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PART I

Envisioning the Chapter

Are there sections? Consider transitions.

—BRIAN ENO AND PETER SCHMIDT,
“OBLIQUE STRATEGIES” CARD (1975)

The history of the chapter (*caput, κεφάλαιον*) has yet to be written . . . it would take an entire book.

—HERMANN MUTSCHMANN, “INHALTSANGABE UND
KAPITELÜBERSCHRIFT IM ANTIKEN BUCH” (1911)

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ANTE CHAPTER

On Segmented Time

THERE IS NO LIMIT to the ways we can imagine the divisions of time. The swell and crash of a wave; the disappearance and return of an axial rotation, an orbit's centripetal curve; the ripening and rotting of a fruit; arboreal concentric rings, radiating outward in alternating shades; the crossing of an invisible meridian; the transit of an eclipse into and out of totality; sedimentary layers of rock, striated by subtle gradations of color; a pattern of stitches, knit and purl together creating a rhythm of textures; the opening and closing of a shutter, darkness falling to isolate one moment from the next; the cresting and descent of pitch as a sound dopplers past; separate celluloid frames merging into continuity as they pass by at the rate of so many per second; manifold and crease, pulse and echo, call and response, downbeat and upbeat, systole and diastole, ones and zeroes; even, if we prefer, the unmarked flow, the continuous stream of duration impossible to cut or mark. And among them, the chapter: that artifact of the book, giving us an image of time as a series of ordered linear segments. Intelligible units, these chapters, each one tagged or numbered and neatly sequential. Puzzling ones as well, somehow speaking to us of both the feeling of being in a unit and of transitioning to the next—the enclosed space and the wall promising an obverse side, the organ and the membrane attaching it to another.

This is a book about ruptures. But traversable ones: gaps one crosses, fissures within continuities, the marks within an individual life. William James: “The conjunctive relation that has given most trouble to philosophy is *the co-conscious transition*, so to call it, by which one experience passes into another when both belong to the same self.”¹ Even nonphilosophers have reason to be troubled by this mystery, and can use a figurative hook by which to grasp it. A gifted analyst remarked to me once, by way of encouragement and explanation at one

such rupture: “You’re starting a new chapter.” For a bookish type, the remark was instantly clarifying. It gave me the hook I needed at a particular juncture: the sense of being propelled forward, the sense of being lodged within a linearity that had just passed over a gap, the sense as well of being narrated. Above all it gave me the sensation, in Donald Winnicott’s terms, of being “held” in a time, my pieces gathered together by the new time I was entering.² While it did all this, the remark also kindled a search. I was a novel reader, I had some pretense at being practiced at it, I’d devoted years to making it into an occupation. Yet this instant novelization of my life—that was how it felt; I’d eagerly accepted the time signature of a novel—was something whose effects I couldn’t as yet explain to myself. I clearly knew how to think in chapters. I’d been doing it my entire reading life; it had created an orientation to time that I would struggle to erase even had I become conscious of it, which until then I hadn’t been; it was in some sense what I’d been thinking all along, without knowing it. The little release of the chapter break, the tidiness of its sequencing, the quiet space of resonance it opens, all these were rhythms to which I had learned to respond without effort and without much thought; chapters were occasionally pleasures to encounter, but more often a cognitive and even haptic habit, a discipline, a training. Its bearing on me was precisely its way of helping me find my bearings. A temporal GPS, a way of finding your location: here, in this chapter, this is where I am. (Like the chapter- and book-ending line of Henry James’s *The Ambassadors*, a plangent but also reassuring deictic demonstrative: “Then there we are!”)³ But I had no idea why chapters existed—a historical question—nor what exactly they did to our sense of time, a theoretical question. So this book came slowly into being.

I finished this book in the midst what felt like a series of breaks in collective life. They were far from common, even if they could well have been predicted. Again, a series of adjustments seemed necessary, as if everyone were engaged in adapting to some kind of weather condition, trapped as we were in a transitional historical moment—in fact, in several overlapping transitional historical moments. There were of course literal weather conditions: planetary time seemed to have decisively shifted. Some others (say, a presidential term) were discrete, however infinite they felt. Others (a pandemic, outbursts of collective outrage over the immiserations of racial subjugation, a widespread coming to terms with the ruinations of capitalism’s latest phase) were more amorphous, as it was unclear whether they served as a boundary—as the gap between temporal units, the transition to something new—or as the unit themselves, something into which we were sealed, no threshold visible. The

Jamesian question of “where we are” beckoned again, if differently. Everywhere the language of chapters was invoked as a way of answering it. That language was often abused, tendentious, or merely glib. It has featured, for instance, in the rhetoric of American presidential speeches stretching back for well over a century, in order to declare any number of national perils, however prematurely, concluded.⁴ And in the years of this book’s development it returned continually. Take two recent presidents, one who spoke of “a new chapter of international cooperation,” the other “a new chapter of American Greatness.”⁵ The juxtaposition is politically significant for its similarity as well as for its difference. Both are assertions of change within continuity, progress as repetition, the rupture as merely a resumption. If the metaphor can be so tamed by the banalities of power, the experience of temporal fissure the chapter break evokes can also ramify unpredictably. A new chapter might be more of the same, but intensified: long-prepared causes exploding into effects, long-delayed reckonings awaiting. Or new, untold horrors awaiting. So it seemed to me at the most recent turn of the decade: the logic of a linear segment coming to an end, of sequential advance and of the caesuras of transition, possessed a newly heightened communal-historical force, even if instead of feeling “held” by these collective chapters, more often recently I felt trapped, stuck, or strangled by them, without feeling as if their conclusion would offer comfort.⁶ We can be lacerated by shifts in time just as well as relieved by them.

Between those two orientation points, an experience of personal and then collective transition, both articulated by the same metaphor, this book took shape. What became apparent was how deeply embedded, how durable, the metaphor of the chapter was. As the American idiom “chapter book” still tells us, mature literacy, a familiarity with how to use a book, is defined by the expectation of the chapter break. We “start a new chapter” in our lives with dread or excitement; we “close that chapter of my life” with regret or relief. It is an old metaphor, its bookishness signaling its longevity. But its antiquity—both in cultural-historical terms and in our individual lives as readers, taking us back to some of our earliest experiences with books—allows it to modulate between the personal and the collective. It is almost always both: the life lived as a historical narrative, historical change lived as an individual itinerary. Thomas De Quincey, writing in 1853: “About the close of my sixth year, suddenly the first chapter of my life came to a violent termination; that chapter which, even within the gates of recovered paradise, might merit a remembrance.”⁷ Vilém Flusser, in 1991: “On the one hand, the history of the human species is one of the final chapters in natural history. On the other hand, natural history is a late

chapter of human history.”⁸ We live stretched between many different clocks, many different temporal rhythms: the abstraction of an hour, the inevitability of diurnal repetition, our different biological rhythms and phases, the measures provided by a historical or cultural or economic phase. The chapter is not just one of those clocks; it has become a metalanguage for the interrelationship, the intricate polyrhythm, of those various clocks in their simultaneous operation. If it still works for us this way, for how much longer? I have attempted here to trace the history of this temporal construction, this bookish way of parsing time, and to consider its phenomenological nuances. It did not escape me that I was perhaps standing near the conclusion of its long history, the end of the chapter of the chapter. In a culture, and on a planet, where our temporal frames seem as unlocked or mismatched as ever before, and where the influence of the book on our mappings of time could be waning, it may be that this study is written as almost an elegy. But if I was foretelling a transition, taking the attitude of anticipatory poignancy, it did not escape me either that I had learned that habit from chapters.

This book can then be thought of as a study of the long, slow coming into being of the conditions of the chapter metaphor and its persistent grip on how we speak and think of change, transition, boundaries in time. It starts, however, with some naïve and nonfigurative questions: Why do books have chapters, and when did they start to have them? How has the chapter, and the idea of the chapter, changed over the two millennia of the practice of writing and reading in them? What kinds or durations of experiences do chapters encapsulate? What I aim to detect are some patterns in the history that help give shape to what otherwise might seem too hopelessly shapeless, irregular, and nebulous to be anything like the phenomena literary scholars usually study. Such a purpose, however, necessitates a few opening explanations, a provisional map to the peculiarly organized terrain that follows and the compromises I’ve adopted in charting it.

Norms and Exceptions. That there are broad, enduring logics to the chapter, affinities across different genres, languages, and historical occasions, is one of this book’s contentions. Necessarily therefore it is in search of representative, model examples, those that seem to best (or, most quickly) encapsulate normative practices in the long history of chaptering. This is not a history of resistances to the chapter or flagrant refusals of its protocols. Much of my attention has been devoted to the *usual* chapter and its almost unthinking repetitions of technique, as well as the subtleties of that technique. And yet, often the exception has proven too important to ignore: the “bad” or flawed version of

chaptering, the deliberate adjustment to a habitual gesture, the idiosyncratic stamp put on an old template. Some of those eccentricities, in the eddies of stylistic history, have spawned their own microlineages. Which is to say that the tension between the norm and the exception runs throughout this book's choice of examples, in a way that is not finally resolvable; their relationship is unstable. But that tension even goes to the heart of my arguments about the chapter's form itself. The chapter metaphor might seem to indicate—particularly given its presence in the lexicon of the powerful, in the rhetoric of governments—not just the presence of a norm but the influence of normativity. Yet the chapter, as the following pages will demonstrate, is far stranger than that, far more porous and recalcitrant than the regulatory goals to which it is sometimes put. This is an irony that my book pursues throughout. The chapter is indeed one of the primary exemplars of linear time, still a significant way of expressing the dread and hope associated with that mode of futurity. Yet it is also a means for prying linear time apart, making it conspicuous and peculiar, balking or taming its relentlessness. A chapter is a way of paving a linear path and of marking gaps or tears in that path; it is the progress and the impasse both, the space of hesitation between them, the hiccup or delay as well as the leap across or thrust forward. It is a norm, and a way of imagining an escape from or interruption to that norm.

Counting and Reading. Chapters have an intimate relationship with numbers. It can even sometimes seem as if numbering is all they exist to do. George Gissing's 1891 *New Grub Street*, providing a tableau of writer's block: "At the head of the paper was inscribed 'Chapter III.,' but that was all. And now the sky was dusking over; darkness would soon fall."⁹ More cynically consoling, Elizabeth Taylor's 1947 *A View of the Harbour*: "The best part of writing a book is when you write the title at the top of the page and your name underneath and then 'Chapter One!' When that's done the best part's over."¹⁰ A chapter numerates a text, even in the absence of literal numbers. And so it is not an accident that one intellectual mode this book adopts is that of counting. Word counts, in particular, will matter here, as one way of measuring size; size will matter as one way of measuring stylistic change over time. None of these quantitative elements are particularly sophisticated or have required feats of computational power. I have wanted to stay close to the rudimentary arithmetic of chaptering itself: Chapter One, Chapter the Second, the chapter-as-next-in-a-series. I have not refused the aid of counting, nor some of the analytic styles (the graph, the grid, the chart) that accompany it. That said, this is not a study that operates solely, or even largely, at the level of the quantitative. Its interest is

finally phenomenological: how a chapter organizes both diegetic and readerly time. Counting is one way to capture elements of chaptering style that can operate below the threshold of consciousness, and of recognizing patterns and deviations from them, but it is always accompanied by reading, the procedure of investigating a select few instances in granular detail. At a moment when the relationship between quantitative and hermeneutical impulses is fraught and sometimes polemical, my method here—eclectic, rudimentary, and even happenstance as it might be—is an experiment in companionship between these modes.

Archives and Itineraries. The scope of this book is necessarily broad in time and geography, and necessarily highly partial in its examples. There are countless forms of textual segmentation in the world: cantos, stanzas, paragraphs, dramatic acts, Qur'anic surahs, Vedic mantras, Attic strophes. Few, if any, however, have become so mundanely widespread, so adaptable to different geographical and generic climates, so pervasively figural; one does not speak of “paragraphs of my life,” nor of a “new canto” in the history of a nation. Some part of this ubiquity is the effect of the chapter’s multicultural and multilingual spread; whether *capitolo*, *chapitre*, *capítulo*, *kapitula*, or *Kapitel*, *глава* or *bab* or *kabanata* or *κεφάλαιο*, it is evidently unmoored from any particular linguistic or national tradition. It is an enormously diverse terrain, and what this book offers is one itinerary through it, weaving its way across a number of locations and times, starting with a 2,200-year-old Italian legal tablet and leading to, among many others, scriptoria and schoolrooms in third-century Caesarea, sixth-century Vivarium, and thirteenth-century Saint Albans; a courtly coterie in Burgundy and a London printer’s workshop in the fifteenth century; a host of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century locations from Britain to Germany, Russia, Brazil; and finally to the Paris of the early 1960s captured on film and the United States, sometime around now, captured in a slide presentation. That itinerary is admittedly limited by the linguistic and interpretive tools with which I am familiar, and its stopping places have been significantly determined by something like an individual readerly education and taste. There are enormous gaps here, of culture, region, and historical time. My examples are drawn from Western languages and locales only, already just a portion of the chapter’s wild global proliferation, and this is also literary scholar’s book, oriented toward the highly self-conscious presence of chapters in novels. A version of this book written by a theologian, or philosopher of science, or historian, might imagine a different trajectory; the alternative paths that could have been taken are limitless, in language, geography, and genre. But the route this book

sketches is not just a matter of disciplinary training or eccentric preference. Certain inarguably pivotal examples loom large, among them the Bible itself, in its long history toward becoming one major paradigm for a chaptered text. At other moments I have chosen examples because archival evidence permits us to glimpse chapters in the process of formation—where, as in my instances in chapters 3 and 4, we can directly compare texts chaptered by editors, scribes, or printers to the older, undivided texts to which they applied breaks, or to different attempts at chaptering the same texts, these before-and-after comparisons revealing the poetics of the chapter at particular moments. Chapters are everywhere, but they are not everywhere so visibly *worked*, and one principle of my approach has been to try to locate moments where the thinking behind chaptering might be most visible. Whether my landmarks were chosen for their cross-cultural influence or the fact that they bear useful traces of their construction, the goal has been to extract from these stopping places a list of stylistic and tonal traits of the chapter that have endured over long stretches of time and found their way into very different historical occasions. Each of my own chapters is focused, not just by a particular set of texts embedded in its cultural-technological specificity, but by an identifiable chaptering style that is there generated and that would last beyond its initial moment. Neither this list of styles, however, nor the examples out of which it has been derived are in any way exhaustive. It is meant instead to suggest that, however infinite the possibilities of chapter division might be, the repertoire of its uses is much less than infinite. A set of tropes around the chapter tend to recur across its long history: a rhetoric of hands and fingers (grasping, reaching, pointing); a set of architectural images (thresholds, doors, staircases, steps); a frequent recourse to daily biorhythms (resting, sleeping). The chapter is a set of familiar styles and justifications: broad, and flexible, and far from doctrinaire, but recognizable. Recognizable not just as a way of writing but as a way of conceiving of a life in time.

What follows is in three parts: The first is a theoretical portion, laying out synchronically some of the conceptual terrain around the chapter; the second a history of the editorial chapter, which studies moments in which legal texts, philosophies, Scripture, and prose romances from antiquity to the early days of print are segmented, sometimes in multiple ways, by scribes, compilers, or printers after their initial composition, creating durable habits of division that would remain influential for later writers composing in chapters from the outset. The third is a final portion on the novelistic chapter, where I argue for the novel form's unique ability to use the chapter—the numbered or titled section,

the blank space of its caesuras—as a way to articulate how the experience of time is the experience of time’s segmentations. So while this book’s second part generates a set of nouns to identify techniques, or *topoi*, that never quite disappear (the threshold, the syncopation, the cut, the fade), the third, or novelistic, portion turns to the adjectival (the postural, the tacit, the diurnal, the antique-diminutive) to describe some of the styles in which those early techniques were used and transformed at particular moments in the novel’s history. One motto for the book’s final section might be: how the novel is like other kinds of books, and what it takes from, and does to, that likeness.

Nothing in this story, however, is irreversible or entirely forgotten; older kinds of labor arrangements or stylistic emphases have a habit of returning. As such, the chapters of this book are in a tense relation to some of the basic presumptions of chapters *per se*, particularly their linearity. This is a story, but with eddies, loops, persistent motifs. In its broadest sense, however, the trajectory of these three parts is from the chapter’s use as an editorial technique performed on texts not originally written for or with the chapter to its use as a compositional unit—inevitably if not always deliberately, willingly if not always happily. So it goes with my own arrangement of this book. You must, after all, write about chapters in chapters. Writing this book forced me to contend with how I’d learned to write literary-critical chapters, through no precepts or explicit instructions, just by a vague slow osmosis absorbed from countless examples; in this I very much doubt I’m alone. And as the novelists Gissing and Taylor both knew, with that pause before the new—and particularly first—chapter, comes the pleasure and anxiety of trying out something that is also too invitingly open, and too seemingly blank, to instruct you in how to use it. If the white space after a chapter’s last words can sometimes feel like falling through open sky, a pen or cursor hovering as if in zero gravity, one might as well try to savor it as exhilaration before the terror returns. Here, then, is the first leap in a book about crossing gaps.

1

In Which an Object Is Proposed for Analysis

WHAT IS A CHAPTER that we might study it? The very object itself is difficult to conceptualize. Countless are the world's narrative forms, we know; how much more beyond counting the segments known to us as chapters that so often organize, interrupt, and in various ways mark them: chapters in histories, textbooks, memoirs, children's stories, sacred writings, guides, theories, manifestos, pornographies, realist novels, and yes, academic monographs.¹ They pullulate; they spawn. Yet they are almost never an object of notice as such.

An opening comparison, then: two pages from almost five hundred years apart. The first comes from the second volume of an unexceptional manuscript Bible of the late thirteenth century produced in Bologna and held at the British Library (Add MS 18720); the second is from the middle volume of Charlotte Lennox's 1752 novel *The Female Quixote* (figure 1.1). They share neither physical material, size, mode of production, genre, conventions of authorship, nor many operating assumptions of page design, although neither was particularly unusual for its time and genre. The word "chapter" is not present in any form in the Italian Bible, and its chapter openings—here, Luke 13 and 14—are not titled. Instead a colored initial begins each chapter, as well as Roman numerals indicating the chapter number, rubricated in alternating red and blue and inserted in the line space remaining at the end of the previous chapter. These numbers correspond to no table-of-contents-style list (or "capitula list") elsewhere in the volume; they exist alone. A running head, spreading across the volume's facing pages, announces the name of the book only, while slender borders on the left of each column trail off into thin winding scrolls.² The British novel, on the other hand, has a thirty-two-word chapter heading and a "drop cap" for the chapter's first letter, the weight of segmentation falling on the heading

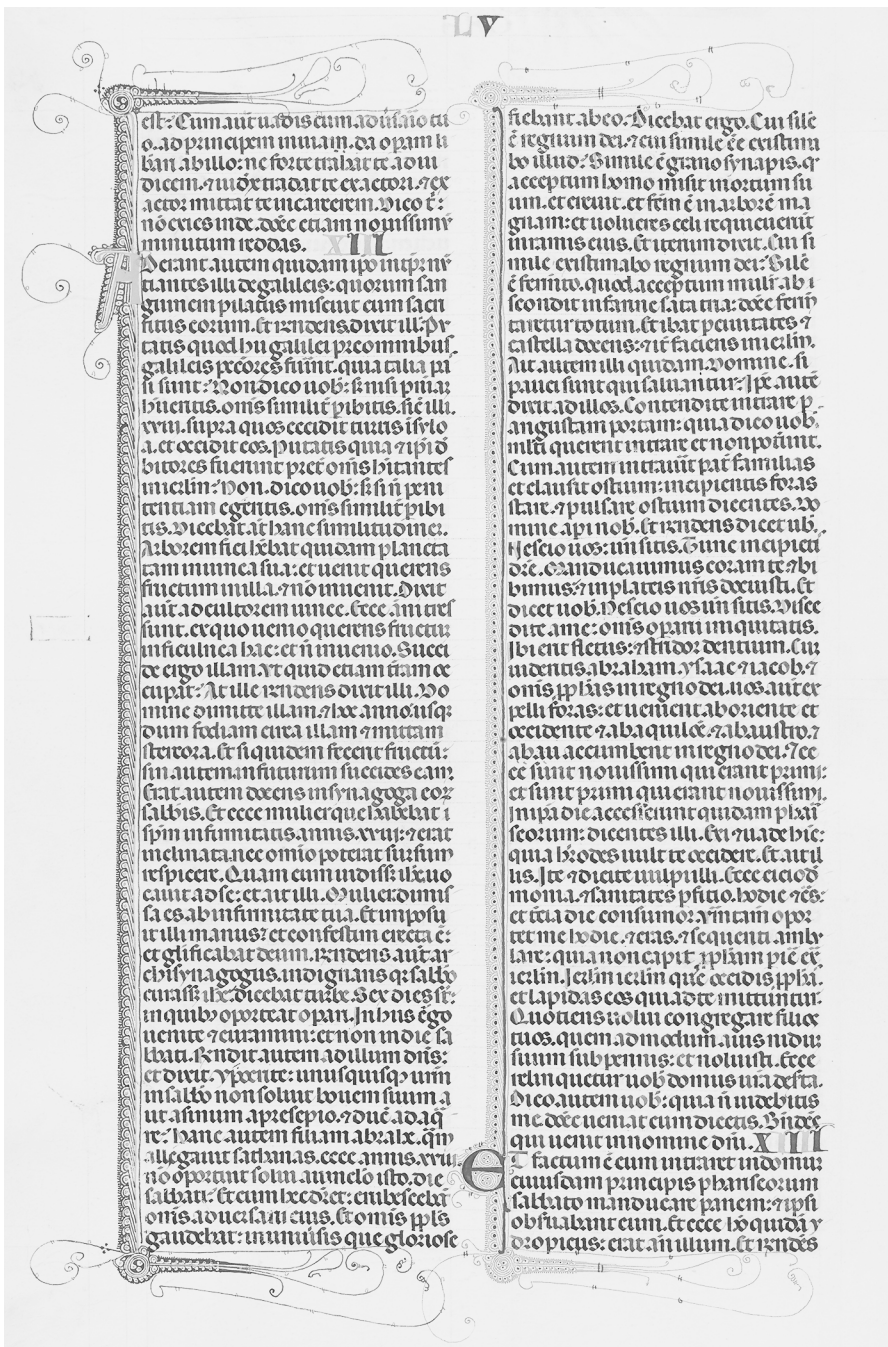


FIGURE 1.1 Two varieties of the chapter: *left*, chapter openings of Luke 13 and 14 in British Library Add MS 18720/2, fol. 438v; *right*, the opening of book 5, chapter 5, of Charlotte Lennox's *The Female Quixote: or, The Adventures of Arabella*, volume 2 (London, 1752), page 32.

Left courtesy of the British Library; *right* courtesy of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

CHAP. V.

In which will be found one of the former Mistakes pursued, and another cleared up, to the great Satisfaction of Two Persons; among whom, the Reader, we expect, will make a Third.

ARABELLA no sooner saw *Sir Charles* advancing towards her, when, sensible of the Consequence of being alone with a Person whom she did not doubt, would make use of that Advantage, to talk to her of Love, she endeavoured to avoid him, but in vain; for *Sir Charles*, guessing her Intentions, walked hastily up to her; and, taking hold of her Hand,

You must not go away, *Lady Bella*, said he: I have something to say to you.

Arabella, extremely discomposed at this Behaviour, struggled to free her Hand from her Uncle; and, giving him a Look, on which Disdain and Fear were visibly painted,

Unhand me, Sir, said she, and force me not to forget the Respect I owe you, as my Uncle, by treating you with a Severity such uncommon Insolence demands.

Sir Charles, letting go her Hand in a great Surprise, at the Word Insolent, which she had used, asked her, If she knew to whom she was speaking?

Questionless, I am speaking to my Uncle, replied she; and 'tis with great Regret I see myself obliged to make use of Expressions no way

FIGURE 1.1 (continued)

more heavily than the initial words of the unit; the word “chapter” is present but abbreviated, as if too informal to bother with the full label one already knows; and a moderate amount of white space, equivalent to one line of text, separates title from chapter proper. Lennox’s chapter number competes with other location devices at the page’s head—both a page and a book number—and therefore is nested within one finding scheme while overlapping with another. Both the chapter number and title are recapitulated in a list of “Contents” at the start of the first volume. The chapter breaks of both Bible and novel hail a reader, but they do so with a wide tonal difference: the tacit expectation of the Biblical chapter number, that it will be used as a finding aid or citational marker, contrasts with the occasion Lennox seizes to playfully address the reader directly—this despite the fact that her novel has a more elaborate finding apparatus, its table of contents. Finally, Lennox’s chapter is self-evidently understood to have authorial sanction; the division here is intrinsic to the text. Could a differently chaptered version of *The Female Quixote* possibly exist? Quite the opposite with the thirteenth-century biblical page: its chaptering is, as of the likely date of the manuscript, a fairly new scheme of division developed in the first decades of the thirteenth century, inserted into a text that had been divided quite differently over the preceding eight hundred years. One would seem to be essential and unalterable, the other provisional.

Are these chapters at all the same? What do two such things share other than a name, which might seem just a flag of convenience? What, to extend our thought experiment further, of other frequent variations—the “chapter” that is not even announced as such, marked only by a number, if that? Can these instances be said to belong to a category that could become an object of analysis?

Further confusions abound: what, in each instance, looking for a “chapter,” are we supposed to see? For the literary theorist Gérard Genette (perhaps encouraged by the fact that *chapitre* or *chapter* derives from a diminutive of *caput* in Latin, or “little head”), chapters are essentially their titles, or *headings*—the labels or “intertitles” that, like the other “paratexts” Genette studies, such as prefaces, epigraphs, or dedications, exist in a space auxiliary to the text itself.³ In the case of the biblical chapter here, these are minimal; in Lennox’s novel, lavish. In both cases these are largely conventional for their time. Yet what of the unit of text so marked off, the stretch more commonly referred to as a “chapter,” which is far less conventionally—perhaps even somewhat casually, or idiosyncratically—measured? In not being quite sure whether a chapter is a unit of a text or a way of marking off that unit, a label or

the textual contents so labeled, we are accordingly uncertain how much freedom it permits. In either case a suspicion lingers that only half the story is being told. The writer of a chapter feels constraint, no doubt; the very fact of writing in a chapter is less chosen than expected, and the appearance it will take, its length, the extent to which it will be set off by blank space on the page, how or if it will be titled, tends to be far more conventional to a time and a genre than freely manipulated, and in any case not often completely within authorial power. Yet a massive freedom exists in between. What a chapter is meant to do—how it must begin and end—is nowhere codified. Is such a composite thing any kind of “form”?

A “form,” stretching back to the term’s uses in Kant, is an identifiable feature that negotiates between limitation and invention; it realizes itself by adhering to, if not a rule, at least a pattern or external constraint, and yet it cannot seem entirely rote or predetermined.⁴ The chapter violates that balance. It seems at once infinitely various and wholly routine, both too weak to be any constraint and so ubiquitous that it can be nothing but a passively acquired constraint. As a result, the chapter has almost never been accepted in the range of elements that constitute a literary form.⁵ But it will not do to be too nice about what we allow into that category, if only because of what it prevents us from seeing—here, the durable consistency and manifold variations of the chapter’s segmenting work. In this I am following the call of literary critics Jonathan Kramnick and Anahid Nersessian for a pragmatist understanding of form, one that resists any totalizing definition in favor of a flexible usage that is largely ostensive: to use the term “form” is to point to something, and by doing so isolate it among a host of overlapping and competing phenomena.⁶ (As we will see, this approach is appropriate for the chapter, which is itself a kind of pointing.) To designate a “form” is not necessarily to posit something objective about what one points to, but instead, in the philosopher Rodolphe Gasché’s phrase, to name “a subjective condition concerning the representability” of that object or category of objects; to call the chapter a “form” is above all to make it visible.⁷ This is no small thing. There are many reasons not to see chapters: their dull, even remedial ordinariness, their omnipresence across so many kinds of prose documents, and also, across the millennia of their existence, what can look like their deep unlikeness from one another.

Those obvious dissimilarities, and the chapter’s oddly composite status between text and paratext, have tended to restrict the historical and generic scope of the few studies of the chapter that do exist, which by and large concentrate on the logics of chapter form in specific genres or even particular

writers, usually those locations where chapters are within authorial control.⁸ In the foremost instances, the sophisticated and broadly synthetic work of Georges Mathieu and Ego Dionne, the result is something closer to taxonomy than history. This book proposes a more drastic kind of abstraction and a longer genealogy: to move across the difference between the authorial chapter and the kind produced by editors, scribes, and scholars at other points in the lifecycle of the text, and to move therefore across almost two millennia of textual production. It means thinking of the thirteenth-century medieval Bible, not to mention much older material, and the novelistic chapter, even many newer such examples, together. It means often adopting an uncomfortable or embarrassing literalism: if the unit was at any point called a chapter, it is a chapter, however it looks and however it was made.

I want then to propose a highly abstract object of analysis, and as a result a fairly new one, and so I began with a comparison meant to suggest a level of abstraction sufficient to gather together two such disparate instances. Where that abstraction will take us is primarily toward the question of time. The difference between medieval Bible and satirical eighteenth-century novel is of course vast, and the idea that the chapter develops slowly with every shift in genre and technology of publication will be fundamental to this study. Equally fundamental, however, is that the object of analysis is bound together and given its cultural weight by one quality every instance shares: the chapter is a form of textual segmentation that articulates time. That function is not, as we will see, one of its original purposes. It is to some extent an accident occasioned by its migration from informational to narrative genres in late antiquity. But even in its earliest instances it is present, and as the chapter spreads into an inevitability of almost any codex, it is what gives chaptering a cultural purchase not afforded other kinds of segmentation. To the extent that this mess of individual objects belongs to a class, it does so because each chapter participates in the project of imagining a temporal experience, one that is organized into flexible yet regular units, punctuated by breaks, and loosely, at times very loosely, tied in a developing sequence. It is this kind of temporal experience that gives the metaphor of the chapter—the “chapter of my life,” the desire to “start a new chapter”—its power. The claim my following pages will press is that this innocuous, ubiquitous device, not just a format but not quite a genre, has a purchase on one of the grander claims of written narrative: to be capable of representing, and even structuring, what it feels like to have an experience in time. Chapters locate a reader. They fit us into a scheme that is at the same time chronological and topical; they “commensurate” our lived time, to use Nan Da’s

term, to textual time.⁹ As such this book is a study of the gradual diffusion, long preexisting the novel but flourishing in it, of something that can be called *chapter time*.

The distinction I am making here is between what might seem like the chapter's most obvious function—its ability, particularly when indexed to a table of contents or other tabular representation, to produce a synchronic map of a text—and how chapters segment, interrupt, and articulate a diachronic or linear process through a text. By emphasizing diachrony, I am alluding to a historical argument that this book will make: the chapter, more swiftly than has been understood, outgrew its initial function of mapping or outlining and became a caesura or temporal measurement, an implicit evaluation of what is possible in the time given us by a chapter. I am also making here an argument as to essential function. Insofar as the chapter has meaning—a meaning that can become a metaphor—it is because it speaks of a sort of time analogous to, but crucially different than, the other time units we live in: hours, days, months, years; eras, periods, epochs, phases. In fact, the charged tension that seems to inhibit us from calling the chapter a “form,” the tension between something that seems so abstractly conventional and yet so free to be filled in so many distinct and personalized ways, is exactly the tension of any unit of time. That is the “form” of this particular form: it marks time. And it marks time in ways that absorb and compete with other ways of marking time, at different historical moments stretching or compressing in a constantly elastic relationship to other, often more rigid, temporal concepts.

Ten Premises

From this initial comparison, I want to move to some hazarded generalizations: a list of ten premises about the chapter, an abbreviated overview of aspects of chaptering that later parts of this book will illuminate more fully. These are general observations, closer to sociological norms than ironclad distinctions. Quite often they present features that cry out, at particular moments and for particular writers, to be resisted. Yet they are surprisingly durable across a long historical stretch, and together they define a practice that, however different in material appearance or authorial intent, remains recognizably similar.

1. *The chapter is stylistically distinct; it is not fully explicable by analogy to units in other media or to psychological models. It is only loosely like a*

musical phrase, a dramatic scene, or what cognitive scientists call “event perception,” however tempting the analogy becomes. It is its own practice, peculiar and peculiarly useful.

“A new chapter in a novel is something like a new scene in a play,” begins chapter 11 of Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre*.¹⁰ Sketching out chapter plans in his notebooks, Henry James had frequent recourse to similar language. On *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896): “I seem to see the thing in three chapters, like 3 little acts”; on *What Maisie Knew* (1897): “Each little chapter is, thereby, a moment, a stage.” Ruminating in late 1914 over the project that would be *The Sense of the Past*, James considered the means by which he “ended my chapter, or dropped my curtain.”¹¹ The comparison between chapter and scene is recurrently appealing, just as other such comparisons tend to offer themselves as suitable explanations of how chapters operate. In *Jane Eyre*, the comparison seems motivated by embarrassment: so much has happened in the preceding chapter break, so much more than ordinarily occurs in that space—a complete change of life, from years spent at Lowood School to a new life among strangers—that the typically more modest interval of a chapter break seems scarcely capable of accommodating it. Too much has changed, as if in that space stagehands were busily arranging a new set.

Chapters exist, then, in a matrix of different temporal units, comprising the vocabularies of other aesthetic media, such as the “scene,” as well as a more diffuse vocabulary of time measurement. The ingredients of daily time, from social to physiological or circadian rhythms, like a day, an hour, a visit, an event; the human political units of reigns and revolutions, wars and careers, and the periods in which an ideology dominates; the abstractions of small and large time, from minutes to geological eras: the chapter is not only porous to all these, potentially, but often explained with reference to them, depending on the particular speed and scope of the individual text. Similarly, the chapter exists in a matrix of different marks of punctuation.¹² It is often grouped with the page, the paragraph, and even the separation between words as a protocol for parsing text into distinct entities.¹³ Yet by existing within *both* matrices, the chapter remains stubbornly, if partially, independent of either, and maintains its difference. It can absorb other units while not being reducible to them.

The occasional comparisons of chapters to other temporal segmentations are just that—comparisons, catachreses. The chapter is tied to the materiality of text, yet can float free of it; it can help shape more notional units of narrative, such as the “episode,” without remaining beholden to them either. A

chapter can be “scenic”—limited to one continuous scene or action—or pure summary; more usually it is a combination of both, only obliquely related to either, making it difficult to parse through one particular narrative speed.¹⁴ The chapter’s relation to other kinds of temporal or narrative measurement is constituted by fleeting and changeable kinds of mimicry, making it, necessarily and paradoxically, ever more itself. More prosaically: it can encompass, at times, something like an episode, an era, a scene; and it can take on other documentary forms, such as the testimony, the affidavit, the letter; but it absorbs these within its own rules and tends to violate, or reshape, their boundaries. To echo Laurence Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy* (1759), the chapter will observe other kinds of time measurement, like the pendulum, while rejecting “the jurisdiction of all other pendulums whatever.”¹⁵

If the chapter is not reducible to some other unit, either specifically aesthetic or more generally cultural, a suspicion remains, familiar in our moment, that it might be explicable with reference to properties of the human brain: that the chapter satisfies, or can be derived from, ways in which time is cognitively processed. A large body of work within cognitive science has been devoted, for the last four decades, to the question of how stretches of time are segmented in ways that either make them amenable to coding as memory, or simply reviewable as coherent experiences. Such experiments have focused on the ordinary perception of events as well as the special case of reading. The basic claim of this work seems important for any theory of the chapter: boundary making is a ceaseless activity of the brain in its encounter with time, and is essential for any recall or experiential coherence. As one of the earliest such studies insisted, “ongoing behavior is perceived in units.”¹⁶ The initial and still-popular term “chunking” described exactly that aspect of perception: the spontaneous, automatic division of temporal experience. Later work in what is now known as event segmentation theory (or EST) has described some of the specific mechanisms by which the data of continuous temporality are parsed, and from the standpoint of a literary theorist, the workings of event segmentation are surprisingly Aristotelian. EST argues for a ceaseless cognitive labor of marking time into basic plot units characterized by actions and the intentions of the actor; that is to say, we scan for completed actions, where “action” is defined as a goal-driven human act.¹⁷ Our default cognitive template for the shape of a narrative unit, which becomes the basic unit of our temporal experience, is according to logic of EST the inception and completion of a human intention, however fleeting. Simply put, the history of the chapter is inconsistent with this theory. Human intention is not the inevitable, or even a particularly

frequent, grammar of chapter boundaries.¹⁸ Or perhaps EST has a merely negative relation to the chapter: if, as is the contemporary consensus of research in the field, our episodic memory—that is, our narrative memory—is organized by the activities of event segmentation, we would have some help in understanding how difficult it can be to remember the events of any one particular novelistic or scriptural chapter.

The chapter, in other words, does not fit with current accounts of cognition the way a tool fits with an intended use. As a tool, its original purpose was never perfectly aligned with the task of chunking temporal sequence into memorable units, and it has outlived that tool-purpose in any case. As an artifact, it is best thought of as addressing virtual states of affairs—as an experiment in imagining different kinds of temporality than those spontaneously or habitually produced by our cognitive acts of segmentation.¹⁹ Theories of other modes of dividing time can be at best suggestive in any account of the chapter, and at worst will be misleading. We will need to respect its strange, stubborn autonomy.

2. *It is so ubiquitous as to be almost invisible: the essence of conventionality.*

It is hard to *see* chapters, such is their banal inevitability. The chapter possesses the trick of vanishing while in the act of serving its various purposes. In 1919, writing in the *Nouvelle revue française*, Marcel Proust famously insisted that the most beautiful moment in Gustave Flaubert's *Sentimental Education* was not a phrase but a *blanc*, or white space: a terrific, yawning fermata, one "sans l'ombre de transition," without, so to speak, the hint of a transition.²⁰ It is the hiatus, Proust explains, that directly ensues from a scene set during Louis Napoleon's 1851 coup, in which the protagonist Frédéric Moreau watches the killing of his radical friend Dussardier by Sénécal, a former militant republican turned policeman for the new regime. After this sudden and virtuosic *blanc*, Frédéric is in 1867; sixteen aimless years elapse in the intervening silence. It is, Proust argues, a masterful change of tempo, one that liberates the regularity of novelistic time by treating it in the spirit of music. And yet this *blanc* is not entirely blank. What Proust neglects to mention, whether out of forgetfulness or disdain for such editorial and typesetting detail, is that the hiatus he is praising here is a chapter break.²¹ However masterful and unprecedented its handling of time, it is also to some extent procedurally typical—a *blanc* like countless others in the history of the novel, dully routine in visual terms, simply the transition between the fifth and sixth chapters of the novel's third part, marked in the early editions published by Michel Lévy Frères not just by the

Roman numeral that prefaces the new chapter but by a change of page between the two units, an arrangement most subsequent editions followed. It was an arrangement already present in the novel's manuscript, where across six different rewritings Flaubert indicated this transition with a horizontal line and a carefully, even dramatically, indited "VI." The blanc has more than a shadow to indicate it; it has conventional marks. Flaubert was writing a chapter break. It is easy to see, but also, apparently, easy to forget, or too common to be worth mentioning.

This is the chapter's usual fate, to be considered dully expedient but embarrassingly common, the musty old furniture of the book. We cannot entirely forget chapters because we do not ever really have to learn about them. The conventionality of the chapter places it in the middle of a spectrum of form: too ordinary to be easily apparent as a particular aesthetic method or choice, too necessary to eliminate in the name of an antiformal freedom that claims to speak on behalf of pure "life." That intermediate position is a place, we might say, where form's deliberate artifice and life's unruly vibrancy mix most intimately. The chapter has one foot in both restriction and freedom, diluting the force of both: a not very severe restriction, a somewhat circumscribed freedom.

Put another way, the chapter, like any pervasive conventionality, feels natural. It is old-fashioned, but that old-fashioned aura nonetheless does not need to rise to the level of a conscious reference to its history. To write a chapter is to be aware of working within the preferences or norms of a genre, to think of its vaguely usual length, to be conscious of the reader's need to pause. In fact, that weak but persistent inevitability, that which we often mean when we speak of the conventional, is one of its determining characteristics, and something that any account of the chapter will have to bear in mind. Recovering what chapters do, and a history of their changing shapes and uses, should not tip into a psychoanalytic account that imagines readers as excessively, even if unconsciously, aware of their presence.²² An essential element in how chapters have developed is toward a functional innocuousness, an insistence, in fact, on their own vagueness, flexibility, and resistance to rising to any flagrant notice. As a result chapters escape the structure/ornament distinction; in their long, slow history, they become ever more tacit and recessive, ever farther from their initial structural purpose as an indexical device, and as a result ever more indispensable, something that cannot be removed without damage to the whole.

Put in a more dismissive vein, we might say that a chapter is usually, in fact possibly always, "just" a chapter. Its claims on our attention are marginal. This is not the whole story, but neither is it something to be ignored. In an attempt

to keep the chapter's ubiquity and innocuousness from sliding into something more vivid and unusual, my instances of chapters in what follows will more often come from a range of ordinary, typical, customary examples than from those that seem to call for our attention through intense self-consciousness or experimentation. My bias is toward the example that just barely calls out for notice, that takes part in the chapter's usual near-invisibility. Although even these examples will have intriguing lessons for us, beyond providing the ground against which more experimental instances could be understood.

3. *As a result, the chapter has no explicit canons of construction, no theory of its own.*

Like any paratext, as Genette defined the term, the chapter is “constrained.”²³ It is a place where norms are obeyed more often than flouted, a space of repetition rather than innovation. But the fact of obedience does not mean that there are explicit rules being obeyed. Obscure norms do the work of regulating the chapter's shape rather than anything like a set of hard prescriptions. There is not even a canon of illustrious examples to be followed, parodied, or rejected—so diffident is the chapter's demand to be noticed. A few landmarks of metacommentary rise to the surface across the centuries, clustered in particular places and times: the “chapter on chapters” in *Tristram Shandy*, the chapter titled “Of Divisions in Authors” in Henry Fielding's 1742 *Joseph Andrews*, the “Table of Instructions” to Julio Cortázar's 1963 *Hopscotch*. But these do not function as models so much as places to explore metaphors or possible alternate uses for chaptering, and they are not widely emulated. The chapter has no foundational or primary instance, no explicit tradition, no set of guidelines; it is in this sense that Ugo Dionne, speaking of the novelistic chapter, calls it “*informalisable*,” resistant to any grammar.²⁴

Such resistance gives the chapter its durability. Its shape is never so hard as to become brittle. This suggests that the chapter is most itself when least self-conscious, most habitual or automatic, when its elastic norms are most taken for granted and not pressed into the mold of a specific metaphor or function. No small part of that elasticity is that the chapter allows for a considerable confusion as to the question of agency. If a chapter is a shaped object, who shapes it?²⁵ The question is never easily settled, even in the cases where it becomes most apparent. “The division of the novel into parts, parts into chapters, chapters into paragraphs—the book's *articulation*—I want to be utterly clear,” Milan Kundera insists in the interview with Christian Salmon collected as “Dialogue on the Art of Composition.” But such clarity is a somewhat

diffuse responsibility: “I also want each of the chapters to be a small, self-contained entity. This is why I insist that my publishers make the numbers prominent and set the chapters off sharply from each other. (Gallimard’s solution is best: each chapter starts on a fresh page.) Let me return to the comparison between novel and music. A part is a movement. The chapters are measures. These measures may be short or long or quite variable in length.”²⁶ Without quite acknowledging the dilemma, Kundera nonetheless points it out: the chapter, even at its most consciously shaped, is at least in part a collaboration, an effect of typography as well as of composition, a paratext as well as a form. As a result the ensuing musical metaphor expresses nothing so much as the wistfulness of the novelist in regard to another medium; composers, after all, do not thank their publishers for setting off the measures with sufficient distinctness.

In its will-to-metaphor, its implicit admission of the limits here of an author’s agency, and its veering from a statement of intent (“I want . . . I insist”) to something that takes the form of a definition (“chapters are measures”), Kundera’s explanation is a model of how the conventions of the chapter are muddled, if productively so. Like any convention, it exists whether or not anyone wants to participate in it, but one is free—as Kundera does here—to invest in the convention, even imagine a way to transform or rationalize it. But this is not the same thing as obeying a rule. Nor is it even something like constructing a theory. It is closer to finding a way, a compromise with one’s will, to live with a norm.

4. *And yet for all its unformalized conventionality, the chapter is also, perhaps inevitably, metafictional; it cannot help but attempt to explain itself.*

To say that the division of a narrative must in some way become a comment on that division is true in multiple senses. It is of course most notable in the category of statements that dot eighteenth-century fiction in which a narrator refers to the chapter itself, as in this characteristic chapter ending from Fielding’s *Amelia* (1751): “That we may give the Reader Leisure to consider well the foregoing Sentiment, we will here put an End to this Chapter.”²⁷ Those closing tags need not be so explicit, as the following selection of chapter-ending clauses from Eliza Haywood’s *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, published the same year, demonstrates:

the reader shall presently be made sensible.

the reader will presently be informed of.

how she was amused will presently be shewn.

as will hereafter appear in the progress of this story.

will in due time and place appear.

Although such comments cluster at chapter endings, they can appear anywhere as useful cross-referencing. Haywood, for instance, has recourse to this phrase: “as related in the sixth chapter of this volume.”²⁸ These are obvious examples, culled from two novels published within months of each other, but by no means peculiar, and they reveal that the very presence of a break in the action tends to occasion a shift in which the break becomes the subject of the discourse. Genette has called these “advance notices and recalls”; Monica Fludernik refers to them as “metadiscursive.”²⁹ It might be more fruitful still to turn to the branch of linguistics known as pragmatics, where such a reference is understood as a deixis—technically a “discourse deixis,” a gesture that locates an utterance within a surrounding discourse, lifting figure from ground. Such deictic moments tend to blur temporal and spatial registers: “presently” and “hereafter” can merge with demonstratives such as “this” or “that,” “later” can also be “below.”³⁰ Like any deixis, these moments refer to anchoring points in both space and time, pointing from the relative viewpoint of the now toward some larger temporal scheme: like proprioception, but for time.

All chapter titles, in this sense, are essentially deictic, and therefore metafictional, no matter their individual styles. The shift from a seventeenth-century heading—“How Simplicissimus Was Changed from a Wild Beast into a Christian” (*Simplicius wird aus einer Bestia zu einem Christenmenschen*)—to an early twentieth-century one like “Initial Inquiry” (*Erste Untersuchung*) is stylistically large but functionally minor.³¹ Both point outside of the story world to a reader, situating the “now” of narrative within some broader and usually sequential context. (Grimmelshausen’s title tells us we will be left with a Christian protagonist in what follows; Kafka’s promises at least a second interrogation, and possibly several.) In fictional prose where the presence of an implied author is for whatever reason illicit, the chapter heading nonetheless refers to a world occupied by that author. “Who speaks the chapter heading?” is an unavoidable question. In more openly metafictional novels, that question can become explicit, and chapter heading can cross over into narrative (figure 1.2). In others, devices such as epigraphs signal an exterior world commenting on the world of the narrative.³² Yet even that most discreet of

SYLVIE AND BRUNO.

CHAPTER I.

LESS BREAD! MORE TAXES!

—and then all the people cheered again, and one man, who was more excited than the rest, flung his hat high into the air, and shouted (as well as I could make out) “Who roar for the Sub-Warden?” *Everybody* roared, but whether it was for the Sub-Warden, or not, did not clearly appear: some were shouting “Bread!” and some “Taxes!”, but no one seemed to know what it was they really wanted.

All this I saw from the open window of the Warden’s breakfast-saloon, looking across the shoulder of the Lord Chancellor, who had

✓ E

B

FIGURE 1.2 The cross-contamination of chapter head and narrative: Lewis Carroll’s *Sylvie and Bruno* (London: Macmillan, 1889), page 1. Courtesy of the Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

chapter headings, a simple number, points to an outside order and sequence as well as an attitude—mocking or reluctant—toward that order.

Of course, the metafictional dimension of the chapter can be handled with varying degrees of willfulness and explicitness. Take one eventful chapter from Elizabeth Gaskell’s 1854 *North and South*, “Home at Last,” in which Margaret Hale’s mother dies shortly after the clandestine arrival from abroad of her brother Frederick, a naval mutineer who had been living in a Spanish refuge.

It is a chapter of major transitions: the death of a mother and the dangerous presence of fugitive brother will initiate a more fluid series of events in Margaret's Manchester life as a more unpredictable anxiety replaces another. It ends at the first daybreak of the vigil over Mrs. Hale's body, and with it several "chapters" align simultaneously: "The night was wearing away, and the day was at hand, when, without a word of preparation, Margaret's voice broke upon the stillness of the room, with a clearness of sound that startled even herself: 'Let not your heart be troubled,' it said; and she went steadily on through all that chapter of unspeakable consolation."³³ That "chapter" is John 14, of which we hear Margaret speaking the first verse. As that Gospel chapter begins, "Home at Last" ends, novelistic chapter yielding to biblical chapter in a deftly metafictional gesture that yokes Margaret's recitation within the story world to our temporary release from it in the chapter break. In a novel not at all given to metafiction, the suturing of novel and Scripture through the word "chapter" is unusually sly. It demonstrates the continual pressure upon the framing of a chapter to account for itself, by finding some way to link a hiatus within the fictional world to the exigency of a readerly pause. To go one step further: we can even detect, in the history of the novel, fashions or recurrent styles of such synchronization.

5. *A chapter is a particular kind of segment. It is resistant to wholeness, autonomy, being excerpted; it prefers irregularity and elasticity. Its orientation is linear or syntagmatic rather than paradigmatic.*

A thought experiment: Is it possible to imagine an anthology of famous novelistic chapters? It would be a peculiar exercise, and no more or less compelling than an anthology of paragraphs; the chapter not only tends to be too embedded in the context of a plot to be excerptible but is not often shaped with enough attention to internal coherence to be memorable on its own. Harry Levin, in 1958, on "The Whiteness of the Whale," chapter 42 of *Moby-Dick*: "one of the farthest-ranging chapters in our literature."³⁴ Who else speaks of chapters in this way? A chapter is an *articulation* of a text, in the sense of the links in a chain, the bones of one's hand, or the interwoven steps of an escalator.³⁵ Alone, it is shorn of its function and therefore much of its effect.

Those metaphors—chain, skeleton, escalator—are also, however, slightly misleading. The chapter does always exhibit some minimal difference, despite its place within a larger working scheme, and is never quite identical to others, either in length or procedure. It has an uneasy relationship to isometry or any nested, hierarchical, regular structure. It has rhythm rather than architecture.

One way to understand this resistance to higher-order formalization is by a second thought experiment, along the lines of a quiz: How many chapters are in *Gulliver's Travels*, *I promessi sposi*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, *Invisible Man*? Any correct answer would be definitionally trivial. Chapters imply numeration but not usually numerology; there is no widely acknowledged numerological tradition proper to the chapter or the chaptered book, unlike the twelve or twenty-four "books" of epic, the three or five acts of drama, or Dante's hundred cantos divided into three canticles.³⁶ Those texts that adopt a chaptered numerology are deliberately eccentric, such as the unlucky thirteen chapters of Horace McCoy's 1935 noir allegory *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*; the twelve chapters of Malcolm Lowry's 1947 *Under the Volcano*, with that number's Kabbalistic, mythological, and calendrical significances; or the thirteen books of Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999–2006), each with thirteen chapters.³⁷ Where it is not eccentric, such numerology is deliberately countercultural: there is the example of the early sixteenth-century *Book of a Hundred Chapters*, authored by the anonymous Revolutionary of the Upper Rhine during the Peasant's Revolt, although, as if to illustrate the oddity of such totalizing numerical schemes, the book in fact includes only eighty-nine chapters.³⁸

The tension the chapter occupies is that between complete autonomization and distinctness—"even the assing girouette of a postfuturo Gertrudo Steino protetopublic dont demand a new style per chapter," Ezra Pound exhaustively warned James Joyce in 1919, having just struggled through a draft of the "Sirens" chapter of *Ulysses*—and complete totalization, or absorption into any schema that would enforce regularity.³⁹ It intersects with a more regular material rhythm (the page) and with different kinds of narrative rhythms (the day, the episode), cutting aslant each of them and resisting being wholly incorporated into their order.⁴⁰ In this sense, the chapter attunes us to a sense of time as multiple, overlapping, irregular. "Intervals of time," Ricoeur noted, "do not simply fit into one another according to their numerical quantities, days into years, years into centuries."⁴¹ Nor do the slippery cadences of the chapter fit easily into larger, graduated orders. There are different ways of understanding this unevenness, different value judgments and aesthetic terms that could be applied: organic versus mechanical, self-aware rather than externally imposed, embodied rather than abstract and automatic. It is not necessary to choose; and in fact, at various historical moments, chapters may generate their impetus from any one of these vocabularies.⁴² What is most important is to recognize the stubborn way in which the chapter, as

a segment, defies subordination to some master scheme and evades any excessive consistency.

Which is to say that an understanding of the chapter cannot be oriented upward, toward the paradigmatic or the schematic, but forward, to a syntagmatic or linear series. The inescapable relation of chapters to ordinal numbers (“Chapter the Second”) suggests how crucial linearity is to its function. This might suggest that the chapter enforces what Elizabeth Freeman has called “chrononormativity” and José Muñoz “straight time,” a way of suturing the collective to the personal by enforcing a rhythm of linear, forward-directed sequence, lockstep “progressive” movement, the denial of alternative timelines or the curlicues of other-directed temporalities.⁴³ But its linearity is not a regular, Newtonian time; it comprises nonuniform leaps or transitions, interrupted flows, voids and blancs, that fissure linearity into an often eccentric modularity. We might now call this time “digital”: discontinuous, segmentary, discrete.⁴⁴ Both comfort and foreboding can arise from its directionality, its irresistible pull to one more unit, one more chapter, promising escape and dread in equal measure. What order exists for the chapter inheres in the idea of *next*, *more to come*, and *yet*.

6. *As a segment, its work is primarily interruptive; it is a caesura, an aeration. Interruption is one of its primary communicative modes—it is a way of talking to a reader. To the reader it says: rest is now permitted. What we are meant to do with that rest, depends.*

For all the attention paid to “closure,” we prize the experience that refuses to be firmly end-stopped: the concert-goers humming a tune while heading for the exits, the students who keep discussing after the class is done, the children still possessed by the fantasy game they’ve been forced to finish. In such cases “closure” is the incorrect term, even if each experience depends on the halt it elides for its force. We would do better to speak of a pleasure in *lingering*. These are not always protests against endings per se; they are more likely to seize the opportunity of an ending in order to allow it to diffuse into the outside air, to permit it to gently haunt us, to let it pass into our preoccupation. Such a pleasure needs the boundary of an ending, and needs that boundary to be a little porous. It desires a respite. Here again the American idiom “chapter book” is suggestive; such a book requires not only the stamina to read for long stretches but the maturity to want to resume it after a pause, which means acquiring a taste for interruption.

This is not reading, exactly, nor is it quite *not* reading. It poses the question of how we are to understand the role of interruption, usually ignored by literary historians and theorists because of the continuing power of immersion in the value systems that surround reading.⁴⁵ The interruption/immersion binary is, however, a false one. Cognitive approaches to literary form have been best at understanding this self-evident, if persistently ignored, fact: attentiveness requires its opposite.⁴⁶ The chapter break solicits immersion in ongoing narrative because it permits release. But it does something else as well: it encourages a diffuse resonance, allowing long narrative all the pleasures other aesthetic media possess, like the pianist's fingers lifting while a chord still echoes. It is what Jean-Luc Nancy calls "sonorous time": a not-yet-sense-making willingness to let an experience spread, extend, pass away.⁴⁷ That "lingering" of narrative spilling over into the everyday is produced by the pause.

Unlike so much else in the history of the chapter, the function of interruption has long been understood and frequently restated. Sterne in *Tristram Shandy*: "Chapters relieve the mind. . . . [T]hey assist—or impose upon the imagination."⁴⁸ Thomas Mann, as Serenus Zeitblom, in *Doctor Faustus* (1947): "It is only out of consideration for the reader, who is always keeping an eye out for places to pause, for caesuras and new beginnings, that I have divided into several chapters what in my own conscientious authorial opinion can really lay no claim to such segmentation."⁴⁹ Playful or sententious, the sentiment is nonetheless commonplace, and remains so.⁵⁰ The chapter is, to adopt the language of contemporary media, an interface: a space that connects media and user, where a direction is given (here, pause your reading) but where different possible behaviors (put the book down for a minute, put it down for the day, ignore and continue) are possible in response.⁵¹ The direction is merely to rest, pause, suspend in some manner.

But not—it must be repeated—end. The chapter break is not a unit of closure but of hiatus. It is not a division *of* so much as a division *within*, a caesura within an ongoing experience, an internal bracketing.⁵² We might think of the chapter in this sense as the enjambment of narrative prose. Prose, as so many of its theorists insist, is defined by its lack of enjambment, its continuous, blocklike quality; the chapter break is among the oldest techniques to provide prose what it otherwise resists, the space of a breath.⁵³ That space can have particular aesthetic qualities. It can vary in frequency across a text, in predictability or regularity, and in its relation to the narrative it articulates. It can also have particular cultural qualities. The "one chapter a day" habit of biblical

reading in Protestant societies can and did often lead to an idea of any narrative reading being meted out similarly; in certain regimes of labor and leisure, this might mean the association of the chapter break with a longer pause, that for sleep, the end of day. The matching of chapter break with nightfall will then in turn have a feedback effect upon the shaping of the novel, as chapter 7 of this book will explore. But these particularities, however numerous, all stem from a structural condition of the chapter's interruptive work: the chapter break synchronizes, however temporarily, a reader's time with story time. Pause matches pause. Like a conductor's baton, the break signals a rhythmic coordination of worlds.⁵⁴

7. *It is both material and immaterial; tied to the book, it nonetheless has no physical, three-dimensional referent.*

Many kinds of textual division are based in distinctions between discrete objects or material practices, even if those distinctions have become merely figural. Dramatic "acts" are normally marked by a pause or curtain fall. The division of long texts—epic poetry most notably—into "books" refers to the separate *bibloi* of papyrus scrolls, even if the size of scrolls may not have been directly responsible for the length of these divisions.⁵⁵ Then there are the tablets, or *tuppu*, of Babylonian cuneiform, such as those that compose what is left of the epic of Gilgamesh, which would be numbered and listed in a colophon tablet. These *tuppu* are now often called "chapters" as well as tablets, in an attempt to naturalize them for Western audiences.⁵⁶ One can then begin to imagine that all textual divisions have some physical referent, a constraint borrowed from some previous technology that time has rendered invisible to us.

It is a persuasive idea and often justified. Yet as Bonnie Mak has argued, even a textual unit like the *page*, which seemingly is defined by its tactile qualities, may be at least partially independent of its usual objecthood.⁵⁷ So it is, even more emphatically, with the chapter—like the page, older than the codex with which it is so often associated. Its physicality is ghostly, inaccessible. It is not amenable to the hand: one cannot ordinarily hold, grasp, or clasp a chapter. It is not even susceptible to the eye, given how rarely a chapter is visible in one glance. The result is the extreme difficulty in imagining its materiality at all. Even its relationship to the page is historically contingent; the fashion for starting a chapter at the top of a new page is a relatively modern one, and for much of its history any coalescence of page and chapter would have been accidental. A common kind of chapter heading, beginning with the playfully locative "in which," alludes to a container or position while committing itself to no fixed

(continued...)

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