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A Printed Proteus: Textual Identity in Grimmelshausen's *Simplicissimus Teutsch*

Grimmelshausen's masterpiece, *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* (1668), is at its core a stifled quest for self-discovery. Throughout the novel the eponymous protagonist is in a constant state of flux, fluidly moving between places and languages, fantasy and fact, and an almost innumerable host of professions. Over the course of his textual odyssey, he changes political and religious affiliation, gender, even species—never finally coming to a clear and permanent identity. John Heckmann puts this quite succinctly when he writes that “Simplicius does not undergo a single conversion, but a multiplicity of conversions, each one of which is revealed in retrospect to have been in bad faith” (880).

The politico-historical inspiration for this protean metamorphosis seems obvious: the profound destabilization of religious and national identity during the Thirty Years War is not merely alluded to, but is indeed the target of the more polemical aspects of Grimmelshausen's work. Less obvious, perhaps, is the unstable status of writing itself at an historical moment when the printed word is still a novelty. I would therefore like to refocus attention onto the textual and narrative implications (if not inspirations) of the protagonist's mutable identity. My central claim will be that Simplicius's written project aims essentially to establish a stable sense of self, but that this endeavor is subverted by the very character of *text*. If *Simplicissimus* seems to sell itself, in its fifth book and *Continuatio* (1669), as a kind of *Bildungsroman* for the Baroque—a textual attempt to come to terms with the “traumatic experience” of the Thirty Years War (Menhennet 6)—what it actually portrays is a failure of *Bildung* through writing.¹

In *Simplicissimus*, there is an historically appropriate fascination with the printed word. Books and allusions to the budding print culture repeatedly crop up at key moments in the novel and Grimmelshausen capitalizes on the visuality of printed matter to enable word games and create ambivalences in meaning. The narrator himself praises printing as sovereign among the arts: “Welcher wolte den nicht preisen / der die Buchstaben zu erst erfunden? ja wer wolte nicht vielmehr den über alle Künstler erheben / welcher die Edle und

der gantzen Welt höchst nutzbare Kunst der Buchdruckerey erfunden?" (152–53).² Clearly, as an artwork, *Simplicissimus* does not take its medial materiality lightly.

Not only does the narrative include a precise description of its own fictional medium, but the *Continuatio* to the novel dedicates itself largely to a fictional explication of the conditions under which the work comes into existence. As it is the conclusion to the work that, somewhat paradoxically, chronicles its fictive coming-into-being, I will focus my investigation primarily on the fifth and purportedly final book of *Simplicissimus* and its appendix. Through an analysis of key scenes of reading and inscription, I intend to demonstrate that text, while supposedly proffering a potential unification of self, ineluctably subverts this undertaking—that text in this apparent *Bildungsroman* is, in fact, ultimately antithetical to *Bildung* itself.

As my point of departure, I will discuss the work as a trauma narrative in which the fictional act of writing serves in therapeutic fashion (albeit futilely) as an attempt to bring wholeness to a psyche shattered by overwhelming events. After establishing the appropriateness of this classification of *Simplicissimus*, I will turn to medial concerns in order to argue first that reading, for the protagonist, consists of a rending of the self into disparate roles and that text is, by its very nature, complicit in this process. Finally, I will address the fifth book of *Simplicissimus* and its many continuations to affirm that text invariably postpones and defers signification—and consequently any ultimate attainment of a conclusive identity on the part of the writing subject, the subject producing text.

I

The protagonist's quest for a stable sense of self is thwarted throughout the entire novel and the incredible events it seeks to recount, but it is only at the apparent conclusion to the work that Simplicius himself becomes aware of the failure of this endeavor. Moreover, this revelation is a *textual* one, insofar as it results from a reading of the works of Greek antiquity: in the penultimate chapter of the fifth (and allegedly final) book, Simplicius quotes the dictum "*Nosce teipsum, das ist / es sollte sich jeder selbst erkennen*" (543). This of course echoes the advice given in Chapter XII of the first book by Simplicius's mentor, thus fracturing the source and identity of this essential counsel. More ironically, the final piece of advice given by the *Einsiedel* is that Simplicius should always remain constant.

The content of the written command for self-knowledge already requires a certain multiplicity insofar as it splits the self into two parts: the knowing and the known. On a formal level, it is also important to note that this central element hesitates between the oral and the written inasmuch as it is, in its

original manifestation, the spoken proclamation of the Delphic oracle yet comes to Simplicius through the mediation of writing. This hesitation between orality and writing calls into question the medial identity of text itself, just as the necessity for translation challenges the simple, singular identity the dictum initially appears to demand. Indeed, not only is the phrase twice translated (and rather dubiously at that) from Greek to Latin and then from Latin to German, but, moreover, even the ostensibly original citation itself is cloven from its origins inasmuch as it is quoted in both Latin translation and thus in Latinized transliteration, with the German *Frakturschrift* beside the Latin “original” in Roman typeface.³

This very inspiration for the protagonist’s crucial quest for self-discovery performs a lack of unambiguous identity. Nevertheless, Simplicius takes the advice to heart and openly contemplates his own inability to know himself:

Solches machte daß ich mich hindersonne / und von mir selbst Rechnung über
mein geführtes Leben beehrte / weil ich ohne das müßig war / da sagte ich zu
mir selber / dein Leben ist kein Leben gewesen / sondern ein Todt; deine Tage ein
schwerer Schatten / deine Jahr ein schwerer Traum / deine Wollüst schwere
Sünden / deine Jugend eine Phantasey / und deine Wolfahrt ein Alchimisiten
Schatz / der zum Schornstein hinauß fährt / und dich verläßt / ehe du dich dessen
versiehst! (543)

In this manner, Simplicius outlines the fundamentally picaresque nature of his own attempted development: his is a journey marked by a failure to grow into himself, a failure, as it were, of *Bildung*. What is revealed here—to employ Cathy Caruth’s terminology in her work on trauma narrative—is “a wounded psyche”: the story Simplicius will relate “addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed and belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in [...] language” (4). Clearly, in retrospect Simplicius regrets the mercurial nature of his own fluid identity as his greatest deficiency, but the protagonist’s split identity is only further accentuated by the form this lamentation takes: it is, in effect, a dialogue, and one in which Simplicius is required to fill multiple roles. In the extensive summary of the plot of the previous books following the passage just cited, Simplicius is speaker, recounted subject, and (insofar as he is speaking only to himself) audience in one.

With the vicissitudes of his earthly life and the ephemerality of each of his innumerable states of being, all that is left to Simplicius, as Heckmann puts it, “is the attempt to salvage some permanency by becoming an author” (888–89).⁴ Writing, according to this view, proffers mnemonic permanence and the potential for a single definitive identity qua authorial identity. Implicit to this intimation is the idea that identity is only achieved upon entrance into the Symbolic order, or, as Derrida would have it: “self-consciousness [...] is never perfectly foreign or anterior to the possibility of

language" (15). One can distill from this assumption the statement that self-expression is equivalent to self-knowledge.

Such is certainly the paradigm presented by the inquisition of Simplicius when he is accused of being a traitor and a conjurer; he is compelled not only "mein ganztes Leben [zu] erzehlen" (212), but repeatedly defined by his inquisitor by his ability or inability to write: "Er hiesse mich eine Feder nehmen und schreiben / zu sehen was ich kōnte / und ob etwan meine Handschrifft bekant / oder doch so beschaffen wāre / daß man etwas darauß abnehmen mochte?" (214). At a later point in his journey, Simplicius more succinctly contends, "daß einer am besten auß seinen Schrifften erkennet werde" (319). This is also true in the first book, when Simplicius is asked to identify himself to the powers that be:

[weil] anders nichts bey mir gefunden worden wāre / als gegenwärtiges Büchlein / welches sie ihm zugleich überreichten / läse er ein paar Zeilen darnach / und fragte mich / wer mir das Büchlein gegeben hätte? ich antwortet / es wāre von Anfang mein eigen gewest / dann ich hätte es selbst gemacht und überschrieben: Er fragte / warumb eben auff birckene Rinden? Jch antwortet / weil sich die Rinden von andern Bäumen nicht darzu schicken: Du Flegel / sagte er / ich frage / warumb du nicht auff Papier geschrieben hast? Ey / antwortet ich / wir haben keins mehr im Wald gehabt. (74)

Here it is not only Simplicius's written project (as this is one of the first indications of his autobiographical aim)⁵ that is constitutive of his identity, but the very materiality of the text he is producing. Clearly, only through text—to wit: through his entrance into written discourse—will the protagonist ever be allowed an identity.⁶

Simplicius's retreat from the world is just such an entrance into writing, and, accordingly, it is immediately after his encounter with the pronouncement *know thyself* that the protagonist bids his first farewell to the world,⁷ and only shortly thereafter that he undergoes what is presumably his final conversion on his unknown island. As this retreat from the earthly world corresponds to the beginnings of the protagonist's autobiographical writings, there is good cause to draw a connection between the search for self and the written project generally.⁸ His written endeavor is a recapitulation of his existence up until that point; but if written recollection is meant to bring with it an understanding of the author's identity by summarizing and recounting the details of his existence, Simplicius's writing must inevitably fail, for the details of his autobiography, as he himself acknowledges, do not provide a stable sense of self.

In his work on the psychological effect of war, Robert Jay Lifton postulates an inherent doubling of the self that accompanies traumatic experience—a perception of traumatic events, on the part of the survivor, as something that has happened to *someone else*. All of us, argues Lifton, "have in us something of the survivor and witness" (116), and Simplicius—as a survivor and witness of

the Thirty Years War—is certainly both.⁹ Indeed, most of the protagonist's earliest recounted experiences could convincingly be considered traumatic, and it is significant, moreover, that these violent occurrences are related in fragmentary fashion: the errant and episodic structure of the narrator's memoirs makes it initially almost impossible to comprehend how each adventure fits into the aggregate entirety.

The goal of therapeutic treatment of traumatized individuals under such a model as Lifton's is a reunification of the current self and the former self that underwent the trauma; the aim is often to allow the subject, through storytelling, to take control of past events and order inchoate, fractured memories into a narrative whole. Writing, for Simplicius, is meant to do just this: to affirm therapeutically the unified identity of the narrating/narrated subject. Yet writing fails to achieve its purpose insofar as Simplicius's writings remain fragmentary, episodic, erratic and disjointed, even if they appear to proceed in a largely chronological fashion. Writing, for Simplicius, is only an imitation of the real world, a mere mirror image. It is, in the terms Simplicius retrospectively uses to describe his fractured and failed existence, "ein schwerer Schatten," "ein schwerer Traum," "eine Phantasey" or, perhaps most tellingly, "ein Alchimisten Schatz" (543).

The first indication of this disintegration of the self is the split narrative perspective: Simplicius as recounted character remains fundamentally non-identical in his knowledge and attitudes to Simplicius as a narrating subject.¹⁰ Moreover, there is an obvious obsession with naming which defers the revelation of the original, if not ultimately unequivocal name of the protagonist after hundreds of pages of surrogate appellations. (The name finally given to the protagonist also calls into question the ostensible sovereignty of the author—and his subsequent ontological separation from the textual world created—inasmuch as it is anagrammatic for Christoffel von Grimmelshausen.) This narrative non-self-identity is further problematized by the fragmentary nature of the text (divided into five books and a *Continuatio* consisting of many brief chapters each), in which Simplicius more than occasionally acknowledges his own sleight of hand, his reordering of certain passages and the incredible nature of many key episodes. Despite all appearances to the contrary, the narrative never achieves linearity inasmuch as—by concluding with the history of the textual genesis—it turns into a serpent devouring its own tail/tale. Identity is also upset by an often unsteady blending of factual historical detail and fantastic invention or mythological allusion, the mercurial modulation between poetry and prose, and—most importantly, perhaps—the interplay between the oral and the written to which I intend to return shortly.

Moreover, writing splits the self in the same manner we have just observed—requiring him to be speaker, listener and audience simultaneously.¹¹ Indeed, this is precisely the dynamic of the Simplician authorial project in

general: attempting to escape the multifarious and ever-changing identities imposed upon him by the outside world, the protagonist retreats into the solitude of a hermetic life modeled on that of his *Einsiedel*—to wit: into a world of *text*. Here, Simplicius hopes, in contemporary terms, to find himself. Yet, alone on his island in the *Continuatio*, Simplicius will exist both as narrator and narrated subject—both subject and object, self and other. Furthermore, having retreated into hermetic solitude (not only on a hitherto undiscovered island, but under the darkened cover of a hidden cave), the Simplicius of the epilogue can hope for no immediate audience, but nevertheless continues to write. If the goal of writing is to affix a sense of identity, it seems to fail entirely; writing as a therapeutic model proffering unity of selfhood ultimately renders this unity an impossibility.

II

This failure is largely a result of the fluctuating formal identity of text itself—and particularly of Grimmelshausen's text—for *text*, like Simplicius, is not one thing but many. Already noted is the hesitation in *Simplicissimus* between the written and the oral. In the centuries immediately following the advent of the printing press, one must similarly distinguish between writing and print.¹² Moreover, Grimmelshausen's text has important oral elements alongside its emphasis on the written or the printed.¹³ Consider, for instance, the scene in which Simplicius is first introduced to writing—and more specifically to the printed word—through confused observation of his mentor:

Als ich das erste mal den Einsidel in der Bibel lesen sahe / konte ich mir nicht einbilden / mit wem er doch ein solch heimlich / und meinem Bedunken nach sehr ernstlich Gespräch haben müste; ich sähe wol die Bewegung seiner Lippen / hingegen aber niemand / der mit ihm redet / und ob ich zwar nichts vom lesen und schreiben gewust / so merckte ich doch an seinen Augen / daß ers mit etwas in selbigem Buch zu thun hatte (43).

Simplicius simply cannot understand the nature or the source of this presumed dialogue. The movement of the *Einsiedel*'s lips implies an oral (and hence, *aural*) discussion, yet the only indication of the absent interlocutor is the *visual* movement of the reader's eyes.¹⁴ Reading, then, is a discussion in which the reader, in a sense, must fill both roles, both speaker and listener. Significantly, this split perfectly prefigures both the passage in which Simplicius considers his failure to recognize himself and the instance of his writing on the island. Thus, although writing is traditionally regarded as the tool ultimately permitting the protagonist construction of his hermetic identity in the final chapters of the novel, the introduction of print into the life of Simplicius in fact introduces with it a schizophrenic splitting of the self which Simplicius will never overcome.

Text reveals itself as manifold: it comprises not only visual and aural elements, but written and oral elements as well. The protagonist's first attempt at reading involves futile spoken inquiries to the printed images before him: "Ich gab Achtung auff das Buch [...] und bekam im ersten Griff [...] die davor stehende Figur / so eine feiner Holtzschnitt / und schön *illuminirt* [...] in die Augen; ich fragte dieselbige Bilder selzame Sachen" (43). The emphasis is manifestly on the visual aspects of print: the well-illuminated woodcut and the images Simplicius sees. Yet, to the extent that the protagonist receives no answer to his queries, the visual is ultimately insufficient.

In the first scene of reading, then, printed material fails to communicate insofar as it differs from the spoken word—prompting the protagonist's aggravated inquiry: "Ihr kleine Hudler / habt ihr dann keine Måuler mehr?" (35). Asking images to *speak*, Simplicius immediately establishes the paradox of print. Importantly, this conflation of categories also extends to the purely visual aspects of writing. As Jörg Jochen Berns points out, Simplicius learns to write "sogleich wie gedruckt" (114)—not by copying manuscript but rather by imitating *printed* text. In many ways, this is simply a continuation of the interplay between sound and sight, as the first step in Simplicius's instruction is spelling: a *phonetic* process, the process of putting visual image to acoustic experience.¹⁵

The protagonist learns to form letters not from an antecedent example of writing but from print itself: "demnach schriebe er mir ein Alphabet auff birkene Rinden / nach dem Druck formirt / und als ich die Buchstaben kennete / lernete ich buchstabiren / folgends lesen / und endlich besser schreiben / als es der Einsidel selber konte / weil ich alles dem Druck nachmahlet" (44). Thus, Simplicius's writing is an imitation of the *Einsiedel*'s own imitation of printed letters—the shadow of a shadow, "ein schwerer Schatten." Moreover, the protagonist's writing is of dual origin: it comprises not only the acoustic image associated with any given letter or combination of letters, but also the printed image that each writer imitates in turn.

Ultimately, the protagonist claims to have surpassed his teacher inasmuch as his writing copies the printed word rather than the written one. But what does it suggest about Simplicius's writing that it remains an imitation of a medium that it will never become? If, after all, Simplicius learns to write as if he were producing typeface, "so wird die Szene vollends dadurch ironisiert, daß die Druckbuchstaben (mithin die technisch avanzierteste Buchstabenform) nun nicht etwa auf Papier, sondern auf dem kulturgeschichtlich obsoletesten Schreibgrund, der Birkenrinde, nachgemalt werden" (Berns 114). I concur with Berns completely in his assertion that Simplicius learns to write from print purely as a pedagogic tool and *not* "um sein Geschriebenes drucken zu lassen" (114). What Berns neglects to recognize, however, is the key detail that the explicitly described mediality of the fictional text itself echoes this technical archaism: later, on his island, Simplicius will inscribe his messages directly

into the trunks of trees and write his incredible autobiography on palm leaves—still, presumably, imitating the printed letter, but without aspiring to have his own work ever printed.

Text is doubly supplementary, with writing as a supplement to speech and print as a surrogate for script. And this supplementarity—to speak with Derrida—reveals the fundamental *lack* inherent at each medial stage. That Simplicius comes at this backwards, beginning with print, sets in motion a metonymic chain, a sequence of signifiers reaching back, like Simplicius himself, towards unattainable origins. If the printed word is awarded sovereignty by Simplicius over the word merely written (and this seems to be the case), then it is of central significance that his own writing will always fall short: writing, for Simplicius, is a futile attempt to return to the origin of *printed* text through the mediation of his mentor. Thus text calls into question its own identity. Not only can it not be neatly classified as purely oral or written, aural or visual; but, along the same lines, within *Simplicissimus Teutsch*, text oscillates unsteadily between manuscript and type. Text is always both; it is, invariably, itself and other simultaneously. How can writing, for the protagonist, be an apt means of establishing a sense of self, when his writing, by its very nature, consistently refutes its own identity?

III

Not only does the suggestive synthesis of the printed and the written word call to mind the cultural-historical context of the early years of the printing press, but, in this same vein, it puts great emphasis on the visibility of writing and the coeval association between printed text and emblem. There has been no paucity of studies treating the emblematic nature of certain elements of Grimmelshausen's work, chiefly the many images of Simplicius's island which vividly recall emblematic topoi. Moreover, printed matter blurs the ontological boundaries which keep apart actual worlds from textual ones insofar as Simplicius—in the pivotal initial scene of reading—mistakes the images depicted for reality and rushes to put out a fire he sees portrayed on the printed page. The printed image creates radical ontological uncertainty.

Such a failure to distinguish between text and reality is demonstrated, however, not only by Simplicius's penchant to inhabit textual worlds—not only within the confines of the text itself. Rather, this transgression of textual boundaries is no less than a *mise en abyme* of Grimmelshausen's own writing project insofar as the breakdown occurs metatextually as well: *Der Abenteuerliche Simplicissimus Teutsch* is replete with anagrams for the actual author's own name—not only providing fodder for a bevy of autobiographical readings of *Simplicissimus* with an eye to its potentially autobiographical elements, but also rendering the fictional world perhaps a bit more realistic.¹⁶

Indeed, there is an entire series of games fictionalizing the genesis of the text itself, all of them involving anagrams for the actual, non-fictional author's name.¹⁷ In a recent article, Peter Burgard demonstrates that this dynamic is already presented on the title page:

the goliard's name is Melchior Sternfels von Fuchshaim. But, of course, Melchior Sternfels von Fuchshaim also is *not* his name. The [...] fact that it is an anagram of the editor's name, German Schleifheim von Sulsfort, confirms this non-identity. That both of these names are anagrams of Christoffel von Grimmelshausen [...] compounds the non-self-identity of the editor, the author, and the protagonist, as well as the narrator the latter will turn out to be. (583)

Through textual play, Grimmelshausen has invoked his own authorial identity and himself stepped into the textual world that he has created, much in the same manner as his protagonist engages with the printed world that he observes. Such anagrammatic playfulness is a fundamentally *textual* phenomenon impossible to recognize if not for the faculty of sight. This is perhaps the most manifest example of textual dissimulation of identity, of the link between writing and the non-self-identity, to borrow Burgard's expression, that Simplicius ironically aspires to overcome through writing.

The game, for the reader of *Simplicissimus*, thus becomes not only a search for the identity of the protagonist, but for Grimmelshausen, too; for, as Foucault puts it: "if a text should be discovered in a state of anonymity—whether as a consequence of an accident or the author's explicit wish—the game becomes one of rediscovering the author. Since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma" (213). Grimmelshausen playfully posits this enigma, almost explicitly challenging the reader to discover his identity from the clues he has given—anagrams and initials, that is to say: text. This blurring of ontological boundaries between text and reality calls into question Grimmelshausen's authorial identity; indeed, it calls for a reconsideration of the entire notion of authorship. As Burgard puts it, "in the anagrammatic play of identities, the very notion of an 'actual' author, of identifiable or unique authorship or textual authority, begins to collapse" (583).

IV

By jumbling letters of text to manipulate their meanings and various potential referents, the author calls attention to an habitually overlooked aspect of language: that it is, particularly when written or printed, always encoded. Grimmelshausen trumps any perspective affording credence to natural and straightforward signification—his text offers none. To give but one early example of the variety of typographical play that Grimmelshausen employs to create ambivalences in meaning: already in the first book, the narrator manipulates the typography of "gEsell" (90) to render both *Esel* and *Gesell*.¹⁸ By play-

ing with printed language, Grimmelshausen questions its capacity to signify without ambivalence, if not its ability to produce any definitive meaning at all.

Such typographical play occurs again—in more protracted form—at the moment when Simplicius encounters his *doppelgänger*, Baldanders. Baldanders initially appears as an ancient statue, but, in the span of three pages, takes on the form of an oak, a mulberry tree, a sow, a bratwurst, a field, a cowpat, a flower or a twig, etc. I call him a *doppelgänger* to Simplicius not only because he himself advances the claim that he has been with the protagonist all his life, but because of the similarity of their existential volatility. Baldanders even credits himself with causing the many metamorphoses of the title character's existence: “unangesehen [hab] ich dich mehr als ander Leut bald groß / bald klein / bald reich bald arm / bald hoch bald nider / bald lustig bald traurig / bald böß bald gut / und in summa bald so und bald anders gemacht” (604).

This figure lacks self-identity on a textual plane as well. His name constitutes linguistic play insofar as it is employed both as a proper name and as an adverbial phrase describing him—“Ich sihe wol daß du *bald anders* bist” (603, emphasis added)—between which two valences there is only slight *typographical* difference. (This titular play occurs at other points in the novel, as well, with names such as Spring-ins-Feld.) Furthermore, Baldanders is himself a literary quotation from Hans Sachs—hereby implicitly relating the stifled quest for self-identity to literary discourse. A moment that heralds itself as an epiphany instead becomes a quest for unattainable origins of authorship: Simplicius admits to never having read Hans Sachs and instead loses himself in a meditation on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the mythical figure of Proteus. Again textual worlds—and the literary figures they portray—have stepped off the page and into the protagonist's actual existence.

Furthermore, the epiphany Baldanders promises is a form of reading, what Friedrich Gaede rightly calls “das allegorische Schriftverständnis”: the statue offers to teach Simplicius how to speak “mit stummen Dingen” (606). Recalling the protagonist's initial scene of reading, wherein he berates the images before him for their silence, this link becomes even more explicitly textual. Indeed, even Baldanders's riddle is textual, consisting, as it does, in a series of seemingly invented words¹⁹ from which the reader must extract only the first and last letter in order to arrive at the following: Magst dies selbst einbilden wie es Einem jeden ding ergangen hernach eine discours daraus formirn Und davon Glauben was der wahrheit ehlich ist so hastu Was deine narrischeR vorwitz begehret (604–05).²⁰ The type of discourse suggested here is truly schizophrenic insofar as it requires the reader to provide both halves of the conversation, just as Simplicius initially perceives reading as a conversation with an invisible interlocutor.

Attempting to decode Baldanders's textual game, Simplicius ruminates on the nature of text itself: “weil ich ohne Ruhm zumelden / ein zimblicher

Zifferant bin / und mein geringste Kunst ist / einen Brieff auff einen Faden: oder wohl gar auff ein Haar zuschreiben / den wohl kein Mensch wird außsinnen oder errathen können / zumahlen auch vor langsten wohl andere verborgene Schriffthen außspeculirt" (606). Thus the protagonist describes his own literary aspirations. As a reader, his task is to decode by no means unambiguous textual games. As a writer, his aim is to bring such codes into being, not in an attempt to bridge the cleft between signifier and signified, but, indeed, to expand it.

Simplicius makes good on these aspirations a bit later in the work, when he imitates Baldanders's textual riddle in order to keep his secrets. Having lost a list of his many skills that he had written down—again problematizing the mnemotechnic potency of writing—Simplicius learns that it was stolen by his curious host and is consequently coerced into leaving behind the key to at least one of his methods: an explication of how to avoid gunfire. Unwilling to do so honestly, Simplicius "gedachte [den Gastherrn] zubetrügen [...] und weil ich merckte / daß ers nicht achtete / obs mit Wörtern oder Creutzen zugienng / wann er nur nicht geschossen wurde; beschlug ich ihn auff dem Schlag wie mich Baldanderst beschlagen" (626). He thus leaves his host an encoded message (which requires one to read only the central character out of each of the fabricated words) in order to betray the latter without explicitly lying. Text thus creates the semblance of accessible meaning while in fact concealing the same: "Alß ich ihm diesen Zettel zustellte / stellte er demselbigen auch Glauben zu / weil es so kauderwelsche Wort waren die niemand verstehet / wie er vermeinte" (626).

Initially, writing seems destined to supplement memory and consequently establish identity: Simplicius is defining himself through a written inventory of the various skills he has acquired. Yet, in the end, this *Lebenslauf* is ultimately as empty as the one presented by the infamous *Schermesser* episode in the chapter directly preceding it, wherein Simplicius is audience to the autobiography related by a sheet of toilet paper.²¹ Condemning it for the inconsistency and many mutations of its existence, Simplicius returns the paper to the earthly detritus whence it originated. Yet, just as the toilet paper—once the pages of a book—recounts its story only to be disposed of, Simplicius's incredible curriculum vitae is similarly no sooner written than it is lost. Moreover, Simplicius has only written down the skills themselves, without any explication of the knowledge behind them. If the protagonist is, as he himself claims, inscribing this inventory of abilities lest he lose them, what is the mnemonic purpose of a document that provides no indication of how to perform the tasks it archives? Simplicius also seems concerned by the implications of his text's potential posterity: "villeicht / gedachte ich / wird er dise Schriffth und nãrrische Wörter künfttlig seinen Kindern oder sonst seinen Freunden als ein gewisse Sach / communicirn, die sich alsdann darauff verlassen: in unnõthige Gefahr geben: und darüber ins Graß beissen werden" (627). This

anxiety results, in part, from the vapid nature of the text's content even when decoded: Simplicius's secret strategy for dodging bullets is simply to avoid any area where there is gunfire.

This scene betrays a conception of text as profoundly treacherous. Not only is the text produced by Simplicius triply encoded—first as language, then as writing and, finally, as encrypted writing—but the message conveyed by this cipher itself purports a meaningful identity that it does not in fact possess. The attempt to arrive at some ultimate or original meaning is thus repeatedly deferred in a type of Lacanian metonymy: the protagonist's text produces a chain of signifiers, each referring to the next, but never arriving at the desired signified, never effectively achieving actual signification. Much in the same way, Simplicius—himself a literary *signifier*, a figure of desired *Bildung*—never actually arrives at his own meaningful identity insofar as the reader never witnesses him in a conclusive state of being. Text, for Simplicius, is an obstacle to the very *Bildung* that it promises. As a signifier of himself, Simplicius is irreparably cloven from the completed identity he is ultimately meant to signify.

It would be impossible to claim that the protagonist's ostensibly final form is truly his last, as he is left (repeatedly) to die in privacy; the reader is never given bodily proof. Grimmelshausen eschews endings inasmuch as he adds to his book not only a *Continuatio*, but an *Anhang* and then a *Beschluss*, and then a series of sequels, each time declaring new authorship, each time providing the reader with a new, albeit often imperfect, anagram of his own true name. Thus, shortly after revealing Simplicius as the narrative voice in his own tale, Grimmelshausen again denies his protagonist this authority, as if to imply an essential fluidity inherent to authorial identity. Realizing the danger of his own textual manipulation, the protagonist ultimately conveys the key to his textual riddle: “nehme auß jedem unteutschen Wort / als welche weder zauberisch noch sonst von Kräfften seyn / den mittlern Buchstaben heraus” (628). What is the significance of Simplicius's alteration of Baldanders's textual strategy—his choice to emphasize midpoints rather than endpoints? Could it be an indication that the final identity adopted by the protagonist is not, in effect, as final as it may appear?

V

The veritable refusal of the work to end is reflected by the key to Baldanders's riddle: “Jch bin der Anfang und das End / und gelte an allen Orthen” (604). The *Continuatio* is, after all, both a continuation of the work and “der Schlußdesselben,” as its title asserts. This uncertain status of the different chapters near the end of the work is also demonstrated typographically. The penultimate chapter of the fifth book flows into the sixth, separated

not by a period but merely by a colon. Similarly, the period at the end of the ostensibly “allerletzte” chapter (544) then comes after the word “Ende” (551), thus inscribing this ending into the text itself and providing, perhaps, some indication of more to come.

At this crucial point in the cycle, the fragmented chapters flow over into one another, and repeat each other, entirely failing to maintain distinct identities. There is, after all, only a single letter’s discrepancy between the conclusion to the fifth book (“ein seliges ENDE” [551]) and the final words of Simplicius’s portion of the *Continuatio* (“ein seligs ENDE” [678]),²² both of which are prefigured by part of the chapter heading announcing the *Einsiedel*’s death scene early in the novel: “ein schöne Art selig zu sterben” (47). It is perhaps for this reason that Grimmelshausen has Simplicius write: “Alle diese Wort erwog ich mit Fleiß und stetigem Nachdencken / und bewogen mich dermassen / daß ich die Welt verliesse / und wieder ein Einsidel ward” (551). Having retreated into a hermetic world of text in many ways identical to his *Einsiedel*’s, Simplicius has by no means discovered his own identity, but rather adopted that of his mentor, taking on *his* life and *his* customs.

The final identity assumed by the protagonist is no more his own than the others, nor are we certain that it is the last, as Simplicius does not die at the end of this work, and we have been shown that endings can be beginnings. To this extent, the novel doubles back on itself, returning to its origins when it should be coming to its conclusion. And the conclusion to the work is also its fictive beginning: while ending the book, the *Continuatio* also first provides us with an account of the originary instance of writing. It is on the island of the *Continuatio* that Simplicius qua narrating subject both begins and concludes the act of writing that both begins and ends the story of his life—it is *der Anfang und das End*. Similarly, the final four chapters and the *Beschluss* each contribute another piece to the fiction of how this implausible autobiography made its way from an isolated island into the hands of the reader. The novel’s fictional ending is its textual beginning.

VI

In his seminal essay on the definition of the author-function, Michel Foucault speaks of the links between death and writing. A traditional paradigm would assert that the written word achieves a form of permanency that permits the author to live on after death: narrative would, under this model, be a form of immortality. But writing can also function to postpone death, as Foucault notes, citing the *Thousand and One Nights* as an example of literature written “in order to forestall death, to postpone the day of reckoning that would silence the narrator” (206). Nevertheless, this warding-off of death itself becomes another type of death, an

effacement of the writing subject's individual characteristics. Using all the contrivances that he sets up between himself and what he writes, the writing subject cancels out the signs of his particular individuality. As a result, the mark of the writer is reduced to nothing more than the singularity of his absence (207–08).

Such a dynamic is made manifest by Grimmelshausen's Simplician cycle, where it is not only the protagonist-narrator's death that is endlessly postponed and deferred, but, with it, any definitive sense of self. Simplicius does not find his place in the world, he merely retreats from it. Never having established a conclusive identity, Simplicius fails to complete the apparent teleology of this debatable *Bildungsroman*. If writing, for the protagonist, was meant to reunify a traumatically cloven self, to locate authorial presence, it has succeeded only in marking the singularity of his absence. Simplicius's writing is constantly referring back to an origin that it cannot attain (orality or print), struggling to achieve unity while inherently fracturing the writing subject, confusing actual realities with textual ones. Grimmelshausen's own text in turn performs a similar conflation of fantasy and fact, losing its own identity in a constant game of quotations, allusions and anagrams, setting the reader searching for an authorship—for a textual identity—which always remains elusive. For Grimmelshausen's text initiates an endless play of difference, always and only deferring signification, always traveling, and—like Simplicius himself—never arriving.

Notes

¹ It is because of Simplicius's search for himself that the work has often been considered a precursor to, perhaps even the earliest example of the *Bildungsroman*—although more recent scholarship is relatively unanimous in its reading of the work as inheriting the tradition of the picaresque. A host of studies have debated the genre classification of the novel, for example Gerhard, Jost, Rohrbach and Bertsch.

² Unless otherwise specified, this and all subsequent references to *Simplicissimus* are to the 2001 Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition.

³ Peter Burgard makes mention of similar dynamics concerning the emblem preceding the text of Grimmelshausen's work: "here we are confronted with difference even before we read the words, for the Latin word is printed in roman type and the German words in German *Fraktur* type" (568). This problematic use of various typefaces is also presented by the closest approximation to an actual authorial signature that Grimmelshausen offers us, when he places his initials on the final page of the work, as Burgard further notes: "The initials themselves convey a degree of difference, since instead of "J" for Jakob we find the Latinizing "I" for Iacob" (583).

⁴ Heckmann paves the way for my interpretation in that he recognizes that the essential *prise de conscience* required to become an author proffers an ostensible awakening into self-consciousness that ultimately and inevitably fails, inasmuch as "the fiction that he is the author of his own story collapses, and he becomes the character in a book written by someone else" (888)—a narrative split that Italo Michele Battafarano

explains as a necessary tool to allow Simplicius to narrate the Thirty Years War “entertainingly and didactically” (48).

⁵There is an important discrepancy to be noted here, as the narrating Simplicius of the *Continuatio* claims only to have written his memoirs retrospectively from the privacy of an island where he was abandoned without possessions. Yet, in this early scene, Simplicius claims already to have in hand the text of the work that we are reading—again demonstrating the fundamental instability of his narrative project. Credit for this insight must be shared with my colleague Thomas Herold.

⁶Dieter Breuer makes a similar suggestion, noting that “das ständige Lesen und die Versuche Gelesenes und Erfahrenes in Einklang zu bringen—all das fügt sich leicht zu einer Deutung des Romans, die das Erzählen selbst im Blick hat” (64). Ralf Georg Bogner makes a corollary observation, discussing literacy and social status, when he notes that the narrating characters in the Simplician cycle are mostly “charakteristische Vertreter von illiteraten Schichten der Zeit” (374). Elizabeth Eisenstein, more generally, shows how this desire to achieve (authorial) identity through writing is peculiar to *print* culture: “The wish to see one’s work in print [...] is different from the desire to pen lines that could never be fixed in a permanent form [...]. Until it became possible to distinguish between composing a poem and reciting one, or writing a book and copying one [...] the modern game of books and authors could not be played” (84).

⁷However, as Günther Weydt demonstrates in detail, this farewell takes the form of an extended (but modified) quotation from Guevara via Albertinus and perhaps other translations, revealing a fundamental multiplicity of authorship (216–40).

⁸Marcel Lepper ties Simplicius’s task as writer to the legibility of the world: “Die Buchwerdung des Lebens wird [...] als moralisierende Erinnerungsarbeit, als Prozess narrativer Sinnkonstitution präsentiert. Die finale Selbstverwandlung mündet ins Schriftgedächtnis des aktuellen Textes ein” (396).

⁹Battafarano insightfully addresses Grimmelshausen’s ambition to write about a war that “cannot be spoken of as an object. In order to have a better approach to the monstrosity of war [...] Grimmelshausen makes his personal experience of the war the theme, while making use of the form of the autobiographical novel” (46).

¹⁰These distinctions correspond to the differentiation between an “erzählendes” and an “erzähltes Ich” first introduced by Lothar Schmidt in 1960.

¹¹This dynamic is suggested by Walter Ong when he describes writing as “a solipsistic operation” (101). Even in a personal diary, according to Ong, a fictionalized addressee is as necessary as a fictionalized author. Moreover, “[t]he kind of verbalized solipsistic reveries it implies are a product of consciousness as shaped by print culture” (102).

¹²This tripartite categorization with regard to the novel is first established by Berns.

¹³Berns notes the necessity of such an inclusion of oral culture in Grimmelshausen’s project (101). Grimmelshausen’s intentional cultivation of a style drawing from both written and oral tradition provides another example of the multiplicity of narrative identity.

¹⁴It is important that we not entirely abandon the understanding of written language as deriving from sound. Challenging, in part, Derrida’s critique of Rousseau, Walter Ong, for instance, argues for the primacy of oral language as antecedent to writing: “Thought is nested in speech, not in texts, all of which have their meanings through reference of the visible symbol to the world of sound” (75).

¹⁵ See Bogner for an analysis of how this compares to actual reading instruction of the time.

¹⁶ Battafarano reads the anagrammatic referent of each the Simplician cycle's many invented scribes as an attempt to "underscore the fictional nature and autonomy of that which is being narrated" (53), but I disagree. To my mind, Grimmelshausen painstakingly places multiple layers of fictionalized publication in between the reader and the work, making it effectively impossible to delineate decisively the border between fact and fiction. Along these lines, Burgard concurs that these anagrams allow some aspects of reality to creep into the text: "[Grimmelshausen] goes on to identify the person signified by [one] anagram as the author of 'den Keuschen Joseph' and the 'Satyrischen Pilger,' both actual works of Grimmelshausen" (583).

¹⁷ Günther Weydt maps out the contemporary context, potential motivations, influences and allusions of Grimmelshausen's anagrams (192–96).

¹⁸ In this same vein, Breuer discusses the impossibility of determining whether certain typographical idiosyncrasies in Grimmelshausen's *Continuatio* are printing errors or wordplay (73).

¹⁹ Fritz Halfter notes a certain textual disunity here when he points out that the words appear "halb lateinisch, halb hebräisch" (39).

²⁰ It is also important to emphasize that Simplicius is astounded by Baldanders's ability to produce "Schrift mit guten *teutschen* Worten" (523, emphasis added). In her work on early print culture, Eisenstein demonstrates how the invention of the printing press helped amplify the notion of national literatures (88–90). Noting this connection between the Baldanders passage and national-linguistic identity, Wilhelm Kühlmann explores other texts by Grimmelshausen to demonstrate that the author conceived of his work as polyphonic, drawing from a variety of national or regional traditions and literary fashions: "Grimmelshausen kannte die Denkfiguren, Schriften, Vertreter der altdeutschen Bewegung am Oberrhein sehr genau, hob ihren Patriotismus im Erinnerungsraum seiner Schriften [...] auf, urteilte jedoch letzthin pragmatisch unter dem Erfahrungsdruck der Epoche des 'Baldanders'" (26).

²¹ The *Schermesser* episode has often been brought into conjunction with the Baldanders passage, for instance, by Tarot, Menhennet, Bertsch and Busch.

²² The facsimile edition of the 1669 printing of the *Continuatio* reveals an interesting oddity, making it impossible to determine whether the word is in fact "seeligs" or if the *e* in "seeliges" is simply printed over the *s*, which would make the conclusion to the *Continuatio* identical to the end of the fifth book.

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