





Reassembling Text(ure)s: Canon and Creativity

Workshop delivered by Fleur-Nicole Riskin in collaboration with 10 Una Europa students

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Foreword:

Reassembling the Literary Canon – an Una Europa Creative Writing Exercise

The texts in this collection were written as part of the workshop "Reassembling Text(ure)s – Canon and Creativity" that I held on September 18th 2024 at the Una Europa Student Congress 2024 hosted by Freie Universität Berlin. Applying the Congress' theme, "Dis-/Assemble: Reinventing the University" to my subject, literary studies, and media studies more generally, the 10 students participating in the workshop and I discussed the meaning and dis-/advantages of the literary and media canon(s). In this context, we used pieces from world-famous literature such as Shakespeare's Hamlet, Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Dante's Commedia as sources and inspiration to create our own original literary texts. There were no boundaries on how to use the source material or on what length and genre the texts should be – creating an array of 11 vastly different textual experiences.

The students who have written these texts come from 8 different Una Europa Universities: Freie Universität Berlin, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie, Universiteit Leiden, KU Leuven, Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna and Helsingin yliopisto/ Helsingfors universitet – making for a very international Una Europa group. Each student contributed their personal experiences, background and creativity to our discussion and their respective text, reassembling those famous text pieces into very different text mosaics made from their own creativity.

We are proud to present these products of the exercise to a wider audience with and through Una Europa. A big thank you also goes to the Una Europa Team at Freie Universität who supported me in creating and conducting this workshop, to the Una Europa Student Engagement Team for working to improve the Congress every year based on the student reviews, and to all the students who participated in the workshop or in the Student Congress 2024 in general.

Thank you for the support and participation – and always keep on reading and writing!

Fleur-Nicole Riskin MA General and Comparative Literature, Freie Universität Berlin

January 19th 2025

« Do not consider me now, as an elegant female, intending to play you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart. »

Elizabeth, tell us, what is this truth from your heart?

« My heart is filled with hopes.

I have a dream.

Where men does not define what is a woman anymore. She is not just a mother, a cooker or a wife.

A thing that belong to her father, her husband or her son.

No, women are free to define themselves. They are independent. Equal to the men.

I picture a world where a woman has the right to dream, to choose what she wants to do with her life.

That is the truth stuck in my heart.

In my day, I not even allowed to think about this future for the female kind. »

Don't worry Elizabeth, your dream will become true. In 1813, to tell a man to look at you as a rational creature was a significant step.

Then, Rosa Parks, Angela Davis, Marie Currie followed in your footsteps and continued your struggle.

Thanks to those women, we are now able to dream in 2025.

Nonetheless, the fight is far from being over.

There still have some women around the world waiting for their Elizabeth, Simone Veil, Jane

Austen. They need those brave women who fight for their rights.

I thank you Elizabeth for being a role model to follow.

Every little girl reading Pride and Prejudice knows now that she is a rational creature, that has to be listen by everyone, and above all listen by her future Darcy!

Live your love story with Darcy peacefully, the new generation will continue to fight.

Goodbye Elizabeth!

Sara Binisti, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

Thoughts on the Obsession to Reach an End-Point

We humans are beings of motion, of dynamic. We have always been wanderers and explorers, by instinct or by imposition, by nature or by force. On the move, on search. Odysseus' journey to Ithaca, Dante's pilgrimage through Inferno to Paradiso, Don Quixote's endless adventures... they portray stories of transition, physical and mental spaces, spurred by hopes of eternity.

But eternity, again, what is that? Why do we long for it so desperately?

Us humans, we go everywhere. We want to do and know every secret aspect of the realities we inhabit, even the ones we cannot physically reach. Yet the more we dig, the less we find. The more we explore, the more we realise our smallness. The more we question, the more questions arise. Goethe writes "And here, poor fool! with / all my lore I stand, no / wiser than before" disrupting all of our coming-of-age narratives. And he also writes "Thou too shall rest," perhaps comforting us about our inherent inability to grasp everything our curiosity desires. We are always thinking of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood, something immense.

Believe me, I am twenty and nowhere close to having experienced one-tenth of what the world has to offer; yet, if eternity even exists, I like to think that I caught glimpses of what it feels like. And no, it did not look like eternal flames of glory, nor like a villagebath-house, grimy, and spiders in every corner. Although many have tried to give it shape, to me, eternity felt like sensing my finitude and incompleteness, in everything I do not know and everywhere I have not been to, without aiming for solutions and responses I cannot access.

In the labyrinth of labyrinths and maze of mazes that reality is, I strive to touch raw humanity, meeting life as it comes, feeling it all. In the end, I believe that the constant longing for an Ithaca is somehow less relevant than the enjoyment of the journey and learnings we take along the way.

Selene Cailotto, KU Leuven

BREAKING: Rodion R. (23) kills two in fatal pub brawl!

We're always thinking of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood, a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a Sea of Troubles. But what ails the people lost in the mind who suffer the Slings and Arrows of outrageous Fortune instead is a little sleeping, so much reading, a little room there.

A pursued man looks on his hands which executed the deed – killing by fraud, killing by force – and an infinity of passion evaporates and his brain is quiet now:

all hope abandoned. Out of his mind, in hardly a breath.

"I think," says he, "of endless summer days, of blue foxglove outside the dor. Bees and butterflies and an elegant female on that bench. I felt myself the way of highest wisdom and primal love –

I've studied Philosophy and Theology from end to end, felt the heartache and thousand natural shocks, sublime Omnipotence of the Flesh.

Alas, poor fool! My hands will haunt my thoughts for an eternity.

Why must it be? That is the Question. To be absorbed in those illusory imaginings makes of me an abstract perceiver of the world, indifferent to sleep, indifferent to stars.

I took a life, and speaking the truth, through my end the way to justice lies. Sometimes I drink from inns in the city dolent, reeling drunken and inebriate of air. I shall not forget my eternal burden, my crime which implies no rational creature.

My mind is a village bath-house – grimy and spiders in every corner. Being able to sleep, 'tis noble – to rest in the stillness of the night, absolved. Not me – I stand to renounce divinity! A breathing Debauchee, and ambulant warning sign.

No man should suffer this twisting, turning, ever-widening eternity of guilt. To sleep is to say we end, and end I cannot - I eternal last. Preventing me from being able to intend the truth from my heart,

I renounce rest. I renounce sleep. I renounce dreams.

Through me is the way to eternity! Hearest thou the birds, asleep in the trees? Hearest thou the hill-tops, all quiet?

Before me there is no sleep, but night. Madame, I taste a crime and this nightsong is my punishment."

Finishing his soliloquy, he shouted from inside the cave and went completely out of his mind.

Friederike Decker, Freie Universität Berlin

Shakespeare: Hamlet in Gen Z slang?

Fr, should I stay or should I leave Life is grind, it's hard to breathe Do I stay & fight the game Or dip it quiet, no shame?

Should we stay here though the vibes are bad Cuz the unknown's what makes us sad We deal with damn, lowkey pain Hoping one day we get the gain

Dante: Inferno III 1–3, How it sounds to me

Pre mňa si vaňa citu doletna, Pre mňa si nie leto dlhé, Pre mňa si vstať Lepro dutej genií

Student from Universiteit Leiden

Une foule dans un petit espace

Une foule dans un petit espace. ∞ non Q In one minute, au minde merining for of root here Istand heless before au no wise bin so helves als wie zuron, having seen like a fail of the world dans en petit espace

In one minute an infinity of passions

Laberinto de laberintos

Maze of mazes

Suinoso

But why must it be?

A little room?

Isn't it what it is?

Ilusorias Imágenes

Abstract of the world, in one minute

Eternal wasn't it?

But it is calm now

Spürest du Kaum einen Hauch

It's calm, and my imagination will haunt me no more

By opposing end them

To dye

To sleep

By which we say we end

Ruhest du auch

Igual durmiendo se me volvió completamente loco

De tanto leer, inebriate of air

As an eternity of passions

.. a millennial of thoughts

.. a labyrinth of mazes

..... Of thinking

..... that tanto leer brought

I need sleep again, or either my brain dies here

Nonetheless, here I stand

... no wiser than before

... bin so klug als wie zuvor

Having seen like a foule of the world dans un petit espace.

Jules Geoffroy, Universidad Complutense de Madrid

"The Talk"

It's night. The last lecture of the day is over, and dark has settled over the city. People are walking home, to bars, to the library, and in the middle of this crowd, she had been there, on that bench, for an eternity. With no place to go to, Emma sat alone, deep in her thoughts.

"Emma!" someone screams breaking the [routine] of the night. She looks around and sees Them walking towards her in the distance. "We haven't seen in a while."

"No," Emma exhales. "No, we haven't."

"What are you doing?"

"Thinking."

"Of what?"

"Eternity."

They take a seat next to Emma. The bench is cold. Emma sits in silence and doesn't seem to notice the cooling temperature of the night.

"We're always thinking of eternity," They say quietly.

Emma breathes out. "I know," and her eyes seem to be glued at people walking past their bench.

"Well, what about eternity this time?" They ask.

"I imagined a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a twisting, turning, everwidening labyrinth that continued both past and future and somehow implied the stars."

A beat of silence.

"Deep," They answer.

"Are you mocking me?"

"No."

"[T]hat's all eternity is. Sometimes, you know, I can't help feeling that's what it is," Emma continues. "But [d]o not consider me now [...] intending to play you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart."

I[t']s quiet now. They say nothing and the crowd around the bench vanishes. Only [t]he birds are asleep in the trees.

Both do not dare to look at the other, but They continue, "That was interesting."

"Stop it! You're going to start mocking me again," Emma says desperately.

"No, no."

"You are!" Emma continues with fear in her voice. She looks at her hands and whispers. "I'm just tired from little sleeping and so much reading."

"Go home then," They whisper back.

"Should I?"

"Yes."

Silence takes over as the wind pushes cold air through the night. Emma breathes calmly. Her condensed breath can be seen in the dim light of a lamp post. A while passes and They continue, "Thou shalt rest. [I]magination will haunt [your] thoughts no more."

Emma's eyes haven't moved from her hands. Her face shows concentration, but her mind seems to have forgotten the outside world.

Finally, she looks up. They have walked away, and Emma is left wondering when she'll meet Them meet again.

Sara Korjus, Helsingin yliopisto/Helsingfors universitet It is the story of someone who wanted it all. Someone who couldn't suffer uncertainty, who refused to acknowledge that he could not know EVERYTHING. Someone who sinned by hubris, just like Ulysses mocking Polyphemus after his escape from the Cyclops's cave, who would later get punished by the gods for his pretentiousness.

I first met Albert at the university, at that age when you're kind of an adult - but not really, at least in your parents' opinion. While I was waiting for a course of Italian in the Sorbonne's hallways, he came to me and we started to sympathize. At that time, I had already noticed the strange light in his eyes, as well as the nervous movements de made with his hands all the time.

At one point in our conversation, I started to ask him about his past. My curiosity was stimulated because he looked a few years older than the majority of my class comrades. When speaking about his previous studies, hies eyes seemed to lighten up, and his speaking flow became increasingly fast:

- « I have studied now Philosophy and Jurisprudence, Medicine and even, at last! Theology!

And he kept listing all the disciplines - some of them I had never heard of - that he had been interested in for the past years. At one point, I felt like he was inventing most of this, but he wouldn't stop talking, si I ended up interrupting him when a friend of mine passed near us running, as he was late for his next class.

During the following weeks, I saw Albert every Thursday in the Italian class, but I would always try to avoid him, in order not to get stuck in another endless conversation. Though, I noticed that his table was always filled with multiple books from various authors and subjects, racking up in a big pile in front of him, and that he would use any free moment he had - even between exercises, provoking the anger of our professor - to progress in his readings. He read all the time, everywhere and everything. I finally understood that his ultimate goal was to reach some sort of perfection, a state where he would have incorporated all the knowledge available at a given time. Some friends started to mock him, calling him « big brain » in reference to his apparent obsession, but he didn't seem to care at all.

As years passed, I pursued my path and slowly forgot about Albert. But one day - it was in the first half of October, as far as I remember - I was watching the news on TV, and learnt that a library had been burnt to the ground in the center of Paris. Next to the images of the burning building, there was a picture of Albert. Apparently, he was stroke by madness and decided to destroy as many books as he could. The TV channel had managed to bring one of his former co-workers in front of the camera. He said:

- « ... finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind... »

The Powerpuff Girls of the Canon

- $JA \rightarrow$ Blossom: Jane Austen (Pride and Prejudice, 1813)
- $ED \rightarrow$ Bubbles: Emily Dickinson (I taste a liquor never brewed, 1861)
- $MS \rightarrow$ Buttercup: Mary Shelly (Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus, 1818)

First Act: Meeting together

(JA, MS and ED enter the living room.)

ED: I taste a liquor never brewed – From Tankards scooped in Pearl – Not all the Frankfort Berries Yield such an Alcohol!

> Inebriate of air – am I – And Debauchee of Dew – Reeling – thro' endless summer days – From inns of molten Blue –

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee Out of the Foxglove's door – When Butterflies – renounce their "drams" – I shall but drink the more!

- **JA**: Enough ED! Ever since we started writing the rules of our city, you have been drinking more and more. It's almost as if you were the creature MS once tried to create that killed its own inventor. Your own texts are driving you mad! And I hope they don't destroy you.
- **MS**: Oh JA, leave the poor girl alone. She just started crying again and I prefer her when she's drinking than when she's crying. It's so annoying.

(ED cries louder.)

Oh no, now she won't stop for a while.

- JA: Try to be more sensitive to her sense and sensibility, MS!
- **MS**: Just like you did two minutes ago? No way, if she starts crying it's because of you, not me.
- (Frankenstein-Robot enters and hands ED another glass of vodka)
- **ED**: Thank you, Frankenbot, you're the only one who understands me at the moment and cares about my figure.

(She begins to drink and sobs.)

- **MS**: When did you start using my robot to bring you drinks? If you want to stay in shape, you'd better start exercising or just go to the bar and make your own drink. It's a lot better to shake it than drink a vodka with fewer calories.
- **ED**: Just leave me alone! Your robot likes me more than he likes you, and since JA decided we should live in a city without men, that's the only pleasure I get. I really need some macho action.
- **JA**: ED! You know why I did it! They were everywhere, always arguing and deciding what women like and don't like and telling us what to do and what not to. I was fed up with patriarchy and matriarchy is much better than having a selfish dictator running our town.

(MS turns to Frankenbot and starts stalking him)

MS: I look on the hands which executed the deed; I think on the heart in which the imagination of it was conceived, and long for the moment when these hands will meet my eyes, when that imagination will haunt my thoughts no more.

(Frankenbot goes in the direction of ED to get some kind of protection)

ED: Don't talk to him like that! You don't know what wonderful things his hands are capable of and made for! These hands will meet your eyes if you don't stop your imagination.

(ED shows her own fists.)

(Frankenbot flies back to the kitchen.)

JA: Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to play you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart... Sometimes we have to sacrifice something for our own sack. Don't you think I also miss the gentle touch of a strong, yet gentle, hand all over me? Of course I do, but that is part of the lesson. If you disagree, you can go to Mojo Jojo's town and stay at the Mojo Dojo Casa House.

(MS and ED suppress a cry)

End of First Act

Camila Navas López, Freie Universität Berlin It's quiet now, in all the treetops, hardly a breath; the birds are asleep in the trees, and I feel like I've been there, on that bench, for an eternity.

We always think of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood. But why must it be?

I look on the hands which executed the deed. I think on the heart in which the imagination of it was conceived. I've studied it from end to end, with labor keen. I imagined a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes.

Absorbed in those imaginings, I forgot I was a pursued woman...

Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to play with you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart. Before me, there were no created things. Through me, is the way to eternal dole.

"What ails you?" said they. I went completely out of my mind. Here, poor fool, I stand. I shall not but drink the more, and by sleep, to say it ends.

> Angelica Porcheddu, Alma Mater Studiorum – Università di Bologna

Letterinto

The space folds out in front of me – blasting light, blaring sound. I walk, catching snippets –

"Mais un infini de passions peut tenir dans une minute –"

"Da steh ich nun, ich armer Tor –"

"To be, or –"

I let them flow over me, drinking in. Does it taste good? Am I drowning? Floating, swimming?

l don't know.

I don't understand.

Oder doch?

I feel myself in un laberinto de laberintos, a maze of mazes, containing pasado and future and los astros – all is made from words, in words.

Torno. But there is no one there.

All around, I see white.

But I hear words.

I turn the page.

Fleur-Nicole Riskin Freie Universität Berlin

For Elizabeth:

Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading (only three pages), her brain was fried—not enough to make her completely mad, but just enough to render her thoughtless.

We often think of eternity as an incomprehensible, immersive idea. But for her, eternity was that single hour of creative writing class she had regrettably signed up for during student congress. Sitting behind the desk, she felt as though she had been trapped there for an eternity.

Her mind was a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes—an ever-twisting, everexpanding network that stretched across past and future—yet no ideas for her own text emerged. Immersed in her personal eternity of meaninglessness, she forgot that she was supposed to be a rational creature, someone who could speak truth from her heart. She wasn't even an elegant lady who might compensate for her lack of rationality. In that moment, she wished she could cease to exist—she longed to become no one at all.

Her thought process, such as it was, seemed to be shepherded by sheep. Though she had studied philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, and even theology, alas, she now found herself a pitiful fool. With all her learning and effort, she sat there, no wiser than before.

Before her, on a blank piece of paper, lay nothing but a single quote from Dante Alighieri:

"All hope abandon ye who enter in."

For the rest of her eternity—ten minutes, though it felt far longer—she stared at the hands that had written those borrowed words. She longed for the moment when those same hands might finally produce something meaningful, something of her own.

But as the seconds ticked by, it became painfully clear: there was hardly even a "to be or not to be" question to this text. It wasn't even a proper sentence—just a fragment of an idea, hanging in limbo.

Lena Szelęgiewicz Uniwersytet Jagielloński w Krakowie

Appendix: Reassembling Text(ure)s - Canon Text Samples

1. Homer: *The Odyssey* (8th–7th century BC)

'What ails you, Polyphemus,' said they, 'that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely no man is carrying off your sheep? Surely no man is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?'

But Polyphemus shouted to them from inside the cave, 'Noman is killing me by fraud! Noman is killing me by force!'

2. Dante Alighieri: La Commedia (Inferno III) (1321)

'Per me si va ne la città dolente,	'Through me the way is to the city dolent;
per me si va ne l'etterno dolore,	Through me the way is to eternal dole;
per me si va tra la perduta gente.	Through me the way among the people lost.
Giustizia mosse il mio alto fattore;	Justice incited my sublime Creator;
fecemi la divina podestate,	Created me divine Omnipotence,
la somma sapïenza e 'l primo amore.	The highest Wisdom and the primal Love.
Dinanzi a me non fuor cose create	Before me there were no created things,
se non etterne, e io etterno duro.	Only eterne, and I eternal last.
Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate'.	All hope abandon, ye who enter in!'

3. Miguel de Cervantes: Don Quijote de la Mancha (1605)

Finalmente, de tan poco dormir y tanto leer, se le secó el cerebro y se volvió completamente loco.

Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading, his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind.

4. William Shakespeare: Hamlet (1623)

To be, or not to be, that is the Question: Whether 'tis Nobler in the mind to suffer The Slings and Arrows of outragious Fortune, Or to take Armes against a Sea of troubles, And by opposing end them: to dye, to sleep No more; and by a sleep, to say we end The Heart-ake, and the thou[and Naturall fhockes That Flesh is heyre too? 'Tis a consummation Deuoutly to be wilh'd. 5. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: "Wanderers Nachtlied II" (1776)

Über allen Gipfeln	O'er all the hilltops
Ist Ruh,	Is quiet now,
In allen Wipfeln	In all the treetops
Spürest du	Hearest thou
Kaum einen Hauch;	Hardly a breath;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.	The birds are asleep in the trees:
Warte nur, balde	Wait, soon like these
Ruhest du auch.	Thou too shalt rest.

6. Jane Austen: Pride and Prejudice (1813)

Do not consider me now as an elegant female, intending to play you, but as a rational creature, speaking the truth from her heart.

7. Mary Shelley: Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus (1818)

I look on the hands which executed the deed; I think on the heart in which the imagination of it was conceived, and long for the moment when these hands will meet my eyes, when that imagination will haunt my thoughts no more.

8. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust (1829)

Habe nun, ach! Philosophie,	I've studied now Philosophy
Juristerei and Medizin,	And Jurisprudence, Medicine,
Und leider auch Theologie	And even, alas! Theology,
Durchaus studiert, mit heißem Bemühn.	From end to end, with labor keen;
Da steh' ich nun, ich armer Tor,	And here, poor fool! with all my lore
Und bin so klug als wie zuvor!	I stand, no wiser than before!

9. Gustave Flaubert: Madame Bovary (1856)

Et il lui semblait qu'elle était là, sur ce banc, depuis l'éternité. Mais un infini de passions peut tenir dans une minute, comme une foule dans un petit espace.

And she felt as though she had been there, on that bench, for an eternity. For an infinity of passion can be contained in one minute, like a crowd in a small space

10. Fyodor Dostoyevsky: Crime and Punishment (1860)

Нам вот всё представляется вечность как идея, которую понять нельзя, что-то огромное, огромное! Да почему же непременно огромное? И вдруг, вместо всего этого, представьте себе, будет там одна комнатка, эдак вроде деревенской бани, закоптелая, а по всем углам пауки, и вот и вся вечность.

We're always thinking of eternity as an idea that cannot be understood, something immense. But why must it be? What if, instead of all this, you suddenly find just a little room there, something like a village bath-house, grimy, and spiders in every corner, and that's all eternity is. Sometimes, you know, I can't help feeling that that's what it is.

11. Emily Dickinson: "I taste a liquor never brewed" (1861)

Inebriate of air – am I – And Debauchee of Dew – Reeling – thro' endless summer days – From inns of molten Blue –

When "Landlords" turn the drunken Bee Out of the Foxglove's door – When Butterflies – renounce their "drams" – I shall but drink the more!

12. Jorge Luis Borges: Ficciones (1944)

Pensé en un laberinto de laberintos, en un sinuoso laberinto creciente que abarcara el pasado y el porvenir y que implicara de algún modo los astros. Absorto en esas ilusorias imágenes, olvidé mi destino de perseguido. Me sentí, por un tiempo indeterminado, percibidor abstracto del mundo.

I imagined a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a twisting, turning, ever-widening labyrinth that contained both past and future and somehow implied the stars. Absorbed in those illusory imaginings, I forgot that I was a pursued man; I felt myself, for an indefinite while, the abstract perceiver of the world.