Re-reading / La relecture

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Essays in honour of Graham Falconer

Edited by

Rachel Falconer and Andrew Oliver

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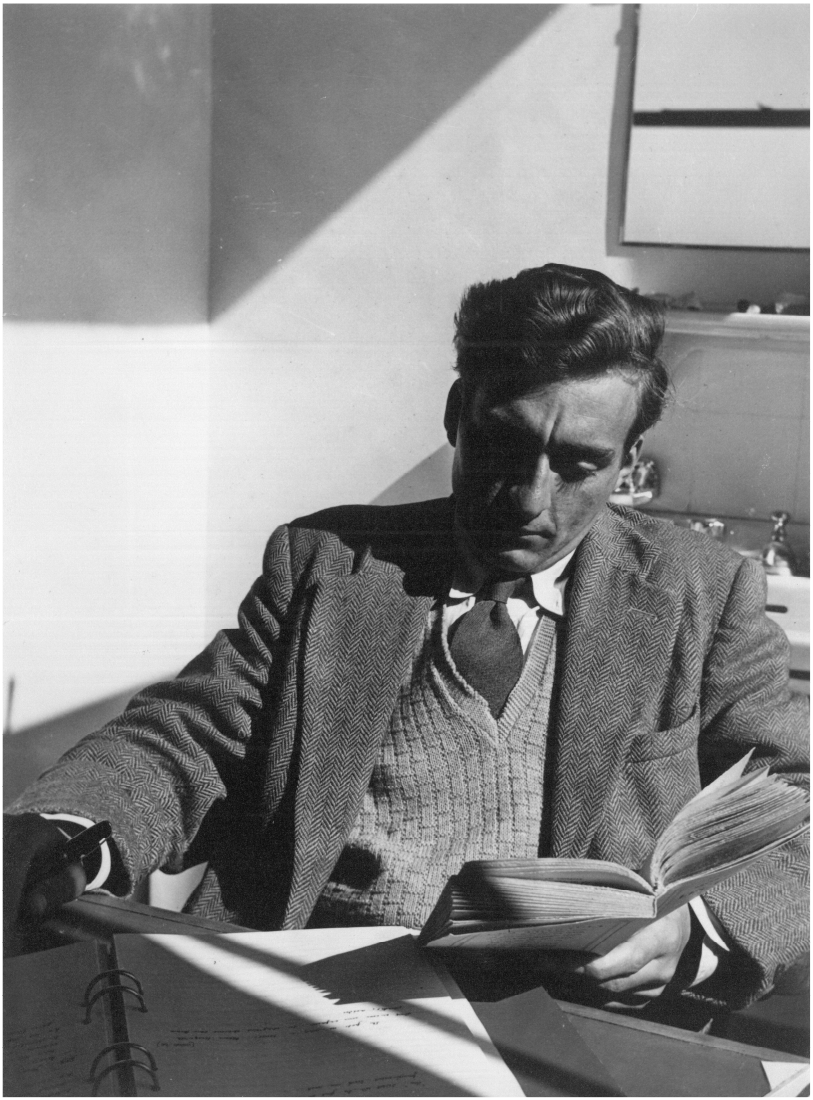

Graham Falconer reading Martin du Gard, Aix, 1956

PRÉFACE :
GRAHAM FALCONER

ANDREW OLIVER

GRAND liseur, grand re-liseur, depuis plus de soixante-dix ans Graham Falconer ne cesse d'approfondir ses connaissances dans des domaines aussi divers que l'ornithologie, le football, la musicologie, l'automobile ou, bien entendu, la littérature dans ses diverses formes. Ce qui fait qu'une conversation avec Graham embrasse toujours un nombre prodigieux de sujets fascinants où ses saillies donnent l'impression de multiples gerbes de feux d'artifices dont la cohérence n'est perceptible qu'après-coup. On n'a qu'à lire la postface du présent volume afin de se donner une vive impression de la diversité de ses intérêts et du style enjoué qui est sien. C'est-à-dire que Graham possède le rare talent d'aborder le sérieux par le biais de l'humour.

Je connais Graham depuis quarante-cinq ans. Nous avons été nommés au même moment au Département d'études françaises de University College à l'université de Toronto en 1966. À l'époque l'université comptait quatre départements de français indépendants hébergés dans les quatre grands collèges de l'université : University College, Victoria College, Trinity College et St. Michael's College. Il y avait près de cent-cinquante enseignants dans ces quatre départements. En 1975 les départements ont été réunis en un seul et, depuis l'époque de l'indépendance, telle une peau de chagrin, le département diminue en effectifs et compte aujourd'hui moins de trente âmes. C'est-à-dire que nous avons assisté à un processus balzacien de grandeur et de décadence qui rappelle bon nombre des romans du maître auquel Graham a consacré une bonne partie de sa vie de chercheur.

En 1966 Graham avait déjà une expérience considérable de l'enseignement dans divers établissements. Après avoir reçu son diplôme de l'université d'Oxford en 1953, il a accepté un poste à St. Aubyns School à Rottingdean en Angleterre où il est resté pendant deux ans avant de s'inscrire à l'Université d'Aix-Marseille afin de poursuivre ses études de doctorat et d'assumer le rôle de lecteur à l'École normale d'instituteurs

d'Aix en Provence. Alors qu'il poursuit les recherches pour sa thèse il passe un an en Suède où il travaille comme « lektor » à la Folkuniversitetet de Stockholm. L'année suivante (1959) il retourne à Oxford où il devient « tutor » à St. John's College. C'est l'année où il soutient sa thèse sur « La chronique de famille dans le roman français du XX^{e} siècle » : c'est aussi l'année où il est nommé comme « lecturer » à l'université de Glasgow. Graham restera dans son Écosse natale pendant cinq ans avant que l'esprit d'aventure ne le gagne une nouvelle fois et qu'il s'embarque en 1964 pour l'Amérique du nord où il devient professeur invité à l'université de Toronto. C'est cette expérience qui conduit au poste permanent à Toronto à partir de 1966. En effet, Toronto semble avoir atténué le goût de l'aventure car Graham y est resté jusqu'en 1997, l'année de sa retraite. Il est vrai qu'il y a eu quelques sorties de durée variable – deux ans (1974-6) à Glendon College dans le cadre du projet de recherche sur Émile Zola, une année à Queen's University (1976) et trois années (1980-1, 1985-6, 1992-3) comme directeur du programme d'études à l'étranger pour étudiants de Toronto à Aix-en-Provence. Pour le reste, Graham a été l'un des fidèles du département pendant plus de trente ans. Enseignant enthousiaste, collègue des plus aimables, participant engagé à tous les colloques et à toutes les conférences, chercheur innovateur notamment dans ses travaux sur Balzac et sur Flaubert, Graham Falconer a inspiré plusieurs générations d'étudiants et de collègues par son énergie intellectuelle et son engagement envers sa vocation de professeur et de chercheur. Pourtant, sa contribution la plus importante à la vie intellectuelle de l'université de Toronto et aux études sur le dix-neuvième siècle à l'échelle internationale est sans conteste son rôle dans l'établissement du Centre d'études du dix-neuvième siècle Joseph Sablé dont il fut le premier directeur. Ajoutons que Graham a été membre du conseil de rédaction de plusieurs revues importantes dont *NOVEL*, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, *Texte* et *Nineteenth Century French Studies*. On consultera la liste de ses publications à la fin du présent volume afin de se rendre compte de l'envergure de son activité intellectuelle au fil des années.

Néanmoins, l'histoire de la carrière professionnelle de Graham ne rend pas compte des multiples intérêts de l'homme. C'est un musicien de grand talent, un musicologue et un collectionneur d'enregistrements musicaux. Son énorme collection était l'une des plus importantes collections privées du Canada. Graham sait tout à propos de sa collection et parle en connaisseur enthousiaste des interprétations proposées par les plus grands (et les moins grands) musiciens de notre époque. À ses heures perdues, il

se met devant son piano et se délecte à explorer tel morceau qu'il connaît par cœur.

Ainsi qu'il le révèle dans la postface, les activités intellectuelles et artistiques de Graham ont été largement conditionnées par sa santé quand il était jeune. Ce n'est pas un hasard si sa lecture préférée quand l'asthme l'obligeait à garder le lit était Proust. À la différence de Proust cependant Graham ne s'est pas enfermé dans la maladie. Il est devenu un redoutable joueur de squash et un passionné de football, passion qui n'aurait pas d'égal pour lui si l'automobile n'existait pas. Et là encore les connaissances de Graham sont encyclopédiques. Il sait qui a conçu quel modèle et en quelle année, qui a gagné quelle course internationale et j'en passe. Et si la collection d'enregistrements musicaux était remarquable, il faudrait ajouter que le nombre de voitures dont Graham a été le propriétaire l'est tout aussi bien. (Je me rappelle qu'il a importé des Pays-Bas l'une des premières voitures hybrides, une Honda Insight, ceci à une époque où le réchauffement climatique ne faisait pas encore la une des journaux…) Quant à l'ornithologie, les connaissances de Graham sont tout aussi impressionnantes que dans les autres domaines qu'il affectionne. Rares sont ses promenades sans jumelles et il sait identifier un oiseau à distance grâce à la courbe de son vol ou à l'écho de son chant.

Il va de soi que le présent recueil ne peut rendre compte de la diversité des intérêts de Graham Falconer de la même manière que ces quelques lignes ne peuvent qu'esquisser la complexité d'un homme dont les qualités ont résonné auprès de ceux et celles qui ont accepté de contribuer à ce volume. Dans cette complexité et dans cette diversité il existe cependant un fil dominant – une curiosité passionnée qui se résout dans la lecture, dans les lectures, enfin dans le retour aux objets chéris qu'est la relecture.

INTRODUCTION: ON RE-READING

RACHEL FALCONER

DOES anybody re-read in the twenty-first century? In 1970, Barthes quipped that re-reading is "tolerated only in certain marginal categories of readers (children, old people, and professors)"[1]. But these days, professors don't have the time, children are on the Internet, and old people may prefer to watch the football on TV. Nevertheless, the essays in this volume show that for some of us, at least, re-reading is still common practice, and indeed provides the foundation for everything we teach and write, and live.

The aim of this volume is not to present a unified theory of re-reading, such as Matei Calinescu proposed in his magisterial study, *Re-reading* (1993), where "the linear (curious, end-oriented) movement of reading" was contrasted with – and yet also intricately related to, "the to-and-fro, back-and-forth, broadly circular (reflective and interpretive) movement of re-reading"[2]. In the present collection, one will find many echoes of Calinescu's thesis that the time of re-reading is circular. According to Victor Brombert, for example, "le roman stendhalien finit par nier son élan narratif pour se fixer dans la simultanéité de la métaphore", and this narrative drive towards synchronicity finds its counterpart in the circular movement of re-reading. But while it may confirm the validity of certain critical insights, the present, wide-ranging collection of essays cannot advance a single, coherent reading of re-reading. What it can do, which is perhaps equally important, is offer specific instances of re-reading, and from a variety of different approaches, whether theoretical, (auto-) biographical, or critical, or a mixture of these.

The specific instances are crucial because, as Ross Chambers argues, (re)reading is, at a fundamental level, a way of testifying to "being there",

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[1] Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. R. Miller (Oxford, Blackwell, 1990 [first published in French, 1970]), pp. 15-6.
[2] Matei Calinescu, *Re-reading* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1993), p. 1.

bearing witness to the human work in and against the passage of time. In the decelerated, reflective time of re-reading, one comes to feel the haptic "caresse du texte" (Henri Mitterand), one learns "to assimilate literature in life" (Tim Farrant), and eventually, one wishes to put the book aside to experience life directly, for "real books bring out an imaginative potential and a curiosity about the world around us" (Graham Falconer). In other words, re-reading grounds us in the moment, bids us pay closer attention to the text, the world, and ourselves.

Each of the essays in this collection bears witness to the effects of re-reading: grounding the reader in a specific encounter, heightening their awareness of their own shifting tastes and judgements, deepening their appreciation and understanding of the text at hand. For the sake of clarity, and in deference to academic convention, the essays have been grouped into sub-sections. Part One contains essays whose approach to the topic is primarily theoretical. The essays in Part Two offer re-readings of canonical, nineteenth century French authors and texts, the concentration of essays on this period reflecting the scholarly career of the honorand. Part Three contains essays that re-read texts in the light of changing historical contexts, or the appearance of new biographical evidence. Part Four explores the idea of re-writing as a form of re-reading, through adaptation, or translation. Part Five shifts the focus from text to re-reader, as scholars trace their own intellectual development through repeated engagements with a particular text. Part Six introduces a note of dissent to the general consensus of the collection (though, Chambers, too has his reservations) that re-reading has a special value: Alberto Manguel celebrates instead the "rookie thrill" of first-time reading. In the Afterword, the collection's honorand, Graham Falconer, reflects on two contrasting encounters with Proust, first as an adolescent grammar school boy, and recently, as an emeritus professor.

It must be stressed, however, that the volume's sub-divisions are intended to highlight different facets of the theme of re-reading, rather than to box individual essays into separate and distinct approaches. There is considerable overlap between the different sub-sections. There are essays on nineteenth century French literature which are not included in that sub-section, while many of the essays reconsider texts in the light of changing historical or cultural contexts, not just those in Part Four. And the majority of contributors reflect not only on the texts they are re-reading, but also on themselves as developing and changing reading subjects.

In fact, the usual difficulties of providing thematic unity to a collection of essays are doubled here, for as Tim Farrant writes, festschrift

collections are prone to shipwreck on two sides; their Scylla and Charybdis are "the irredeemably individual, to starboard, and to port the only reason why the individual matters, that is, in their general import". And these monsters are treble-headed in a collection devoted to re-reading, where each author is invited to negotiate between an account of an individual text, and an account of him- or herself as individual reader. Nevertheless, our collection's reader need not fear being submerged, or even simply, bored, for there are original and ground-breaking discussions throughout: new biographical material relating to Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*, fresh insight into why women writers were not among the winners of top literary prizes in early twentieth-century France, revisionary readings of the founding documents of Nouvelle-France, and so on. There is, perhaps, a danger of our reader's feeling lost, because we have not furrowed a single track through this wine-dark sea.

Anyone familiar with Italo Calvino's delicately unraveling definition of "classic" literature, however, will understand the pleasures and special insights that getting lost in a subject can bestow[3]. Not only does *Why Read the Classics?* provide us with an exemplary structural model for defining a subject without confining it artificially, but also, a "classic", for Calvino, turns out to be a work of literature that is, in multiple senses, re-readable. This being so, it might be worth recalling some of Calvino's "definitions" of the classics (there are fourteen in all):

> 1. The classics are those books about which you usually hear people saying: "I'm re-reading…", never "I'm reading…" […]
> 4. A classic is a book which with each re-reading offers as much of a sense of discovery as the first reading.
> 5. A classic is a book which even when we read it for the first time gives the sense of re-reading something we have never read before […]
> 7. The classics are those books which come to us bearing the aura of previous interpretations, and trailing behind them the traces they have left in the culture or cultures […] through which they have just past […]
> 11. "Your" classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even opposition to it.[4]

While these statements are persuasive in themselves, what is most masterly here is the way Calvino shifts ground from one statement to the next, destabilizing his previous perspective each time he proceeds. Thus no. 4 argues that a classic always seems new, however much it is re-read,

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[3] Italo Calvino, *Why Read the Classics?*, trans. Martin McLaughlin (London, Jonathan Cape, 1999).
[4] *Ibid.*, pp. 3-9; *itals*. in original.

while no. 5 finds validity in an almost diametrically opposite claim; no. 7 shifts from a synchronic to a diachronic perspective, a "classic" acquiring the aura and weight of cultural heritage; yet no. 11 suddenly fixes its eye on "you" the individual reader, and the role that a "classic" can play in shaping "your" personal life-trajectory, regardless of its cultural aura or prestige. The point is not that attempting to define something as amorphous as "the classics" is futile. It is rather that, in order to understand the importance of engaging with such works, it helps to be Argus-eyed, or Avalokiteshvaran-armed, or like the multi-winged singular cherubim in Madeline L'Engle's *A Wind in the Door*[5]. A similar, shifting perspective can be useful when thinking about re-reading, which is equally resistant to precise theoretical definition. Hence the aptness of a multi-layered approach.

Following Calvino's example, then, we present these twenty essays as a series of refracting statements on the multiple and various nature of re-reading. As Mitterand observes, "On relit rarement le même livre, de même qu'on ne se baigne jamais dans le même fleuve". Not only does the text change in relation to different historical contexts, but time and personal experience are constantly changing the reader. As noted earlier, the fifth section of this collection is comprised of essays in which the central focus is on the developmental trajectory of a particular reader, in relation to a given text or author. But the entire volume is also unusually weighted towards the autobiographical, and the *demonstrandum* of Calvino's eleventh proposition: "'*Your' classic is a book to which you cannot remain indifferent, and which helps you define yourself in relation or even opposition to it*".

If reader-response theorists can (or anyway, do) predict the responses of a text's implied, first-time reader, it is much harder to generalize about the re-reader, particularly when s/he is real rather than hypothetical. From the evidence here, it is clear that "re-reading" encompasses many different kinds and degrees of re-encounter. Continual contact with a text through teaching, and writing scholarly papers and articles, produces one kind of re-reading (Lawrence Porter on a near life-time of interpreting and re-interpreting Victor Hugo). Whereas returning after long absence to a book read in childhood raises an entirely different set of questions (Graham Falconer on re-reading Proust, Rosemary Lloyd on re-reading *The Prisoner of Zenda*, Alberto Manguel on re-reading Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, and elsewhere, Francis Spufford's delightful memoir, *The*

[5] Madeline L'Engle, *A Wind in the Door* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973).

Child That Books Built[6]). As Calinescu notes, re-reading is "a special case in a larger phenomenology of repetition: of remembering, revoking, reviewing in retrospect, retracing, thinking back and rethinking, rediscovering and revisiting"[7]. But the processes of memory involved in recalling something across a large temporal gap, as opposed to something read, seen or heard just a few months previously, are very different.

In addition, the second (third, fourth, etc.)-time reader's response may vary widely, from disappointment to joyous affirmation and a sense "of having in the end found kin again", as George Perec puts it in *W or the Memory of Childhood*[8]. These personal remembrances may drift nearer the waters of Charybdic self-absorption than most collections of scholarly essays, but they also come closer to the source of what makes us life-long, vocational re-readers. Nor are we ever far from discovering the general import of the individual experience. This is strikingly evident in Henry Schogt's essay, which contrasts his encounters with Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov,* read before and after the German occupation of Belgium. But we will return to the question of reading in relation to autobiography below.

Closely allied to Calvino's series of propositions is the notion that re-reading creates the literary canon. This is touched upon in Henri Mitterand's essay, where he argues, via a paraphrase of Roland Barthes rather than Calvino: "la littérature c'est ce qu'on *relit*". If this argument is persuasive, the opposing complementary proposition is also valid: that re-reading breaks apart the literary canon and reshapes it, by challenging orthodoxies, introducing marginalised texts, and so on (see Irvine, and Perron and Marteinson). Its canon-forming, and/or iconoclastic, capabilities suggest that re-reading is generally speaking a more social and communal activity than first-time reading. As most of the authors in this collection are professional teachers, there is plentiful evidence here for the notion that the seminar room constitutes a special chronotope of re-reading, where the meanings of texts are polemically debated, internalised or resisted with an intensity that is particular to that time and place, though of course such transformations may also occur wherever a vociferous cluster of re-readers happens to gather together. History also changes the meaning of texts for particular groups of readers. This is shown in Clive Thomson's essay on the reception of Bakhtin's *Toward a Philosophy of the Act,* where for cultural and historical reasons, Bakhtin's readers in the

[6] Francis Spufford, *The Child That Books Built* (London, Faber & Faber, 2002).
[7] Calinescu, *op. cit.*, pp. xii-xiii.
[8] George Perec, *W or the Memory of Childhood,* trans. David Bellos (London, Harvill Press, 1995). Quoted in Calinescu, *Re-reading,* front matter.

1980s would have been reluctant to consider his religious preoccupations, whereas in the twenty-first century, it is Biblical scholars who have found most to say about the text.

But if re-reading involves social interchange, it usually also starts with a solitary experience, and proceeds through a series of further solitary encounters. In *Journées de Lecture,* Proust praises the special form of communication in solitude that happens only with reading and re-reading. At the end of Laurence Porter's essay, it is not the social re-reader, but the Proustian one who emerges after many years: "I find myself in the role, not of a publicist and cheer-leader for my favourite author, but as an admiring kindred spirit who communes with him in solitude".

Yet again, the contours of this chronotope of re-reading shift and change, however, when we take into account the public nature of adaptation and translation, which are also forms of re-reading. According to Marion Schmid, the aim of Nina Companeez in adapting *À la recherche du temps perdu* for television is explicitly to lead a large audience back into the book: "J'essaie de le servir pour l'amener aux gens d'une manière plus simple, pour qu'ils aient envie d'ouvrir un livre". But even translation and adaptation begin with a reader privately immersed in a text, as is evident in Martine de Rougemont's rediscovery of a plethora of boxes containing youthful translations of English poetry. The desire to draw other readers into the penumbra of a particular book stems from the emotions of the solitary reader: "je me dis que j'aurais tort de ne parler de ce que j'aime, que nous devons tous chercher, comme disait Baudelaire, à transformer notre volupté en connaissance" (Victor Brombert).

But is there an essential difference between the *first* of these encounters and all subsequent ones? Ross Chambers maintains that reading and re-reading are not as distinct as we have so far been assuming. According to Chambers, three features of the "reading-writing interaction" are common to both initial and subsequent readings: "(a) the *deficit*, characteristic of the phenomenon of initiation … (b) the *structural features* that ground and govern the practice of interpretation … and (c) the *testimonial function* of all writing and reading … that attests to humanity's historical presence on earth". But, to take the first of these, the initiation into a text comprises a doubled, oscillatory movement, "by which desire for knowledge leads to awareness of lack, which in turn spurs the desire for knowledge". And this oscillation might be understood in other terms, as a continual movement between end-directed and circular, reflective reading.

Where we would be mistaken is in placing what we have characterised as a "first-time" reading experience at the beginning of a chronological

sequence of readings, for this doesn't necessarily happen at the beginning. In the case of hallowed "classics", whose aura of cultural significance overhangs the individual encounter from the beginning, that individual's "first-time" reading may indeed be experienced as secondary. The reader's sense of lack, of wanting more from the text, or feeling inadequate to the act of interpretation, will then urge a second reading which becomes, in turn, another initiation, another doubled experience of reflection and naïve, first-time wonder. Chambers' analysis thus dissuades us from making categorical distinctions, and presents reading and re-reading as a complex and fluctuating continuum of experience.

In fact it is possible to argue that, historically speaking, re-reading precedes reading in the Western world[9]. Memorization of oral poetry, secular re-reading of the classical literature of antiquity, and ritual re-reading of religious and devotional texts all preceded the production and publication of "new" reading matter; the modern novel is a late phenomenon in the history of Western writing and reading. And even some modern novels prove resistant to being read in a "first-time", end-directed manner. Un-first-time readability is a feature discussed – though not, of course, so inelegantly termed – in essays by Robert Lethbridge and Marshall Olds on Flaubert, Rosemary Lloyd on Nabokov, Victor Brombert on Stendhal, and James Knowlson on Beckett. Olds, for example, characterizes the Flaubertian novel as a holey text which habitually leaves the reader hungry for more: "malgré sa perfection formelle le seul texte nous laisse souvent sur notre faim […] c'est pour compléter notre lecture de l'œuvre que – collectivement – nous lisons la correspondance, les carnets et cahiers et les notes de lecture [...] Dans ce sens, lire Flaubert c'est toujours relire Flaubert".

Some re-reading takes us outside the text to its paratexts and contexts. Other re-reading confines itself to the text but discovers its holeyness in a network of partially buried intertextual references. In Calinescu's lovely term, these texts are already haunted by other presences, just as we are haunted by the texts themselves[10]. To what end do we pursue these ghosts, track down networks of associations, become experts on the worlds of *Happy Days*, of *Bel-Ami*, of *Madame Bovary*? What do we gain from re-reading, in other words? A better understanding of the text at very least, one would hope. As Mitterand and others point out, scholarly and in-depth discussions of a literary text are always based on re-readings.

[9] See Calinescu, *op. cit.*, p. xiii.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. xi.

But re-reading can also intensify the reader's sense of initiatory uncertainty, though admittedly this is truer of some texts than others. In the case of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, as Robert Lethbridge, following Jonathan Culler[11], demonstrates, a sequence of readings may lead the reader from a naïve identification with Emma, to a sophisticated awareness of the narrator's ironic distance from his heroine, to a disorienting impression of ironic distances collapsing, leaving the reader unsure whose irony it is (is it authorial?), against whom it is directed (Emma? the sentimental novelist of the day? the author? the reader?) and whether it is irony at all.

It seems intuitively right to suppose that re-reading will bring us greater certainty and wisdom, but sadly this isn't always (or perhaps even ever) the case. In a passage of *Days of Reading* (the English translation of *Journées de Lecture*), cited and discussed by Graham Falconer and also by Rosemary Lloyd, Proust declares, "Reading is on the threshold of the spiritual life; it can introduce us to it: it does not constitute it". Or as Alan Bennett has Queen Elizabeth say, in disarmingly demotic style: "reading was not doing, that had always been the trouble. And old though she was she was still a doer"[12]. Bennett's uncommon reader knows that reading is no substitute for life and cannot in itself make us wise. And yet, what is fascinating and necessary about the books that remain within us, or to which we consciously return, is the way in which they become enmeshed with the business of living.

No reader of the present collection, one hopes, will fail to be moved by the instances of literary discovery recorded below: Victor Brombert shut up in "his" San Gimignano tower, becoming a devotee of Stendhal; Mary Donaldson-Evans imprisoned with *Bel-Ami* in a Quarantine Station on North Head, Sydney; Alberto Manguel with a green-bound copy of *The Island of Dr Moreau*, in a country house in summer time, in Buenos Aires. The times and places are specific: *here* is when/where a particular book entered the life-stream, as it were. While these are all memories of first-time encounters, it is worth stressing that they have become potent spots of time only in the recollection of the encounter. In this sense, they are re-discoveries, re-readings, implicitly (or explicitly, in the case of Manguel) registering a sense of Orphic loss as well as gain.

But what is being traced is how a particular book enters a life and initiates a long process of fructification. Reading isn't doing, but it enhances every aspect of doing, and particularly its narrative aspect; reading can give the individual lived experience the trajectory and

[11] Jonathan Culler, *Flaubert: The Uses of Uncertainty* (London, Elek, 1974).
[12] Alan Bennett, *The Uncommon Reader* (London, Faber & Faber, 2006), p. 101.

structural coherence of (auto-)biography. We are reminded here of an essay by Paul Ricœur, "Life in Quest of Narrative", in which he seeks to demonstrate the close resemblances between biological life and narrative[13]. Ricœur's argument is that human life has an inherent propensity to organize itself as narrative, while narrative, in turn, has certain life-like characteristics. Thus, even before we tell stories about our lives, those experiences have a "pre-narrative" quality, a potential to become narrative[14]. Extending this argument into the domain of reading, one could say that reading is inherently absorbable into life, while life makes us receptive to reading. Indeed, individual life-experiences will render that individual receptive to certain books and not others. There is an excellent example of such "pre-reading" in Brombert's recollection of the San Gimignano tower: when he shuts himself away in his tower as a boy, he is not yet reading Stendhal (nor is he even in Italy yet), but he is living in a way that will make him receptive to Stendhal in future.

Books are like ivy in the way they wrap themselves around individual lives and continue to grow in and through them, as will be found numerously instanced in the essays below. And lives, too, grow around books, especially the lives of bibliophiles, naturally. When one considers how certain kinds of scholarship used to require physical travel, actual encounters, and tactile contact with books in remote places, one wonders how the growing availability of online reference material will transform this life-book symbiosis. Will the network of friendships described in Martine de Rougemont's essay be possible in a world where the network is predominantly electronic? Despite these profound changes in the environmental context, however, there seems to be something in the reading process itself that demands to be lived through. The complex "rapports entre le vécu et le savoir", for example, lead Guizot to take considerable freedoms in translating Edward Gibbon, as Gabriel Moyal shows.

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[13] Paul Ricœur, "Life in Quest of Narrative" in D. Wood, *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation* (London, Routledge, 1991), pp. 20-33.

[14] The "narrativity of life" argument has been challenged by Galen Strawson, in "A Fallacy of Our Age: Not Every Life is a Narrative", *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 15, October 2004, pp. 13-5. Strawson argues that there are "episodic" lives which do not organize into biographical narratives, and one takes his point that the "narrative" life is not necessarily more virtuous, more richly fulfilled, than the "episodic" one. But "episodic" is, of course, a type of narrative, which reveals the difficulty of thinking about life, not only beyond linearity and causality (the features of "narrative" life to which Strawson objects), but beyond story-formation altogether.

This brings us to the third feature of reading discussed by Ross Chambers: its testimonial function. As Chambers points out, textual analysis on its own does not constitute a *reading* of a text. So, for example, Andrew Oliver's use of the software programme Hyperbase to produce a statistical analysis of word clusters in *Le Père Goriot,* feeds into, but does not substitute for, the rich reading of Balzac's novel which follows. To *read*, it seems we have to *live*, and the one will atrophy without the separate input of the other. This is perhaps why, as Tim Farrant explores, some books hide their literariness, in an effort to get us to "de-read", to escape the network of intertextual allusion which entices us from one book to another endlessly.

Is there life outside the text? Proust would say "yes", and yet paradoxically we only approach that "threshold of spiritual life" from inside a book. The cure for too much reading begins (but does not end) with re-reading.

I.

PARADIGMS OF RE-READING / PARADIGMES DE LA RELECTURE

MES ILLUMINATIONS, OR: HOW I LEARNED TO (RE-)READ

ROSS CHAMBERS

What an early-to-know, late to-
practice creature is man.
—J. W. Goethe, *Italian Journey*
(Naples, March 17 [1787])

MY mother was the reader in my family. In the evenings, she would become absorbed in her romances, although sometimes she would shift uncomfortably, look up for a moment from her book, and go back to it for a few more pages. Finally she would throw it down in disgust. "I've read this before!" she would announce in surprise and anger. And the next day the offending volume would be returned to the lending library and yet another romance, virtually identical in all its essentials, exchanged for the reject.

If my mother sought escape in the security of bodice-ripping plots and exotic settings – as long as she remained unaware of having read them before – my own preference went to volumes that my parents declared "way over my head." But it was of course estrangement that I too was looking for, while they fretted that I would "ruin my eyesight." (Their real concern, of course, was that I might come to learn the dreaded "facts of life.") I loved to wade through volumes of complex verse or Victorian prose, content to have found something that, in its very incomprehensibility, contrasted so satisfyingly with the all too accessible everyday of a small, drought-stricken town in western New South Wales during the Depression. For that reason re-reading was never an issue for me: a book I had not understood in the first place could be re-read any number of times with equal incomprehension and (therefore) equal satisfaction.

My older sister, on the other hand, having devoured the whole series of Pollyanna books once, proceeded to re-read them incessantly. She delighted in her familiarity with them and often went so far as to emulate in

her own life the eponymous heroine's exasperating habit of finding reason to be cheerful in the most disastrous occurrences: painful deaths, destructive accidents, financial failures and the like. In this way she sailed cheerfully through the Depression years, happily irritating everyone she knew. Only my father seemed impervious to this annoying habit, perhaps because he in his turn loved to recite lengthy chunks of Milton and Shakespeare, but more especially Longfellow and Tennyson. In the optimistic 1920's, when he had taken night classes at the University in order to better himself, his capacious memory for verse had very largely got him through his exams.

As a family, then, we offered a set of caricatures of what might be called reading for genre. I mean that, in only slightly different ways, we all perversely wanted our expectations to be met, identically and time after time. Only my mother, caught in the same trap of reading predictability, resisted it, albeit ineffectually, her desire for novelty being regularly countered by her firm preference for the most formulaic of all the narrative genres. We were book addicts, but not readers in any but the most trivial of senses. As for my younger brother, he was the youngest child and consequently very largely ignored. Did he read? How did he read? I do not know.

Somewhat similarly, the people who later taught me French literature at the University of Sydney, were convinced Lansonians. Alas, they had absorbed the letter but not the spirit of Lanson's work. From them I learned that, as far as books written in French went, the idea was first to read up on what Lanson had said of their author (we were all equipped with a personal copy of his abridged *Histoire de la Littérature Française*), and then to apply oneself to discovering in the text under examination the very same traits that the venerated literary historian had identified.

But German and English classes were not much more helpful. My German teachers very frequently appealed to the principle of *Textimmanenz* (a version of new-critical principles); but the term was never explained. In English, to read a text seemed a matter of purely personal "response." It appeared to cross no-one's mind that reading might be a teachable skill: and re-reading was, if anything, firmly discouraged by the demands of exhaustive curricula. It was always enough to have "read" a given text once; and indeed the world appeared to me so full of potential reading-matter that I saw no reason to complain. So many books to read! And all of them, thankfully, still "way over my head"! I might as well have been an eight-year-old still happily uncomprehending of the works and worlds of Balzac or Dickens.

The Initiatory Moment (Nerval)

This essay is subtended by an idea that will remain largely tacit. Because reading as well as writing is necessarily governed by assumptions (albeit not necessarily the same assumptions) concerning genre, first and subsequent readings of a given text are never really identical, as my family had tended to think, but they are also, and equally necessarily, related. They represent members of a paradigm, the constitution of which amounts however to a never completed work-in-progress.

Obviously genre expectations change over time: I don't read *La Princesse de Clèves*, say, in the same way as the novel was read by Lafayette's surprised contemporaries. But normally they evolve only minimally within a human life-span. And in the way that I may well, in changing circumstances and different contexts, refer to my dwelling-place now as an apartment (or a flat), now as a townhouse, now as my bachelor-pad, and now as the dump I'm forced to live in, so my umpteenth reading of, say, Baudelaire's "Le Cygne" will differ from the pre-umpteenth reading while nevertheless building upon it (as well as on the [re-] readings that have gone before). That is, the generic idea of a "poem of historical witness" is like the concept of home in that it commands a *range* of mutually substitutable interpretive options (a paradigm), while excluding a range of alternative generic options that form a different paradigm (the genre of the nursery rhyme, say). I may call my home a pig-sty sometimes (indeed often); but it's not a mountain range, a highway or an animal. Similarly one might plausibly argue that Baudelaire's "Le Cygne" is readable, not as "historical witness" but as "elegy"; indeed that is the case with many other instances of testimonial writing as a genre. But, despite its opening line: "Andromaque, je pense à vous! [...]," it would be a stretch to read it as, say, a love-poem.

What follows, then, is an attempt, in autobiographical vein, to sketch my successive discovery of those permanent features of the reading-writing interaction that are common, independently of genre, to initial and subsequent readings of a given text. These are, in brief,

(a) the *deficit*, characteristic of the phenomenon of initiation, that makes the interpretation of writing a necessary, but also an imperfect and never-concluded, but genre-controlled process – one that, being ever subject to further modification and enrichment, is repeatable *ad infinitum*;
(b) the *structural features* that ground and govern the practice of interpretation as described in (a). These constitute a complex set of

relations and interrelations, syntagmatic, semantic, formal (and in poetry phonetic), whose model is the kind of equivalence – i.e. of difference and similarity – that is called rhyme. Available as they are to objective analysis, these relations form the object of the act of (initiatory) interpretation, the *interpretandum*. But there is also, and finally,

(c) the *testimonial function* of all writing and reading, literary and non-literary, that attests to humanity's historical presence on earth and in so doing gives the practice of reading and re-reading its ultimate motivation and *raison d'être*. Where trauma-testimonial is a genre among others, the function of bearing witness strikes me as being common to all human sense-making, from the precious evidence of the caves of Cauchet and Lascaux to the eminently recyclable advertising that comes through the mail slot in my pig-sty everyday. Such, then, is the context in which the initiatory process of interpretive (re-)reading finds its fullest significance.

The literary event of my undergraduate life, then, was my discovery of reading's baffling character as an initiatory practice. It occurred one spring day, at age 18 or so, while walking in the rose-garden of the New England University College (now the University of New England). I read for the first time Nerval's "Les Chimères," and in particular "El Desdichado." It isn't hard to see why this poem appealed to me intuitively. On the one hand I recognized it, gratefully, as *strange* almost to the point of incomprehensibility. But on the other it seemed crucially relevant to my adolescent self, the clue to which it seemed to give me in the final word of the first quatrain:

> Je suis le Ténébreux, – le Veuf, – l'Inconsolé,
> Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la Tour abolie:
> Ma seule *Etoile* est morte – et mon luth constellé
> Porte le *Soleil noir* de la *Mélancolie*.

Strangeness and recognizability are, of course, the joint conditions of readability. Pacing the garden, reading and re-reading those momentous words, by lunch-time I had the sonnet by heart, all without having "understood" it much more clearly than at my first reading. I had had a previous love-affair with the Hugo of *La Légende des Siècles*, but it was during this morning of reading and walking, walking and reading, that I finally acquired a good sense of the alexandrine line, the power of its cadences and rhythms. It would be a long time, however, before I grasped

the deep sense of the poem's orphic message, which is, of course, that the initiate's gain in consciousness is inseparable from, because it consists of, knowledge of the lack, the loss, the "disinheritance" that is constitutive of a never-satisfied desire. To be an initiate is to personify this melancholy awareness.

Nor did I realize at all that in this way initiation provides a model of reading as, inevitably, a process without end, governed as it is by the dynamics by which the desire for knowledge leads to awareness of lack, which in turn spurs the desire for knowledge. The step that was to bring me a little closer to that insight occurred a few years later when I stumbled across Zeno's paradox – more strictly a sorites – of the never-completed heap, which haunts the work of Samuel Beckett (notably *Godot*, *Fin de Partie* and *Oh les Beaux Jours*) and which furnishes an equally compelling figure of reading-as-initiation. Beckett became my second literary enthusiasm: and soon thereafter, having been taken on as a temporary lecturer and had an opportunity to teach both Nerval and Beckett, I took the step that committed me to becoming a professional reader. In the early 1960's, I approached Léon Cellier in Grenoble and asked him if he would be willing to supervise a Master's essay on Nerval's "Sylvie" in light of "El Desdichado." He countered by proposing a doctoral thesis, and gave me my title: "Gérard de Nerval et la poétique du voyage." For the next few years, Nervalian orphism, enriched with Beckett's sense of incompletion and lack, became my model of interpretative reading, understood as the never-ended process of initiatory exploration.

Such a model was exemplified for me by the philosophers of the *imaginaire* (Gaston Bachelard, Gilbert Durand), by readerly critics like Georges Poulet and Jean-Pierre Richard, and above all by the interpretative work of the Geneva school (notably Jean Rousset and Jean Starobinski). It was Léon Cellier's interest in the thematics of initiation as interpreted by the French Romantics – I recall with pleasure his inspiring lectures on Georges Sand's *Consuelo* – that made him the appropriate person to orchestrate this coming together of the variously refined and perceptive as well as consciously subjective and often brilliantly intuitive critical readers who now, at last – many years after my formal education – became my teachers and models. They *practised* the art of reading as a mode of initiation, and in that way served me as initiators in their own right.

"L'œuvre," wrote Jean Starobinski, in *La relation critique*, "a besoin d'une conscience pour se manifester"[1]. He acknowledged of course the necessary "structures objectives," the "substrat vital" that form the specific object of any interpretive reading. But the important point, he emphasized, is that "ces signes m'ont séduit, ils sont porteurs d'un sens qui s'est réalisé en moi." If Calvinist Geneva has its analytic side – it was the home of linguistic structuralism in the work of Saussure – it has also a dreamy Jean-Jacques side that gave us the critical practice of the Geneva School. "L'étude 'immanente' des structures objectives du texte," Starobinski writes with tell-tale *guillemets*, is necessarily completed by the inspiriting *regard* of a subjective interpretation, one that accords the text a dimension I like to think of as comparable with the depth and transparency of an Alpine lake. The idea is not so much to encounter as it is to *recreate*, or to relive, the intimately felt experience of a world, an *Erlebnis* that is not so much expressed in as it informs the illusory transparency of writing. Reading, then, amounts to an (initiatory) process whose guide is the written trace of another's experience (of initiation). There are only learners, *mystoi*, the reader breathing a necessary life into the testamentary performance, the tell-tale *trace* that is the written text.

The account of Nerval that I produced as the record of my reading has the status, then of being itself a trace, in the form of a critical essay, of my own initiatory experience of reading texts that were themselves necessarily understood as always already traces of initiatory experience[2]. The structuring of Nerval's travel writing as labyrinthine wandering, as ascent towards revelation or as descent into the abyss, furnishes a trace of symbolic death that might readily be identified with Roland Barthes' "death of the Author." For this is a death into writing, and one readily submitted to with a view to its subject's return to life through the literary initiation that will be experienced in turn by successive readers of the Nervalian *œuvre*. It is just that, as a reader, I in turn must die symbolically also, submitting myself to the textual experience and dying as it were into my reading, so that the initiate author may achieve, through that reading, a new life.

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[1] Jean Starobinski, *La relation critique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1970), p. 16.

[2] See Ross Chambers, *Gérard de Nerval et la poétique du voyage* (Paris, Corti, 1969). Faithful to my critical models at the time, I regrettably did not consider including an account of initiatory reading in this essay.