



Writing-Unwriting: Paradoxes of Ending in Contemporary English-Language Metafiction

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ABSTRACT

This research will focus on the ideas of finitude and finality relating to the production of a literary discourse informed by writing as unwriting. It will highlight the different forms of erasure, an act itself producing meaning, of which the text, language and speech, in other words the logos, are the object in a formal or metaphorical manner in the works of the corpus. Finally, we will see that these phenomena of disappearance, dilution or even suppression are all metafictional and/or metatextual manifestations of an aesthetic finality. By sabotaging the textuality of their metafiction, the authors under study desecralize the text and establish games of connivance with the reader, sometimes pushing him into his entrenchments during the process of receiving the work: we return to the concept of ergodic literature mentioned above. The novels in the corpus illustrate phenomena of linguistic creation and destruction that translate, on the one hand, the perception of a contemporary world devoid of any referential stability and on the other, the desire for a reinvention of authorial speech and literature.

The relationships to moral and ethical questions that the four authors establish in their stories, the difficulty or the renunciation of saying that they expose through their characters, reflect ambiguous authorial postures participating in the desacralization of the work. The prism of writing as unwriting will make it possible to highlight the exhaustion of speech within the novels of the corpus. The author nevertheless remains a storyteller. In addition to the desire to tell and the duty of remembrance, particularly concerning historiographic metafiction, however, the mechanics of forgetting and the unconscious, which also permeate and distort the textuality of the metafiction under study.

The study will propose to approach the metafiction of the corpus as desiring fictions (on the Deleuzian model), as machinic devices tending towards their own destruction. The issues of the end that are raised there oscillate, as we will see, between the idea of apotheosis and the feeling of urgency as an art in itself. This angle of approach will thus allow us to address the open question posed by Antoine Compagnon: can we really stop writing, or "voyrement", as Montaigne wrote? Compagnon explores the end of literature as a "cessation of activity" from the angle of the "swan song", as the last work of an artist before dying, and of the "senile sublime", which does not apply to the present corpus. We will nevertheless see that this specific idea of the end maintains a creative tension with the Barthesian regime of "vitality" desperate of literature and authorial speech in crisis, a tension which is at the heart of this research.

Keywords:

Writing ,Unwriting , English , ,Metafiction Mark Z., Danielowski Alasdair Gray, Lance Olsen Will Self , Paradoxes of Ending in Contemporary.

Introduction

In his article "Dematerialization and Desacralization of the Book as a Symbolic Object", Régis Debray highlights the "mystical materialism" inherited from Christianity, which qualifies the book and the printed text, Danielewski, Gray, Olsen and Self stage in their novels if not the end of the text, at least its desacralization, a state of crisis characteristic of the second half of the 20th century and all the more salient at the turn of the 21st century.

The metafiction of the corpus indeed underline, in a formal and/or metaphorical manner, the trajectories that are both (self)creative and (self)destructive of the text that composes them ,As John Barth already expressed in "The Literature of Exhaustion" (1967) then in "The Literature of Replenishment" (1980),they manifest a state of transition towards a new form of representation and narrative, illustrating the idea of "desperate vitality" of literature mentioned above .

The process of desacralization highlights the ambiguous sacred or profane character of literary works since the Second World War. It also underlines the equivocal relationship that the text now has with the sacred. The way in which the metafiction of the corpus treat the question of faith as a religious and/or moral belief in relation to writing as an artistic production is therefore added that of deontology, the scope of which is above all metatextual in this context of stripping away the sacred character of the text. The four authors under study are led to adopt sometimes paradoxical postures, notably because they use writing and literature to examine their end, finitude and finality by writing to unwrite and unwrite themselves. The metafiction of the corpus therefore reveal narrative voices that oscillate between the act of telling and the inability to do so, and sometimes even between the demiurgic creation and destruction of speech.

Chapter one: Desacralize the text

As it appears in the metafiction of the corpus, the concept of textuality is ambivalent on several levels, notably intra- and extradiegetic , Danielewski, Gray, Olsen and Self in fact mistreat their texts, even to the point of feigning their discredit or even their annihilation, in order to generate meaning, a message, a word, or a new form of literature.

It is language itself that bears the brunt of such metatextual processes. However, while these processes claim to undermine the relationship that the author establishes with his reader through a text that is difficult to access, they reinforce this relationship by establishing a spirit of connivance. (TAYLOR, Mark C.(2013).

The entropic phenomenon to which language seems to succumb in the metafiction of the corpus is therefore not only synonymous with the "destruction of language," It is also a vector of other forms of signs of expression and communication. The scope of such instances of textual and linguistic destruction must also be examined at the intradiegetic level of these novels.

In Danielewski and Self in particular, the text thus becomes a sort of smokescreen masking an intradiegetic reality which is only a simulacrum of itself, to ultimately denounce the idea of a reality that has become unassimilable.

It is a form of renewal of metafictional writing, and of writing in general, which is highlighted in the works under study. The different degrees of importance of the role played by digital technology in the writing of Danielewski, Gray (where it is almost absent), Olsen and Self reveal in all cases the desire of the four authors to reinvent writing and literature, and thus to transcend reality through metafiction.(HAMES, Scott, Camille MANFREDI et Marie-Odile PITTIN-HÉDON, (2023).

The first paradox of such a literary project therefore lies in the hypothesis that this renewal of writing must be paid for by the deconstruction of language.

1.1. Language entropy

Among the novels in the corpus, *Theories of Forgetting* is probably the one that most clearly illustrates the phenomenon of linguistic entropy. It appears in Olsen's metafiction as the graphic result of physical and psychic failure - relative to forgetting in particular the characters of Alana and Hugh .

In Alana's story, linguistic entropy operates first and foremost through the typography of the text, the protagonist's written expression becoming more and more irregular and crossed out over the pages; one thinks of the numerous typos (crossed out or not), the omissions and displacements of capital letters within words, the line breaks in the middle of sentences, or the erratic use of punctuation and the underscore .

The fading of the ink on the last pages of her story is another example, which concerns both the text and the more or less legible images that accompany it. In Hugh's story, whose fragmentary and a-chronological narrative structure resembles a stream of consciousness, the language disorder is particularly apparent in the syntax, which highlights a pronominal instability of subjectivation, to which are added a number of aposiopeses. (ROBIN, Thierry(2017 (

These different examples of language dissolution, however, call upon the reader's critical-creative imagination to produce new meanings. [1] Thanks to a subjective metalelectronic reading that is put into perspective by that reflected in Aila's story, the growing forgetfulness of Alana and Hugh brings out reflections and memories in the reader that allow them to fully grasp Olsen's work .

Theories of Forgetting therefore illustrates a doubly creative linguistic destruction: on the one hand, it generates multiple meanings; on the other hand, it establishes a privileged relationship between the author and his reader , this is the type of relationship Aila hopes to establish with Lance, both her reader imaginary and its extradiegetic author, through exegesis: "Help me out here, okay?

What are you seeing? [2].

An instance of creative destruction of language occurs in a similar manner in *Poor Things*, more specifically within the six pages of Bella's letter transcribed by photoengraving in Archie's narrative [3] as the protagonist is overcome with emotion, her handwriting deteriorates to the point of requiring Baxter's gloss to be deciphered backwards by the reader What do the scrawls mean, Baxter? Here take them back. Only you can decipher [4].

As Archie's final assertion underlines, the position of listener that he occupies when Baxter reads the letter to him rekindles the initial controversy over the authenticity of his account. The role that is then assigned to him puts into perspective that of the reader in order to better underline the narratological distance separating the latter from Bella's writing conditions :

The following letter is given, not as Bella spelled it, but as Baxter recited it .

[5] The insertion of the photoengravings claims to compensate for this distance, although partially:

They are printed by a photogravure process which exactly reproduces the blurring caused by tear stains, but does not show the pressure of pen strokes which often ripped through the paper [6].

The creation of a momentary proximity between the reader and the intradiegetic author by means of the materiality of the page seems, however, to be immediately cancelled out by Bella's dysgraphia or rather almost immediately, since the first of the six photogravures also contains a part of the preceding entry of Bella's letter, decipherable despite an erroneous spelling that clearly relies on an oral understanding of the English language: (LITTLE, William G.(2007)

This part of Bella's speech has already been reported and corrected by Baxter two pages earlier. Thus, in addition to allowing the reader to imagine the protagonist's northern English accent, the repetition through photoengraving above all allows the reader to better understand the effort that writing represents for Bella, and the reasons for such a loss of control later .

The temporary entropic of Bella's written language, which seems to represent a breakdown in neuronal transmission (thought-writing-graphy), [8] reinforces the emotional bond that connects her to the reader and motor Since the question of authenticity is at the heart of this passage, it appears as a

metatextual and iconotextual stratagem established by the narrator Archie in order to gain the trust of his readership in order to persuade them of the truth of his story.

In this sense, Archie's inserting the pictogram of a hand (his own) pointing at the pages of Bella placed opposite, initiates the relationship of proximity that the photogravures create with the reader, while anticipating the temporary disappearance of the [9] text in favor of the image as in Theories of Forgetting, the destruction of the text in Poor Things is therefore an integral part of Gray's metatextual reflection.

This is also the case with House of Leaves, in which Danielewski exposes a textual and linguistic destruction that is however more ambiguous because it appears in several forms, in a more or less subtle manner, at different narrative levels.

Already noted, the systematic deletion of references to the myth of the Minotaur is the most obvious example as in Theories of Forgetting, it plays primarily a role of preterition .[10].

[11] Nevertheless, Truant's annotations concerning these occurrences all emphasize the gesture of deletion itself, on its materiality in particular, rather than on the text thus covered .

The narrative and metatextual interest of the latter resides mainly in the trace of its obliteration. The sequence of notes 325 (by Zampano) and 326 (by Truant), the second commenting on the first, illustrates the ironic character of such passages of linguistic destruction.

Zampano's note refers to the various fictional and real-life individuals to whom Karen says she forwarded a copy of The Navidson Record for the purpose of compiling their observations and analyses of the house:

The irony of the excerpt is reinforced by the fact that the series of "X"s, abbreviated in the context of this thesis, runs over twenty lines in House of Leaves as for the ambiguous because superfluous omission of the identity of the two people designated by Zampanó, it is attributed to the editors who claim to be at the origin of such deletions at the beginning of sections D and E of the appendices devoted to Johnny Truant .

[13] On the other hand, the reference to the materialities of pencil and tar is a nod to the strange composition of the ashen walls of the labyrinth of House of Leaves, as smooth as obsidian according to Bloom [14].

The metaleptic character of the process of textual destruction in Danielewski's novel is underlined by Truant's note 350, which is motivated by a new series of "X"s, interspersed with a few words and fragments of words or phrases, this time running for almost four pages:

Unfortunately this time I'm to blame. When I first started assembling The Navidson Record, I arranged the various pages and scraps by chapter or subject. [...] On top of this particular chapter I stupidly placed a bottle of German ink, brillant-schwarz or something. [...] Anyway, there must have been a hairline crack in the glass because all of the ink eventually tunneled down through the paper, wiping out almost forty pages, not to mention seeping into the carpet below where it spread into a massive black bloom . Ominously for Truant, the last image illustrates the metaleptic and creative ("bloom") aspect of the linguistic destruction characteristic of the labyrinth at work in House of Leaves.

Adding to the ironic and metaleptic nature of the use of "X"s in Danielewski's novel, they take on an essentially iconotextual aspect at the moment when Zampano describes Will Navidson's difficult advance along an increasingly narrow corridor of the protean labyrinth .

[15]Following the sentence below,, whose typographic arrangement over six pages illustrates the increasing narrowness of the corridor in question, the "X"s printed in bold in the center of the facing page form a window toward which the protagonist heads:

When he begins | dragging himself forward again, the pain has still not diminished. Eventually though, he e | merges inside a very large room w here everything about the house suddenly | changes, [16].

The sudden change noted by Zampanò is symbolized on the page by the equally abrupt replacement of the text by the image, a substitution that, however, only serves to reinforce the confusing and entropic character of the labyrinth: "But when Navidson finally does move forward, nothing changes .

[17] "Illustrating this last remark, the window formed by "X"s is reproduced identically on the new facing page and highlighted by the substitution of the white of the page (the darkness of the labyrinth) for the rectangle formed by "X"s printed in roman containing the first occurrence.

As if to drive home the irony, Zampano then adds his text printed this time diagonally in a corner of the page:

With each step Navidson takes, we too grow more and more convinced that we are really looking at a window and furthermore an open window.

Doorways offer passage but windows offer vision. Here at last is a chance to behold something beyond the interminable pattern of wall, room, and door; a chance to reach a place of perspective and perhaps make some sense of the whole. An eye on the wind. Though as Navidson discovers, there was never a wind and there certainly is no eye.

Climbing out onto a narrow terrace on the other side, Navidson, for the second time during Exploration, confronts that grotesque vision of absence. This time, however, he can do little else but laugh [18].

Here again, the X symbolizing the open window encountered by Navidson serve to indicate if not the trace of a deletion, at least the presence of an absence.

This manifestation of the process of linguistic destruction is a topos in *House of Leaves*. Danielewski indeed enjoys pointing out such absences in different metatextual ways in his novel. Another example concerns the epigraph of chapter XX, a quotation of which is printed in Braille. The editors provide the following translation in a footnote:

"The walls are endlessly bare. Nothing hangs on them, nothing defines them. They are without texture. Even to the keenest eye or most sentient fingertip, they remain unreadable. You will never find a mark there. No trace survives. The walls obliterate everything. They are permanently absolved of all record. Oblique, forever obscure and unwritten. Behold the perfect pantheon of absence." [19].

The irony of the quote and its translation here lies in the materiality of the text, more specifically in the absence of relief of the pages of Danielewski's "house of leaves" and the walls of the labyrinth, a characteristic that is nevertheless essential to reading Braille. The illegible identity of the author of the quote underlines its absence as much as that of the unwritten or unwritten text. Participating in the playful aspect of *House of Leaves*, this absence echoes the sentence: "You will never find a [M]ark [Z. Danielewski] there".

Danielewski explores the idea of language barriers several times in *House of Leaves*, most notably in sections E ("The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters") and F ("Various Quotes") of Truant's appendices. In the letters she written to the latter from a psychiatric institute, Pelafina and her son set up a linguistic game around the Old English poem *The Battle of Maldon*, from which she quotes two passages without providing either the source or the translation. (HANSEN, Mark B. N.(2004).

Danielewski exploits the language barrier he establishes here with any reader unfamiliar with Old English to encourage them, if not to improvise as translators themselves, at least to undertake a reading backwards. Indeed, the following section of Truant's appendices contains not the first but the second quotation that Pelafina includes in one of her letters without further comment. Truant this time specifies the source, the editors provide a translation in a footnote, thus breaking the language barrier previously established on condition, of course, that this reiteration is recognized as such by the active reader, [21]

Another aspect of the first occurrence is particularly interesting for this study .

First, it is the fact of learning that her son gets into many fights at school, which leads to his exclusion, which motivates Pelafina's quotation. Instead of condemning such behavior, she marvels at it .

The first quotation from *The Battle of Maldon* is preceded by the following sentences: "My little Viking warrior! Let the monsters all tremble! Let tomorrow's Mead Halls rejoice. Their Viking soon will come. [22]" Now, the Old English poem relates the Battle of Maldon in which ended with a defeat of the Anglo-Saxon army against the Viking invaders .

From a linguistic point of view, this passage from *House of Leaves* thus builds a bridge between the impact that such a Viking victory represents for the future of Old English, then already prey to the

influences of Old Norse, and the temporary barrier, as explained above, that the equally temporary return to Old English creates .

Thus, through the characters of Pelafina and Truant his intradiegetic reader, Danielewski illustrates a form of linguistic entropy that invites the reader to undertake the symbolic recreation of modern English [23].

The author emphasizes the power of words, text and literature poetry, in this case on and through History; Pelafina continues his letter in these terms: (GIBBONS, Alison (2010)).

Well if you must strike then I certainly won't stand in your way. Just remember words can exceed the might of all blows. In some cases they can be fatal. For the rare few, even immortal.

This metatextual pirouette is another way for Danielewski to confuse the fictional origin of the labyrinth of *House of Leaves*, this destroyer of symbols ("symbol destroyer") 993 and therefore of language which is situated outside of History, time and human space.

On the other hand, like Alana's story in *Theories of Forgetting*, Pelafina's relapses are reflected in increasingly incoherent writing and typography, a cause-and-effect relationship that the director of the institute implicitly establishes in a letter he addresses to Truant. 994 As with Navidson, Zampanò, and Truant, the progressive destruction of language and text makes the threat of death hang over Pelafina. Nevertheless, she seems fully aware of her dire destiny, which she underlines typographically a few pages later, in fact, a second letter from the director announces to Truant the suicide of his mother, [24] An essential element of the narrative structure of *The Book of Dave*, the notion of linguistic entropy has an equally deadly character for the characters. It also erects a new form of linguistic barrier at the intra- and extradiegetic levels of the novel.

The hostile and deadly environment in which the inhabitants of Ham Island survive is mainly the result of the forgetting of the past, that is, the loss of knowledge and learning prior to the cataclysm marking the separation of the contemporary and futuristic narratives of the novel [25].

This ideological disappearance in the dystopian diegesis is explained by the disappearance of the text and literature at the time of the flood; only Dave's book, printed on metal plates and then buried, is said to have survived.

In addition to depicting a dysfunctional worldview, the (written) content of Dave's book, written in "Arpee", [26] is only accessible to the priests of the PCO. In contrast, the rest of the population, illiterate, communicates mainly in Mokni dialect, the speech of the subaltern. Whether Arpee or Mokni, the futuristic language is impoverished and distorted because it comes directly from the book of a depressed and psychotic taxi driver .

Orwellian, in order to establish his religious domination over the futuristic society. It is this linguistic entropy that represents a mortal danger for Symun, then accused of heresy and forced to recite from memory certain passages of Dave's book during his appearances: (AMBROSIO, Mariano d (2016)).

In the broad Mokni of Ham the runs were strings of meaningless gibberish and while Symun knew enough to differentiate one from the other in his own mind, he was by no means certain that he could convince a prejudicial examiner that his was the correct version. [27].

Like the photogravures of Bella's letter in *Poor Things*, the Mokni passages slow down the reading, the dialect and its spelling being built on an essentially oral understanding of the English language .

On the other hand, these passages also authentically represent the spoken language of the futuristic characters (like the accent), which is an ironic reference to Cockney. Paradoxically, it is Arpee, standard British English, and not Mokni, that erects a linguistic and hierarchical barrier within the dystopian society. This barrier reflects the social one that separates the RP from the Cockney and that Dave strives in vain to cross. [28]

Ironically, Dave's second book, which seeks to break down the social barriers incited by the first, [29] does not stand the test of time and the elements. It is above all the mystery surrounding its existence that gives the futuristic protagonists the energy needed to rebel against the established order, which is another form of creative destruction of text and language. [30]

1.2. Consumption and creative energy

Like the sun by its rays, fire by its flames symbolizes the fertilizing, purifying and illuminating action but it also presents a negative aspect:

it obscures and suffocates by its smoke; it burns, devours, destroys the fire of passions, of punishment, of war.

According to Paul Diel's analytical interpretation, the earthly fire symbolizes the intellect, that is to say, consciousness, with all its ambivalence, [31].

This definition of the ambivalent symbol of fire illustrates the apocalyptic episode closing Lanark's story, where the city of Unthank (Glasgow) is in flames. From the necropolis, Lanark first sees there the beginnings of the Calvinist apocalypse envisaged by Nastler, [32] which calls for no renewal, the soteriology of Calvinism emphasizing the inability of human beings to obtain salvation without the grace of God. [33]

This destruction by the "fire of punishment", that of the pseudo-divine retribution of the intradiegetic author, hinders communication between the characters:

"Tell me what's happening, please," said Rima. She lay curled on the ground with her hands over her eyes. Everybody lay on the ground except Alexander, who knelt beside the radio transmitter earnestly turning knobs.

Behind the burning building was a great band of ruddy light with clouds rising into it from collapsed and collapsing roofs. There were no other lights. "First the fire, then the flood!" cried Lanark exultingly, "Well, I have had an interesting life".

"You're as selfish as ever!" shrieked Rima..

"Be quiet, I'm trying to contact Defence Command," said Alexander, [34]

However, at sunrise, fire becomes a symbol of purification and regeneration:

] Lanark] looked sideways and saw the sun coming up golden behind a laurel bush, light blinking, space dancing among the shifting leaves. Drunk with spaciousness he turned every way, gazing with wide-open mouth and eyes as light created colours, clouds, distances and solid, graspable things close at hand. Among all this light the flaming buildings seemed small blazes which would soon burn out. With only mild disappointment he saw the flood ebbing back down the slope of the road. [35]

This is followed by a restoration of oral and body language allowing Lanark and Rima to communicate again, despite the persistence of the surrounding destruction(BARRETT, Laura(2011).

Rima came beside him and said teasingly, "Wrong again, Lanark".

He nodded, sighed, and said, "Rima, did you ever love me?" She laughed, held him and kissed his cheek. She said, "Of course I did, even though you kept driving me away so nastily and so often. They've started shooting again.[36]

From a metafictional point of view, the inversion of the symbolism of fire allows Nastler to continue his writing for a few pages. It also allows Gray to substitute the notion of creation for the purely destructive character that the intradiegetic author associates with the theme of the end. [37]

The incompleteness of the Calvinist apocalypse envisaged by Nastler also finds an analytical interpretation in the symbolism of water, the antagonistic principle of fire, [38] Devoid of a real flood, the apocalypse that occurs in Lanark and which is resisted by the statue of John Knox ("symbol of the tyranny of the mind which can yield to death but not to tenderness") brings the eponymous character a purification "by light and truth", without Nastler showing "kindness towards him: the intradiegetic author always reserves for Lanark a death that promises to be anything but peaceful. [39]

In this sense, the end orchestrated by Nastler desacralizes the apocalypse as much as his own text.

Fire plays a similarly ambivalent symbolic role in House of Leaves, though more ostensibly a metatextual one. Like the series of "X"s Truant uses to transcribe the ink-covered portions of Zampanò's text, the brackets framing an empty space in translate the burned areas, [40]

The two typographic processes therefore illustrate two forms of textual destruction and linguistic entropy, Once again Truant's interest lies more in the mysterious circumstances of such destruction by fire than in the text itself thus consumed, another way for Danielewski to fuel the playful and contradictory dimension of his metafiction:(JAMET, Thomas(2011).

Unfortunately I have no idea what stuff did the actual charring. It's way too copious for cigarette tappings, and anyway Zampano didn't smoke .

Another small mystery to muse over, if you like, or just forget, which I recommend. Though even I'm unable to follow my own advice, imagining instead gray ash floating down like snow everywhere, after the blast but still hours before that fabled avalanche of heat, the pyroclastic roar that will incinerate everything. even if for the time being-and there still is time...it's just small flakes leisurely kissing away tiny bits of meaning, while high above, the eruption continues to black out the sun.

Truant's imagined end of the world is not so far removed from the one Nastler envisions in Lanark. Nevertheless, while remaining implicit, the metatextual parallel that Danielewski draws with the end of Truant's utterance, and of the utterance of House of Leaves, appears more clearly than in Gray's novel: Truant's vision occurs on page 323 of the novel, which leaves the reader several hours of reading before reaching the seven hundred and ninth and final page: "there still is time."...

The image of a book burning at the very moment of its reception refers to two other episodes in Danielewski's novel where the time devoted to its reading is also counted, but where the destruction by fire this time reveals its negative and positive aspects. These are the two passages describing the more or less deliberate auto-da-fé (literally "act of faith") of House of Leaves, one by Navidson the other by Truant, a classic metafictional device symbolizing the end of the text and its desacralization par excellence .

The second occurrence highlights the ambivalent character of fire:(BARRETT, Laura(2011).

The book is burning. At last. A strange light scans each page, memorizing all of it even as each character twists into ash. At least the fire is warm, warming my hands, warming my face, parting the darkest waters of the deepest eye, even if at the same time it casts long shadows on the world, the cost of any pyre, finally heated beyond recovery, shattered into specters of dust, stolen by the sky, flung to sea and sand, [42]

On the one hand, the fire comforts Truant by the warmth it gives off as much as by relegating to memory and to the past the danger represented by the "house of leaves"; on the other, it darkens the world by signing the end of the text and of literature. Also apparent in this image is a form of purification "by light and truth" ("parting the darkest waters of the deepest eye"), in all the ambivalence that a new knowledge, a new clarity, can imply on the individual and universal scales.

Navidson's burning of House of Leaves reflects similar ideas, albeit under different circumstances and with a purpose opposite to Truant's, whose goal is to get rid of the book ("at last"). Navidson is primarily forced to resort to fire as he sinks inexorably into the dark depths of the labyrinth:

Taking a tiny sip of water and burying himself deeper in his sleeping bag, he turns his attention to the last possible activity, the only book in his possession: House of Leaves.

"But all I have for light is one book of matches and the duration of each ma" (for whatever reason the tape cuts off here). [43]

The next two pages feature humorous speculations about the origin of the matches used by the protagonist, their burning time, and the length of each page of the book, which Navidson is forced to light one after the other in order to continue reading :

However, despite the fictional researcher's conjectures about Navidson's average reading speed, a complete reading of House of Leaves under these conditions is humanly impossible; all the more so since the consumption of the text is added, in the haste, a form of loss:

Hans Staker's pseudo-scientific theories, despite their ironic and metafictional character, [46] nevertheless open the way to the positive aspect of the symbolism of fire, which Zampanó associates with reading and, more generally, with literature:

In the end Navidson is left with one page and one match for a long time he waits in darkness and cold, postponing this final bit of illumination. At last though, he grips the match by the neck and after locating the friction strip sparks to life a final ball of light.

First, he reads a few lines by match light and then as the heat bites his fingertips he applies the flame to the page. Here then is one end: a final act of reading, a final act of consumption. [47]

The use of this last term, "consumption", generates through its polysemy an ambivalence as to the nature of the end of *House of Leaves*, symbolized by the act of consuming the book as much as by its consumption at the moment of reading: the syntactic construction of the sentence in question, more specifically the comma separating "a final act of reading" and "a final act of consumption" presents the two propositions as equivalent and, at the same time, it distinguishes one from the other while connecting them by fire ("one end"), the common reason for their final character. It is therefore also a question here of the consumerism specific to current Western society of which the figure of the pseudo-academic, represented by the character of Hans Staker, is an example.

Moreover, the succession of the two auto-da-fés in *House of Leaves* acts as a new spotlight on the intra-metaleptic processes that feed Danielewski's metafiction .

Indeed, the destruction by fire of Truant puts into perspective that of Navidson and fictionalizes it, once again blurring the lines as to the intradiegetic origin of the book .

The comparison of the following two passages thus underlines the fictional nature of Navidson and, to a lesser extent, that of Truant (who seems already to have become aware of it), [48] two characters made of ink and paper whose hands would be reduced to ashes at the mere contact of fire:(Isabelle ROBLIN(2015)

And as the fire rapidly devours the paper, Navidson's eyes frantically sweep down over the text, keeping just ahead of the necessary immolation, until as he reaches the last few words, flames lick around his hands, ash peels off into the surrounding emptiness.

A strange light scans each page, memorizing all of it even as each character twists into ash. At least the fire is warm, warming my hands [49]

Related to that of fire, the symbolism of ash is just as ambivalent. By its residual value, ash represents what remains after the extinction of the fire, therefore, anthropocentrically, the corpse, the residue of the body after the fire of life has been extinguished. [50]

Chevalier and Gheerbrant specify however that "everything associated with death falls, with it, under the symbolism of the eternal return", mentioning a few lines later the example of the Phoenix bird that rises from its ashes. [51]

From a metatextual point of view, the intradiegetic auto-da-fé of *House of Leaves* therefore represents a symbolic destruction that calls for the renewal of the text and the literary work.

Chapter two: Faith and ethics

Examining the textual desacralization at work in the metafiction of the corpus also involves noting the ways in which they thematize the question of the sacred it will thus be a question of demonstrating that the processes of intra- and extradiegetic textual dynamiting observed above reflect similar questions relating to the faith of some of the authors. intradiegetic of the corpus .

In Danielewski, Gray and Self, the sacred duality Eros-Thanatos governing the human condition of their author-characters, according to Freudian thought, is openly called into question a form of desacralization of their fictional existence that they breathe into their literary and artistic creations.(PAREY, Armelle(2018)

The analysis will also focus on the moral dimension of such intradiegetic authorial postures, which call into question the reading contract established with the reader we will see that the death drives attributed to the characters in question sometimes reflect a difficulty in speaking, sometimes a renunciation of speaking, in other words an exhaustion of their speech: this is again the characteristic of writing as unwriting zpart from the theme of the sacred, these forms of decadence, disintegration and/or discursive debacle in fact permeate all the novels in the corpus .

They thus highlight the similar approaches adopted by Danielewski, Gray, Olsen and Self to question the future of authorial speech, by presenting themselves as an element of response to their common desire to mistreat the text through metafiction.

2.1 Eros-Thanatos

[T] he human species is the only one for whom death is present during life, the only one that accompanies death with a funeral ritual, the only one that believes in the survival or rebirth of the dead. [52]

As Edgar Morin points out, for whom the idea of death encompasses "the refusal of death, the myths of survival, resurrection, immortality", [53] human life is necessarily imbued with the sacred. Morin's anthropology is based, among other things, on the conflict between the life drives (Eros) and death drives (Thanatos) which, according to Freud, are the foundations of psychic life, [54]

Danielewski, Gray and Self implement a form of imbalance within the drive tension that defines some of their intradiegetic authors, an instability generally but not always symbolizing the victory of Thanatos over Eros. (Revolutionary Closure in A. S. Byatt's Neo-Victorian Fiction, 2019).

It is then madness that strikes the characters in question, when they are not directly drawn into death. In *Lanark*, the plagiarism index entry devoted to Freud, marked by irony (towards the psychoanalyst's theories) and self-mockery (towards Gray himself), underlines the psychic disorder of the intradiegetic author Nastler:

Difflags in every chapter. Only a writer unhealthily obsessed by all of Dr. Freud's psycho-sexual treatises would stuff a novel with more oral, anal and respiratory symbols, more Oedipal encounters with pleasure-reality/Eros-thanatos substitutes, more recapitulations of the birth-trauma than I have space to summarize. (See also DISNEY, GOD and JUNG.) [55]

At first glance, the entry reveals the ascendancy of the sexual drive, thematically associated with the pleasure principle and the life drive, over the death drive in Nastler .

However, coupled with the Promethean character of his life condition, Nastler's discourse on the theme of the end [56] rather than that of the beginning ("birth-trauma") - suggests that his neurosis rather stems from an excess of thanatos, an uncontrolled death drive that infiltrates his own text.

Nastler's discrediting suggests not only that of culture and theory, represented here by Walt Disney, God, and Carl Jung, three attempts to explain the world through popular culture, religious myth, and pseudoscientific theory, respectively .

This dynamiting also resonates with *Lanark*'s event of spiritual purification, which is the subject of the three entries to which Freud's entry refers. Like the Disney and Jung entries, the one devoted to God refers to *Lanark*'s moment of being swallowed by a gaping mouth emerging from the ground, an ambivalent metaphor for the mouth of truth since it evokes another form of thanatos, illustrated here by a catabasis .

The entry in question further underlines the biblical intertextuality in the narrative of the eponymous character: (LEJEUNE, Philippe.(2001).

The presumed mythification of *Lanark*'s life is, however, "reversed" in Jung's entry, which specifies that the ingestion of the character transports him to the Institute, which is, among other things, a metaphorical representation of Thomas Hobbes' Leviathan:

Nearly every chapter of the book is a Difflag of the mythic "Night Journey of the Hero" described in that charming but practically useless treatise *Psychology and Alchemy* .

This is most obvious in the purification by swallowing at the end of chapter 6 But the hero, *Lanark*, gains an unJungian political dimension by being swallowed by Hobbes's Leviathan. [58]

Nastler's thanatos also echoes the death drives that haunt Thaw (in the form of a raven) [59] before leading him to commit suicide by drowning.

This is again an ambivalent act, like the oxymoron concluding Thaw's, [113] since it brings together the ideas of purification (by immersion) and transgression of the sacred character of life .

The page describing Thaw's suicide is placed opposite the frontispiece of Book 4, whose main illustration is a direct reference to Hobbes' Leviathan the juxtaposition of the two pages thus suggests that it is the spiritual corruption of Thaw and *Lanark* that links their existences, reflecting the psychic life of their intradiegetic author.

The identity of the intradiegetic author of *House of Leaves* remains ambiguous throughout the novel; nevertheless, the psychic life of the main author-characters, namely Navidson, Zampanò, Truant and Pelafina, is troubled by death drives .

Zampanò and Pelafina pay a high price for this, while Navidson and Truant come close to self-destruction. Truant reveals his suicidal tendencies in a digression relating an altercation he had in a bar:(DIEL, Paul.(1952)

He was twice my size, bigger and stronger. That should of mattered. For some reason it didn't. Odds were he'd rip me to pieces, probably even try to stomp me, and yet part of me still wanted to find out for sure. Luckily, the alcohol returned. I got wobbly and then I got scared.

Lude was yelling at me.

"You got a death wish Truant"?

Which was the thing that scared me.

'Cause maybe I did, [60]

The section of Chapter XIII devoted to the character of Holloway, more precisely to the (self)destructive madness that takes hold of him in the labyrinth, [61] questions the origin of his suicidal impulses before contrasting them with those of Will Navidson. [62]

The theme of thanatos returns later to the center of Zampanò's reflection, in Chapter XVII which is structured around the reasons pushing Navidson to return to explore the house on Ash Tree Lane after the death of his brother Tom.

Zampanò then contrasts several interpretations, presented as schools of thought, 1089 whose humorous names are partly made up of the names of their authors. One of them, called "The Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria" and then "The Criteria", suggests that Navidson's katabatic return to the labyrinth would be motivated by "projections" (in the Freudian sense of the term, as a defense mechanism) pushing him unwittingly back into the void, or rather: "the blankness of that place, "the utter and perfect blankness." [63]

Zampanò continues:

It is nevertheless the underlying position of The Bister-Frieden-Josephson Criteria that Navidson in fact relied on such projections in order to deny his increasingly more "powerful and motivating Thanatos ". In the end, he sought nothing less than to see the house exact its annihilating effects on his own being. Again quoting directly from The Criteria :

"Navidson has one deeply acquired organizing perception: there is no hope of survival there life is impossible and therein lies the lesson of the house, spoken in syllables of absolute silence, resounding within him like a faint and uncertain echo... If we desire to live, we can only do so in the margins of that place.[64]

This statement reinforces the metatextual aspect of The Criteria theory, highlighting it three times by means of italics, the underscore and the polysemy of the term "margins" which refers both to the limits of the fictional labyrinth and to the margin of the sheet of paper. (Abrams , M. H. et al. Eds.(2020).

The theory of The Criteria is an implicit reference to the fictional nature of the protagonists' existence . Concerning Zampanò who, let us recall, is suspected of having invented The Navidson Record (including The Criteria), Eros would have succumbed to Thanatos for the simple reason that his story occupies the body of the text of *House of Leaves* and not its margin which is reserved for the story of Truant, for example.

The Criteria devotes the second part of its analysis to the other side of the sacred duality of life, in other words to the life drive ("desire to live") guiding Navidson's choices. However, this is to better highlight the self-destructive behavior ("desire for self-destruction") of the protagonist in his ambivalent desire to reach the confines of Danielewski's "house of leaves ".

The Criteria illustrates its point with a Latin epigraph accompanied by the following gloss (taken from the Book of Exodus, although the source is not specified:

"Non enim videbit me homo et vivet", which is explained in a note by the editors: "Maurice Blanchot translates this as "whoever sees God dies." [65]

Zampano's commentary then confirms the metatextual dimension of the reference to the divine in House of Leaves, which is none other than the Minotaur hidden in the white of the page :

Herein lies the (metafictional) explanation of Zampano's premature death, more than ever the figure of the Icarian exegete annihilated by his quest for the essence of the << house of leaves, which is intended to be as elusive as death.

The Criteria bases its analysis of the sacred Eros-Thanatos duality governing Navidson's human condition on the letter he addresses to Karen before his departure .

Reproduced by Zampano, this letter nevertheless brings an additional metatextual dimension to the old exegete's remarks by extending them to literature itself, that is to say to all novels (printed or not) of which Danielewski's "House of Leaves" is only one example:

Do you believe in God? I don't think I ever asked you that one. Well I do now. But my God isn't your Catholic varietal or your Judaic or Mormon or Baptist or Seventh Day Adventist or whatever/ whoever. No burning bush, no angels, no cross. God's a house. Which is not to say that our house is God's house or even a house of God. What I mean to say is that our house is God.

Think I've lost my mind? Maybe, maybe, maybe Maybe just really drunk. Pretty crazy you have to admit. I just made God a street address, [67]

The risk of this quest for the very essence of fiction ("the margins of that place"), which oscillates between Eros ("desire to live") and Thanatos ("desire for self-destruction"), is if not death, at least madness and the disintegration of language, which are also found at the confines of literature, on the margins or in an in-between position ("Maybe, maybe, maybe Maybe .

Danielewski thus suggests that the sacred character of literature and fiction is not only independent of any religion, it must also be constantly examined and questioned as we have seen, the series of "X"s following Navidson's statement represents part of the letter that Zampanò crossed out in ink, an act of desacralization of his own fiction. (Almatore, Watheq Ghazi (2022)

Similarly, Navidson's final trivial remark immediately demystifies his point by refocusing it on Danielewski's "house of leaves," which he simultaneously demystifies by reducing it to a postal address, or to a simple novel title: House of Leaves.

In Dorian, the metafictional questioning - rather than the quest for the essence of fiction - is particularly articulated around the relationship between Cathode Narcissus and the character of Dorian Gray.

Both combining immortality and debasement, their states of sacralization and/or desacralization remain doubtful throughout the novel .

Here again, this ambivalence reflects the trouble of the sacred duality that defines the existence of their creator, Basil Hallward .

Although Henry Wotton considers it as the paragon of the sexual drive (going beyond eroticism), [68]

Baz's screen installation symbolizes first and foremost the love he has for Dorian:

I've always loved you. I loved you when I made Narcissus. If you really look at it it's obvious that I loved you then and I still do now. It's a love letter, that piece, a fucking love letter, it's not some mad fetish that keeps you looking young. [69]

It is nevertheless Cathode Narcissus who costs him his life when he is violently assassinated by Dorian, who then manifests a death wish in an act of madness :

>>Blood spurted and sprayed around the two figures as the starveling ghouls on the screens cavorted and leered.. Dorian howled and even lapped at the splatter. >>[70]

Dorian's passing madness announces his coming suicide, the triumph of the death drive over the life drive, a sacred duality perverted by the narcissistic character of his existence:

On the seventh day of sitting and staring at the hated cardigan-wearer, Dorian got the switchblade out and opened it. It was the one he'd used to kill the creator it would do for the creation as well. No, don't! the ninth Narcissus begged. Don't do anything foolish, Dorian... [71]

Symbolized by the switchblade, the role reversal between Dorian and Baz reflects Baz's own death drive. [72]

At the time of his assassination, this drive translates into an inability to say:

Despite all the death he had already witnessed, the thanatos he was steeped in, Baz discovered that he'd rather not take a permanent nap .

The poor sick withered Dorians danced in the darkening periphery of his vision as he grappled with this hellcat Dorian who was stapling him to the present. Oh to get away! To get back! Get off me! Baz wanted to shout, supremely irritated to be dying in such a lousy frame of mind. [73]

It is this same inability to say that motivates Wotton to create his (meta)fiction .

His story represents in fact a form of exhaustion of his authorial speech, its intrinsic paradox being that which characterizes his own version of Cathode Narcissus and the life of Baz :

the story Wotton's is also a love letter to Dorian, [74] expressing at the same time the death drive of the intradiegetic author, [75].

The following analysis will show that, as in Dorian, the death drives of the intradiegetic authors of Danielewski and Gray reflect an exhaustion of authorial speech we will also see that the deontological question implied by these discursive postures extends beyond the idea of thanatos and concerns all the metafiction of the corpus.

.2.2Decadence, disintegration, collapse

Concerning the act of writing in particular, deontology and, more broadly, morality [76] occupy a position of contradiction when applied to postmodernist works, due to the collapse of the ideologies that characterize them .

The forms of desacralization observed in the context of this chapter have demonstrated this since they each time call into question the moral character of the metafiction of the corpus. (Akinbode, O. (2023) Through these different processes of creative textual, linguistic and symbolic destruction, Danielewski, Gray, Olsen and Self thus illustrate the idea of an exhaustion of authorial speech, forced to constantly renew its textual support, and therefore to renew itself, at the turn of the 21st century it is in this postmodern logic that the four authors under study examine the future of authorial speech by presenting it if not as immoral, at least as the expression of deontological dilemmas.

Considered above in Lanark, Nastler's thanatos presents himself as both the creator and the destroyer of his metadiegetic universe and underlines the lack of moral conscience he displays in the face of the crimes committed by History:

After a silence the conjuror said querulously, "I can't change my overall plan now. Why should I be kinder than my century? The millions of Children who've been vilely murdered this Century is don't hit me [77] Gray suggests here that the great ideological upheavals of the twentieth century, including its many deadly conflicts, have profoundly affected the narrative itself. Lanark's encounter with his intradiegetic author thus ends with the latter's literal disintegration, symbolizing that of his own authorial speech:

>>Lanark had only tensed his muscles but the conjuror slid down the bed and pulled the covers over his head; they subsided until they lay perfectly flat on the mattress. » [78]

Indeed, it is to the uncertain future of authorial speech, faced with the postmodern revelation of the absence of telos, that Nastler alludes before dismissing his protagonist :

>>I wish I could make you like death a little more. It's a great preserver. Without it the loveliest things change slowly into farce, as you will discover if you insist on having much more life. »[79]

Gray manipulates the moral, deontological question relating to the act of writing from the first chapters of Lanark in order to better take his reader by surprise at the time of the epilogue .

Indeed, the metatextual questioning of the art of storytelling is evident in chapter 3, entitled "Manuscript", which presents itself as the autobiographical story of the eponymous character.

Lanark's writing fever is however short-lived since the opening of chapter 4 marks the return of a supposedly omniscient narration, Lanark's writing being further discredited by Sludden: (Priebe, R. (2021)

Sludden read a couple of pages, flicked through the rest, then handed it back saying, "It's dead. Perhaps you're more naturally a painter. I mean, it's good that you've tried to do something. I'm pleased about that, but what you've written there is dead, [80]

In addition to the metafictional wink that Sludden's remark represents (Gray was himself a painter, as was Thaw, his diegetic avatar and Lanark's earlier incarnation), the reader discovers in reverse that Lanark's authorial speech is in fact interrupted by Nastler, whose thanatos is here salient ("dead).

Here again, the author highlights the moral problem linked to the art of storytelling, let alone telling oneself, in the age of postmodernity:

"your dull experiences. If a writer doesn't enjoy words for their own sake how can the reader enjoy them"?

"But I do enjoy words some words for their own sake! Words like river, and dawn, and daylight, and time. These words seem much richer than our experiences of the things they represent [81]

On the one hand, Sludden criticizes Lanark for focusing too much on the truth to the detriment of the pleasure of the narrative and the text. On the other hand, the words that Lanark considers profound and aesthetic in themselves no longer refer to true things in the dystopian universe of the novel .

Only a "flat" writing, stripped of aesthetic pleasure, therefore allows Lanark to give his reader a personal truth that goes beyond his individuality to represent the collective reality of Unthank. Moreover, Sludden's remark is also a metatextual reference to the materiality of the page devoid of relief and, in a proleptic and ironic way, to the materiality of Nastler himself who ends up becoming as flat as the writing style he attributes to Lanark. (Almatore, Watheq Ghazi (2022).

In *Poor Things*, Gray also confronts several fictional voices that place the question of the future of authorial speech at the center of the debate proposed by the novel. It is this same question that the intradiegetic editor highlights when he quotes the following extract from Victoria's letter in his introduction:

I cannot laugh at this book. I shudder at it and thank the Life Force that my late husband had just this single copy printed and bound. I have burned... the original manuscript and would have burned this too, as he suggests... but alas! it is almost the only evidence left that the poor fool existed, [82]

As in *House of Leaves*, the auto-da-fé aims to destroy an authorial word above all. Archie being a fictional character, the destruction by fire of his story would have signified more than his symbolic death: his non-existence.

Danielewski brings together the notions of thanatos and morality when he stages the two intradiegetic auto-da-fés of *House of Leaves*. He also does so through the letter that Navidson addresses to Karen before resuming the exploration of the labyrinth, more specifically that of the void that constitutes it ("the utter and perfect blankness"). [83]

As we have seen, Navidson's perilous quest is that of the very essence of fiction that he describes as divine in his letter ("our house is God"). The protagonist abruptly interrupts the reflection that led him to this affirmation before evoking the ethical controversy that torments him, as if they were two subjects with no apparent connection between them: "Forget all that last part, just forget it." [84]

The effect produced is nevertheless quite different, the preterition reinforcing the transition linking his remarks.

It is the mystery surrounding Delial's name that is then revealed to the reader at the same time as to Kare the reader thus learns that it is the name given by Navidson to a Sudanese girl, since starved to death, whom he photographed during one of his reports, a photo that earned him the Pulitzer Prize. [85]

This revelation once again blurs the line between fiction and reality since the photograph really exists, as does the ethical controversy that accompanied the fame it earned its author, the photojournalist Kevin Carter.

He committed suicide shortly after receiving the Pulitzer Prize for this photo taken in 1994 during the 1993 famine in Sudan.

Concerning Navidson, it is his writing that disintegrates under the weight of guilt and thanatos, even if he justifies this linguistic entropy by his state of drunkenness. Its typography becomes increasingly confusing, with repetitions further signaling the presence of trauma:

Jmiss miss miss but i didn't miss i got her along with the vulture in the background when the real vulture was the guy with the camera preying on her for his fuck pulitzer prize i wish i were dead right now i wish i were dead that poor little baby this god god awful world im sorry i cant stop thinking of her never have never will [86]

Navidson's turmoil then appears as the reason for the existential quest he leads within the labyrinth:

i miss her i miss delia i miss the man i thought i was before i met her the man who would have saved her who would have done something who would have been tom maybe hes the one im looking for or maybe im looking for all of them [87]

It is therefore a difficulty in saying or a renunciation of doing so through death that is at the origin of The Navidson Record and, by successive metaleptic leaps, of the novel House of Leaves itself .

The deontological questioning that such an authorial posture, shared by Navidson, Zampanò and Truant [88] and by the intradiegetic authors of Theories of Forgetting, in turn raises, comes mainly from the fact that it renegotiates the reading contract established between the intra- and/or extradiegetic author and his reader .

Moreover, as in Olsen's metafiction and like Navidson's letter cited above, the autobiographical stories of House of Leaves that emerge from this authorial posture often go against the principle of readability as an aesthetic and ethical norm, [89]

Self uses similar metafictional and metatextual devices in his metafiction as in Dorian, the author places the question of the exhaustion of authorial speech and its future at the center of The Book of Dave. In the futuristic narrative of the novel, the speech of Dave Rudman, the author of the sacred book, is exhausted in a dynamic of decadence by being distorted by the religious oligarchy .

In addition to the immoral nature of the content of his book, the composition of which stems primarily from Dave's inability to express his anger and hatred, it is also incomprehensible to the futuristic society since only members of the PCO have access to it .

Furthermore, the reading contract that Dave establishes with his son Carl, the recipient of the book, is null and void from the start due to the psychotic state that motivates his writing process; it is even more so in the dystopian narrative since it is an entire community that receives the book, failing to be received by Carl himself. Moreover, like Nastler's sleight of hand ("trick") in Lanark, the exhaustion of Dave's authorial speech is symbolized by the disappearance of his second book, a two-level unwriting.(Abrams , M. H. et al. Eds.(2020((

The Book of Dave denounces less the immorality of the sacred text than the dangers of religious fanaticism this ambiguity is apparent in the conclusion that Carl draws from the epiphany during which Dave appears to him to announce the imminence of the Apocalypse :

More broadly, Self thus questions the ambivalence of the power of authorial speech, over which the speaker of the latter no longer has control once the work is published.

Underlined a contrario by Gray in the epilogue of Lanark, this loss of control of the author over his work and his speech is what constitutes the crux of the six metafictional under study. It is in fact the repetitions of speech of the characters of the corpus among themselves that form the novels of Danielewki, Gray, Olsen and Self. [91] .

The effects of textual and linguistic desacralization engendered by these narrative dynamics of creative destruction reflect the desire of the four authors to represent, by means of fiction and the book, a moving and increasingly elusive reality at the turn of the new millennium.

While authorial speech must now seek to continually renew itself so as not to become exhausted, a "new writing practice" is emerging, similar to that discussed by Barthes. [92] As Régis Debray points out:

"we only destroy what we replace." [93] Thus, as it appears in the metafiction of the corpus, the desacralization of the text seems to operate a "transfer of sacredness" (to quote Debray once again) not only towards the author-reader relationship itself, but also towards the relationship that animates communities of readers, such as that which Danielewski's work brings together on the Internet, for example. (LEJEUNE, Philippe.(2001)

The solution to the exhaustion of authorial speech would be found in questioning these extradiegetic relationships within fiction itself, as a writing process. It is therefore the figure of the author as a storyteller that must be redefined.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the exploration of writing and unwriting in contemporary English-language metafiction, as seen through the works of Mark Z. Danielewski, Alasdair Gray, Lance Olsen, and Will Self, reveals a complex interplay between narrative construction and deconstruction. These authors blur the boundaries of traditional storytelling, using innovative techniques that challenge readers to question the very nature of authorship, reality, and fiction.

The paradoxical endings in their works reflect a deeper commentary on the instability of meaning and the inevitability of uncertainty in modern literature. As metafiction continues to evolve, it remains a powerful tool for reflecting on the processes of creation and interpretation, urging both writers and readers to confront the endless possibilities of what can be written and unwritten.

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Footnotes

1. See supra, << Polyphonic Instability and Resolution », p. 126 and « Aestheticizing Silence », pp. 147-148.
2. OLSEN, Lance. *Theories of Forgetting*, op. cit., p. 33.
3. GRAY, Alasdair. *Poor Things*, op. cit., pp.
4. Ibid., p. 151.
5. Ibid., p. 102.
6. Ibid., p. 144.
7. Ibid., p. 145.
8. Archie describes the phenomenon in these terms: A catastrophic reversion to an earlier phase with a brisk recovery at the end ». Ibid., p. 151.
9. The symbol in question is inserted directly after the following sentence: « I give the pages here as they were given to me: ». Ibid., p. 144.
10. See supra, "Organicity of the Textual Body," note 736, p. 248.
11. Truant's note 279 mentions this: "These Xs indicate text was inked out not burned.">>>> DANIELEWSKI, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 328. The reference to fire will be the subject of the next point.
12. Ibid., p. 354. See also notes 283 and 284 on p. 330. The three editorial indications referring to missing pages in Truant's typescript perform a similar metatextual function.
13. Ibid., pp. 372, 377 and 403. The last indication is followed by note 389, consisting of five entirely blank lines, which in turn generates Truant's note 390, giving rise to further digressions on his part.
14. The note opening section D, entitled "Obituary", reads: "At Mr. Truant's request, we have omitted the last name of his father as well as several other details./ The Editors"; that of section E, entitled "The Three Attic Whalestoe Institute Letters", states: Mr. Truant wished to make known that though some names here were not deleted many were changed./ The Editors". Ibid., p. 584 and 586, respectively.
15. Ibid., p. 360.
16. Ibid., p. 376.
17. Ibid., pp. 461 and 463.

18. Ibid., pp. 455-460. The tubes are inserted within the framework of this study to indicate page changes.
19. Ibid., p. 462.
20. Ibid., p. 464.
21. Ibid., p. 423. My emphasis.
22. Ibid., p. 595.
23. Ibid., pp. 601 and 653.
24. Section F Various Quotes » is mainly structured around the idea of language barriers since it consists of various quotations reproduced in their original language, ranging from French to ancient Greek to Neapolitan. Nevertheless, these quotations are all accompanied by a translation proposed by the editors. As if to complete the symbolic destruction of the linguistic barrier, the section also contains a passage from the Iliad reproduced in its original version as well as in official Italian, German, Russian, French and English translations.
25. Ibid., pp. 648-450. 991 Ibid., p. 595.
26. Ibid. 993 Ibid., p. 360.
27. Ibid., p. 639. The use of X to indicate the erasure of Johnny Truant's surname and contact details suggests that he was the originator.
28. Ibid., p. 643.
29. See supra, "The Dying Microcosm," pp. 161-162.
30. The term is a corruption of the acronym RP, for Received Pronunciation, which designates the pronunciation in standard British English. SELF, Will. *The Book of Dave*, op. cit., p. 185.
31. "What am I doing here? Dave said to himself with Received Pronunciation, as Mrs Hedges's Hs fell on the floor by his feet and Ts stopped up his companions throats. This isn't me, it's an act... because Dave hadn't dropped his Hs he'd flung them away from himself, ninja stars that stuck quivering in the smoky bacon Victorian woodwork. » Ibid., p. 94.
32. Ibid., pp. 420-421.
33. A second Book could prove beyond any doubt that Ham was the cradle of our faith... Undermine the pretended claims of the Davidic line... Circumscribe the very turning circle of the PCO itself... » Ibid., p. 434.
34. CHEVALIER, Jean and Alain GHEERBRANT. *Dictionnaire des symboles. Mythes, rêves, coutumes, gestes, formes, figures, couleurs, nombres* (1969), Paris: Bouquins éditions, 2021, p. 505.
35. See also DIEL, Paul. *Le Symbolisme dans la mythologie grecque* (1952), Paris: Payot, 1966, pp. 37-38.
36. Nastler's presentation of it in *Lanark* ends as follows: "Anyway, your eyes finally close upon the sight of John Knox's statue symbol of the tyranny of the mind, symbol of that protracted male erection which can yield to death but not to tenderness-toppling with its column into the waves, which then roll on as they have rolled for a very great period. >> GRAY, Alasdair. *Lanark*, op. cit., p. 497.
37. Soteriology refers to the "[p]art of theology concerning salvation and redemption through Christ." TLFi. << soteriology », <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/sotériologie>, consulted on June 28, 2023.
38. Ibid., p. 557. My emphasis.
39. Ibid., p. 558. My emphasis.
40. Ibid. p. 560
41. Ibid., p. 498.
42. "Water is also purifying and regenerating. But fire is distinguished from it in that it symbolizes purification through understanding, to its most spiritual form, through light and truth: water symbolizes the purification of desire to its most sublime form, goodness." CHEVALIER, Jean and Alain GHEERBRANT. *Dictionnaire des symboles*, op. cit., p. 506 and DIEL, Paul. *Symbolism in Greek mythology*, op. cit., pp. 37-38 .

43. Some kind of ash landed on the following pages, in some places burning away small holes, in other places eradicating large chunks of text. Rather than try to reconstruct what was destroyed I decided to just bracket the gaps[] >> DANIELEWSKI, Mark Z., *House of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 323.
44. Ibid., p. 330.
45. Ibid., p. 323. My emphasis
46. Ibid., p. 518. 1015 Ibid., p. 465.
47. Ibid., p. 466.
48. Ibid., p. 467. My emphasis.
49. Unfortunately Staker's calculations are really more a form of academic onanism, a jerk of numeric wishful thinking, having very little to do with the real world. >>> Ibid.
50. Ibid. My emphasis. Here again, Danielewski exploits the materiality of the book to directly challenge his reader. The body of the text of the two pages in question momentarily returns to a classic typographic arrangement that underlies a chain of consequences of a metatextual nature: 1. these two pages, printed opposite each other, represent the last sheet and therefore the last two pages that Navidson reads from *House of Leaves*, in a double-meaning play of *mise en abyme*; 2. the reference to the apocryphal and inadmissible work by Hans Staker, which appears in the circular note at the bottom of page 466, symbolizes the flame that the protagonist applies to this final sheet; 3. this paratextual insertion is therefore a way that is both symbolic and ironic of presenting academic criticism (already compared earlier to academic onanism) as destructive of literature; 4. from a purely playful point of view, fully assumed in *House of Leaves*, the close relationship thus established with the character of Navidson implicitly encourages the reader to reproduce the experience that the latter has in the darkness of the labyrinth, by testing in turn his own speed of reading page 467, for example.
51. Ibid., p. 326. See above, "Organicity of the textual body", pp. 249-250.
52. DANIELEWSKI, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 467 and 518 respectively. My emphasis.
53. "It is to recognize the immaterial at the foundation of all reality and the sacred as the permanent form of all social structuring. From this point of view, digital technologies contribute to the resurgence of the sacred in postmodernity and reinforce the mystery and mysticism that we find in the formation and consolidation of community and collective existence. RABOT, Jean-Martin. "The Resurgence of the Sacred in Postmodernity", in *Societies. Revue des sciences humaines et sociales*, No. 139 (1), pp. 29-46, Louvain-la-Neuve: De Boeck Supérieur, 2018, p. 29. Rabot thus subscribes to the words of Thomas Jamet: "Information creates an almost mystical transcendence. In a world full of it, sharing it has more value than the information itself." JAMET, Thomas. *Ren@issance mythologique. L'imaginaire et les mythes à l'ère digitale*, Paris: François Bourin, 2011, p. 46.
54. Digital technology is not part of the themes of Gray's literary work. Nevertheless, Kat Rolley and Anita Sullivan suggest that, had Gray been more interested in digital narrative, he would probably have sought to push the transfer of sacredness beyond the dematerialized (analog) text itself, to previously unexplored literary forms and rhizomic domains. ROLLEY, Kat and Anita SULLIVAN, "Who is Digit Al?", in *A Gray Space* [Online], <https://www.agrayspace.net/head/post-digit-al>, published in 2022, accessed December 7, 2022.
55. MORIN, Edgar. *L'Homme et la mort*. Nouvelle édition revised et complétée, Paris: Seuil, 1970, p. 7. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
56. 1979 FREUD, Sigmund. *Beyond the pleasure principle* (1920) (trans. Jean-Pierre Lefebvre), Paris: Points, 2014, p. 170.
57. GRAY, Alasdair. *Lanark*, op. cit., p. 488.
58. I warn you, my whole imagination has a carefully reined-back catastrophist tendency; you have no conception of the damage my descriptive powers will wreak when I loose them on a theme like THE END. >>> Ibid., p. 498. Ibid., p. 488.

59. Ibid., p. 491.
60. Ibid., p. 348.
61. “ 1985 And when at last, like fingernails losing clutch on too narrow a ledge, he, tumbling, yells out last dregs of breath and has to breathe, there flows in upon him, not pain, but annihilating sweetness. >> Ibid., p. 354
62. DANIELEWSKI, Mark Z. *House of Leaves*, op. cit., p. 87.
63. Ibid., pp. 323-338.
64. Where Flint's argument makes the impulse to destroy others the result of an impulse to destroy the self, we only have to consider someone with similar self-destructive urges who when faced with similar conditions did not attempt to murder two individuals”. Ibid., p. 332.
65. Ibid., p. 385.
66. Ibid., p. 387.
67. Ibid., pp. 387-388. 1992 Ibid., p. 388.
68. Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 390.
70. The sensation imparted as all nine monitors came to life was of the most intense, carnivorous, predatory voyeurism. The youth was like a fleshly bonbon, or titillating titbit, entirely unaware of the ravening mouth of the camera. >> SELF, Will. *Dorian*, op. cit., p. 12.
71. Ibid., p. 162.
72. Ibid., p. 164.
73. Ibid., p. 252. The biblical character of the extract, where Dorian appears as a bad demiurge, completes the desecration of the protagonist.
74. Oh, is that so, Dorian sneered, reaching for the remote. He picked it up and pushed a button. Well, look on your love letter now, Baz; I'm returning it to sender. » Ibid., p. 162 .
75. Ibid., pp. 165-166
76. Love, Dorian. Henry loved you. He always loved you. I think the book is a long love letter... » Ibid., 1. 259.
77. Henry Wotton hated being Henry Wotton-that was the key to his book; and he, Dorian Gray, had been made the proxy for this monumental self-hatred. » Ibid., p. 263.
78. Morality designates < [a]ny set of rules concerning the actions permitted and forbidden in a society , whether or not they are confirmed by law", when ethics concerns the "set of moral rules which govern the exercise of a profession or the social relations of its members. » TLFi, morality", <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/morale>, consulted on July 1, 2023 and TLFi, "deontology", <https://www.cnrtl.fr/definition/déontologie>, consulted on July 1 2023.
79. GRAY, Alasdair. *Lanark*, op. cit., pp. 498-499.
80. Ibid., p. 499.
81. Ibid.
82. Ibid., p. 25.
83. Ibid. I emphasize.
84. GRAY, Alasdair. *Poor Things*, op. cit., p.37
85. DANIELEWSKI, Mark Z. *House of -Leaves*, op. cit., p. 387.
86. Ibid., p. 390.
87. Ibid., pp. 390-391. "As was already mentioned in Chapter II, before the release of The Navidson Record neither friends nor family nor colleagues knew that Delial was the name Navidson had given to the starving Sudanese child. For reasons of his own, he never revealed Delial's identity to anyone, not even to Karen. » Ibid., p. 394.
88. Ibid., pp. 292-293.
89. Ibid., p. 393.
90. See above, "Palinegenetic writing", pp. 287-290.
91. LEJEUNE, Philippe. *The Autobiographical Pact*, Paris: Seuil, 1975, p. 44.

92. L SELF, Will. The Book of Dave, op. cit., p. 450.