Armelle Parey (Caen), “‘Will not the leaf be turned some day, and the story be told?’: Emma Brown (2003) by Clare Boylan and Charlotte Brontë”.

When Charlotte Brontë died, she left behind the beginnings of a novel, a manuscript of two chapters with “Emma” as a title, dating from 1853. One hundred and fifty years later, Irish novelist Clare Boylan (1948-2006) finished the novel, now entitled Emma Brown.

Rewriting the Victorian era in the late 20th - early 21st century has become a trend and a genre identified as “neo-Victorian”. The genre however implies self-conscious re-engagement with the period and one may wonder if Emma Brown qualifies for it as Clare Boylan seems to be returning to the Victorian period in hiding, humbly or blandly pastiching Charlotte Brontë. The leading question in this paper is: does Boylan have anything new to say about the Victorian era or does she just “recycle and deliver a stereotypical and unnuanced reading of the Victorians and their literature and culture” (Heilmann and Llewelyn, 6)? I will first deal with the contents of her pastiche which relies on intertextuality and takes Brontë where she has never been, with a detective plot in order to retrieve the characters’ past and in London’s seedy parts to denounce child prostitution. My second part will explore the tension between Boylan’s faithfulness to Brontë and her early-21st century stand in the characterization of female characters. Finally, I will focus on the conclusion given to Emma Brown considering that neo-Victorian novels tend to copy what they think is a typical Victorian ending whereas Charlotte Brontë was famously ambiguous in her last paragraphs.

Anne Chassagnol (Paris 8), “Strokes, Scraps and Cracks: The Enigma of Richard Dadd’s Unfinished Painting.”

Richard Dadd (1817-1886) is a Victorian fairy painter who spent most of his life in the Criminal Department of Bethlem hospital where he was confined after he stabbed his father to death. His physician encouraged him to paint and provided him with the necessary materials. He devoted almost a decade to The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke, his most enigmatic painting, which was still unfinished at the time of his death and was allegedly commissioned by the then superintendent of Bethlem. The painting is currently on display at The Tate Gallery in London and recently featured among the 20 Unmissable Paintings in The Time Out’s Guide Must-See Works of Art in The City in 2011. This very small format (54 x 39 cm) captures in minute detail a mysterious ceremony, the cracking of a nut, at a fairy court. The hammer of the Fairy-Feller is left unfinished by the painter, as is the ochre-entangled bank in the foreground.

This paper will examine the notion of incompleteness in relation to this disquieting scene and question the extent to which we can crack Dadd’s self-contained fairyland. If the painting was unfinished when the painter died, incompleteness, in this particular context, is also to be understood in the sense that the suspended gesture of the Fairy Feller seems to freeze the action in time, allowing a multitude of different interpretations. Dadd’s painting is the object of a cult. Various artists and writers, such as Neil Gaiman, Angela Carter, Robert Rankin, and even the band Queen, were obsessed by The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke. This paper will explore how these different adaptations can be seen as an attempt to complete this fragmentary painting.

Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822) was only 29 when he died, and thus he left behind many unfinished texts and fragments of poems, plays, prose notes and narratives. The fragmentation of his work was also due to his various fields of interest, be they only literary (poetry, tragedies, translation, essays), his travels in Britain and Europe, but also what he calls the ‘fading coal’ of inspiration (A Defence of Poetry, 1821). Mary Shelley, who gives other reasons for her husband’s throwing poems aside, then sometimes had to convince him to complete these poems, like « Rosalind and Helen » (1817–1818).

The inadequacy of the English idiom and figurative language is also a cause for giving up composition, especially in the fields of translation and ekphrasis, where the poet is confronted with another semiotic system like painting and sculpture, or when the poet finds it difficult to paint with English words. This causes him to stop writing or, on the contrary, to constantly rewrite what he has attempted to describe through words and metaphors, which, in ‘On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci’ (1819) for instance, overlay or overlap one another to the point of blurring what they were supposed to represent. However, perhaps the unfinished form of this latter poem but also of the prose fragments of his ‘Notes on Sculptures’ (1819–1820) and the uncompleted narrative ‘The Colosseum’ (1818) is also aesthetic, an attempt to mirror sculptures that are themselves fragmented, most of them being relics from Antiquity, or to echo the unsaid in painting.

Aude Haffen (Université d’Évry – Val d’Essonne), “Anthony Burgess’s Abba Abba, a fictional continuation of John Keats’ uncompleted work and life”.

Abba Abba, a novella by Anthony Burgess, appears as a composite piece of work. It includes a short narrative of the last days of John Keats in Rome in 1821 and some selected poems by Roman poet Giuseppe Gioacchino Belli (1791–1863), translated into English by “J. J. Wilson”, a fictitious alter ego of the book’s author. The link between the short biofiction on the death of the Romantic poet and Belli’s translated poems is Anthony Burgess’s staging of an imaginary encounter, historically totally undocumented, though possible, between the two poets. Indeed, the biographer/novelist eschews the pitfalls of pathos and fate associated to the young poet’s premature death and unfinished work, in order to replace them with the sense of a continuation between Keats’s creative genius, frustrated by illness and death, and the poetic inspiration of Belli, who literally actualizes in his own work the unaccomplished, virtual potential of his English alter ego. The very title Abba Abba refers to both the initials of Anthony Burgess (the author’s pen name) and the rhyme scheme of a Petrarchan sonnet octave. Besides, an autoparodic paratext reconstructs a fantastic genealogy linking Burgess to Belli and makes James Joyce’s Ulysses the continuation of Belli’s work. Thus, Burgess weaves a whole network of authorial influences which escape the rigid frames of literature schoolbooks and anthologies.

Imbued with Burgess’s idiosyncratic imagination, Abba Abba rewrites literary history in a subversive, “what-if” way. The biographer/novelist transgresses the geographical and chronological limits attributed to writers and their works by traditional literary criticism, particularly by F. R. Leavis’s The Great Tradition (1948), which highlights a writer’s work’s “organic” qualities and anchors it to a national tradition and Zeitgeist. For Burgess, to a certain
extent, the accomplished work is worth less than a potential, virtual work which the contingent circumstances of existence may have hindered or thwarted. Besides, Keats’s individual genius departs from the narrow frame of Romantic Englishness and partakes of a broader European creative inspiration.

Burgess discovers in Keats’s correspondance a bawdy, crude spirit and naturalistic streak which is not to be found in his odes and mythological poetry: the novelist/biographer thus portrays his biographee John Keats as yearning to start a new work that would be radically different from what he had written before – an epic poem living up to modern Rome’s teeming, vivid urban life, and rid of Nature or Greek mythology.

The end of an artist’s work does not appear as some necessary fate ensuring its organic perfection, but as an accident interrupting his human and artistic evolution. Burgess’s biofictional rewriting of a poet’s life – his own blatant autobiographical projections on the other poet’s life, his apocryphal imagination, his suggestion that another, truer “life-and-work” has remained unfulfilled – is in itself a reflection on the (un)finished quality of any work, and on the hidden existence of “interauthorial” filiations that subvert more obvious literary legacies.

He also questions psycho-biocriticism (i.e. the notion that the work is the product of the artist’s life experience) in order to suggest that the work is a means for the artist to “anticipate him/herself” (Jean Starobinski), to free him/herself from his/her past in a gesture of experimental defiance, bifurcation and departure – creation having thus more to do with deviating or breaking away from previous achievements and/or facing the unfinished than with the fulfilment of one’s project or destiny.

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Saturday

Isabelle Roblin (ULCO), “(The Love of) The Last Tycoon of F. S. Fitzgerald et la tentation de l’achèvement”

F. S. Fitzgerald died in 1940 before finishing his last novel. His publisher had to decide what to do with the manuscript, and a first version, edited by Edmund Wilson, a famous literary critic and a friend of Fitzgerald’s, and called The Last Tycoon, was published in 1941. Then, in 1993, Matthew Bruccoli, a Fitzgerald scholar, published another version of the manuscript with some important changes, including its title, which became The Love of the Last Tycoon. A Western. After a brief examination of the two versions of the “novel-in-progress”, we shall concentrate on two of its aspects - the question of the point of view and the very subject matter of the novel.

François Gallix (Paris 4-Sorbonne), “The Mystery of ‘The Empty Chair’ and other unfinished stories by Graham Greene”

Most of Graham Greene’s manuscripts are kept in the archives of the University of Texas at Austin. Amongst the 100 boxes of documents, Box 12 contains a folder with an unfinished detective story. Greene probably wrote the 5 existing chapters of ‘The Empty Chair’ in 1926, aged 22. The first chapter was published in the Times in December 2008 and the rest of the whodunnit in The Strand magazine where a competition was held amongst the readers to complete the short story. Several reasons may be found to explain why Greene never finished this early text. Like his character Bendrix, in The End of the Affair (1951), he believed that ‘A story has no beginning and no end : arbitrarily one chooses that moment of experience from which to look back or from which to look ahead’. In 1947 he decided to publish an uncompleted novel, Across the Border, written in 1936 and wrote in the introduction : ‘The other day, looking through a drawer,
I came on the MS of an unfinished novel, and as I read it, the characters, the scene and the half-unfolded story seemed to me to have more interest than many tales of mine that had appeared fully dressed between covers, why shouldn’t this book, too, I felt, have its chance? 


John’s Updike’s novel, Gertrude and Claudius may be read as a prequel to Hamlet. Opening with an image of Gertrude about to be married against her will, the novel takes the form of a long analepsis of the play by moving its beginning back in time and providing additional information about the characters and what has led to the extreme tension at the outset of Shakespeare’s play.

A literary ‘extension’ game (to use Genette’s terminology), the novel at times draws attention to itself as a literary construct (exact similitude of the beginning of its three parts, playful use of outdated language or literary codes…). However, this slight distancing is no obstacle to the meticulous construction of the main characters, in particular Gertrude, Updike’s eponymous protagonist, whose point of view we enter into, thus increasing our empathy towards a central character in the novel.

Updike adds elements to the play but is careful to maintain a sense of continuity with it (by using punctual references to specific events in Hamlet or taking up major motifs from it and above all by ending the plot almost where the play starts), thus giving the impression that he has been extending Shakespeare’s ‘unfinished’ plot.

The grafting of a past occurring prior to the play subtly modifies our vision of it, qualifying Gertrude and Claudius’ fault and precluding Hamlet’s absolution. Thus Gertrude and Claudius appears to be more than a game, a pleasant, learned stroll in a remote historical and literary past. Rather by decentering Hamlet, Updike’s novel leads us towards a new reading of the play whose interpretation is thus widened.

Sophie Chapuis (Caen), «L’esthétique du supplément dans The Four Fingers of Death de Rick Moody»

Rick Moody’s latest book, The Four Fingers of Death (2010), is a novel of anticipation which, paradoxically enough, recycles old material. Indeed, the author uses a 1963-horror movie, The Crawling Hand, as a source of inspiration and in a convoluted chronology, he imagines the novelization of the B-movie’s future remake. In the 2025 NAFTA zone (the United States as a country no longer exists), movies have overridden books and letters are under threat. That is probably why this long novel of 730 pages stands as a maximalist opus and a manifesto for writing.

Considering the fact that the novel as a whole is to be read as a complement to the horror movie, my intent is to discuss concepts of rewriting, supplement and repetition and wonder whether the novelization of the horror movie is only to be read as an addition to the original material. Isn’t it also prompted by the secret wish to prolong or “unend” the life of a work of art?

Moody works this idea through the novel thanks to the extended metaphor of the severed hand – a diseased arm that once belonged to a dead astronaut but which continues to move and scare the living in its post-mortem state.

In this paper, my intent is to argue that the novelization as a supplement to another work of fiction is genuinely linked to the problematic of ending and conceals a deeper anxiety of closing and a concern with death which are also to be found in many other novels and short stories by Rick Moody.
Published in 1968, *Blind Man with a Pistol* is one of Chester Himes’ best known novels as well as one of his finest literary achievements. It is based on a highly sophisticated narrative structure. It features the writer’s favourite heroes, the detectives coffin Ed Johnson and Grave digger Jones investigating the grisly murder of a white man used to satisfying his homosexual needs in Black Harlem. But this is no ordinary investigation. Very soon the detectives are stonewalled, confronted with reluctant witnesses, with clues leading to nowhere, with the hostility of their hierarchy. A key witness is murdered, as a consequence of which the man is declared to be guilty of the first murder, despite a last-minute testimony innocent of him.

The novel is left deliberately incomplete; although coherent, it constantly disappoints the reader’s expectations. There is no Truth, no Justice, no unmasking of the killer. On the other hand the open end which defies the conventions of the detective story, makes it possible for Himes to enlarge the debate, turning what should have been a ‘whodunit’ into the depiction and denunciation of a corrupt society. Greed and perversion are the name of the game and the all-pervading lawlessness that mars Black Harlem actually only reflects America’s own amoralism and violence. Once more the black people are victimized by their former oppressors.

In his essay, “Epic and Novel”, Mikhail Bakhtin rejects the “absolute conclusiveness and closedness” of the epic, rooted in an inaccessible past, in favour of a “still-evolving contemporary reality” represented in the novel. Interestingly, Bakhtin’s remarks on the epic’s closed hermeneutics apply remarkably well to much of colonial discourse, which as Frantz Fanon points out, justified its imperial ambitions by grounding them in an unequivocal triumphalist epic narrative wherein, “The settler makes history; his life is an epoch, an Odyssey”.

Building on this idea of this self-fulfilling ‘colonial Odyssey’ as it were, this paper will posit the following thesis: to make the epic step into the colonial narrative as an intertext is to introduce the “openendedness, indecision, indeterminacy” characteristic of the novel within the colonial Odyssey. Postcolonial epic allegories such as Shashi Tharoor’s *The Great Indian Novel* (1989) and Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990), for instance, set up a dynamic system of felicitous analogies between epic intertexts and colonial history, only to destabilize this double narrative by an accompanying set of discordant intertextual interferences. Thus instead of a Rankean empirical vision of history as complete in itself (“what actually happened”), such postcolonial rewritings propose a more open-ended Crocean vision wherein “All history is contemporary history”, susceptible to infinite revisions and rewritings.