

**FOR THE READERS WHO WILL PERISH
IF THEY DON'T KNOW WHAT THE NOVEL IS ABOUT**

(In which it is observed that the readers who skip around in a book are nevertheless complete readers. Moreover, when something like skip-around literature is inaugurated—as it is here—they should exercise caution, and read in order, if they want to keep being skip-around readers. Equally, the author is surprised to discover that although he is an out-of-order man of letters, he likes skip-around readers just as much as the others who read in order, and to persuade the reader of this, he has found this good argument: he who reads everything to the end (since it's lazy to read out of order and disrupt the frame) will, with this novel, end up mortified, saying to himself: "I read it in bits and pieces; very good novel, but a little disjointed, very truncated.")

Disorderly reader, I do not ask you—unconfessed—to read all of it, or that you stop reading all of my novel, what with the pagination arranged in vain for you, but you should know that in the book in which the reader will finally be read, *Biography of a Reader*, it disconcertingly happened that with such a trench-riddled book the disorderly reader had no other recourse than to read in order, so as to maintain the disorder of the text, since the book was out of order before . . . I do not ask your forgiveness for giving you an out-of-order book that, as it is, would be an interruption for you, because you interrupt yourself on your own and you are so uncomfortable with the disorder I brought you with my prologues, in which the disorderly author makes you a figure of art and dreams, that you have flipped and are now a continuous reader to the point that you doubt the inveterate identity of the disorderly self.

If you have to read all of it, a bit of forewarning. Don't go around trying a little bit of my novel here and there to see if it's finished, if it needs sugar or if it's too cold; you'd do better to do as my butler does when he ties on a napkin and takes up knife and fork "just for a taste," as he meekly tells the cook. I've made you an orderly reader thanks to a work full of prefaces and such vague titles that you have finally been trapped by the unexpected continuity of your reading.

Now I can't keep you happy any longer. I've already advanced you all the postponements that I've been able to cook up: I don't have any more prologues until after the novel. How it oppresses me, this artistic endeavor to which I have committed myself! I still don't have any true comprehension of the theory of the novel, let alone an aesthetic or plan for my own.

Very well, as for the point of the title of this prologue, which is to say, as for the reader who is bothered because he doesn't know everything in the novel:

It's true that "the Traveler then uttered a few words, inaudible from this novel, and, waving goodbye, *went away*" (travelers tend to do that). My novel also waves, but it is

mortified that one of its characters hasn't finished reading everything. It's curious about the story it's going to tell, a reading of itself, or better a narrative of itself, since self-love is inherent in Art (for Art, and to Art). Art is that which is written without knowing what will happen, and thus has to be written while docilely discovering and then resolving each situation, each problem of action or expression. As an author, I despair of my novel every time I am slow to finish a scene. The novel is enamored (and Eterna is not) of itself (Eterna's not in love with herself, either: in a disregard of self that is immensely beautiful and which fills me with sadness and reverence, she also disregards my daily pleas that she love herself. Is it that neither she nor I should love ourselves or love at all, or is it a supreme error that clouds her vision of herself and of the grandeur of her destiny? I'm not uncertain about this: Eterna, our passion is as plain as can be; but you don't care that passion exists, you don't admit it is even possible in this phase of your life; and despite all this, you love Art, without loving yourself) . . .

This novel is enamored of itself and it is the sort of novel where mishaps and adventures happen, artistic indecisions, whether to get lost in art, to be silent, to be ignorant; even as it relates events it is swept away by others; it contains accidents and it is the victim of accidents. We see it today, in streetcars that carry internal warnings in the form of drawings of transients being run over even as externally the machine metes out shock and alarm. It is curious about itself, like children in costume who shout "Trick or treat!" and ecstatically run away. What is disguised is that they are children with a public. Going around in costume is for them a disguise: the mask is the disguise. I, the author, am principally public even now, in publicity. I am always searching, and I'm missing knowledge and living because there's a kind of living that I'd still like to experience even though I think I already understand it: the finality of Art as the end of life, of the individual aspect of life: the Tragedy-Idyll that is Love, which is itself made from Beauty by Death which makes of love as much tragedy as idyll, since the certainty, along the path of life, of the personal destruction of lovers (also there are those who aren't in love who, although they have death, they don't have the Beauty of life, an individual matter) exalts, makes love just as it makes its tragedy. Death is only death of love; there is only the death of the other, her concealment, since for oneself there is no concealment. But there is much for me to learn about love in its execution, about how to slake its daily thirst, about its delicate and implacable congress.

So it is that even as I write, I inquire and hope for things to happen, just like the reader. And when I think of the unruly skip-around reader, I notice that I'm obliged to

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—QUARTERLY CONVERSATION

imagine what I should have the Traveler feel after what's just happened, in order to deduce what he likely said—since it was inaudible. What he would have said would be what I just told you. It's not improbable either that he would have articulated "I'm a Traveler in a Novel, in a story already underway: I shouldn't dally then, I've been in this scene already too long. Let the reader always see me boarding a train or setting sail; he has to see me leave so many times that I don't even know what it's like to be around, and now I fear I'll have to leave the novel in a flurry of departure." ■