most simplistically, where the degree of the leading coefficient in the denominator exceeds that of the numerator. Because the value of “0” cannot be the fractional denominator without the function being undefined, specific limitations are set upon it. What is entirely so appropriate about the tangent graph is that these limits that occur as asymptotes that do not allow the line to be perceptible. Further, the word asymptote comes from the Greek “having fallen not together” from “a” (without) “sun” (together), and protos (perfect passive participle, having fallen), which denies the possibility of logical progression. What occurs when these limits prohibiting certain locative values are present is that the graph approaches them indefinitely and refuses to intersect—but it also disappears and reappears on an entirely different quadrant of the graph, in which it also approaches a point indefinitely. These multiple parts are never connected, nor do they follow a logical progression.
continual recycling of varied snapshots of the same varying event—the illusive origin. However, this necessitates the any actual authorial voice would have no significance upon the current substitution of it, because this variation contains no normative progression. The author function colludes that this original event is built upon by classifiably normative supplementation, rather than this single event undergoing reoccurring variations—each of which contains a divergent understanding that is asymptomatic, and therefore unclassifiable in its progression from this foundation.

Furthermore, Heraclitus posits his famous river statement as a simulation that is directly applicable to the problem of perceiving only a reoccurring strain of the text that manifests itself infinite variations, rather than a normative body of accumulating work. Heraclitus states, “the river where you set your foot just now is gone—those waters giving way to this, now this” (Heraclitus 27). Rather commonly, this epithet has been widely misinterpreted⁶, through a highly Platonic lens that consists of reading this epithet so that the emphasis is placed upon the phrase, *panta rei* (everything flows)—that is, that everything constantly flows. This is clearly a problem in that it suggests a constant force

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⁶ G.S Kirk problematizes what he distinguishes as a Platonic interpretation of Heraclitus’ river statement in that the emphasis of *panta rei* (everything flows) suggests the river always flows steadily. Kirk refutes this interpretation, qualifying that Heraclitus would have found this a gross oversimplication of change in positing it as a constant. Further, Kirk explicates that to interpret the statement in this way would antithetical to Heraclitus’ epithetic, connotative style, “to have said that everything changes, like rivers, would have been for him either an absurdity or a loosely expressed commonplace: what he did say was that the natural changes occur in the way that rivers change, i.e., in measures” (Kirk 379). The idea of constant change is not supported at all by the fragments. Therefore, Kirk faults the Platonic interpretation “which may be summarized in the phrase παντα ρει, certainly puts the emphasis in the wrong place” (Kirk 370). Moreover, the phrase “we are and we are not” is also highly suspect: Kirk questions this simply on a grammatical level, stating that “it is absurd to think that in any kind of Greek the predicate could be omitted thus after copulative ειναι [to be]” (Kirk 373). All these translations are, as Kirk terms “a glaring anachronism” (Kirk 374). Kirk maintains that the Platonic interpretation and afterward mistook the stress of the sentence: Plato interprets Heraclitus’ use of αιει [always] to mean essentially that “perpetual change ‘escapes our perception’” (Kirk 376). Heraclitus meant to illustrate the “coincidence between the stability (of the whole river) and change (of waters flowing past a certain point), rather than the continuity of change” (Kirk 377).
of change—as in, a transcendence—that makes the entirety of the river inaccessible. It contains, therefore, all the tenets of Hegelian logic, or rather Brod’s”': it transforms this statement into a metaphor instead of a simile, emphasizing that the river symbolizes change as force that transcends everything. However, because Heraclitus writes in an epithetical manner, this statement is rather meant to be understood as a simile, wherein change occurs like rivers: as in, the reoccurrence of same material water flowing past a single point that is indisputably manifesting variation, but imperceptibly. He did not attempt to introduce a universal constant but rather intended to illustrate the occurrence of change through the illustration of the river, depicting the foolishness of discovering the whole from any single vantage point. Instead, one is left with an endlessly reoccurring revision of the same material—imperceptibly different. Moreover, the concept of the river as a whole occurs after comprehending these numerous variations, and assuming this means there must be a whole river—a sentimental projection, because of course, it is not one that can be proposed through observation. Rather, it is more comforting to conclude that there is a secret whole; the thought of mad, devastating variation of the same is altogether frightening. Further, this transformation mimics the reactionary endeavor to locate the author: it assumes a whole, founding origin that is left untouched in spite of constant change. It is an assumption that ignores the fact that any reading is a rewritten modification of the same material that has no relevance to the actual founding event of the text. Instead, these modifications of the origin do not recreate the author so much as the presence of mastery, which has little relevance to the actual, original writer of the text.
CHAPER IV

SOLVING THE IRRATIONAL

However, although the search for the author is often irrelevant, it is not sufficient simply to abandon the preoccupation concerning his location. Because reading is writing, even if this approach to the text is discontinued, a rational meaning is often already written into the text. The collective desire for a masterable, limited meaning is written into the text, a meaning that intends to stop a dissemination of references that makes the text unchartable. Clearly, it is certainly impossible to limit these unconscious, textual modifications, but in order to remove the limiting presence of the author, it is necessary to question the manner in which the text has been modified, removing this marginalization. Nearly everyone has heard of Heraclitus’s river statement; however, these interpretations have been collectively understood as colored by a Platonic authority, which allows the river to symbolize a rational, transcendent force. This process has occurred through the author function, but on the level of language: that is, translation. As a process that is subjected to the same unconscious, collectively shared valuations, translation is necessarily a transformation, a re-writing in another language. It is both a cause and an allegory for the re-writing of texts, since the same transforming process occurs by reading within a single language. Although there is certainly an inherent difficulty of translation in and of itself, given that there is no distinct identity behind the signifying words (as empty signs, there is no manner in which to preserve the sign in its
absolute integrity), the pervasiveness that this rational valuation has upon translation can allow staggering recreations of the text. Because of translations that mistake the stress of words, or replace them with increasingly less nuanced ones, the ‘river statement’ goes from a simile accounting for the irrational reoccurrence of variations to a metaphor indicating transcendence over an entirety. It is rationalized from the claim Heraclitus makes, a process that removes nuance and complexity—indeed, the very textuality of the text. Clearly, the author function pervades not as a single presence but as a paradigmatic reading that destructively oversimplifies the text, constructing representations that are dangerously ineffectual.

1. Negative Effects of Dissemination

Firstly, Derrida illustrates in Dissemination that the character of Thoth has not constantly and ahistorically assumed the role of an ancillary to Ra/the author. In fact, he is re-written into this single, supporting role, so that his actions seem merely simple rather than revolutionary. If, however, this prejudice is removed, Thoth is revealed as the uneasy movement between underhanded visor and a usurper: his intent to countenance Ra is not nonexistent, but rather, it always must be questioned what his motives for doing so are. Derrida discusses Thoth’s duplicitous manner in a particular scene in Plato’s Phaedrus. In this scene, Thoth presents to Ammon-Ra, with the utmost humility, the pharmakon, a product he has created specifically to destroy his master. However, Thoth’s duplicity is read as simplemindedness, in the demand that the rational order not be questioned—destroying the brilliance of Thoth’s character. This distortion arises
specifically from the translation of the *pharmakon*, a highly irrational concept that is rendered in the most rational manner possible, causing the nuance of this scene to be utterly distilled. Derrida discusses how rationalism, by attempting “regular, ordered polysemy” (Derrida 71), allows, “without mistranslation” (Derrida 71) this concept to be slanted to mean either remedy, poison, recipe, or drug. However, this concept is infinitely more complex: as an inherent paradox, the *pharmakon* does not interchangeably indicate any single one of these in separate contexts, but inhabits the all of these loci simultaneously. Instead, this concept has typically been understood as inhabiting any of these poles at a single time only, causing severe consequences for its meaning, which has been “dispersed, masked, obliterated, and rendered almost unreadable […] by the imprudence or empiricism [rationalism] of [its] translators” (Derrida 72), thereby stultifying the contexts enveloping it. Neither a true medical remedy or actually a poison, the *pharmakon* is fundamentally outside the healthful, rational practice of physicians, and a concept that is denoted widely by Plato in a “malevolent and suspicious vein” (Derrida 72). Derrida writes, in fact, that the *pharmakon* is associated with a medicinal approach scorned by licensed professionals, but neither is it an attempted lethal concoction,

As opposed to the true practice of medicine, founded on science, we find indeed, listed in a single stroke, empirical practice, treatments based on recipes learned by heart, mere bookish knowledge, and the blind use of drugs. All that, we are told, springs out of *mania* […] without any real knowledge of medicine. (Derrida 72)

The *pharmakon* at its root is a non-medicinal, dangerous drug; as a remedy, it is unapproved and risky; depending on its usage, it can also poison, intentionally or
unintentionally. Most importantly of all, it cannot be limitedly interpreted to mean any of these things in different circumstances: it is always all of these things at once—and therefore, it is entirely irrational.

Furthermore, not only is the *pharmakon* completely outside the rational, scientific practice of medicine; it is also compared to writing, making it both subordinated and a threat to the pureness of speech—that is, to Ammon-Ra, the absolute, authorial voice. What Thoth is offering to Ammon-Ra is a substance mirroring himself, lethal to Ra specifically, as the original presence “from the position of the holder of the scepter, the desire for writing is indicated, designated, and denounced as the desire for orphanhood and patricidal subversion […] this *pharmakon*, then, [is] a criminal thing, a poisoned present” (Derrida 77). But, as aforementioned, the *pharmakon* is not always or purely lethal: it is precarious to handle but can be used as an unlicensed cure. It does have the power to be a remedy (though a dangerous, experimental one) as well: without writing (the *pharmakon*’s alias), speech is revealed as completely impermanent. So, as Derrida notes, it is a poisoned present, being completely overwhelming to the rational concept of the author (as writing is always a dismantling of the origin), but, still prevents the death of the text by subjecting it to irrational variations. From the position of the author, it is both a poison and a remedial drug, at once, as a paradox. This offering, then, is clearly toxic to Ra, as the absolute origin—as is the one who offers it: Thoth, who clearly is not a static supporter. Having created a devastating product, Thoth offers it to Ra to overwhelm his master: Ra, who does not realize Thoth’s duplicity, is shown to be far less ingenious and powerful than his subordinate. However, Thoth’s single role is recreated,
in spite of these indicators, as a lacking, unimportant simpleton. The *pharmakon* is translated improperly so as to avoid devastation upon the authorial order, fearing the textual consequences of this overwhelmingly irrational product—as well as its creator, who mirrors these properties.

The re-writing of Thoth coincides with the skewed translation of the *pharmakon* because if translated as a stable product, Thoth, in turn, is exactly who he says he is: a humble servant. Indeed, he is a subordinate who has made a careless error that his master has to correct. Derrida demonstrates that the *pharmakon* is typically translated as ‘remedy’: while not exactly an inaccurate translation, is unfortunate, because it is the most stabilizing for the inherent paradox contained by this word: it is this metaphysical valuation that has transcribed Thoth to become classically transformed and portrayed, from a dangerously underhanded advisor, to a stooge. Derrida describes that the *pharmakon* can “really mean *remedy*, and thus erase, on a surface of its functioning, the ambiguity of its meaning. But it is even quite obvious here, the stated intention of Theuth being precisely to stress the worth of his product, that he *turns* the word on its strange and invisible pivot, presenting it from a single one, the most reassuring, of its poles” (Derrida 97). This translation, by stabilizing a meaning that Thoth clearly is intentionally manipulating so as to underhandedly advise his superior, cancels out the entire framework this offer undergoes. Indeed, *remedy* purposefully removes the fact that this product can also be, as Thoth is well aware of, an irrational and dangerous force, “as opposed to ‘drug’ or even ‘medicine’, *remedy* says the transparent rationality of science, technique, and therapeutic causality, thus excluding from the text any leaning toward the
magic virtues of a force whose effects are hard to master, a dynamics that constantly
surprises the one who tries to manipulate it as its master and as its subject” (Derrida 97).

Thoth is very aware that this product is inherently unmasterable, that it will indeed make
Ra its subject—that is, since Thoth is the god of writing, and the pharmakon is writing,
Ammon-Ra will become the subject of Thoth, his puppet master. Instead, Ammon-Ra,
being only somewhat aware that the beneficial qualities of this product might backfire,
seems to be correcting Thoth’s foolish error. The pharmakon, as a poisoned present, and
Thoth, as its clever creator, have been demoted at the same time to something inane and
harmful—the properties metaphysically assigned to writing. Instead of Thoth casually
slipping a lethal gift to his superior, this masterful move is presented as a mistake. Thoth
becomes an ancillary, one who seems blithe and harmless, and Ammon-Ra is once again
the origin and the patriarch, gently reprimanding his subordinate/child. Because Thoth’s
opaque intentions are fearsome from the standpoint of a rational valuation, and because
he is unable to be rationalized, he is instead reactively understood as a child/stooge,
subordinate to his cleverer and powerful ruler.

The fact is, it is not Thoth who is corrected by his more careful superior; Thoth’s
role is one of a careful, clever schemer, pretending countenance for dubious reasons. He
tries to pass off an ambiguous product he has created through its most innocuous pole—
which is still one that is worrisome: the remedy is still composed through a mad and
unscientific use of drugs. Indeed, his character is much more substantial and dynamic
than the static, archetypal Ammon-Ra: in other words, Thoth is the reason this story is
remotely interesting. Thoth is specifically addressed by Ammon-Ra as “O tehkikotate
“Theuth” (Derrida 103) (master of arts): addressed thus, Thoth as an artistic creator has produced a substance that will, through its paradoxical nature, disseminate Ra as the author of everything. The product he offers is seductive because it can appear a remedy, and only slightly unorthodox, which is certainly how Ra sees it. However, it is because of the fact that the pharmakon can be either an ill-advised remedy or—in clumsy hands—lethal, that it is impossible to master. In fact, those who try to master it, unsuspecting, will be subjected to its irrational displacement. Thoth, who is also called more powerful than Ra, “he judges, arbitrates, and gives orders to one who is greater than himself […] ‘he is simply called god; he is Thoth, the strongest of the gods” (Derrida 92), merely pretends to be a faithful visor, presenting himself as a loyal subject. Thoth, as not simply a master of arts, but also, artifice, is an actor whose intentions are anything but rationally transparent, presents the pharmakon to Ra, “with humility as unsettling as a dare” (Derrida 94). This brilliant role has all been lost by the translations. Indeed, Derrida avers that these series of metaphysical translations have “violently [destroyed] [the pharmakon], reduc[ing] it to one of its simple elements […] an interpretation [that] is thus as violent as it is impotent” (Derrida 98); these translations destroy all nuance to the character Thoth, limiting him to the façade of humility he enacts. Therefore, Derrida argues, it has removed the vigor, the “very textuality of the translated text” (Derrida 98). The brilliance and originality in this scene comes from Thoth’s crippling ambiguity that is so unsettling. Ra is archetypal; he is barely anthropomorphic, as simply a personification of the primordial sun god. He hardly even has a role to occupy, and is more of an abstraction of law, patriarchy, and ownership. Thoth, on the other hand,
occupies many roles at once, so that whatever his moves are, his intentions must always be questioned. Through this clever working, Thoth has already subjected the author of everything to the irrational devastation of writing. However, instead of this fascinating and nuanced role, Thoth has been demoted through these rationalizing valuations to a harmless, and rather bland, stooge. Ra, as a typecast role, becomes, unfortunately, forefront, exemplifying limiting presence of rational mastery, which, as Derrida notes, acts with both violence and impotence.

2. Eradicating the Irrational as Violent Impotence

The imposition of the authorial paradigm, through rationalization of language, is one that Miller in *Reading Narrative* also finds responsible for a critical loss of textuality, remarking that the ‘otherness’ of Thoth is what makes the text worth reading. Indeed, Miller finds that translations imposing the limitations of rationalism are particularly—as Derrida describes—impotent and violent. However, while Derrida’s example of Thoth illustrates how the distilment of the language surrounding Thoth catalyzes his distilment as well, Miller takes this same issue a step further. Miller uses Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* to demonstrate the manner in which the source of catharsis in this work arises from the language itself, not from the plot events. Although this is clearly not categorically true, it is certainly the case with this particular play, if not simply Greek (Pre-Platonic) tragedy in general. Because the Greek texts did not value objectivity, but were purposefully subjective, and because the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were performed at religious festivals as competitions of poetry, it seems this would certainly be a trend.
Miller focuses solely on *Oedipus Rex*, arguing that the catharsis for this particular play does not come from plot-driven action but rather from the unconscious double-meanings of words that create a powerful dramatic irony from almost no action whatsoever. Clearly, this is a problem if the double and irrational meanings of these words are rationally translated as innocuous. Furthermore, Miller notes that the nuance of these words is sometimes remotely impossible to recreate transparently, a value that should never have been attributed to translation. Such a slanting, then, would not simply ruin the nuance of the text: instead, it would destroy the ability of this work to communicate at all to a modern audience. If the catharsis is ruined that connects the modern reader, this piece of literature is lethally threatened, as one that is absolutely irrational, by the rational, authorial prejudice in the translations representing it.

Firstly, Miller notes the manner in which this tragedy has been typically ‘translated’ only through the lens of Aristotle, who is almost a Brod-like figure in gatekeeping the interpretations of this work. According to Aristotle, the catharsis of this play is enacted through the plot elements, which puzzle the reader until the resolution that solves the riddle. However, Miller avers that if Aristotle’s argument is examined, the play hardly “exemplifies Aristotle’s stipulations” (Miller 9). For one thing, the performance at these festivals would take stories the audience was already fully aware of and retell them: the competition was not about creating a new story but rather about incorporating as much originality as they could into an already existing prototype. Because the audience would already know the story’s resolution, whatever elements of plot Sophocles created—however transformed—would be unlikely to cause a catharsis
hinging on the deciphering of these events. Further, coincidentally, the same issue applies to a modern audience as well: because of Freud’s appropriation of this myth and its subsequent popularization, it is unlikely any reader would not be aware of Oedipus’ fate before engaging in the work itself. Further, Miller argues that the plot is not action-packed at all—at least by modern standards. In fact, rather than the plot being driven by action, it is instead “made up almost exclusively of people standing around talking or chanting” (Miller 10). Indeed, Miller demonstrates how the plot of Oedipus Rex entirely excludes all the events surrounding this story:

The real action of Oedipus the King, if one means by action decisive physical occurrences has either taken place before the play begins (Oedipus’s abandonment as a baby on Mount Cithaeron, his murder of his father, his solving of the Sphinx’s riddle, his sleeping with his mother) or takes place offstage (Jocasta’s suicide, Oedipus’s self-blinding) after the ‘discovery’. The play begins long after the real action has taken place. (Miller 10)

Because the audience is aware of the general plotline and Sophocles excludes most of the plot that surrounds this work anyway, Aristotle’s proposition that this play arouses powerful emotions of pity and fear from resolving events the audience already is blithely aware of is hardly possible.

Instead, Miller argues that these feelings of catharsis are affected through dramatic irony, which occurs singularly through the language of the play. Miller notes, “the plot is the language. Any careful reader of the play soon gets caught up in the complicated integument of recurrent complex words and figures, puns, double meanings,
Irons. That is where the action is, in the details of the language” (Miller 12). For instance, Oedipus promises boldly to track down the murder and rid the land of the blood pollution, but, in doing so, “unwittingly promising to track himself” (Miller 24); he also curses the murder, not knowing that he is already cursed and himself the cause (Miller 24). Further, the word for Oedipus’ eyes, when he blinds himself, is “arthra” (Miller 30), which is usually used to refer to ankles; this reference takes one back to the meaning of the name ‘Oedipus’, i.e. “swollen foot” (he was exposed as a child on Mount Cithaeron when his parents learned of the prophesy, and tied by the ankles in such a manner that blood flow was cut off to his feet. Because of this exposure, and being raised by surrogate parents, he confuses his surrogate parents for individuals the curse involves, and blindly misinterprets how to act). This connection establishes there is something wrong with both his feet and eyes, and therefore, his ability to make the right decisions. Throughout the play, the doubling of his feet stumbling or misdirected and his ‘blindness’ to the truth depends on this connection (Miller 30). These, as well as numerous other metaphorical plays of language enact dramatic irony, refer to multiple contexts that Oedipus does not intend, but at which the audience cringes. In this way, it is clear that the play depends on this double language as the only manner that the catharsis happens: it is what keeps the reader fixated—and not the action, which is negligible. In a case such as this, where the language is everything, a translation that would seek to reduce the irrationality of the language—the aspects that Oedipus cannot control—would destroy the ability of the play to function. Therefore, Aristotle’s rationalization, as a looming influence over subsequent readings of this play, threatens both impotence and violence
upon this text, in neutralizing the ironic language. The pervasiveness of Aristotle’s interpretation, in reducing commentary on text to his single, rationalizing voice, is radically reminiscent to the function of the author: indeed, his presence through immanence alone has replaced Sophocles as the authorial presence of *Oedipus Rex*.

However, resulting from the rationalization of this play, wherein the sole purpose has been proposed as ‘solving’ Oedipus’ confusion, the language that the play hinges on becomes subjected to the attempted resolution of paradox. Just as this *pharmakon* is translated into its most stable form, the complex language of this play is threatened by translations that value both avoiding a visible transformation of language (which translation inherently is) and the aspect of the play as becoming clear (which it does not). In fact, this play illustrates how unfeasible the paradigmatic approach of solving is, through Oedipus’ actions, and, indeed, through Aristotle’s oppressive commentary. As the basis for the play itself, the language is therefore full of irrational, untranslatable words. To translate quite literally is difficult and threatens comprehensibility: however, transparency is a supposed value of translation, from a rational perspective. A rational translation would endeavor to create a resolvable ending, removing the irrational modes of meaning that Oedipus cannot control. Miller notes that even aside from this dangerous, rationalizing value, in translating to English, “subtle echoes from one word to another are [...] lost because the roots of the corresponding English words are different” (Miller 20); at times, there is simply no English equivalent that matches the nuance of the original Greek words. He extols, then, a particular translation of this text undergone by Thomas Gould, who manages to maintain, for the most part, the complexity of these
signifiers through excessive footnoting. Miller notes “the ‘literal’ translations Gould
gives in his footnotes, impossible English though they are, “are more often more useful
than the translation proper on the same page” (Miller 20). Miller notes that these
annotations create the most literal translation possible—which is, because of the nature of
the play, one that is not rational. However, while this is allows the reader to most fully
experience the sheer irrationality of these words, it also threatens the comprehensibility.
The annotations subject the reading to what Miller calls “grotesque effects” (Miller 21),
because the literal Greek is bizarre and unreadable in English; it is “impossible to be
literal and stay within the bounds of good English” (Miller 20). Indeed, this problem of
‘grotesque effects’ is probably why “this admirable book is now out of print” (Miller 21).

This once again reveals the problem of rationality—that a translation from
another language should be anything other than grotesque, that it should not appear to be
what it is—a transformation—is a value that is entirely transcendental. This problem is
certainly not limited to the context of Oedipus Rex, nor to Greek as some sort of
particularly irrational language. That any translation should endeavor simply to translate
the text into an immediately perceptible vehicle is a value-ridden device by which the
author function operates. Indeed, if translation (allegorically) as reading is constantly
transforming and re-writing the text within the same language, there is no reason to
expect that a translation between languages would amount to any transparency at all.
Moreover, if the translation does not undergo the excessive footnoting that Gould’s does,
the dramatic irony that functions in order to affect the very purpose of this text is
reduced, causing a loss of meaning. For this reason, rationalism and nihilism are
fundamentally linked, where nihilism neutralizes the devastation of paradoxical meaning that is constantly occurring naturally. By reducing an inherently paradoxical sign to a summary of its contradictory components, this rational value imposed on translation (and also reading) causes a textual corruption, in simply stoppering meaning that overwhelms mastery, thereby subordinating irrational as a lack. This collective complacency has caused the disappearance of Gould’s grotesque, irrational, and complex translation—and threatens continually, the irreparable loss of *Oedipus Rex* itself to modern readers, in supplying the desired transparency in a work concerning the impossibility of solving the irrational.

Indeed, Sophocles clearly utilizes this play to highlight irrationality. The play is centrally about the specific problem that the grotesque language creates: the impossibility of resolving paradox. Attempting resolution brings results that are both violent and impotent, as demonstrated through Oedipus’ attempt to rationalize his situation. The double-meanings that *Oedipus the King* revolves around specifically incur displacement in “the movement of something that belongs to another” (Miller 33)—it is the crisis Oedipus undergoes throughout the play. The irrationality of the dramatic irony is particularly difficult to place, necessarily defying transparency because it involves both

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7 Henri de Lubac, in *Paradoxes of Faith*, notes that meaning is stabilized through the summary of signs that are inherently paradoxical “paradox exists everywhere in reality, before existing in thought […] our universe in growth, is paradoxical” (de Lubac 10). De Lubac refutes this reduction, because paradox, by nature, necessitates continual investigation “paradox is the reverse of what properly would be synthesis. But the proper view always eludes us. Each of us contributes by his existence to the weaving of a wonderful tapestry but it cannot yet be comprised entirely within our vision […] synthesis can only be sought” (de Lubac 9). Paradoxes, inherently refuse a conversion of one into the other, as a dialectic, that they escape the domain of logic (de Lubac 12), but that this escape is what grants “vigor” (de Lubac 12). Moreover, to desist this incessant seeking, or to rationalize a paradox, is to become stagnant “but we often prefer to hug its rotten corpse. And we go rotten with it” (de Lubac 14).
a literal placement that is intended, but a metaphorical other that is not. However, the problem is that the meaning truly belongs to **neither** the metaphorical nor the literal locus. Because the irrational language is a microcosm for the situation in the play, the problem of linguistically placing metaphor is one which Miller compares to incest—central to the play’s ‘action’. He states that “incest is an allegory of metaphor” (Miller 34), which he explains by noting that metaphor “puts meaning where it does and does not belong. It belonged as much in the new place as the old, for it had no natural belonging in the old place. It does not belong in the new place either, for using it in the new place is against its usage” (Miller 34). Oedipus is born in Thebes but raised in Corinth; he is abandoned as an infant on Mount Citharon, the wild and inhabitable area between them that does not constitute a place of its own—he is caught between the former cities, belonging truly to neither, and fundamentally confused about which place is innately his. This confusion of incest and the placement of Oedipus surrounds this play, created through the paradoxical language that is constantly threatened by an authorial reading, which simply removes these untranslatable, irresolvable elements.

Indeed, the threat posed by the impulse of simply removing irresolvable, paradoxical elements of the text is exemplified through the distortion of the title, ‘Oedipus the King’, a translation which has failed to properly transform its original implication—one that sets up the entire incestuous crisis of the play. Most readers who examine this play are aware of the Latin title, *Oedipus Rex*, for which ‘king’ is a perfectly adequate translation. However, the translation of “Oedipus the King” from the Latin “Oedipus Rex” is a misconception that dulls the metaphorical displacement essential to
this work. The original play, as written by Sophocles, was entitled \textit{Oidipus Tyrannos}, which has been adopted universally by the seeming equivalent Latin “\textit{rex, regis}” term for “king”. However, the Greek phrase “\textit{tyrannos}” is more gradational than this. According to Platonic dictionary on \textit{Perseus Digital Library}, the term \textit{tyrannos} is not identical to the modern derivative ‘tyrant’. The term \textit{tyrannos} was simply used to make a distinction between itself and the more common “\textit{basileus}”—which also means ‘king’. The term \textit{tyrannos} specifically makes a distinction as to the manner in which sovereignty was obtained: the mild Pisistratus is described as \textit{tyrannos}, but not the despotic kings of Persia (Perseus). Therefore, the \textit{tyrannos} was a non-hereditary sovereign, opposed to the more common \textit{basileus}, which was reserved for biological heirs. Sophocles uses, not the “equivalent”, \textit{basileus} for the Latin \textit{rex}, which would have been the more common word. Instead, he intentionally chooses the term \textit{tyrannos} in order to set up the metaphorical displacement central to the play, indicating the dramatic irony pervading the entire work. Oedipus \textit{thinks} he is a \textit{tyrannos} because he believes his mother is \textit{not} Jocasta but Merope, but in fact, as the whole audience knows, he \textit{is} the hereditary \textit{basileus} and has just married his mother as the prophesy foretells. Yet, at the same time, he is not fully either of these roles. The Latin translation utterly distills what is clearly a poetic, thoughtful choice on the part of Sophocles. The dramatic irony resulting from the displacement \textit{tyrannos} indicates is removed because it is untranslatable without transforming the language with a visible mark such as an annotation, and because it is irresolvable. The value of translating (literal or allegorical) that removes this irresolvable displacement is thereby a nihilistic removal of both irrationality and textuality. Aristotle’s interpretation
of resolution and his looming, authorial presence enforcing this rational and nihilistic removal imposes a violent impotence upon the essence of *Oedipus Rex*.

3. The Rational as Self-Blindness

However, because this entire text revolves around the incestuous metaphorical language that defies the rational, it can be seen, in the same manner as Kafka’s *The Trial*, to do more than merely resist such an imposition. In fact, the text’s central concern is dismantling the rational. In *Reading Narrative*, Miller discusses how the purpose of *Oedipus Rex* is to demonstrate the inability to contain language to a rational meaning. Moreover, this is the cause of the catharsis: throughout the text, Oedipus is unable to say only what he means to say and is unaware of the unintended extra meanings: this fearsome lack of control inspires terror in the reader, who fears he too cannot speak as intended, who sympathizes with Oedipus even though he has *created* this problem himself. The inability to limit the irrational is what Miller calls “Aristotle’s Oedipus Complex”; although Sophocles purposefully centers the text about the irrational, Aristotle attempts to rationalize everything—and, just like Oedipus, engages in a self-blinding. On the contrary, what happens to Oedipus is entirely irrational, because Sophocles has purposefully excluded any explanation for why Oedipus is cursed. Both he and Aristotle are obsessed with trying to trace the intent of Apollo, an intent that Sophocles has excluded. In fact, there exists an entire back-story prior to this text explaining why Oedipus is cursed. Further, this tendency to try to solve is extremely similar to the blindness of K, and indeed, the blindness of the reader, that allows the sentencing of
oneself. Oedipus and K have the same realization: that they were both blinded by the ideological impulse to rationalize, to become a judge and sentence themselves. Further, since Aristotle takes Oedipus’ impulse as valid and not a tendency to be dismantled, he and those who engage in his writing of this work blind themselves to the true potency of the catharsis by trying to limit meaning so that the irrational can be ‘solved’.

To begin, Miller notes that Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, chooses an argument that dismantles itself. Determined to rationalize the text, Aristotle rather opens his argument to a whole host of logical fallacies, thus imposing the same violence and impotence on himself he attempts, rationally, to impose upon the text. Miller discusses how in Aristotle’s argument, his chief goal is to solve the irrational, which allows the catharsis in the clarifying vision at the resolution. Indeed, Aristotle proposes that all irrationality in the play should be assumed to be rational “in spite of the absurdity” (Miller 5), because, at the end, all confusion will be resolved, thus obtaining the feelings of catharsis, in the purging of the irrational. Aristotle specifically picks an instance of plot contradiction that he urges the reader to overlook: the absurd assumption that Oedipus would not have heard from someone the manner of Laius’ death, become suspicious, and have begun to figure out what happened to him. Aristotle validates this approach because the catharsis is dependent on Oedipus not figuring this out, until the end. So, the reader, according to Aristotle, is supposed to give the rational the benefit of the doubt, concerning this and similar logical improbabilities, in order to experience the resolution at the end. However, Miller proposes that Aristotle’s *Poetics*, far from being a code from which to understand the irrational events—which do nothing but accrete as the play proceeds—is rather a
“spectacular example of the way great philosophers choose examples that put the greatest strain on the doctrine they are propounding […] the examples they chose that perhaps even confound and dismantle that doctrine” (Miller 7). Aristotle, in attempting to rationalize a play in which the events are entirely irrational, subjects his own argument to severe logical flaws.

In fact, there is something “irreducibly irrational” (Miller 8) about Aristotle’s argument—namely, the problem of the metaphorical language. As already mentioned, the dramatic irony achieved through double meaning is precisely what replaces the so-called ‘action’ in the play. Aristotle acknowledges the language as talent, “the mark of genius in a poet […] good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances” (Miller 26). However, these metaphorical resemblances are more than simply a stylistic choice. Rather, they directly affect the content by constantly referring to multiple, contradictory contexts that prohibit Oedipus (or any given character) from saying what he means, instead unintentionally imparting something “ironically, comically, or dangerously different” (Miller 26). One could attempt to explain away the inherent irrationality that invades the entire text, as Aristotle does: that in that at the end, the riddling language is solved, and the play becomes, from confusion, transparent. However, Aristotle appears to be laboring under the delusion that the metaphors are only “initially obscure” (Miller 34), and that they become deciphered at the conclusion of this work. In fact, such a deciphering is completely absent from the end—there is no point in the text at which these duplicitous meanings are resolved. Instead, the ending of Oedipus the King throws the rational into crisis because it does not become solved at all. Miller explains, “the
enigma remains painfully unresolved, since it is entirely inscrutable why the gods, who are lawful and just, as the chorus says, should have done such an apparently unjust thing. In the same way, metaphor reveals and hides at once, by giving a sign. The play, both the plot and the language of which it is made, is made up of signs that both reveal and hide” (Miller 35). Although Oedipus ‘solves’ that he is the cause of the plague upon his kingdom, in his marriage to his actual mother Jocasta, nothing at all explains to him why he has been driven to do this. Indeed, the seeming inscrutability of the gods’ motives is not a matter that is resolved at the ending. The conclusion, rather, leaves the reader questioning why, if the gods are supposedly just, are Oedipus and his family punished? There is no fathomable manner from which to apprehend what it is that “Oedipus, Laius, and Jocasta [have] done wrong […] what law they have broken [and] how they have offended the god” (Miller 14). Clearly, Aristotle’s argument that inexplicable instances should be ignored so that the ending can comfortingly solve everything irrational is flawed. In fact, nothing the audience did not already know—whether classic or modern—has been solved at all. In this way, Aristotle becomes subject to blindness, in attempting to force a rational meaning upon the text—leaving gaping holes in his argument.

However, interestingly enough, there is explanation for all this inscrutable punishment. In fact, there is an entire history that Sophocles excludes from the text. Although Miller does footnote a reference, he seems not to consider it a valid explanation that would fix the problem of the irrational punishment. In any case, the argument of irresolution that Miller presents is highly valid despite this, if not more so. It cannot be
inconsequential that Sophocles would intentionally exclude the preceding events that allow Apollo’s actions a reasonable basis. Sophocles does not simply take a typically irrational god and utilize him: he takes the god of reason himself and makes him incomprehensible by writing the text without any of the very extant details that would elucidate a reason for Apollo’s actions. This formation is diametrically opposed to Aristotle’s valuation where he advocates the scapegoating (literally the placing outside the city/work) of the irrational. Sophocles intentionally excludes the reasonable, contrary to Aristotle’s tragic form, leaving the reader with not a long-awaited comprehension, but utter perplexity that is permanently suspended.

In fact, there is a mythological saga explaining why Laius and his descendents are punished by Apollo. What is not acknowledged typically in Sophocles’ story of Oedipus is that the prophecy Laius hears is not random at all: rather, it can be traced back to a curse. This curse is referenced in Aeschylus’ Seven Against Thebes, which is written before Sophocles’ career. This play, although it concerns Oedipus’ offspring, Polynices and Eteocles, who fight in a savage battle for control over Thebes, contains many references to this curse. Eteocles, who is defending the city against the attack of his brother Polynices and seven other heroes, is fully aware of why these unfortunate events are happening to him: he blames, not Apollo, or his own follies, but Laius’. Eteocles states “since God hastens the deed so quickly, let the whole race of Laius, hated by Phoebus [Apollo], be swept on the wind to Cocytus’ destined flood” (Aeschylus line 689-691). The events explaining why Apollo is infuriated with Laius are not depicted in this work; however, one can assume that the audience was aware of the genealogy that
preceded Aeschylus’ reference of the curse. The cause of Apollo’s anger is outlined in the Theban Saga, depicted in *Classical Mythology*, as Labdacus, the great-grandson of Cadmus, founder of Thebes, dies and leaves the infant Laius the only heir. Predictably, there is a subsequent, bloody struggle over the throne, during which Laius is exiled and kindly taken in by Pelops, king of Elis. While staying in Elis, Laius accrues this curse by dishonoring the code of hospitality. Traditionally, there was a very strict, highly held importance on the trust between a guest and his host, and Laius disregards this. According to the reference work, *Classical Mythology*, Pelops had an illegitimate son, Chrysippus, who was also his favorite. Laius, rather than honoring Pelops’ hospitality, instead abducts and rapes Chrysippus, who, because of this dishonor, regains his dignity (in the Classical tradition) by committing suicide. Pelops, when discovering this, curses Laius. The contents of this curse are revealed through the prophecy later foretold by the oracle of Delphi: that Laius would beget a son who would kill him and marry his mother. Laius knows he is cursed, but is not initially concerned. Shortly after this, Laius returns to his homeland, becomes king and marries Jocasta.

It is at this point when Apollo becomes involved: Laius, attempting to conceive an heir, goes to the oracle and instead is warned not to conceive, or he will activate this curse. As told by Aeschylus’ account in *Seven Against Thebes*, it is blindingly clear that Laius is forbidden by the god from producing offspring—that to do so will not simply affect him, but curse his entire line of descendants and blight his kingdom. However, Laius does not attempt to prevent himself from having a son; in fact, he intentionally disregards the god’s prohibition. In Aeschylus’ work, the chorus proclaims
Indeed I speak of the ancient transgression, now swift in its retribution. It remains even into the third generation, ever since Laius—in defiance of Apollo who, at his Pythian oracle at the earth's center, said three times that the king would save his city if he died without offspring—ever since he, overcome by the thoughtlessness of his longing, fathered his own death, the parricide Oedipus, who sowed his mother's sacred field, where he was nurtured, and endured a bloody crop.

(Aeschylus lines 742-757)

Therefore, Laius deliberately and selfishly disobeys the council of Apollo, accounting for the fury of this god depicted throughout Sophocles’ text. All of Laius’ preventative action occurs after the birth of his son—after Apollo is already infuriated. Apollo, who originally intended to forestall this curse, now, “manipulates all of this” (Miller 11), ensuring its fulfillment. It is clear why Apollo is angry: Laius transgressed the law of hospitality, disobeyed a direct order, and willingly took a selfish action forbidden to him, activating the consequences of the curse upon his family. Apollo’s motives of punishment toward Laius are clear.

Finally, the reason for the inclusion of the guiltless Oedipus (as well as his descendents, Eteocles and Polynices) in the fallout from the curse is one of traditional belief. It is assumed in the classical tradition that a curse involving the father includes the entire family in its trajectory. This is depicted in the Mycenean genealogy, as the house of Atreus remains cursed through several generations, all the way down to Orestes, because of the original perversion of natural law that occurs when Tantalus serves his children to the gods. In the same way, the blunder of Laius is projected onto his entire
line of descendants, culminating in the notably bloody, savage battle between Oedipus’ sons. In *Seven Against Thebes*, a messenger, commenting on the curse, assumes this tradition, “lord Apollo, the reverend leader […] fifteen took for himself the seventh gate, accomplishing upon the children of Oedipus the ancient follies of Laius” (Aeschylus 800-803). The play culminates with the two brothers killing each other, in a “frenzy like a maenad […] their corpses dripping with blood, how they died through the workings of cruel fate” (Aeschylus 843-45). Moreover, this savage and unpleasant fulfillment is confused by no one as an unreasonable event; as a messenger puts it, “the curseful utterance of their father has done its work and not fallen short. Laius’ plans, made in disobedience, have kept their force. I am anxious for our city; divine decrees do not lose their edge” (Aeschylus lines 840-43). Laius has fulfilled exactly what Apollo proclaimed: a curse upon all his descendents and the doom of his city. In Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes*, the characters are completely aware of why terrible things are happening to them. Sophocles, however, does something entirely different: he defies the tragic definitions posed, after the fact, by Aristotle. He excludes an entire history, or even a mentioned reference to such a history, from this work. Contrary to this very clear explanation, Apollo’s motives in *Oedipus Rex* are entirely irrational, making the god of reason himself inscrutable.

However, the existence of this genealogy does not inhibit Miller’s argument at all: rather, it strengthens it. The reader is already aware that the play’s movement arises from the equivocal language that is impossible to control rationally. Supposedly, the catharsis would occur at the solving of the riddle, the resolving of the metaphorical displacement.
Instead, the irrational language dismantles these presupposed valuations of mastery and resolution. Sophocles, by denying the rationality of Apollo, allows the audience to be overwhelmed with pity and fear because “the unfathomable gods, the others that are wholly other, twist both language and events, as black hole causes perturbations in whatever is nearby” (Miller 34). The discovery of what has happened to Oedipus does not allow him to understand why it has happened. At the conclusion, the reader still has no idea why Oedipus is punished, and neither does it matter: what the audience understands is the impossibility of a solution to the paradoxically irrational—the inevitable suspension of undecidability. Instead, what the reader is left with is the implication that it is impossible to be sure that “performatives will perform what they [are supposed] to perform […] to speak is to be perpetually in danger of making a slip of the tongue. Human speech, as exemplified by Oedipus manifests a horrible lack of control” (Miller 25). Fear of the irrationality of speech is what motivates the catharsis: the fact that the impossibility to master meaning could have disastrous consequences. Of course, this depends on understanding the metaphorical displacement, and the motives of Apollo, as irresolvable. The Aristotelian transparency would bankrupt the catharsis; it would change the reader’s fear into comfortable relief at the expense of Oedipus’ blunder. Rather, the reader realizes Oedipus remains unclear about what blinded him: he only knows that he has been blinded. The reader fears the same otherness invading his own speech, the same blindness, and the same denied solvability. Miller notes, “I pity Oedipus for this alienation of what he says from what he means. I also fear that I may be subject, without knowing it, to the same double speaking. How can I be sure my own
language is not subject to the same alienation?” (Miller 24). The textuality of this play is fundamentally dependent on the irrationality Sophocles permits, through the exclusion of any transparency that is detailed in Aeschylus’ work, making *Oedipus Rex* unmasterable through even the logic of Aristotle himself.

In fact, if *Oedipus Rex* is examined as directed by an unfathomable presence, this play posits a radical resemblance to Kafka’s *The Trial*. Both of these authors illustrate an irrational power, demonstrating the paradigmatic desire of solving in order to dismantle its effectiveness—and, both metaphysically, have been misread. All K’s actions are distilled through an unforgiving, a priori guilt, in accordance with a negative theology; *Oedipus Rex*, as read by Aristotle, is similarly distilled through a rationalistic lens that attempts to solve the irreducibly irrational language in this work. Both these works are interpreted through a simplifying code from which to avoid confronting the devastating madness these texts present, in which the ideological approach of solving is useless. As Kafka’s machine, the position of an inscrutable god is one that thoroughly removes any hierarchical order. The unfortunate events that befall Oedipus and his family are not scripted by Apollo; they are performed through their own actions. Miller notes that at the time Sophocles was writing, the gods did not have clearly personified, orderly roles, but rather, were “‘others’ in relation to human rationality and knowledge” (Miller 17). Plato represents this differentiation through the word ‘daimon’, which delineates a chaotic force, as opposed to a personified, reasonable, god. Miller notes that the ‘daimon’ was considered a “more or less inscrutable divine power […] assumed to be the ultimate cause of what happens” (Miller 15). The sudden plague on Oedipus’ kingdom is
certainly similar to K’s random arrest, and like Brod’s transcendental authority that imposes a priori guilt, Aristotle’s attempts to find reasonable justification for what happens to Oedipus are similarly patchy. This is most commonly done through the approach that Oedipus possesses the hubristic quality of losing his temper (giving way to irrationality): that is, irrationality is to blame for his downfall. Miller posits a different solution: that Oedipus is “too rational” (Miller 17); in fact, everything that happens to Oedipus happens because he tries to reason things out. The machinic assemblage and the ‘daimon’ both defy the hierarchical assumptions that suggest the locating of an all-powerful presence manipulating punishment. The prophecy is fulfilled because Oedipus and Laius engage, in a rationalistic attempt to avoid it: in other words, it is fulfilled through desire alone. Apollo does not do anything to encourage them at any point. As a result of trying to trace these inscrutably other entities, Oedipus and K punish themselves; it is Oedipus, not Apollo, who blinds himself; Jocasta hangs herself. This is very different from myths of Apollo the ‘far shooter’ who strikes down those who offend him. Sophocles, in structuring Apollo as a daimonic presence, rather posits the impossibility solving anything. Ultimately, it is Oedipus himself, and the paradigm of solving, that gets him into trouble: his need to rationalize.

In fact, Oedipus is left with only his own ideological, obsessive rationalism to account for his fate—that is, he is constantly attempting to impose his rational logic upon that which defies logical mastery. However, it is not only Oedipus who attempts to explain an entirety of irrational occurrences by enveloping it with logic. In addition, this defines Aristotle’s attempt in Poetics: to place a virtual logic on each irrational event, that
hypothetically would lead to the solving of the riddle—which is not, at the end, solved. Instead, this obsession to solve is what Miller terms, ‘Aristotle’s Oedipus Complex’: indeed, the same ideological valuation that produces author function. This is undoubtedly why Miller states, “the Poetics manifests the presence of the repressed irrational in the act of attempting to rationalize it. In this the presence of Oedipus the King in the Poetics is like Oedipus himself in the play. Oedipus has come back from the dead, so to speak, to fulfill the oracle’s prophecies. The play can be taken as an allegory of the doom that awaits attempts to rationalize the irrational” (Miller 8). Indeed, this immanence is also the reader’s; the natural reaction is to wait for the rational solution, and in the meantime, explain away any problematical elements with by a nihilistic approach: that they are not important. The concept of Oedipus deserving what has happened to him because he is quick to anger is not only completely unsupported in this tragedy, it is also absurd—as absurd as the postulation that K acts out of guilt, when he clearly insults everyone from indicted fellows to judges. Aristotle’s obsessive rationalism is one that is a collective, ideological pervasion that prefaces readings to this text, being immediately dissembled the second this ideology is questioned (which is also the cause of Oedipus’ doom, in that he dismantles himself). Such an irrational product as this text defies the possibility of mastery, as Thoth’s offering of the pharmakon that will force the absolute origin to be dismantled in attempting to master what is intractable. Moreover, the collective ideology that pervades both Oedipus the King and The Trial is one that subsumes Oedipus, K, Aristotle, and the rationally fearful reader to the same doom: that is, the self imposed impotency and violence the reader projects onto the text.
Indeed, both Oedipus and K appear to have some amount of realization that they have effectively been mastered as subjects of the machine by engaging this rationalizing ideology. K has the same realization as Oedipus: in dealing with daimonic machines, the “movement from ignorance to knowledge is unreadable […] he knows that he does not know […] at [this] level, however, knowledge is attained” (Miller 44). This realization leads Oedipus to understand that rationalism has instead critically limited his vision: Apollo as an inscrutable machine is entirely other than what is logical. Both K and Oedipus become judges of themselves in a radically reminiscent manner: K willingly goes to his execution, becoming a subject to this ideological, collective, self-willed blindness. Oedipus, in the same manner, judges himself in what is both a “displaced castration” (Miller 38) and “failure in perspicuity” (Miller 38). They both undergo acts of violence and impotency, in attempting to impose on devastatingly unmasterable events a logic that rather masters both of these characters instead. In addition, the same desire masters Aristotle, who, by imposing a rational mastery, opens his argument to blindness and castration. Further, the unwary reader writing Aristotle as an ‘author-figure’ (one who has resolved the irrational, mastering and limiting the text) undergoes a similar blindness and misplaced castration, in that he has willingly subjected his own voice to the rational, limiting presence he himself has created.
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