: a Ship of Fools

by

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To my brothers,
Samuel Benjamin and Aaron Joseph Kachuck

Worry less, read more
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A Note on the Title

The motivation for the thesis’s title was related to my interest in the history and function of allegory as a tool for grappling with language and the past as a site for reference and interpretation. When we use an allegory in a phrase with a colon, we evoke the relationship between expression and allegory that I investigate in the following pages.

The blank space preceding the colon suggests the multitudinous and unpredictable possibilities—in past, present, and future—for the employment of allegory.

1 An example is an Irish popular historian’s 2010 study on twentieth century Irish economics, Fintan O’Toole, Ship of Fools: How Stupidity and Corruption Sank the Celtic Tiger (New York: Public Affairs, 2010).
Deep within the Musée du Louvre’s Richelieu wing, on the second floor, the “Dutch Painting” rooms host the museum’s collection of paintings from Northern Europe. Though the rooms include masterpieces by Van Eyck, Rubens, Vermeer, and Rembrandt, they are not typically spaces for the meandering that is common in the rest of the collection. Visitors that linger long enough, however, might stop in a darker corner of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century room, where they would find the Louvre’s only painting by Hieronymus Bosch, his Ship of Fools, or La Nef de Fous (Figure 1).  

Like many paintings by Bosch, the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Dutch painter of macabre, moral-allegorical, and the fantastic, it’s uncertain exactly what the painting presents. Thanks to recent restorations by the Louvre’s conservancy groups on the occasion of Bosch’s fifth centennial, some of the figures now appear more clearly outlined. At the center of the painting, portrayed as in the center of a boat, and, therefore, the first to catch the viewer’s eyes, are two

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1 Hieronymus Bosch, *The Ship of Fools*, 1500–1490, Oil on panel, 57.8 x 32.5 cm, 1500–1490, Musée du Louvre.
figures in religious garb. A Beguine plas the lute and a monk sings along. This central religious focus is not surprising; art historical criticism often points to Bosch’s regularly directed visual invectives against what he may have perceived to be a growing laxness in the Church’s moral and spiritual authority. The bowl of cherries between the two religious figures recalls a popular symbol of lust and sex, seeming to suggest that the figures are singing in preparation for mating. The Church figures, though, do not sing alone. Amidst their singing, ten figures surround the monk and nun, all involved in variegated forms and expressions of folly, a popular topos that captured widespread popularity in its allegorized, satirized, and personified forms in literature, art, and various cultural expressions in Early Modern and Renaissance Europe.

Indeed, Bosch’s Ship of Fools is replete with figures engaged with folly, so much so that while the other passngers on Bosch’s Ship of Fools suggest folly as the painting’s central argument, there remain opaque webs of reference and meanings that resist our interpretation. At the bottom of the painting, and out of the ship, two nude swimmers each gesticulate toward the vessel: one with a bowl, asking gluttonously for a fill of wine, while the other grabs the ship’s side, perhaps begging for admission. On the ship, the steersman distracts himself with singing merriment, while his oar cuts lazily into the

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2 The colors of these two figures also suggests the possibility they were meant to be viewed first. As is even more clear after the restorations, the oranges of the figures surrounding the nun and monk contrast with the greys and white of the religious garb, and the monk’s lightly colored (and bare) head, catches the viewer’s eyes especially.

3 Cutler, “Bosch and the Narrenschiff,” 272.

4 Walter Bosing, Heironymus Bosch, c. 1450-1516: Between Heaven and Hell (Köln: Taschen, 2010), 30.

water behind him. He is joined by two other singing men behind the religious couple, one of whom stares at a pancake hanging in between while the other gestures upward in either remark or performative flourish. In the bow, another Beguine accosts a man with a jug. He has a sickly visage and is nearly folded over the end of the ship: he has had too much. At the other end, another man—supposedly already well drunk—seems to be vomiting over the stern. Right above him, hanging on a tree branch inexplicably ascending out of the boat, is the only passenger we actually witness imbibing in the scene, a person garbed in all the proper accoutrements of a Low Country court jester, or, in other words, a fool. Climbing the mast, shrouded in shrubbery, a figure is in the midst of cutting down a cooked goose, whose fleshy pink matches that of the ribbon flag that bears a Turkish crescent—presumably, in the stead of a Catholic cross. And finally, aloof and above from this frenzy of folly, an owl, nearly camouflaged in the crown of the tree (the trunk of which, we gather, is the mast), surveys the scene, with a look of marked disapproval (Figure 2). Indeed, the owl looks on as the passengers of Bosch’s Ship of Fools lead their way to certain sinful disaster, caused by negligence of religious and secular duty, and overindulgences of gluttony, lust, and passion.

Who is this owl, and why does it look on so? To answer such a question, we must venture further outside the frame of the painting; into its broader iconographic environment. The owl appears clearly, and sometimes concealed, in

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6 Hieronymus Bosch et al., Hieronymus Bosch: Visions of Genius (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2016).
numerous Bosch paintings, looking on from the tree above *The Wayfarer*\(^7\), perched atop the pig-faced lute player in *The Temptation of St. Anthony*\(^8\), embraced and oversized in *The Garden of Earthly Delights*\(^9\), shadowed beside *St. Jerome at Prayer*\(^10\), and elsewhere. In most cases, Bosch depicts a pigmy owl, marked by its smooth head—which contrasts with that other important symbolic owl of European iconography, the horned owl. In his landmark study of *The Bestiary of Chris*, Catholic scholar Louis Charbonneau-Lassay remarks that pigmy owls, numerous in Classical Athens and Greece and affiliated with Pallas Athena, could represent in the popular imagination a “bird that sees clearly in the dark when all others are blind…a symbol in which were united the three qualities of wisdom, knowledge, and prudence.”\(^11\) The owl was known to be stationed in trees and on walls, and could be imagined as a meditative, and ever-observant, judge and spectator of human action. Perhaps we, the viewers, are to identify most with the owl, the prudent spectator who sees the light through the darkness of the ship’s folly and sinfulness. Once the owl is afforded its iconographic meanings, it transforms the Bosch painting from a representation of foolish characters, amidst the revelry of lustful festivities, to a more powerful moral allegory about the observation, and discernment, of the folly surrounding us. Yet, even as this owl might represent the clear-sightedness of a morally aloof observer, its cultural affiliation with nocturnal, perhaps sinister,
mystery complicates tidy and complete analogical readings of the painting’s symbolism. If the owl is sinister, then it too might be partaking in the folly of the scene, solely from its passive observance of sinful behavior.

This problem of the owl’s meaning is representative of reading Bosch’s paintings more generally. Overflowing with figural elements, often allusive and fantastical, Bosch’s paintings resist totalizing assessments of their meaning. Further, the wide scope of his webs of signification, reference, and meaning, which were also so entangled with the webs of his own period, further reminds us of the difficulties of interpreting a work separated from us by the vicissitudes of temporal distance.

Similarly, if we turn to the material conditions of the painting, we open wider the question of the painting’s allegorical power and reveal parallel difficulties in interpretation. The exact dating of the painting is not certain, but most scholars pin it to the last years surrounding the turn of the sixteenth century. Recent dendrochronological studies, the process of dating a wooden substance by examining and counting its growth rings, dates the wood Bosch used for the panel to 1490, which at least delineates a lower minimum for the painting’s provenance. Further analysis, mainly from the use of X-radiography and comparison with Bosch’s work of the era, also reveals that the Louvre’s Ship of Fools was never originally meant to be viewed as an isolated work. The Ship scene was cut away at the bottom, sometime in the eighteenth- or nineteenth-century, from its original partner, The Allegory of Intemperance (now housed

in the Yale University Art Gallery), and was once a part of a triptych which also included Bosch’s *Death and the Miser* panel (now housed in the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C.)

Together, these paintings offer the possibility for a broader reading about Bosch’s intended artistic mission of displaying his contemporaries’ vices and follies. Yet, such readings are burdened by the absence of panels still missing, which could have constituted the entirety of the possible triptych. In short, to approximate Bosch’s vision, we as viewers must implant content to empty space. Further, our twenty-first century sighting of Bosch’s painting is not only a privileged one because of the painting’s material disruption via conservation—from natural conditions of time’s wear—our viewing is also one of awareness of the incompleteness of our vision on a past that is far and gone. Indeed, there is little chance the panels of the erstwhile triptych will be restored in totality, and the panels have each taken such independent identities in the art historical reception of Bosch’s works that such a reconstruction would reveal an ostensibly insurmountable temporal aporia: an aporia we are left to try to solve with our own temporally-bound subjective content, that is, our reading of the object.

14 Hieronymus Bosch, *Allegory of Intemperance*, 1500 1495, Oil on panel, 34.9 x 31.4 cm, 1500 1495, Yale University Art Gallery.

15 Hieronymus Bosch, *Death and the Miser*, c. /1490 1485, Oil on panel, 93 x 31 cm, c. /1490 1485, National Gallery of Art.

I first saw Bosch’s *Ship of Fools* projected on a screen in a classroom, in a first-year Renaissance Art History course at Wesleyan University; then, again, hung in the dark corner in the Louvre while I was studying in Paris; and, this time in my mind’s eye, when I first encountered the woodcut frontispiece of the richly annotated 1497 Latin edition of Sebastian Brant’s *Narrenschiff* (*Ship of Fools, or Stultifera Navis*) in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives (Figure 3).17

![Figure 3: Frontispiece of Wesleyan’s Grüninger Ship of Fools](image)

17 Sebastian Brant, *Stultifera navis*. (Strassburg: Johann Reinhard Grüninger, 1497). All future figures from this artifact refer to this cited archive.
Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* was originally written in German, and first published in Basel, Switzerland, in 1494. Therafter, it was widely spread in its original German, and in authorized and un-authorized translations (and adaptations), throughout Europe, becoming what we might call one of the earliest secular bestselling books following the invention of the printing press. In his *Narrenschiff*, the humanist Brant presents a seemingly never-ending barrage of individual poetic caricatures of various fools aboard a ship—each accompanied by a woodcut—who eventually sink on the way to their destination, the land of Narragonia (Fool Land). Much art historical ink has been spilt on the question of Brant’s influence on Bosch’s *Ship of Fools*, and most seem to (at the very least) concur that Bosch’s moral allegory was less an explicit homage to Brant’s book than it was an organic product of various and multitudinous influences, including (but not limited to) visual sources related to medieval boating parties and May minuatures depicting fertility festivities, and literary sources about burlesque carnivals such as the early fifteenth century poem by Jacob van Oestvoren of Zeeland, *Blaue Schuit* (Blue Boat), and Guillaume de Deguileville’s fourteenth century allegorical poem (which included the Ship of Church), *Le Pèlerinage de l’Âme* (The Pilgrimage of the Soul).\(^\text{18}\)

Thus, even the identification of striking similarities betwixt Brant’s subject matter and illustrations and Bosch’s painting cannot lead to a definitive assertion of the allegory’s origin or influence.

The historical stakes and conditions at play in the interpretation of Bosch’s *Ship of Fools*, as demonstrated above, offer a meaningful opening perspective to the tensions and avenues of historical, art historical, and literary thinking that I will explore

\(^{18}\) For a more comprehensive review of the network of influences possibly at play in Bosch’s painting, see Cuttler, “Bosch and the Narrenschiff.”
throughout this study of the as-yet unexamined artifact of Brant’s *Ship of Fools* in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives. Attempts to ground a work with concrete historical or exegetical methods fail to fully account for the aspects that remain allusive, and these aspects that evade easy encapsulation are deeply related to the way we must augment a past object by making it present in our own contemporary consideration.
INTRODUCTION

The allegory of the Ship of Fools carries with it not only the high-horsed humor of neighborly rebuke, but also qualities that render it a continually impactful and inviting means to critique and describe contemporary society. In my thesis, I will explore the way the allegory of the Ship of Fools navigates through time: as it exists in a material artifact of its late-fifteenth century adaptation by Sebastian Brant, and in its status as a powerful and pervasive allegory. The central pillar of this study will be the artifact, a role filled by Wesleyan University’s Latin edition of Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools*—published in Strasbourg in 1497 by Johannes Grüninger—though I intend to project the present artifact to its past and future to better understand its significance. To enact this projection, we must transmit the questions such a study could, and I would argue must, evoke when considering a past literary product as popular and influential as Brant’s.\(^{19}\) These questions necessarily must be approached with a mind toward material conditions and physical historical circumstances, but also should be informed by cultural history, art historical criticism, literary theory, and other disciplines related to considering past historical agents and their cultural production and reception.

Central to my project is the understanding that no matter the mix of method, there will remain gaps in my explanations for particular and broad issues related to the subject at hand, and that this tension is embedded in the nature of thinking and writing about a past that is dead and gone. A tempting path amidst the confrontation of these gaps, when evidence fails to provide a foolproof chronology or when symbols are...
unclear, would be to emplot my observations in a tidy narrative that suits my preferential way of understanding this artifact. The nature of historical writing will often demand I do so. However, I hope that by confronting the questions this artifact evokes through various perspectives and methodologies, the readers of this thesis will better grasp the ontological tensions we must confront when we, as observers, ascribe stories and explanations to past objects, that is, giving them a being in the present. A pivotal understanding undergirding this study is that the past is not a fixed and immutable object that we can reconstruct in our present imagination through disciplinary and methodological rigor. We, as historical thinkers, must look creatively to the past with the various analytical tools we have to construct worthwhile paths to considering the past as it speaks to us in our present historical position. As such, this artifact study will engage in what De Man calls the “problematics of reading” that we encounter when attempting to ascertain “historical definition.”

To begin my discussion about this artifact, its history, its annotation’s implications, and the necessity to approach the artifact from a multifaceted method, I will explore the ways in which the *Ship of Fools* engages us in its allegorical character.

When Sebastian Brant set on his project of writing poetic caricatures of fools aboard a ship, he was both transmitting and capturing an allegorical tradition related to the ship and its occupants. Simply put—and, perhaps, reductively—Brant’s *Ship of Fools* is an allegory insofar as he wrote the book so that it would be read to mean something other than literally what he wrote. But, to concur that he was writing an allegory, and leave the discussion at that, would do a disservice to the complexities of

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allegorical writing and allegorical interpretation that can better situate Brant’s project within his own time, the past he references, and the future it influenced. In this introduction, I will explore the theoretical and historical considerations regarding allegory that apply to the Ship of Fools.

As will be discussed more thoroughly later in this introduction, a discussion of the concept of allegory is not only one of symbolic reference, but also one of historicity and origins. As such, I will ground our exploration of the Ship of Fools, and of allegory more generally, in an origin story that begins in ancient Athens, with Plato. Indeed, it is fitting that our theoretical and literary-historical discussion of the Ship of Fools allegory begins with Plato, a thinker from whose ambivalent stance toward the concept we may glean the tensions at the heart of this thesis. In the sixth book of his Republic, Plato offers what we may delimit as an origin of the ship as a microcosm allegory for something other than the ship itself. A close examination of Plato’s use of allegory generally, and of the ship particularly, complicates what has been understood as his apparent resistance toward allegory and its relation to figurative language’s distance from eternal truth. Fascinatingly, Plato not only allows but demonstrates the necessity of allegory for the practice of rhetoric. In this sense, allegory functions as figural language and as persuasive language, rather than simply as possibly deceptive ornament.21 Even if we do not go so far as to unreflectively assent to Alfred Whitehead’s oft-quoted “safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition,” we may say that the

21 Much of the discussion of allegory in Plato’s Republic derives from an essay written for a seminar on the text led by Professor Tushar Irani at Wesleyan University in the Fall semester of 2017. I am very grateful for his generous permission to include material from the course’s final term paper into this present thesis. Gabriel Kachuck, “Allegory in Plato’s Republic,” Wesleyan University, 16 December 2017. In possession of the author.
questions and tensions Plato elucidates remain fundamental in discussions of the concept to our present days.\textsuperscript{22}

Indeed, the \textit{Republic} stands as Plato's longest extant exposition of a philosophical problem, and it involves not only an incredibly elaborate frame story, but also numerous consequential forays into figural language throughout. He does this even for his explicit warnings against the harmful vicissitudes of figural language. To argue that the just life is not only the best, but will produce the happiest life, Plato understands he must set his prime interlocutor, Socrates, onto the task of foregoing the attempt to explain conceptual puzzles through direct and literal explanations. He has Socrates tell a story of an ideal \textit{polis}, whose formation and dissolution will prove the point along the way. Plato's Socrates appreciates that to be understood we must depend on the interpretative abilities of our interlocutors. Plato appreciates this as well, which he evinces in the dialogical form of his philosophical works. Though, there is more to these questions than the utility of figural language.

In his foundational book on the subject of \textit{Allegory: The Theory of Symbolic Mode}, literary scholar Angus Fletcher describes allegory as “a revealed transcendental language which tries to preserve the remoteness of a proper veiled godhead.”\textsuperscript{23} For Fletcher, the sociological importance of allegory is deeply entangled with a metaphysical construct that dovetails into a Platonic understanding of a world of transcendental Forms. That is, to speak of an idea of a thing, we must speak about it

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allegorically. But, if we are speaking about ideas or Forms, we implicitly stipulate that they must be independent from the profane multiplicity of material life. Thus, though the language is transcendental, it works to maintain an awareness of our distance from the intelligibility of transcendent Forms themselves.

Though, not unlike the disjunction of meaning natural to allegorical expression, there is also trouble talking about allegory at all because of the various names it has taken up in literary, philosophical, and theoretical contexts. In the Republic, certainly, there is figural language that suggests disjunctions of meaning, but is all of Plato’s figural language part of a broader allegorical expression? Readers of the Republic are presented with examples, and descriptions, of figurative language that are called myth (muthos), icons (eikonas), and language that corresponds to the original Greek version of allegory (later changed in the Roman era) that literally means “under-meaning” (hyponia). Discrete definitions of these terms are especially difficult to ascertain in Plato, because they are often entangled in their application. Most simply, a myth is a story told, or read, by a storyteller, but written by a poet, about gods and heroes (377a-d). Importantly, Plato’s conception of a myth is a story that relates experiences or happenings that are not available to the mortal life, whether they involve the divinities (as in Homer) or the soul after death (as in Plato’s own myth of Er). Their content is itself unreachable, and, perhaps, unintelligible, in the material world—that is, without either the force of belief or allegorical interpretation. One must either believe the gods truly exist as they do in the stories or find within the very same stories a hidden meaning.

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I pick this definition of myth out of Plato’s description of the major myths, which are told to children, and involve certain values of which Plato is wary.
about virtues, moral conflict, and vices to which the characters and situations refer. One option demands faith and the other interpretation. Myths are the fundamentals of shared culture and knowledge, and they are used throughout the Republic as a means of sharing a common cultural reference.

Thus, before contending with his views on allegory in the Republic, we will begin by attempting to approximately define Plato’s lexicon of figural language. For Plato’s definition of icons, as opposed to myths, one must look to his description of pictorial images and mimetic poetry in Book X. For Plato, an icon is a copy of the sensible appearance of an object. For instance, a painting of a couch is only the representation of what a couch appears to look like, rather than having anything substantial to do with the independent Form of the couch from which the maker produced the original object (596d). It seems that icons are not as naturally a shared cultural object as myths, but are rather a source of cultural capital. Knowledge of myths is assumed, while knowledge of poetry acts as a sign of distinction. Icons can be newly created and accepted as worthy inspirations of values and models of living without being ingrained in a cultural memory. Icons need not necessarily be stories—they can just as equally be in a tragic drama as on a vase decoration. A constant characteristic of icons, though, lies in their imitative properties. They are “by nature third from the king and the truth” because the artist imitates only the appearance of an object which was already fashioned from

\[25\] Andrew Laughlin Ford, The Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2002), 212. Ford argues that the flurry of poetical quoting in the beginning of Plato’ Republic sets the sociological groundwork in the discussion for agreeing that all involved are elite enough to spend the time at leisure discussing poetry and philosophical discussion. This poetical back-and-forth, though, is not successful in actually reaching any dialectical conclusion to their discussion, which leads Socrates to begin the discussion of justice that threads the text.
the object’s true and transcendent Form (599d). Additionally, icons cause receivers of
the image to imitate the image into their own consciousness (598e). This imitation
occurs on the level of linguistic definitions, such as thinking that the only couches are
those which correspond to the image of the couch; and to moral ones, such as believing
courage and justice only manifest themselves in ways that match those seen in drama.
Given these distinctions, a useful approach to distinguish myths and icons is to identify
the various people Socrates and his interlocutors mention as representative of either
“myth” or “icon.” Homer and Hesiod should be seen as ‘mythmakers’ (377d), while
Sophocles (329d) and Aeschylus (361b) should be seen as makers of icons. Socrates
rejects extant myths and poetry in his construction of the kallipolis, as will be further
explained below, but leaves the future of allegory more uncertain.

Plato’s definition of allegory is only explicitly found in his description of
allegorical interpretation and content. In Book II, Socrates introduces allegories as one
of the first aspects of his contemporary life to be excluded from the ideal polis:

We won’t admit stories into our city—whether allegorical or not…The young
can’t distinguish between what is allegorical from what isn’t, and the opinions
they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable (378d).

The term Socrates uses when he refers to allegory is hyponia, which translates directly to
an ‘under thought’. An under-thought, Jonathan Lear explains, “enters the psyche
beneath the radar of critical thought.”26 An under-thought bypasses a text’s surficial
levels of meaning, and dives directly to the deeper philosophical truths or arguments
underneath the original expression. The word we use now in the stead of hyponia,

26 Jonathan Lear, “Allegory and Myth in Plato’s Republic,” in Gerasimos Xenophon
Santas, ed., The Blackwell Guide to Plato’s Republic, Blackwell Guides to Great Works (Malden,
allegory, derives its meaning from the combination of *allos* (other) and *agoria* (speaking). It is a relatively new addition to the Greek language—made especially popular by early Christian theologians and philosophers Philo of Alexandria and Origen. A notable distinction between these two terms, though their meanings (no matter how ostensibly different) were subsumed into what is now called allegory, is that *hyponia* refers directly to the veiled nature of allegorical expression. The author of an allegorical expression intentionally hides content, and the reader must both realize the presence of the veiled meaning through a conscious awareness of the construction of the literary product and dig under the expression’s surface to reveal it. In Plato’s lexicon, a story can be allegorical, but it cannot itself be an allegory. Hidden meaning is a quality of a particular kind of expression, not a type, mode, or genre of expression itself. Thus, it is perfectly sensible that Socrates, in the *Republic*, never calls a story he describes, or tells, as an allegory. Rather, he participates in discussing the implications of certain readings of stories or expressions that suggest a hidden meaning, an *hyponia*. This focus on the veiled nature of language will save allegorical expression from exile and disuse in Plato’s *Republic*.

These definitions are important to grasp because they allow us to speak more specifically about the conditions surrounding Socrates’s infamous ‘exile of the poets’ in Book II and Book X. Socrates’s censoring project is not a comprehensive repudiation of figural language; rather, Socrates argues that myth and icons are possibly harmful to philosophical thinking. As I will demonstrate, Plato is mainly concerned with a

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transference of unchallengeable authority that occurs in the reception of certain instances of figural language. Myths and icons, as incommensurate with philosophical discourse and as imitations of the appearance of the sensible world, inhibit the individual’s ability to develop value systems based on objective principles of the Good.

Andrew Ford goes so far to explain Plato’s misgivings related to myth, and poetry as well, as parallel to a more general anxiety about ideology. What Plato is especially worried about is how the unreasoned attribution of authority to poetic figures—which are both unverifiable and non-argumentative—encourages a culture where people “cobble together from what they read and hear beliefs about the nature of the world.” Such ideologies become so inflexible that they work to devalue human independence and subjective idea-formation, reinforcing the status-quo and maintaining constrictive power structures of knowledge.

Plato might have also been concerned about the kind of allegorical interpretation adults engaged in with the stories pervasive in his culture. The fifth century in Ancient Greece experienced significant developments in literary culture and reading, much of which pointed to an expansion of allegorical interpretations of Greece’s foundational texts. The scholars we now refer to as sophists, or-pre-Socratic philosophers, began codifying more texts, especially of Homer, and also partook in readings which associated the cosmos of the written word with that of the universe, both phenomenological and moral. These readings gave way to what Socrates suggests are ideas that prove closer to opinions than knowledge. Democritus, for instance, taught on the linguistic cosmos of the Iliad as a parallel structure of his own atomic theory of

\[29 \text{ Ford, } The \text{ Origins of Criticism.}
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\[30 \text{ Ibid., 211.}\]
universe. The Darveni Papyrus, a 5th century text found in the mid-twentieth century, includes an extensive allegorical commentary on an Orphic poem that reworks the fundamental aspects of the original text into an allegorical justification of the theory of the world’s creation and the gods’ birth found in the philosophy of pre-Socratic Anaxagoras. In Gorgia’s *Encomium of Helen*, he allegorizes Homer’s story of Helen of Troy to support the fundamental Sophist trope that deceptive speech (*logos*) is the most powerful tool for asserting dominance over others. The proliferation of written texts could only have exacerbated this use of allegorical interpretation for the sake of ideological bolstering, as writers and readers could more easily reach one another without the possibility for dialogical intervention.

By allegorizing shared cultural references of myths as a means of perpetuating their ideology, Plato’s near-contemporaries transferred the authority accompanying myth to themselves and their own desired reading. Plato demonstrates his anxiety about this kind of reading in the Phaedrus, when Socrates bemoans the power of writing to establish fixed, unquestionable meaning, to diminish an individual’s memory, and to affirm a hierarchy of foreign signs and symbols over an individual’s own thinking, judgment, and interpretation (275a-d). For Socrates, writing only provides the appearance of wisdom, not wisdom itself—just as did mimetic poetry in the *Republic*.

Thus, in consideration of the state of literary thought in Plato’s time, it is probable to assume that his weariness of allowing allegorical stories into the city is related to the possibility that allegorical interpretation would lead, just as myths did, to the reification of ideologies that impede an individual’s ability to question and discuss meaning and truth.

Plato’s criticisms of figural expression and his weariness of the interpretations therein pose a great challenge for his central project: demonstrating the philosophical discourse in the written form. In the process of arguing for the sake of the just life in the stead of the unjust life, Plato also offers new and countervailing examples of allegorical expression and interpretation.

On one level, as Lear argues, the allegories Plato presents, through Socrates, share in an under-meaning that compels the receivers to question their current state of affairs, whether those be political, epistemological, metaphysical, psychological, or spiritual. They are, in essence, the anti-ideological response to a preponderance of ideology. This paradigm is especially present in Plato’s Ship of State allegory in Book VI. Responding to a challenge of his argument that cities will be governed poorly until a true philosopher takes rule, Socrates presents the allegory of a ship beleaguered by incompetency. The ship-owner, though larger than everyone else, is “hard of hearing, a bit short-sighted,” and lacks knowledge of seafaring. The sailors are constantly quarrelling over who gets to steer the ship, using persuasive “drugs [and] wine” to gain power and killing competitors that successfully get a hold at the rudder (488b). Any “true captain” who knew the proper craft of navigation would be mocked and ignored.

on such a ship, and even though his rule would be the best for the ship he would never ascend without a restructuring of the total system of governance. After presenting the image, Socrates tells his interlocutor that he need not explain it in detail to show how the “ship resembles cities” and their “attitude” to philosophers (489a). In many ways, the use of the ship as a microcosm for the situation in cities whose citizens neglect wisdom and extol sophistry is Plato’s way of arguing against a fundamental principle undergirding his native Athens, to wit, democracy. Whereas a supporter of democracy might assert that justice is best served when the voices of the many are attended to, the ship allegory exposes the fact that the voices of those with true knowledge are misunderstood and drowned out by the blistering volume of persuasion, demagoguery, and skepticism. In short, narcissistic and ignorant folly triumphs over reasoned wisdom, which can only be established to its proper place of authority via a turning over of the entire structure of governance.

The Ship of State is the most explicitly political of the Republic’s allegories, though its varying counterparts retain this theme of an anti-ideological stance. In the religious myth of Er in Book X, symmetrically opposed to its counterpart’s location at the beginning of the Republic, Socrates repudiates the beliefs of horrendous afterlives (that support the unhealthy fear of death Socrates bemoans in his Apology) held by his early interlocutors in the dialogue. In the allegory of the cave in Book VII, Socrates tells his interlocutors that they have spent their life under the spell of culturally constituted understandings of reality, staring at shadows and hearing echoes. Socratic allegories, even as they remain examples of a figural language that holds the same possible dangers as myths and icons, contain one principle aspect that sets them apart, their imposition of self-awareness, critical distance, and Socratic ignorance. Socrates is consistent, even
if it seems otherwise. After Glaucon remarks on the strangeness of the people in the cave allegory, living their lives in blissful ignorance of the truth, Socrates responds, “they’re like us,” and he later warns that he can only speak of the “offspring of the good,” and not the good itself (515c, 506e). In order to speak of lofty subjects beyond the capability of our sense-perception, Plato resorts to figural language, but he acknowledges throughout that there exists no perfect analogy to express the concepts he introduces. He never provides a complete interpretation because he allows his interlocutors to arrive at their own interpretations of the image, engage their own subjectivity in the process, then to assert their subjectivity with the image-makers themselves through the form of the dialogue. In this way, Plato’s allegories are a reminder of the allegorical quality of daily life, in that we must contend with constant disjunctions of meaning between what we see, read, hear, and what we know must exist in reality, yet lies beyond our grasp.

The story of allegory’s conceptualization from Plato to today is a long and turbulent one, and for reasons of time and space we cannot properly delineate its complete historical genealogy. Rather, we will now turn our attention to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, when interactions between poetics and literary history developed into the professional sphere of literary theory. In this conceptual space

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37 Though, to contextualize its reemergence as a mode of theoretical discourse in the twentieth and twenty-first century, it is worthy to note that allegory experienced a decline of popular intellectual support in the nineteenth century, as romantics. Represented in the scholarship by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and his comments in “The Statesmen’s Manual,” the romantics found allegorical abstraction antithetical to the transcendent imagination, in which the particular and material were “translucent” to each other. Vital to its return to prominence is a distance from a definition of allegory as simply a sustained metaphor pictorial emblem, or a personification for ideological and didactic purposes. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Statesman’s Manual; or, The Bible, the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight (London: Gale and Fenner, 1816).
allegory donned its status as a prominent mode of expression worthy of study for its literary, figural, rhetorical, and temporal, properties. Rather than relying solely on exegesis of particular allegorical texts, or the allegories within broader narratives, thinkers like Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, and Gordon Teskey provide a helpful morphological perspective on the functioning and perversity of allegory that represent the groundwork for this study. A central location of argument in these thinkers’ reflections on allegory is its place in a conceptual struggle with the symbol. Whereas the symbol suggests a continuous relationship of being and meaning, wherein the signified and signifier refer to the same being, allegory complicates and interrupts such ascriptions of meaning, preferring the mystery of subjective interaction with objects and expressions of the past. In many ways, the theories of allegory presented by these thinkers build from each other, so I will build my own working theory along with a discussion of each thinker in chronological order.

In his *Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin discusses the evolution of the German baroque mourning play (*Trauerspiel*) in the context of allegory’s relation to human subjectivity, and to its reclaiming power over the world of physical objects and simple symbolic relationships.\(^{38}\) Benjamin assigns allegory not strictly to expression, but to an allegorical experience, in which the subject’s perception of the privation of the physical world is confronted by a building up of signs that present an incomplete image of a transcendent truth. Benjamin employs a distinction between the Romantic symbol, which seeks an ontological unity between the signified and signifier, and allegory, which partially cancels its true relation to its references through speaking about them

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otherwise. In this way, allegory affirms the subjectivity of viewing more generally, loosening fixed notions of how ideas relate to things. Allegory reveals a mystery to human experience and subjectivity that is irredeemable by theological truth and symbolic relations. In allegory, one is forced to confront the “facies hippocratica” of history, as a being nearly dying that cannot be elevated through the redeeming light of a symbolic or theological equivalent.\(^\text{39}\) Indeed, Benjamin suggests that allegory is an eternal factor in our relation to ideas: in the human drive for symbolic meaning, allegory “emerges from the depths of being to intercept the intention, and to triumph over it.”\(^\text{40}\) For Benjamin, allegories are “in the realm of thoughts what ruins are in the realm of things,”\(^\text{41}\) traces left behind by previous thoughts that need be reconstructed through the process of, as Howard Caygill summarizes in his chapter on Benjamin and allegory, constructing “constellations out of the material of the past” via reading and interpretation.\(^\text{42}\) This language of ruins and constellations in Benjamin’s exploration of allegory emphasizes his argument that the object of inquiry when a philosophical historian turns toward allegory is an incomplete object. That is, allegory, in its expressed form and as a component of symbolic relations, deters us from reaching an understanding of the essence of a past object in totality. The incompleteness of this object assumes that the formal properties of a work of the past is partially present and absent in our present imagination, which leaves to individual subjectivity the work of reaching a philosophical truth. An allegorical view of the world and human expression

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 166  
\(^{40}\) Ibid., 183. 
\(^{41}\) Ibid., 178  
originates in a “triumph of subjectivity,” which dwells on the tension between the decay of physical reality and the internal drive toward tidy symbolic meaning. In reflecting on the ways allegory resists affording eternal content to the physical world of things and squaring off difficulties with past object and expressions with complete symbolic relations, Benjamin defends allegory as both an artistic expression and as a means of observing the past.

Importantly, Benjamin’s arguments in defense of allegory are deeply related to a theory of historical thinking and its aesthetic destination: allegory reminds us of our subjectivity’s part in reviving the beauty of past objects. What Benjamin’s articulation of allegory lacks, though, is a thorough examination of the ways allegory, as a mode of perception and expression, relates to itself. That is, to what, if anything perceivable, do allegories reference, and how do they do so? Paul de Man’s theory proves especially helpful here, as his theory of allegory asserts not only the rhetorical property of allegorical expression and interpretation, but also the ways in which allegory is deeply embedded in our notions of narrative and temporality in thinking about the past. In his essay, “Rhetoric of Temporality,” de Man returns to an antimony between symbol and allegory.: De Man, however, marks the associative allegories in Romantic texts as evidence that allegory, in its rhetorical and temporal sense, lies in the background, even in texts, and from authors, that posture themselves against allegorical expression.

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43 Benjamin, 233.
45 It is worthwhile to divert our attention from the currently unfolding argument to address what are important critiques against the use of Paul de Man in my theoretical framework. The historical record has seemed to arrive squarely on a number of conclusions regarding the life of the Belgian literary critic who, along with Jacques Derrida, built the foundation of post-structuralist deconstructionism in France, the United States, and elsewhere.
A most comprehensive recent work on his life is Evelyn Barish, *The Double Life of Paul de Man* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2014). Barish’s story tells us we can be fairly certain de Man engaged in repulsive intellectual behavior, writing articles spouting explicitly Nazi collaborationist anti-Semitism in the Belgian *La Soir* and Flemish *Het Vlaamsche Land* from 1940 to 1942 and using his ‘publishing house,’ *Hermès*, as a fraudulent front for grabbing enough cash to flee to America in 1948. Once in the United States, he lied his way through coveted posts in academic institutions, where he taught, and from which he wrote, on narrative, reading, and deconstruction. He was well loved by his contemporaries and students, and the ‘revelations’ of his collaborationist writings in the spring of 1987 (three years after his death) came as a severe shock to the intellectual community. Parallels were drawn between his case and Martin Heidegger’s Nazism, demonstrated in his ‘black notebooks’ and written about in detail in Victor Farias’s 1987’s book on *Heidegger and Nazism*, though de Man’s case is far more complex than was Heidegger’s outward support and participation in the Nazi regime.

In both cases, however, critics of their philosophies found these truly troubling historical findings as perfect strategic opportunities to argue for the exclusion of their respective philosophical contributions. In short, critics argued that these thinkers were contaminated beyond relief or excuse. Louis Menand’s review of Barish’s biography points directly to the way critics of Yale-school criticism, especially supporters of New Criticism and New Historicism, found the journalistic behavior of de Man so unpalatable, and relevant enough to his academic thought, that they suggested it be better to move on from the alleged ‘relativist’ deconstructionist critique of our ways of reading to an evolved status quo. Louis Menand, “The De Man Case,” *The New Yorker*, March 17, 2014. Jacques Derrida comes to a similar conclusion, that there were strategies at play other than moral ones, in his passionate defense of deconstructionism shortly after the discovery of de Man’s wartime writings. Jacques Derrida and Peggy Kamuf, “Like the Sound of the Sea Deep within a Shell: Paul de Man’s War,” *Critical Inquiry* 14, no. 3 (1988): 590–652. Here, though, I offer another route through the difficulties of relying on writers whose actions we find despicable, and it comes from a reading of de Man himself. I come neither to praise nor to bury de Man. Rather, I hope to use de Man against himself, and thus transcend these ethical challenges against the consideration of his theories in this thesis.

In an article on “Autobiography as De-facement,” de Man introduces the theoretical implications of the figure of prosopopeia in autobiographical works with a particular focus on Wordsworth’s more self-referential poetry. He defines the prosopopeia as “the fiction of an apostrophe to an absent, deceased, or voiceless entity, which posits the possibility of the latter’s reply and confers upon it the power of the speech.” Paul de Man, “Autobiography as De-Facement,” *MLN* 94, no. 5 (1979): 919–30. It is, in the etymological and metaphorical sense, a giving of a face, or mask, to an otherwise mute voice. De Man suggests that the employment of the figure deprives writers of their own voice and therefore “a world accessible only in the privative way of understanding.” Ibid., 930. I do indeed deploy the theoretical construct of de Man, certainly a problematic source, for the sake of building my own personal understanding, and my historical person is not responsible for de Man’s collaborationist action. I have, it may seem, given a more tolerable face to a voice that may have been better left without figuration. Yet, de Man also argues that language, the mode through which we mask past voices, is “always privative” because in the moment of providing a figure to a presumed reality, it also disfigures it from its maskless being. Hence the possible double meaning of masking. In other words, literary thought cannot reach the political and ideological until it has first surmounted the problems of the linguistic and figural. I also would argue that evocation of a past disembodied voice through textual exegesis and for the sake of developing one’s own original argument is more empowering than de Man’s theory of prosopopeia suggests. Moreover, if we were to take an incredibly generous view of the ethical landscape, we might say that de Man’s burden of his
De Man argues that allegory is always a present aspect of literary expression in that we reveal the allegorical quality of a text when we discover its “authentically temporal destiny.”\(^{46}\) Whereas a symbol delineates a figural space in which two objects share a continuous ontological relationship, via synecdoche, the constitutive element of an allegory and its modes of referencing is first and foremost time.\(^{47}\) In an allegorical perspective, we confront a temporal disjunction between the allegory and the referenced object, and can better grasp at the ways that meaning is deferred. Allegorical signs must refer to signs that precede it, but they exist only in repeating the preceding sign in an asymptotic destiny of never truly reaching the essence of the original reference. In this way, allegory is a rhetorical mode, in which figural expression repositions meaning to an otherness: it speaks otherwise, and refers to a world of signs unreachable through the vicissitudes of temporal distance, yet still within the world of phenomena. Again, allegory acts as a reminder of the tension between presence and absence. The “pure anteriority” of the previous sign resists such continuous ontological relationships like those that occur in the symbol.\(^{48}\) Allegory, then, is always a reminder of temporal difference, and the allegorical impulse, whether in reading or writing, is to “establish a language in the void” that is left between the original meaning of the previous sign and our own subjective positioning.\(^{49}\)

\(^{46}\) De Man, 206.
\(^{47}\) Ibid., 207.
\(^{48}\) Ibid., 207.
\(^{49}\) Ibid., 208.
George Teskey, in his work on *Allegory and Violence*, stabilizes de Man and Benjamin’s arguments related to the historical nature of allegorical expression to discuss the ways allegories function within a broader tradition.\(^{50}\) Teskey argues that allegory “oscillates between the project of reference and a project of capture,” insofar as an allegory desires to refer to a previously constructed allegorical expression and supplant the previous expression.\(^{51}\) Allegory presupposes a world of concepts and ideas where participants can share in meaning-searching and interpretation in allegory’s evoked “schism in consciousness” through time.\(^{52}\) An allegory carries with it a certain transcendental quality, in which the allegorical interpreter, or writer, attempts to merge philosophical, objective and imaginative, subjective truths to fix abstract formulations onto the “material of historical life, capturing some portion of what lies on the other side of the rift and holding it up for inspection.”\(^{53}\) Like Benjamin and de Man, Teskey is less interested in what lies on the other side of the split consciousness then in the void itself wherein we try to articulate our own situation through images and language. In this way, Teskey suggests that the allegorical perspective is one through which we can better know ourselves as subjective observers and active occupants of the phenomenological world. He allows allegory to wield a greater psychological power through which interpreters can share in what turns out to become a ritualized appreciation of allegory’s ability to reveal the tensions in connecting imaginary, other forms and real, phenomenological worlds.

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51 Ibid., 8.
52 Ibid., 2.
53 Ibid., 30.
Importantly, in order to enter into this process of allegorical expression and usurpation, an allegory must gain entry into what Teskey defines as a “tradition,” the bar for entry being a work’s status as a treasure, monument, and mirror.” A work’s ability to act as a treasure is related to the novelty and attractiveness of its physical existence. In order to reach the status of treasure, the medium through which an allegory is expressed must itself be not only appropriate to the expression, but itself act as a signal to the importance of the work. The material conditions of the allegorical production place it in the context of the media through which allegories before and after it were expressed. Examination of the material conditions also places the allegory in its own localized history, that is, how expression generally was presented in the years surrounding the work in question. Next, a work’s monumentality is related to how effectively it captures the “substance from the realm of the previously made,” and sets itself up to be commemorated in a culture’s memory through reproduction, repetition, and, eventually, its own capture into a new allegorical expression. Finally, a work properly acts as a mirror when it inspires a culture, as a subject, to use the work to view itself through interpretation, that is, to make the work an object of self-consciousness.

In summary, a work joins the allegorical tradition only when it is a treasured object of sense perception, when it is repeated for cultural subjects’ reception of it, and, finally, when cultural subjects interpret the work as significant for their own lives and times, affirming their own reflective consciousness.

54 Ibid., 159.
55 “Only when the work achieves sufficient monumentality is it substantial enough to enter into tradition and to be transmitted forward in time—or to be torn by a hand reaching back into it from the future.” Ibid., 160.
56 Ibid.
If the progression presented by Teskey—from the material substance of the object to the cultural, and psychological, internality of the subject—represents the way in which an allegory properly functions, then a study of an allegory as pervasive as that of the *Ship of Fools* will require close attention to these components. Thus, this study will begin by placing the artifact in the locations of its past—where it was produced and where it ended up. Later, we explore how the artifact’s entrance into Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives effected what I will define as its *archivization*, which amounts to its becoming as a treasured example of allegorical expression. I will also investigate the ways in which the *Ship of Fools* was monumental enough to be repeated and remembered, though in varying permutations and manipulations by its readers. Additionally, through an investigation of the artifact’s annotations, the thesis considers the extent to which Brant’s model of satirical allegory allows future readers to see his text and allegorical expression as a mirror through which cultural subjects may view themselves. Further, following from the theories of allegory presented by Benjamin and de Man, in each of these forays into the battle of meaning-finding in particular aspects of the *Ship of Fools*, allegory will return to remind us of the ways meaning is deferred and disjointed by temporal difference. Thus, the historical examination of the allegory takes on some of the qualities of its object, that is, becoming allegorical itself.

The *Ship of Fools* fits not only within the allegorical tradition, whose theoretical implications undergird this thesis’s approach to the artifact in Wesleyan’s collection, but it also takes a position within a tradition of satire that expands the realm of our inquiry of the text and artifact. Indeed, the *Ship of Fools* functions as a satirical allegory, which, just like the first-order allegory, uses linguistic misdirection through its other-speaking expression to achieve its purpose. In her monograph on the subject, *Satiric
*Allegory: Mirror of Man*, Ellen Leyburn refers to the “double consciousness” that is demanded by satirical allegories. Writers of satirical allegories ask their readers to interpret their expression as speaking about the particular people, or societal norms, which they are allegorizing in their societal critique, but also to reflect on the human condition generally. Indeed, if non-allegorical satire poses as a mirror to humanity’s faults, then a satirical allegory is a distorted one that projects an ‘other’-image that readers must assimilate to their own understanding by participating in interpretation.

Satirical allegory evokes another void in the work’s referential relationships: in order to identify with the satirist’s perspective on their society, readers must accept that the satirist is speaking about particular societies the readers experience and relate, yet also that the satirist has rendered those particular people into general concepts that can be viewed, mocked, and repeated far after the satirist’s time. Further, the satirist’s utilization of irony as a rhetorical tool along with the employment of allegory, focusses attention not on the literal meaning to which the sign points, but to, what de Man calls, the “thematization” of the different meanings. In order to truly participate in a satirical allegory, readers and writers alike must engage in a “dialectic of self-destruction and self-invention,” which allows them to have a reflective consciousness about madness and human fault “inside of madness itself.” Participants in a satirical allegory depend on their ability to act as both unaffiliated observers—with an unbiased moral foundation from which to judge others—and as those who are themselves complicit in

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59 De Man, *Blindness and Insight*, 209.
60 Ibid.
the behavior mocked. Unlike the temporal predicament of allegorical signs’ relationships with previous ones, that is, its historical properties, the temporal predicament in irony exists inherently in the human consciousness at all moments, not just in the allegorical experience.61

Thus, the study of an allegory, in its literary form in expression and material form in the medium through which it is presented, is one that demands we remain conscious of the tensions related to ascribing meaning to past expressions and objects, and to the past selves that related to the allegory. The allegory demands that we make our very approach of it an allegorical one, with the components at play in the literary realm taking part also in the realm of historical exposition. The Ship of Fools resists and unmoors itself from our very desire to anchor it to particular meanings or to specific historical moments. The Ship of Fools tends to drift between meanings and networks of reference and influence. I hope that through the examination of these ways of drifting, this thesis will act as a model for an allegorical perspective on the past.

61 “…not with the history of an error but with a problem that exists within the self” Ibid.
Chapter Summaries

In my first chapter, I will attempt to trace the artifact’s history, from its printing in Strasbourg in 1497, by master printer Johann Grüninger. By studying the origin of this particular copy of Brant’s Ship of Fools, I will use Johann Grüninger, and his print shop, as a useful medium through which to discuss the conditions and circumstances of fifteenth century book publishing, printing, and distribution in Early Modern Europe. A grasp of these conditions will prove helpful in placing the artifact back in its time of conception. The chapter’s narration then moves on to the context and event of the artifact’s entrance into Wesleyan’s archives from the library of Classical Professor James Cooke Van Benschoten (1827-1892).

Once the book entered Wesleyan’s library, the conditions and regulations related to its entrance changed the way it was to be viewed by future readers. In the second chapter, I argue that through a process of archivization, we take otherwise mundane objects and elevate them to the level of the treasured and sacred, perhaps in response to a post-modern situation defined by a diminution of the sacrosanct and aauratic qualities of objects and locations. This chapter interweaves close readings of Walter Benjamin with an adaptation of museumology, and arrives at an original argument about archivization through reflecting on the ‘special’ status of the artifact of the Grüninger Ship of Fools in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives.

In between this book’s printing in Strasbourg and its arrival in Wesleyan’s library, it was read, annotated, colored-in, and accommodated to the philosophical, exegetical, and political habits of its various readers. Through the evidences of the book’s manipulation, we can discuss the applicability and function of this particular allegory over time. Thus, my third chapter explores how readers responded to and
applied this allegory through analysis of the artifact’s observable annotations. The chapter begins with a close reading of the text of Brant’s *Narrenschiff*, as it is presented in our artifact, to pull from it a sense of Brant’s construction of an ‘ideal reading,’ then proceeds to investigate the marks left by previous readers that I define as engaged manipulation of the material.

Throughout the thesis, I will employ the artifact as the anchoring mechanism for demonstrating how we may take an allegorical perspective on the past. In the thesis’s conclusion, I will briefly discuss how an allegorical perspective can serve as a salutary tool to use in response to a predicament of current historical thinking and writing that neglects the possibility, and possible duty, of serving life in all its inherent complexities.


CHAPTER ONE

A STORY

Stories, whether we call them historical or literary, depend on an age-old structure: they typically consist of a beginning, middle, and an end. This emplotment strategy, as a means of bringing order to an otherwise disorderly past, comes as a nearly natural aspect of our thinking consciousness, and may very well be, as philosopher of history David Carr argues, the way through which we constitute and justify our own identities. In his formulation, Carr applies Husserl’s phenomenological analysis of the “time-experience” to say that we are always consulting the past, living in the present, and anticipating the future—he calls this process a “means-end” structure. Accordingly, this means-end paradigm may be mapped onto the beginning-middle-end of narrative if we stipulate that we are always trying to wrest the future as a controllable end to our self-constitutive stories, that is, to take on the role of the storyteller of our own lives. Carr’s radical position on the human reality of stories contends that they are the continuity of the human experience and are therefore worthwhile to study not as merely socially constructed artifices, but as entangled structures of our own lived stories.

1 My understanding and employment of the term “emplotment” derive from theoretical considerations from a reading of Hayden V. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Paperback ed., [Nachdr.], A Johns Hopkins Paperback (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000). White’s challenge to the epistemological framework of historical consciousness and his reminder of the literariness of historical writing constitute a contribution to the humanities and social sciences in general, and to this thesis in particular, that is perhaps too vast and ingrained to point to exactly. In many ways, this thesis is an attempted response to White’s challenge to historians to think more critically about how and why we write histories.


3 Ibid., 122.

4 Ibid., 121.
Even if we do not ascribe to Carr’s position—surely, his “skeptical” interlocutors in the philosophy of history, such Hayden White and Louis Mink, would doubt the ease in which he merges the individual Husserlian means-end structure to the formation of narrative—we also cannot mindlessly eschew the constitutive significance of story forms on how we present selves, both our own and of others, and the past. Indeed, literary theorist Frank Kermode might qualify these assertions with a more palatable philosophical offering: a recognition of human mortality forces us to locate ourselves always in the ‘middle’ between birth and death. We cope with this anxiety of mortality by engaging in a longing for eternity that we express in fictions of present decadence, of past golden ages, and future redemption or destruction. The unfortunate aspect of our seemingly natural inclinations for the chronological method of beginning-middle-end is that it restricts the freedom of the storyteller, and, due to ostensibly natural tendencies to conflate chronology with necessity, to imply determinant structures of causation that are more often products of our narrative structure than of the historical ‘data’ we use to emplot such stories.

Thus, for the emancipation of both historian and receiver of history, these narrative structures need be interrogated, pushed toward new boundaries, and themselves take up the role of being the objects of experimentation. Hayden White might suggest the seeming banality of the annals form as a means of decentering history from a belief in the narrative-laden force of reality. Another alternative in response to such restrictions might manifest in a radical turn against chronology through, for

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example, the implementation of a thematic (symbolic or gestural) framework or the application of a highly focused synchronic perspective on the data in question. I refer here to methods propounded by the Aby Warburg school of “cultural memory” (kulturelle Erinnerung), especially their focus on the emergence and adaptation of gestures in art history, and Saussure’s contention that an historically diachronic perspective on linguistics is “absolutely and without compromise” opposed to the synchronic one. Saussure argues that this is because the diachronic view “is unable to make a sharp distinction between states and successions.” The organization of this thesis’s three body chapters takes a less radical approach: it retains the fundamental components of the beginning-middle-end narrative structure; yet, it also experiments with such structures by participating in a conscious reordering of the chronological parts to shed light on the possible insights we may glean from a non-linear chronological model of historical narrative.

Thus, this chapter will highlight two moments which demarcate the beginning and end of the life of the copy of Sebastian Brant’s Ship of Fools now in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives. This story begins in the book’s conception in Johann Grüninger’s master print shop in late fifteenth-century Strasbourg; it ends with the book’s entrance into Wesleyan’s Special Collections in the early twentieth century by

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8 Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics. (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 82-83.

9 A comprehensive account of connecting Saussure’s linguistic formulations to those of history and subjectivity more generally can be found in Robert M. Strozier, Saussure, Derrida, and the Metaphysics of Subjectivity, Approaches to Semiotics; 80 (Berlin; New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), esp. 130-142.
way of the then recently deceased Wesleyan professor James Cooke van Benschoten. In both cases, my focus will be not on the book itself as material, but on the people, and their respective situations, which surrounded the book at the moment in question. Only in the third chapter will we learn what might have occurred between these two moments, and what kind of people might have been involved in the book’s manipulation.

With this disjointed temporality, we work against what Louis O. Mink, in his discussion of “History and Fiction as Modes of Comprehension,” calls the “unreflective view” that finds connection between events only in “temporal succession.”

To provide a reader of an historical text with comprehension, a primary goal of the historical enterprise, writers have the double obligation of following the rules of evidence and its presentation and also of creating a space in which the individual reader, through the act of reading, may ‘see the things together.’ Indeed, comprehension is “neither an input nor an output of data-retrieval systems.”

No matter how strong the temptation, simply pointing to a stack of books, articles, and documents which constitute what I have read on the subjects explored in the following pages would do little for your comprehension. Interested more in the messy webs of relationships than in simple links of causation, I engage in a mode approximating what Mink calls the “configurational,” in which I show how a particular event—the Grüninger Ship of Fools—“belongs to a particular configuration of events like a part of a jigsaw puzzle.”

To achieve a configurational comprehension of the story as a whole, it is best to leave behind the

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11 Ibid., 553.
12 Ibid., 551.
necessity of temporal contingency. The story must still be followable, that is, legible in the realm of what is socially defined as being a story by its readers, but we must be wary of equating following a story with comprehending it. Followability is a prerequisite of communication, which is why I retain many components of common narration, but the goal of comprehension is involved with the action of surveying the presented content “in a single glance as bound together in an order of significance, a representation of totum simul which we can never more than partially achieve.”13 Though he uses a different vocabulary, Mink’s assertions here relate very much to what has already been discussed with reference to an allegorical perspective on the past. Temporal succession certainly exists, but it does not define our comprehension of the world and the past. Within this perspective, an object of historical inquiry carries with it the promise of its beginning and the promise of its end, and time takes on a less tyrannical position in our comprehension.

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13 Ibid., 554
What will scholars, what will students find
More pleasing, useful, or more well designed
Than means both blessed and new to man's inspection
By which to print long texts without correction?
Now what it took a thousand days to do
Within a day can be completely through.
Uncommon once were books and libraries,
And just a learned few, I say, had these,
While writing was found rarely in some towns:
It now in every private home abounds.
A huge supply of books has recently
Emerged through Rhenish perspicacity:
A book, which scarcely kings or rich men knew,
Is now discerned in humble dwellings too.
First thank the gods; next thank in equal measure
The printers who first gave to us this treasure.
-Sebastian Brant, *On Printing*, 1498

The first person to whom we direct our attention is the man and workshop behind the printing of the Wesleyan copy of Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools*, Johannes Grüninger. Grüninger’s profession, that of a master printer, was a relatively new one when he first assumed the title in Basel in 1480-1481 (the first records of Gutenberg’s press date from 1439), after which he shortly departed for more permanent placement in Strasbourg. But, we have already gotten ahead of ourselves. The initial difficulty with discussing master printers in general is that even for a growing consensus in historical studies about the significance of the printing apparatus, workshop, and master printer in the creation of products of culture and learning, there remains a comparatively paltry record of these printers who helped disseminate the writings of the

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prominent authors, artists, and clergymen we remember more readily today. Even when it comes to the name by which we call this man, the historical record equivocates: French writers tend to call him “Jean Grüninger;”17 German writers, “Johann Grüninger;” British writers, “John Gruninger;”18 and historian Robert Proctor notes that a colophon from a 1489 edition of *Sermones exquisitē* shows that Grüninger also went by “Reinhardt,” “Reinhardi,” or “Reinhart.”19 Clearly, his Biblical name has been adapted to any pronunciation that will best suit whoever is writing, or for that matter, reading, about him: we, however, will stick to the German-esque spelling of “Johann.”

In addition, a notice regarding the character of sources I use in this section might be of use and interest. Namely, because of the limits of my linguistic knowledge (I have little German), my sources about the fifteenth- to sixteenth-century history of Wesleyan’s copy of the *Ship of Fools* mostly derive from French specialists in bibliography, such as Francois Ritter in his 1955 study of the *Histoire de l’imprimerie alsacienne aux XVe et XVIe siècles*, and Charles Schmidt in his 1879 *Histoire Littéraire de l’Alsace*, written within ten years after the Franco-Prussian War. Motivations for this French historiography certainly vary, but one may imagine that in the aftermath of Germany’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine in World War II, and in the Franco-Prussian War, the reconstitution of French culture and identity in the region may have also included a drive to compile, write, and provide French-language historical output about

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17 Daillon, “Jean Grüninger, imprimeur-éditeur à Strasbourg.”
the region’s cultural history. This is not to say that any particular nationalistic ideologies need be dug out from under the bibliographic work (indeed, much of it is coming from a considerable amount of primary research already done in German), but it is worthy to remember that some notion of the need to provide a French version may have played a role in the production of these works. Along with the possible national biases attached to my sources, a significant absence haunts our archival knowledge of book ownership in this period in Alsace-Lorraine: the burning of the Gymnasium and libraries caused by devastating bombardments during the siege of Strasbourg in September 1870 as part of the aforementioned Franco-Prussian War. Innumerable archival documents relating to the city’s intellectual production and to its reading communities during our period in question were burned in the flames. Thus, this historiographic problem is a continued reminder of the theme undergirding this thesis. It is not only the theoretical nature of historical writing and thinking about the past, but also the vicissitudes and complexities of what happened in the past, which contribute to difficulties in attaining certainty when attempting to interpret evidence of the past for the present understanding.

In sum, the act of writing in French, especially during periods of annexation by German-speaking powers, may be viewed in retrospect as an act of defiance, affirming French identity through linguistic expression. For a comprehensive cultural historical perspective on the various politics of language, culture, and national identity see Bernard Vogler, *Histoire Culturelle de l’Alsace: Du Moyen Age à Nos Jours, Les Très Riches Heures d’une Région Frontière*, 3. éd., avec mise à jour, *La Bibliothèque Alsacienne* (Strasbourg: Le Nuée Bleue, 1994), esp. 305-310, 386, and 440.

The most recent comprehensive English-language source from which I pull is an intensive quantitative and qualitative book on *Lay Culture, Learned Culture: Books and Social Change in Strasbourg*, by American social historian of the German Reformation, Miriam Usher Chrisman. Chrisman’s long and focused career was pivotal in introducing histories of the German Reformation, especially as it occurred in Alsace-Loren, to English speaking audiences.
With these evidentiary questions in mind, we might return to a narration of Grüninger, his workshop, and how the printing of the *Ship of Fools* fits more broadly into the history of early humanistic printing. Grüninger’s surname suggests he was born originally in Markgröningen, which is a town in Germany’s southwestern region of Württemberg. As noted above, he most probably gained his training in the art of printing in Basel, but eventually settled in Strasbourg sometime shortly before 2 October 1482, which is the date registered for his purchase of bourgeois citizenship in the city. It is in Basel that Grüninger may have most likely picked up a taste for, and technical understanding of, illustrated books, which expressed itself in full force when he arrived in Strasbourg. His motivations for moving to Strasbourg might have included an already oversaturated printing market in Basel, complemented by inspiration from the resounding success of pioneering Strasbourg-based Johannes Mentelin, who published a groundbreaking German edition of the Bible in 1466. The fact of Grüninger’s foreign origin did not deter his rise to commercial success in the Alsatian city: only ten of the counted seventy-five printers of the fifteenth century were Strasbourgeois, and nine of the larger scale master printers in the city were immigrants. A broader European migratory trend following the devastation of the fourteenth century black plague—especially of that which hit most strongly in urban

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23 Ibid.
24 For a comprehensive look at the explosion which was humanism printing in fifteenth century Basel, see William Gilbert, “The Culture of Basel in the Fifteenth Century; a Study of Christian Humanism.” (Cornell University, 1941).
centers—may have also contributed to the openness to enterprising citizens from without the city walls. Many immigrant printers bought burgher status, as Grüninger did, and joined the Steltz, the central guild for artists, engravers, and goldsmiths.27 Others gained citizenship through strategic marriage into Strasbourg printing families, as occurred in the prominent printing Flach family—much to the probable dismay of the junior Martin Flach II, who lost the inheritance of his father’s large Catholic printing press to a traveling journeyman-turned-stepfather, Johann Knobloch, and attempted to little avail to open his own shop with his own unimpressive capital.28 Indeed, early printing enterprises, especially in Strasbourg, were highly dependent on family as sources of “vocational security and continuity,” but could not serve as capital support due to the low profit margins under which the industry functioned.29 Presses seldom survived the death of the founding master printer, as evidenced by Grüninger’s progeny, Bortholomeus Grüninger. Even for a desire to continue in the printing business after his father’s death in 1531, Bartholomeus was forced, in a moment of pecuniary paucity, to sell his father’s shop to pioneer printer Pierre Schoeffer’s family before embarking on his own short-lived printing stint in a less frequented part of town.30

At the time, Strasbourg was an independent, free, and imperial city, and sported a population approximating twenty thousand people—a not unremarkable number.

27 Many of the original master printers, and printmakers, began as goldsmiths, so they’re assignation to this guild should come as no surprise. Indeed, the typical examples of such an origin comes from Albrecht Dürer, one of the foremost printmakers of the ‘Northern Renaissance,’ and Johannes Gutenberg, who both came from goldsmith backgrounds.
28 Chrisman, Lay Culture, Learned Culture, 16.
29 Ibid., 18.
30 Chrisman, Lay Culture, Learned Culture, 21.
relative to other European cities. It was not yet dominated by any particular cultural subset until near the 1520’s and hosted Catholic clergy along with Protestant reformers. Due in part to its independent sovereign governance, and its strategic positioning in between France and Germany, Strasbourg played an important trading role in between multiple European centers, thereby making it a node through which ideas, merchants, and, most important for our purposes, books easily travelled. The presence of a wealthy and cultivated bourgeoisie, along with a prominent university, made Strasbourg an important center for printing in the German-speaking lands of the Rhine. In 1482, Grüninger first installed himself in the center of the Grand Île on 5 Rue l’Outre, surmounted by somber homes—his workshop was well shadowed, and not often frequented. During the same period, he bought a boutique in the main city square facing the massive and ornamented Cathedral of Notre Dame de Strasbourg—the proud symbol of Catholicism in a city soon, during the sixteenth century, to turn apparently entirely toward Protestantism. Perhaps realizing where the best source of his business laid, he shortly relocated to 2 Quai du Sable, which, sitting on the river and just meters away from the Cathedral, allowed him more direct access to his clerical clientele. There, he kept in employ at least five men: two compositors (one for the recto and one for the verso), two pressmen (large-presses of the time, such as his, usually had two presses in operation), and an illustrator. Indeed, between 1480-1520, thirty five

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32 Chrisman, xxiv.
35 Ibid.
36 Chrisman, Lay Culture, Learned Culture, 5.
percent of what was available from Strasbourgh printing shops were Catholic in character—whether the books be published sermons, missives, or prayer books. Grüninger’s stock shows a similar tendency: thirty three percent of his 389 editions were Catholic, which was rivalled only by the aforementioned Martin Flach (who published a striking majority, seventy nine percent, of Catholic books). In this particular field of book production, a few printers quickly gained monopolies in monastic and Catholic communities by establishing networks of connections in churches, monasteries, and preaching groups. Grüninger, for instance, gained exclusive rights to publish breviaries and missals for “fourteen dioceses of the Holy Roman Empire.” Those who ascribe to a tragic view of the past might see perfect material here: if readers concede both that much of early printing survived because of a steady stream of capital from the Church, and that the Reformation used the printing press as a key tool in spreading its challenges and doctrine, then they might see the Church as a sort of Victor Frankenstein, bolstering the source of its own demise.  

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37 Chrisman., 81. Another twenty six percent of the total publications were literary works, grammar books, and classic texts, all of which were prepared by clerics. The rest can be attributed to professional manuals, and books related to the medical and scientific fields.  
38 Ibid., 35.  
39 Ibid., 83. A particularly important patron of Grüninger’s printing workshop was the priest Salicetus, who commissioned Grüninger to print multiple editions of his well-received book, Antiodarius. Ritter, Histoire de l'imprimerie Alsacienne Aux XVé et XVIe Siècles, 85.  
40 In Strasbourg, for instance, the Roman church was unable to fully realize the potential for propaganda that the printing press offered. Without the organizing principles and guidelines that the Reform leaders later displayed, Catholic publication saw a consistent decline between 1480-1520. Ibid., 82. As Eisenstein points out, “not only did the church legitimate the art of printing, it provided a most important market for the infant industry... For fifty years before the Protestant Revolt, churchmen in most regions welcomed an invention which served both.” Eisenstein, The Printing Revolution in Early Modern Europe, 176. For a nuanced version of the argument of printing’s role in the spread of Lutheranism, and the Reformation more generally, see Andrew Pettegree, Brand Luther: 1517, Printing, and the Making of the Reformation (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).
Indeed, Grüninger was steadfast in his support of Catholic publishing. He was one of the last Catholic printers to continue working even in the most intense moments of the early Reform, during which his business was eventually run into the ground.41 In between 1480-1500, the religious convictions of the Strasbourg printers were clearly demonstrated by the character of the books they published.42 Throughout the Reform, Grüninger published public enemies and opposing polemicists of Luther and his cause, such as Johann Cochlaus, Gebwiller, and Johann Dietenberger. He also published satirist Thomas Murner, for whose 1522 satirical poem, *Von Dem Grossen Lutherschen Narren*, Grüninger was censured by the Strasbourg magistrate.43 Grüninger was also the first editor of the sermons of the popular preacher Johann Geiler von Kaisberg, who, along with Sebastian Brant, supported reform, but not separation from, the central Catholic Church and the papacy.44 In 1511, Geiler would publish one of his more widely read book of sermons, the *Navicula Penitentie*, which translates Brant’s microcosm ship allegory into the ship as *nave*, that is, both ship and the body of the Church.45 Reformers, like Geiler, pointed publicly to what they perceived as the greed and worldliness of the Strasbourg Catholic bishops, who involved themselves mainly with economic—rather than spiritual—life, lost hold of the rules and regulations of the religious discipline of their dioceses, and were conveying rich honorary chapter

41 It is important to say that a publisher’s first and foremost goal is sustainability and profit. For times when Catholic texts were a less feasible way to maintain his business model, Grüninger maintained a diversity of products, such as books about astronomy, classical texts, and grammar instruction books. Dirk Sacré and Jan Papy, eds., *Syntagmatia: Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Honour of Monique Mund-Dopchie and Gilbert Tournoy*, Supplementa Humanistica Lovaniensia 26 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2009), 125.
44 Ibid, 105.
positions to noblemen who contributed little to the spiritual fabric of their communities.\textsuperscript{46}

This ostensible negligence was complimented in the realm of education as well. There existed very few secular schools, and the parochial ones (\textit{magistri scholarium}) attached to churches taught Latin only as a means of properly learning the choir and for copying legalistic documents. Along with this artless Latin education, the teachers in these schools also dealt severe punishments to children, which incited further moralistic reprobation by the intellectual elite.\textsuperscript{47} Brant’s distaste for this treatment of children is evident insofar as one of the earlier passengers on the \textit{Narrenschiff} is a fool who believes in harsh physical punishment against children and believes that little else than severe discipline can instruct the youth in proper behavior. These factors might have created the environment in which a group formed—consisting of mainly Catholic and classically trained scholars, polemicists, lawyers, and printers—to encourage the return of order to Church affairs and to reintroduce Classical texts as a means of linguistic education. It is in this context that Sebastian Brant and Johannes Grüninger began their productive partnership.

Sebastian Brant was born, in Strasbourg, to an inn-owning father, Diehold, and a daughter of a prominent wine dealer, Barbara Picker, in 1457, or 1458. (We cannot be entirely certain about the date.)\textsuperscript{48} Once his scholarly aptitudes were apparent, his mother (his father died in 1468, when Sebastian was quite young) sent him off to the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{47} “...almost every student was ornamented with a wound that represented the menacing master of that arme of the children sitting at his feet.” (my translation) Ibid., xiii.
\end{flushleft}
University of Basel, where he acquired a baccalaureate degree in 1477, having studied Greek, Latin, and philosophy. From his early letters as a schoolboy, one could have already recognized what Edwin Zeydel calls the “features of a stern moralist.”\textsuperscript{49} Most probably due to his precarious financial situation, Brant continued into the study of canon and civil law, taking a teaching position at the University of Basel—while teaching some poetry classes on the side—and eventually earning the coveted title of \textit{doctor utriusque juris} in 1489. During this period of teaching, Brant developed relationships with thinkers who would later be called leaders of the “early humanist renaissance.” These include printer Johann Heynlin (who brought the first printing press to French soil) and a devoted student, Jakob Locher, who would later translate his \textit{Narrenschiff} into Latin (who also called himself by the Latin moniker, Philomusus). In addition, Brant was an “expert counsellor” for printers and publishers, such as Bergmann (who would publish the first edition of the \textit{Narrenschiff}), Amerbach, and Froben.\textsuperscript{50} This counselling position’s tasks may have ranged from checking proofs of Latin texts—he was comparatively much more knowledgeable in written Latin than in either German or Greek—to ensuring a book was worthy of publication in the first place. His friendship with Heynlin may have bred his distaste for the Scholasticism of his contemporary educators and his later expressed belief in the teaching of the Classics as a proper route for linguistic pedagogy. His student, Locher, eventually followed his love of the Classics further than his mentor, advocating for an educational system in which people read the texts for the sake of themselves as works of art, rather than learning for linguistic prowess in understanding the sacred books. This humanism aligns

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 21.  
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 30-37.
later with a more secular renaissance of the classics as independent objects of study, a movement toward the texts themselves which parallels the Lutheran call for laypeople to read foundational works. Finally, while Brant was counselling various Basel printers, he was introduced to the printing of journalistic broadsides, which often included accompanying journalistic woodcut illustrations—like those later found in his *Narrenschiff*. Brant’s involvement in the printing trade was not highly unusual in his milieu. Indeed, Lisa Jardine remarks: “Humanists…were as much international promoters of the print trade as they were individual, contemplative scholars…”  

By the late 1480’s and early 1490’s, Brant began writing more and more in his mother tongue of German. A rise to a respected academic position may have paralleled a desire to take on the pulpit as a public intellectual for a larger audience. Zeydel, in his biography of Brant, contends that “he [Brant] considered it imperative to reach the masses, if he was to achieve his goal as a deeply religious, deeply patriotic moral-political publicist.” (So too did Grüninger feel this affiliation with German: unlike the other large- and medium-scale Strasbourg printers, who published mainly in Latin, Grüninger published sixty one percent of his works in German.) His desire for a wider audience may also be related to a “drive for fame” that was particularly prevalent in the early years of printing. While arguing that the introduction of printing in early modern Europe effected revolution in social and cultural practices, rather than a gradual evolution, Elizabeth Eisenstein describes the experience of seeing one’s work in print (“print-made immortality”) as categorically different from the scribal era.

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52 Zeydel, 38.
53 Chrisman, *Lay Culture, Learned Culture*, 34.
“desire to pen lines that could never be fixed in a permanent form…” Possibly with a mix of these notions in mind, Brant wrote his *Narrenschiff* in German in Basel at the encouragement of his friend and publisher, Max Bergmann, and enjoyed almost instant fame amongst reading publics after its publication in 1494. The book saw six authorized re editions up until 1512, seven unauthorized editions in German dialects, several unauthorized translations in Low German, French, Dutch-Flemish, English throughout the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, and an authorized Latin edition written by Jakob Locher—of which the Wesleyan copy is an exemplar.

Moreover, in addition to writing in German, Brant coordinated the design of the original book to include an accompanying woodcut for each page as illustration to the respective poem. One should not underestimate the power that placing explanatory and symbolic imagery alongside already engaging allegorical satire had on the fifteenth century reader. Illustrated books could, as Le Febvre argues, “edify a huge public that could hardly read…to make real and comprehensible” episodes of moral importance. Illustrated books may have also eased the transition between a public who mainly enjoyed communal oral stories to one that could enjoy the communal reading of books with accompanying illustrations. Along with literary-historical considerations that focus on the content of the text itself, scholars also attempt to pin the success of the *Narrenschiff* to its illustrations—and this attempt is generally concurrent with a claim that the quintessential Northern Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer played a decisive role in the woodcuts.

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The primary arbiter of the claim of Dürer’s role in the *Narrenschiff* is German art historian Friedrich Winkler who, in his 1951 study on *Dürer und die Illustrationen zum Narrenschiff*, traces Dürer’s travels to place him in Basel at the time of the *Narrenschiff*’s designing. Winkler ‘discovers’ Dürer’s technique in over eighty of the original Basel woodcuts in support of his contention that a young Dürer participated in illustrating the original book.\(^{58}\) Following Erwin Panofsky’s non-equivocating acceptance of this claim in his foundational 1955 book on the artist, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, the claim became mainstream in English-language scholarship on the question.\(^{59}\) As demonstrated recently by Renaissance historian David Price’s *Albrecht Dürer’s Renaissance*, this claim, accepted as historical fact, turns into new possible readings of the *Narrenschiff* and its popularity: “So important were his [Dürer’s] woodcuts to the phenomenal success of this book that, in all fairness, *Ship of Fools* should be designated a work by Brant and Dürer.”\(^{60}\) Reasons for this ascription may be multitude, but its result is an explanation of the otherwise unprecedented nature of the *Narrenschiff*’s popularity that diminishes the role of Sebastian Brant—sometimes called a ‘medieval mind,’ whose religion was of the old guard, whose political beliefs were largely related to German nationalism, and whose poetry some scholars deem lacked the kind of unity of that by his assumed spiritual predecessor, Erasmus and his *Praise of Folly*.\(^{61}\) Dürer, on

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\(^{58}\) Friedrich Winkler, *Dürer und die Illustrationen zum Narrenschiff; die Baseler und Strassburger Arbeiten des Künstlers und der altdeutsche Holzschnitt*, Forschungen zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte; Bd. 36; Variation: Forschungen zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte; Bd. 36. (Berlin, Deutscher Verein für Kunstwissenschaft, 1951).


the other hand, with his learning in Italy, his tacit alignment with Protestant causes, and his trans-European style and artistic evolution stands as a perfect symbol for the “Northern Renaissance,” which scholars may narrate as beginning with his conjectured work on Brant’s popular *Ship of Fools*. A focus on Dürer’s participation in the illustration of the book as a cause of its success may also be an expression of the anxiety certain ‘progressive’ scholars might experience when confronted with the seeming reactionary character of Brant’s satire.

The demonstration above shows that arguments of causation are nearly always related to larger determinant structures that we pick more by path dependence and preference than by simply letting the data of the past speak for itself. In the case of ascertaining how a Catholic law clerk’s satirical verse could so quickly become an early printed secular bestseller, the choice of realigning the narrative’s spotlight on the pre-ordained master of his age, Dürer, while perhaps related to that which actually occurred in 1490’s Basel, is a choice nonetheless. We should never forget the choice we have in the matter of picking these determinant structures, which is why this chapter has attempted to present stories surrounding *Narrenschiff’s* publication rather than lay out specific reasons for its success. Moreover, such demonstration of causation would include generalizations of whatever we designate “popular culture” and how these are defined by, and work against, constraints, rules, and regulations from whatever we designate as the “elite culture.”62 That is, in order to say that a work is popular, especially that which comes from a relatively culturally elite author, we must first say to

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whom it was so appealing. Thus, we end up defining a culture from the outside rather than from the inside. These more particular questions of audience and reading practices will be explored more fully in the third chapter’s introduction and expressed in its observations. For now, however, it is useful to note that the nature of early printing workshops was that some labor, even if it turned out to prove the raison d’être of a work’s success, may have never been attributed to the individuals performing such labor, and this is due to the collective and cosmopolitan effort that was part of the workshop. Under the master printer’s aegis and credit, robed scholars, bustling merchants, traveling journeyman, artists at the beginning or apex of their careers, skilled artisans, and visiting authors all came together to produce the product of a printed book. In most cases, the only names we get from a book are the printer and author.

In addition, there was only a semblance of copyright or intellectual property during the period, so even the authors had little control over that which was inscribed in their names. It was typical in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century that a master printer would notice the profitable marketing opportunity of a book published abroad—or even, sometimes, in their own city—and produce their own edition sometimes with, yet most times without, the original author’s or editor’s permission. To accomplish this, all a printer needed to do was buy the book on the open market and set his workshop to resetting it in their own press. Because of the pay structure in the early printing industry, this process hurt printers more than it did authors. As an

example, Erasmus wrote in his correspondence that he was unconcerned with the counterfeited editions of his works so long as his name was still below the title.\(^{65}\)

Grüninger was especially known for publishing unauthorized editions of books, much to the chagrin of his fellow printers. For instance, in 1501, Anton Koberger, though a friend and colleague of Grüninger, writes in his correspondence to the Basel printer Johann Amerbach that Grüninger published a new, and untimely, edition of the *Glossa ordinaria* originally published by Basel printers Petri and Froben. Koberger had previously purchased the printing from Basel in whole, but Grüninger brought out his new edition before Koberger had a chance to sell his stock.\(^{66}\) In response, Koberger writes that he considered Grüninger’s “undertaking improper and dishonorable.”\(^{67}\) A similar event transpired in 1504, when Grüninger published a counterfeited edition of *Margarita Philosophica*, published by Peter Schott in 1503. In his counterfeit edition, he modified the title, included thirty six illustrations (fourteen of which were counterfeit), and appended a Hebrew grammar.\(^{68}\) Thus, in 1494 and 1497, Grüninger saw it fitting, and perhaps not terribly unusual or unsportsmanlike, to print unauthorized editions of Brant’s *Narrenschiff* in the original German, but with minor “arbitrary alterations.”\(^{69}\) We can perhaps justly assume that his counterfeit printing of Brant’s work did not too much dissatisfy Brant, as the humanist scholar did substantial work in Grüninger’s workshop after the printing of the counterfeit editions. The illustrations for Grüninger’s 1494 edition, most likely because of the fact it was published just months after the first edition,

\(^{65}\) Ibid.


\(^{67}\) Ibid., 234.


\(^{69}\) Zeydel, *Sebastian Brant*, 90-91.
show many errors in cross-hatching and composition; this is probably the result of the rushed quality of the job. It was also in 1497 that Grüninger published, nearly concurrently, an authorized edition of the *Narrenschiff*. It was a Latin edition (called *Stultifera Navis*) translated by Brant’s star pupil, Locher, which that became the acknowledged source for future editions and translations into other European languages. Latin was, after all, the *lingua franca* of most of Western Europe.

Jakob Locher, from the southern German region of Swabia, was fourteen years younger than Brant, and studied poetry under his guidance at the University of Basel. Unlike Brant, however, Locher found himself in open opposition with his conservative and scholastic philosophical counterparts, arguing primarily for a reorganization of curricula with a new priority toward the study of Classical literature as an end for itself. Continuously contrarian, he lost positions at Ingolstadt and Freiburg before moving to Strasbourg, where he wrote the kind of poetry that would earn him the honor of a poetic laureling by the emperor Maximilian in 1497 (the same year as his translation of Brant’s *Narrenschiff*). By 1495, Brant began to translate the *Narrenschiff* on his own, but soon asked his previous pupil to finish it, which he indeed did with enough success to make his edition the basis of translations into French (published first by Guillaume Balsarin), English (printed by Richard Pynson), and Spanish (published by the pioneering Jacques Sacon). Grüninger had the illustrations redone for the 1497 edition, by an unnamed artisan who began working in his workshop sometime around 1495.

A comparison of the 1497 edition of Locher’s edition now housed in Wesleyan’s collection and another Latin edition from Bergmann’s house in Basel (an exemplar now

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70 Zeydel, 58.
housed in Trinity College’s Wren Library\footnote{71} shows the particularities of the one published in Strasbourg by Grüninger.\footnote{72} In this octavo edition (two times as small as that from Grüninger’s house), the images are printed in line with the text, so that the printer’s printed marginalia notes retain their own column throughout. The images are flipped, which suggests that they were copied directly from the original edition, then flipped during the inversion necessary for woodcut printing. Within the images, more figures in the Grüninger edition sport beards, which may have been more familiar to the Alsatian reading public. Whereas the Grüninger printmaker generally put figures in rural situations, the Basel one presents more urban scenes. Finally, the Grüninger printmaker uses trees as a mechanism for constructing composition through vertical centering, while the Basel exemplar possesses fewer perspective-defining features. Thus, when printers copied the edition of a foreign press, especially when this involved illustration, the books come out looking quite different. Even for his relative technical advancements, as compared to those of the Basel illustrator, the Grüninger printmaker of the 1497 *Stultifera Navis* was still developing the skills to properly cross-hatch to create perspective and draw humans with the kind of vivacity that would attract identification. Such technical development only appeared later, once Brant had joined the team in Grüninger’s workshop.

From early on in his career, Grüninger placed a great importance on the illustration of his books, but this interest was only fledgling until Brant began consulting

\footnote{71} Many thanks to my brother, Dr. Aaron Kachuck, for supervising my visit to Trinity’s library to examine these incunabula.

for his workshop. His early illustrated editions were nearly all copies from previous models, and the styles of these reproductions resembled the woodcuts and engravings coming from the earliest printer of illustrated books in Strasbourg, Heinrich Knoblochtzer, who famously published an illustrated edition of the *Dance of Death*, or *Der Doten dantz mit figuren*. The illustrations also resemble the work Strasbourg printer Martin Schongauer published during the period. Grüninger’s editions generally followed the Knoblochtzer or Schongauer school, and the illustrations for the 1497 Latin *Stultifera Navis* similarly follow the style and technique of these two printmakers.

It is at the juncture of the production of the book now housed in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives that the paths of Grüninger, Brant, and Locher all meet.

By 1499, Brant left Basel and returned to his hometown Strasbourg. He may have done this because he was disappointed at the Swiss defection from the Maximillian empire (Brant’s German nationalism played a significant role in all his spheres of activity) or because he longed to be back with his family still in the Alsatian center. He may also have been simply bored with the strenuous duties of professorship. In Strasbourg he took up the position of the city’s legal advisor, a post he received partially due to the recommendation of his friend, the aforementioned reformer-preacher Geiler. Within three years, Brant was the municipal secretary of Strasbourg. But,

73 Grüninger was one of the first to introduce the use of typographic marks to Strasbourg, one of which (he had four in total) is presented in Figure 4 at the early part of this chapter. Figure is from William Roberts, *Printers’ Marks: A Chapter in the History of Typography* (Bell, 1893), 140. In the figure, the last of the four of Grüninger printer’s marks, an eagle is posing with one leg of the book, which has Grüninger’s monogram initialed in the pages. For a more thorough discussion of these marks, see Ritter, *Histoire de l'imprimerie Alsacienne Aux XVè et XVIè Siècles*, 109-110.

74 Ibid., 85.

75 Ritter, 86.
during his bureaucratic tenure, he continued to consult with printers, especially with Johann Grüninger—with whom he shared both religion and pedagogical values—and took on a more active role in the advocacy of the study of the Classics.

For ten years, Grüninger worked under Brant’s inspiration, then later with his in-person advisement and consultation. In this time, Grüninger designed the publication of illustrated editions of Terence’s plays (1496), Horace’s works (1498), Boethius’s *Consolation of Philosophy* (1501), and, eventually, a 1502 edition of Virgil’s complete works that many see as not only the apex of book illustration in the period but also a crucial catalyst for the proliferation of Latin poetry throughout the sixteenth century. For each of these works there was a technical accomplishment that saw its complete development in the Virgil. For the Terence, the frontispiece of the theater displays a bird’s-eye view of the play’s characters and contexts.\(^\text{76}\) In Horace, the German origins of the original manuscript from which the book was made, and the book’s German editor, speak to the focus on German identity exemplified by Grüninger, his workshop, and his clientele. To design the Boethius, Brant, who joined Grüninger’s ranks shortly after his arrival in the city in 1499, increased the number of original prints to 78. The woodcuts for the Boethius are executed with a finesse that was unusual to Grüninger’s workshop prior to Brant’s arrival.\(^\text{77}\) Under Brant’s leadership,\(^\text{78}\) Grüninger’s workshop produced 214 original prints for the press’s edition

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\(^{76}\) Terence, *Comœdiae*. (Strassburg; Johann Reinhard Grüninger, 1499), Wesleyan Special Collections and Archives, Davison Rare Book Room, B4 Incun. 1499 T.


\(^{78}\) Unlike in the spurious case of Dürer’s possible contribution to the *Narrenschiff*’s illustration, we know with more certainty that Brant was involved here: he left a note under the title of the first edition with his name signed. Ritter, 99.
of Virgil, all of which recalled the earlier illustration of the *Stultifera Navis*. Characters were depicted so as to mirror the appearance of the burghers and peasants of Alsace, and scenes were cast in a humoristic and lifelike tone.\(^{79}\) The style of the illustrations were counter to the perspective and form of the reigning Italian artists of the period.\(^{80}\) This affected an “anti-elitist ethics of production,” much like the *Biblia pauperum*, which was demonstrated by its widespread readership.\(^{81}\) The Grüninger *Aeneid* was reprinted in Lyons (in 1517 and 1529), where scholars and humanists used it as a springboard for discussions of the *Aeneid* as allegory. They especially reflected on how the illustrations illuminated the allegorical character of the original Latin text itself.\(^{82}\) Unlike the scholastic editions prior, the Grüninger Aeneid brought the characters closer to the place of production and reception.\(^{83}\) Grüninger retained this style for nearly a decade, during which he achieved some of his greatest commercial success—especially with the publication of a collection of Geiler’s engaging sermons. This success began declining when he started employing well known artists and printmakers in his workshop, such as Wechtelin, Hans Furtenbach, and Urs Graf.\(^{84}\) With these artists on his payroll, his workshop gained in individual technical ability but lost the unique harmony of style and familiarity of the figures expressed in the works dating from the *Stultifera Navis* to the workshop’s Virgil.

\(^{79}\) Ibid., 61.


\(^{82}\) Phillip John Usher and Isabelle Fernbach, eds., *Virgilian Identities in the French Renaissance*, vol. 27 (Boydell and Brewer, 2012), 163.

\(^{83}\) Ibid., 164.

After 1520, two primary factors may have contributed to the decline in Grüninger’s economic situation. Firstly, as literacy increased in the region, along with comfort and familiarity with the printed medium, the demand for illustrated books—his nearly monopolized corner of the market—diminished.\footnote{Chrisman, Lay Culture, Learned Culture, 106.} Illustration moved to the realm of ornament or emblem rather than as complimentary explanation to the word. Secondly, as alluded to above in the case of the Strasbourg’s magistrate’s censoring of Grüninger’s publication of Murner’s anti-Luther satire in 1522, the prospect of continuing Grüninger’s partisan publishing scheme grew less and less feasible. By the end of his career, he would expedite his published Catholic works and pamphlets directly to Switzerland for, as a contemporary in Strasbourg noted, “there will not any longer be a way to sell them here.”\footnote{Quoted in Ritter, 108.} Grüninger died sometime between 1531 and 1531, but the works which he published persisted.
In 1906, the Wesleyan exemplum of the Grüninger *Ship of Fools* made its next certain appearance. It was entered into Wesleyan Academy’s library in 1906 as part of an acquisition from the recently deceased Professor of Greek and modern languages, James Cooke van Benschoten (Figure 5). When Benschoten was appointed as professor at the then-Methodist liberal arts college in 1863, he was one of a few professors on Wesleyan’s faculty who did not originally graduate from the school itself. Born to a moderately wealthy farming family in 1827, in La Grange, Illinois (though his family soon thereafter moved to a farm in Lyons, New York), his scholarly acumen inspired him at a young age to pursue a life of letters, even after his father’s explicit reprobation. He had to pay his way through his education, teaching whilst studying in order to sustain himself. He studied at various local, mostly parochial, schools, earning his bachelor’s degree at Hamilton in 1856 and his master’s degree at Madison (now Colgate College) in 1857. Then, rather than remain in the United States to teach, van Benschoten took a month’s sailing voyage to Europe, and when he arrived there he studied in the

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Universities of Berlin, Bonn, Göttingen, and Athens. After two years of schooling, he spent 1860 to 1861 travelling in Greece and Anatolia. He eventually returned to the United States at the commencement of the Civil War.

During these years of foreign study and travel, van Benschoten was trained in the theories and methodologies of the nascent field of archeology, which was in the midst of developing a more professional character from its antiquarian origins. For Benschoten, along with many American scholars of antiquity of the period, archeology represented an object-based philology, in which the beauty of antique art was directly accessible through sensory, rather than purely intellectual, interpretation and manipulation. Moreover, he also picked up numerous artifacts and books during these years of travel; one of these artifacts may very well have been the Grüninger Ship of Fools. If it was acquired during this time, he most probably purchased the copy from a bookseller in one of the university towns in which he stayed. Rare booksellers of the period tended to gravitate toward the environs of Universities, since they could rely on a steady clientele of bookish scholars. Statements about the acquisition of the book must remain in the realm of conjecture, however, because there is no discoverable line of provenance for the book. Other artifacts from this period in van Benschoten’s life are also housed at Wesleyan, though mainly in Wesleyan’s Archeology and Anthropology Collections, and they include Roman oil lamps, pottery shards, and figurines.

Returning to raise a regiment (and serve as major) in the northerly Wayne County,

91 Ibid., 40.
New York, he was disappointedly forced to stay home due to a hastily configured consolidation of his and a neighboring regiment. He became Principal of the High School in Lyons, then was shortly thereafter simultaneously offered a position at Wesleyan and Union College. Steadfast in his Methodist faith, he sided for the religiously familiar, yet less wealthy, Wesleyan, and made his permanent home in Middletown, Connecticut.

At Wesleyan, van Benschoten, known affectionately as van Benny, quickly made a name for himself other than the endearing epithet. He was the first appointed Wesleyan professor trained in German, a fact which the school’s administration used to publicly testify to Wesleyan’s commitment to following the example of German universities and their refined development of rigorous and specialized disciplinary research. He introduced the study of archeology to the University, complementing the philological and linguistic study of classical texts (Classical languages being a general requirement for the whole student body) with the excitement and mystery of the primary experiences of antique artifacts. The happy marriage of van Benschoten’s devotion to the Methodist denomination and his professional academic credentials allowed him to stand comfortably between, and aloof from, the rising denominational conflict arising at Wesleyan in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

Largely, this conflict can be described as the confrontation of the Methodist Church with the results of developing methods of research in the very disciplines in which Wesleyan’s students and professors were engaged. Wesleyan—spurred on by the church’s clerical authorities—began cultivating a more professional and research-based

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92 Potts, 37.
93 Ibid.
academic atmosphere in response to a thinning of Wesleyan Academy’s attendance by local Methodist students. Interested more in ambition than religious education, the young Methodists of the region opted to go to technical and scientific schools in Boston in the stead of Wesleyan, which was still keeping to an oracular tradition of pedagogy and education. With regards to the faculty, this meant recruiting professors trained abroad at German research universities, or sending faculty members to Germany for years of instruction. This also resulted in a broadening of choice in academics for undergraduates, which included, for instance, the 1874 curriculum that made Latin and Greek required only for the first year of schooling (which could be followed by study in German or French).

To attract more students to the school and the faith, English Professor and public preacher-intellectual C.T. Winchester spent the later years of the century publicly supporting the annulment of Methodist prohibitions from secular amusements such as dance, theater, and card playing. On the side of the natural sciences, Professor of Chemistry Wilbur Olin Atwater’s scientific research into nutrition and metabolism at Wesleyan, which included the invention of the respiration calorimeter, led him to denounce the Methodist-backed temperance movement as lacking in scientific reason.

Thus, by the dawn of the twentieth century, a gap developed between the professional scholarly values of Wesleyan’s faculty and the Methodist Church, even though this professionalization was initially encouraged by the church administration in the 1870’s. This gap lay the groundwork for Wesleyan’s gradual independence from the denomination. Though it took until 1937 for the official

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94 Ibid., 127.
95 Ibid., 151
96 Ibid., 153.
severing to occur, the germ of Wesleyan’s independence may be seen in these earlier movements toward scholarly research and disciplinary methodologies.

Van Benschoten, though, did not live to witness Wesleyan’s more intense secularization that pervaded the institution during the first forty years of the twentieth century. He died on January 17, 1902, after acquiring a dreadful illness from riding to a hotel in a storm in late December after the annual meeting of the Archeological Society of Columbia University. He is buried in Indian Hill cemetery, on the border of Wesleyan’s campus. On the occasion of placing a tablet dedicated to him onto Wesleyan’s Memorial Chapel, inscribing his legacy into the institution, his friend and colleague, C.T. Winchester, made sure to remember him by three qualities, in a particular order: “Professor Van Benschoten was something better than a gentleman, something better and higher even than scholar, he was a Christian.”

In 1906, Wesleyan purchased van Benschoten’s library from his widow for $1,500 (nearly $40,000 in today’s dollars) from contributions of “a number of friends of the University.” Such ‘purchases’ of deceased professor’s collections for significant sums were common at the time. Indeed, widows of professors would often be left in absence of income and in possession of stacks of volumes. In this case, van Benschoten’s collection included a total of 3,336 bound volumes and 2,208 pamphlets, certainly a material burden on whoever would have to serve as guardian of his possessions after his

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97 C.T Winchester, “Address of Professor C.T. WInchester at the Unveiling of the Tablet in Memory of James Cooke van Benschoten” (Wesleyan University Chapel, Middletown CT, June 28, 1904).

98 William J. James, “Librarian’s Report, 1905-1906” (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, June 1, 1906).
death.\textsuperscript{99} As for its contents, the librarian’s report from 1906 describes the collection in these terms: “Its special strength is in sets of classical periodicals, editions of Greek writers, works on Greek art, and books dealing with the New Testament.”\textsuperscript{100} The items most useful for Classical study, approximately half of the collection, were shelved immediately in the Classical Seminary in Fisk Hall. The rest was slated for cataloguing and entry into Wesleyan’s growing library, where the books would join the 65,000 other volumes in the university’s collection. Among them was the Grüninger \textit{Ship of Fools}, though it took until March 6, 1914 for it to officially enter the collection.

Reasons for the delay in the book’s accession may be multiple, and many of them relate to the tide shift toward professionalization at Wesleyan evoked above. An aspect of the institutional directive to support research-based inquiry in the late nineteenth century was the expansion and rationalization of the very sources of research and scholarship, the library and its collection. This coincided with the development of library science in the United States more generally. Thus, in 1891, Professor of Mathematics William J. James was appointed head librarian, a position he would hold uninterruptedly until 1929. Even though he entered with no experience or research in the science of librarianship—that is, the methodology of maintaining, cataloguing, growing, and keeping up to date a collection of books—his tenure witnessed a radical transformation of the library. He received his education in librarianship mainly from the young and educated assistants he hired.\textsuperscript{101} Over his forty years as librarian, the library moved from the small and inconspicuous Rich Hall, which


\textsuperscript{100} James, “Librarian’s Report, 1905-1906.”

\textsuperscript{101} Potts, \textit{Wesleyan University, 1831-1910}, 131.
contained some 30,000 volumes at the time of his appointment, to the grandiose Olin Memorial Library, which held over 150,000 volumes upon his retirement.\textsuperscript{102} The largess of his acquisition during the period overwhelmed the capacity of the library’s staff to keep up with the deluge of incoming books, even for the expansion of the library’s staff throughout the period. Hence the delay in the book’s entrance into the collection. Curiously, the book solitarily entered the collection without any of its original companions. That is, even though it was a part of the 1906 purchase, it was catalogued separately from the other 3,000 volumes of the Benschoten Library. This may be because of its particularities amongst the professor’s acquired collection, such as its old age, its non-Classical subject matter, and its idiosyncratic annotations. Nonetheless, the book was entered with the accession number ‘79248,’ given the author of Sebastian Brant, was titled \textit{Stiltifera navis, tr. par Jacob Locher}, dated 1497, noted as having 232 pages, and was denoted as being sourced from the Van Benschoten Library.

Two other inputs in the accession data require explanation and investigation, and they are that of the “Place and Publisher” and for “Binding.” In Wesleyan’s accession book, the artifact is given the provenance of Argentina, and the place of publisher is filled by “n.p.,” meaning “no publisher.” The error in provenance may have arrived from a misreading of Jacob Locher’s introductory epigram to Brant’s original publisher, Johann Bergmann, in which he writes “imprimis argutis,” which translates closer to “astute criticism” more than it does, “printing in Argentia.” Grüninger’s printer’s mark is covered by a pasted paper, but there are numerous signs within the artifact itself to point to his Strasbourg print shop. The error may have

resulted from the cataloguer’s insufficient Latin knowledge or simply the pressure and time constraints under which the library employee was working when he/she was inputting the artifact into the records. Under binding, the entry reads, “1/2 sh,” which is a book collector classification term for ‘half sheep,’ meaning the binding (though not original) is mainly of cloth on wooden boards, but has a spine and outer corners of sheep leather.\footnote{John Carter and Nicolas Barker, *ABC for Book Collectors*, 8th ed (New Castle, DE: London: Oak Knoll Press; British Library, 2004), 119.} After it was designated in the accession book, the book entered the library, but only under the condition of its non-circulation.

Upon reflection on the historical narrative so far presented, which began in fifteenth century Strasbourg and stretched to nineteenth century America, parallel themes arise that are worthy for consideration—insofar as they inevitably played a role in the construction and ordering of the stories recounted here. In both cases, we have men that found themselves in what were later determined to be great turning points in the production and spread of knowledge, and these technologies of knowledge contributed to the conflicts between their religious convictions and these paths toward knowledge. For Brant and Grünstiger, both men of Catholic commitment, the printing press served as a means to spread notions of gradual, rather than radical, reform to a larger public audience—whether through Brant’s satires, his work on accessible illustrated editions of the classics, or the writings of Catholic thinkers Grünstiger published during the heat of the Reform. Van Benschoten, devoted to his Methodist faith throughout, introduced new systems of knowledge production by bringing to Wesleyan the disciplinary research of archeology and German philology from his studies abroad—countering the mainly oratorical tradition that pervaded Wesleyan in
the years prior. In both cases, we have discussed how these technologies of knowledge production played not insignificant parts in a distancing of the religious institutions and doctrines from the people producing and consuming this knowledge. Specifically, we have discussed how though Grüninger’s business was at first sustained by monopolies of Catholic clientele, the powerful organization of the Protestant printing regime coincided with Grüninger’s loss of business in Strasbourg and its environs. For Brant, his predecessor and pupils, including Jacob Locher, thoroughly continued his humanistic mission to remedy the staid scholasticism of Latin education through the reintroduction of the classics to the masses in familiarizing illustrated form. Though, they went so far as to develop the later humanistic interest which saw the classics worthy of reading for the sake only of their artistic merits. This secular turn, we may presume, would not have pleased Brant, who saw the learning the language of the Classics as vital for a proper reading of the one inherently valuable text in his cosmos: The Bible.

Finally, as demonstrated briefly above, the disciplinary rigor and methodological commitment espoused by Benschoten and his fellow newly professionalized Wesleyan faculty led to research results which forced the faculty to side with reason and scientific investigation over loyalty to faith, accentuating a rift between Wesleyan and the Methodist church. This rift experienced its ultimate conclusion in Wesleyan’s shift to non-denominational independence in 1937. In both cases, also, the men involved in the story of this artifact saw great importance in the dissemination and teaching of the world and texts of Roman and Greek antiquity in comprehensible contexts. Indeed, van Benschoten’s lively demonstrations with the archeological objects of the past in lectures on Homer provided the kind of pedagogical engagement that, perhaps, Brant also envisioned when he directed the images accompanying his Ship of Fools and the
Grüninger Virgil as legible pictorial expositions of the linguistic content. Yet, though these amalgamated observations about these two sets of men surrounding the history of Wesleyan’s Grüninger Ship of Fools allow us to draw possible historical parallels, what kind of meaning should we expect to arrive at from such considerations?
Chapter Two
Archivization

In this thesis’s introduction, I proposed that readers and writers engage in an “allegorical perspective on the past,” in which we approach the past with a consciousness of the tensions and slippages underlying our present meaning-making deriving from past objects of inquiry. This approach denies the bad faith of ontological realist perspectives on the past, and it allows enough space for creativity within the bounds of communication to stop us from digging our heads in the sand of skeptical quietism. Though, for some scholars of history an allegorical perspective on the past means something different entirely. As cultural historian Peter Burke describes, history as allegory may be related to the less reflective parallels historians often make between historical phenomena.\(^1\) Burke takes his definition of allegory from Erich Auerbach’s foundational study on *Figura*, wherein Auerbach examines the use of, and the denomination of, figural language in texts from antiquity to Dante’s *Commedia* and *Vita Nuova*.\(^2\) When Auerbach turns to Dante, he contends that Dante’s use of *figura*—for instance, when he writes on Virgil and Beatrice—is both historical and representative, and need not be one or the other. Burke takes this to mean that *figura* is “something real and historical which announces something else that is also real and historical.”\(^3\) Burke argues that there are two types of allegory: a “pragmatic” one that writes otherwise to avoid political censor, and a “metaphysical or mystical type,” “which assumes some

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\(^2\) Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, Theory and History of Literature, v. 9 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
\(^3\) Burke, “History as Allegory,” 342.
kind of occult or invisible connection between the two individuals or events discussed, however widely separated they may be in space or time.”

Historians tend to use the second metaphysical type when their historical narratives belie a claim that the present was pre-figured by the past, that we live in the reenactment of the past which can be illumined through the artificial articulations of historical parallels. Such claims can range from phrases that call contemporary writers “Shakespeares of our time,” (a recent article in The Guardian compared Stephen King to Shakespeare in “the malleability of his [King’s] work, [and] the ease with which primal themes that can be styled to match the dominant mode of a given era.”5) to the very idea of a Renaissance. Or, as demonstrated above, parallels may be used as a means of summing up an historical narrative through assurances that certain underlying themes ‘discovered’ by the historical writer are comprehended by the reader.

A problem presents itself. If much of my project is intended to provide an informed perspective that is wary of such easy associations of the past as prefiguration of the present, and my definition of allegory is one that is always related to meaning-slippage rather than equations of reference and representative meaning, then the next logical step would be to righteously strike through the entirety of the ‘parallels’ paragraph that concluded the previous chapter. This would thereby excise the slippage into the theological that such prefigural historical philosophies uphold. Though, this retraction would also cause problems, as I have already admitted that such parallels were present at the original synoptic judgment I made of the material I interpreted

4 Ibid., 341.
through my research of the secondary source material. Attempting to hide such a judgment by its extraction would serve the same deleterious purpose as would unreflectively asserting the judgment as true. Thus, we must, even if reluctantly, retain the above paragraph. To assuage this possible reluctance, we should note that the presented parallels are not formulated in such a way as to argue metaphysical figuration. If I have successfully engaged in the configurational mode of historical narration, discussed at the outset of the previous chapter, then such figurations are impossible.

Temporal succession cannot be the medium through which we provide meaning for the past. Through the configurational comprehension, the beginning of the story has within it the promise of the end just as the end has the promise of the beginning. There lies no room for any past to be the pure prefiguration of a related future event. The parallels, expressed implicitly and explicitly, may simply serve as an aspect of the story’s necessary followability because they enlist “our sympathies and antipathies” that constitute the “basic directing feelings” that account for our ability be “pulled along” by the narrative.6 These sympathies may derive from the pseudo-tragic quality of these men’s relationships with their respective religious devotions and their active support of newly developing technologies of knowledge production that were complicit in their religion’s institutional weakening. We must also remember that the factor connecting these two disparate moments is neither purely temporal succession nor thematic parallels. Rather, the connection is the physical artifact now housed in

Wesleyan’s library, and the discussions always trace back to that object as a witness to its past.

In the preceding chapter, we zoomed into two moments in the past of the artifact now sitting in Wesleyan’s Special Collections & Archives. As a constructed material, the book took its current shape in Strasbourg, in Grüninger’s print shop. The moments of its illustrations being cut into wood, its type set, its pages folded, its eventual binding, and first sale (perhaps not in this order) are the book’s conception and birth. From this moment on (or so we might think), the book held with it the history of its conception and represents, and participates in, the past of its medium and locality of printing. Its affiliation with its primary author, Sebastian Brant, whose public fame in fifteenth and sixteenth century Europe is owed in part to copies such as the one now housed in the collection, evokes consideration of the role of the author as director and owner of his completed work. We have, perhaps abruptly, jumped several hundred years forward from the book’s late fifteenth century conception to its entrance into Wesleyan’s Special Collections in the twentieth. From this point of departure, we have explored the particular past Wesleyan Professor, James Cooke van Benschoten, from whose private collection the Wesleyan library received the artifact.

The evocation and exploration of these two moments in the past of this artifact offer a temporal frame of the book’s life. The moments act as two useful flag posts from which to discuss the signification of the book as material product, as witness and testament to its time, and as preserved artifact. Now, when I write the book’s ‘life’ I do not mean only the organic material of which the book is made—that which will eventually decompose over time—as retaining a biological life force comparable to that of humans, animals, and plants. I argue that once completed into its commodified form,
into its ‘bookness,’ it became imbued with a certain characteristic that allowed it to speak for its particular place and time of birth, to be held as a readable, saleable, and manipulatable object. Once it entered the library, becoming an artifact, this characteristic shifted dramatically—if not in essence, then certainly in expression. Indeed, the entrance into Wesleyan’s archive was the death of the artifact if its life was that which began in Grüninger’s master print shop in 1497 Strasbourg. Once that particularly temporal frame, or life, ended, it began a new one with regards to its membership in a collection of special and preserved objects. Saved from the possible dangers of destruction in the boundaries of everyday material possession and use, the book took on new qualities in its archived form that inform our historical approach. To provide a language for this phenomenon, I rely primarily on Walter Benjamin’s formulations and contemplations of the aura. But I rely especially on Benjamin’s allowed fluidity of the concept to argue that the aura of the book was transformed by the act of preservation. Benjamin’s presentation of the aura which was lost through mechanical reproduction only takes us so far in consideration of our preserved artifact. Instead, I argue that once an object enters an archive, or, as in our case, a special collection, it attains a new aura-like enchantment that was absent in its previous quotidian existence.

In his most thorough exposition of the concept, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin locates aura via its negation. This is to say that it is in the description of what is lost in the act of reproduction that Benjamin provides the clearest figuration of what the aura actually is. Reproductions, even those that reach

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the closest semblance of the original matrix, lack a work’s “presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be.”8 It is this presence that accounts for a work’s “authenticity,” that “essence of all that is transmissible from its [the work’s] beginning, ranging from its substantive duration to its testimony to the history which it has experienced.”9 Thus, the two affiliated concepts, presence and authenticity, interweave into constituting a work’s aura. Benjamin’s idea of presence is related to the material existence of the object, that it holds a unique place in the cosmos of being as a unique expression of the materials that composed it at conception. The authenticity of an object is its ability to act as a witness to its past, a past that is entirely its own. Conjecturing from his historical standpoint, Benjamin posits that the age of mechanical reproduction is one that contributes to a continuing destruction of the aura, insofar as contemporary desires to make singular acts of aesthetic production into reproduced multiplicity parallel desires to make distant things and experiences “closer.”10 The desire for similitude is therefore related to a desire for closeness. Benjamin’s vocabulary of distance in relation to this phenomenon implies that works of art, because they belong to a particular time (due to presence and authenticity), present themselves as distant from the viewer’s own position. Conversely, the reproduced object achieves a universality by “overcoming the uniqueness” inherent in artistic expression.11

By making art close, we in turn destroy an aspect that defined its power. In the essay, Benjamin writes explicitly about aura in the context of photography and film and

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8 Ibid., 220.
9 Ibid., 221
10 Ibid., 223.
11 Ibid.
suggests that the seamless reproducibility these media offer to the modern world introduce a revolutionary combatant against aura that did not exist in the first four hundred years of print-making (“for the first time in world history”), or during the span of other reproductive techniques.\textsuperscript{12} Benjamin expounds on a comparison between the situation of a stage actor with that of a film actor, participating in a Brecht-like critique that reveals the necessity for a certain distance, alienation, \emph{Verfremdungseffekt}, to achieve a pure theatrical aesthetic experience.\textsuperscript{13} Such distance is lost when the stage actor is ripped from the presence and authenticity of the stage, of the close, yet distant, audience, and when cinematic close-ups and continually redone scenes predominate the theatrical art form. Benjamin does not bemoan absolutely the decay of aura in modernity. Rather, he diagnoses it as symptomatic of an ever-turning inward of human perception and subjectivity: “Mankind, which in Homer’s time was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, now is one for itself.”\textsuperscript{14} It is affiliated as much with a Marxist critique of capitalist possession as it is a philosophical anxiety about the spread of solipsism.

Benjamin’s considerations of the aura extend past the conditions and specific content in the essay evoked above. Indeed, Benjamin dislocates his aura from the particular phenomenon of cinema and photography that foreground a discussion of the aura’s devaluing in the face of an object’s preservation and collection. In his \emph{Arcades Project}, Benjamin provides a note on the aura, distinguishing it from the trace:

\begin{quote}
Trace and aura. The trace is appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left behind it may be. The aura is the appearance of distance,
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[12] Ibid., 224.
\end{footnotes}
however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us.\(^\text{15}\) (M16a, 4)

Here, nearness and distance take on a new function of possession. By maintaining a work’s aura, we constrain a desire for its possession, and its ultimate degradation to a controllable, perhaps narratable, trace. This is in contrast to the way the aura acts against the perceiver in ways that are strange and foreign, taking possession of the viewer and always retracting before any realization of complete comprehension. As film historian Miriam Bratu Hansen summarizes in her comprehensive study of Benjamin’s variegated uses of the term in his writings, correspondence, and notes, Benjamin was always wary of establishing a single definition for the aura. It always “describes a cluster of meanings and relations,” which generally point to a “medium of perception,” rather than on a metaphysical property of objects and events—and these objects need not be limited to only works of art as reproduced in film or photography.\(^\text{16}\) The aura hinges on the latent possibility of reflective perception of all objects, whether human or not, and when Benjamin writes about its possibility to take possession of the perceiver he suggests an “embodied mode of perception” wherein strict delineations of subject and object are blurred, where linear chronologies (“empty, homogeneous” conceptions) of time are held in abeyance during the span of the gaze.\(^\text{17}\) Thus, the aura’s common conception as an aspect of aesthetic experience may be justly extended to a more general discussion of the phenomenological circumstances in which we confront an object. Because of Benjamin’s historical positioning, technical reproduction may have


\(^{17}\) Ibid., 351.
served as an obvious node at which to explicitly interrogate the concept. The spread of reproductive technology represented an active destabilization of an art object’s aura, rather than its natural, and, therefore, unavoidable, decay.\textsuperscript{18} The true demolition of the aura requires an active interruption by a human subject interested in making an otherwise distant, or uncontrollable, object close, understood, possessed, protected.

One should remember that the primary subject of inquiry here is preservation, not reproduction. In a culture deluged by mechanical or digital reproduction, we have turned to museums, archives, and other cultural institutions of preservation to subtly implant a new sense of an aura to otherwise mundane past objects. The question is not whether or not the aura is being actively destroyed so much as it is about a new aura we construct subsequent to its demolition. Through an inversion of the concept of the aura we may consider it in light of the active efforts by which we seek to reenchant objects with symbolic and cultural power. Museologist and cultural anthropologist Gottfried Korff, in his co-authored “Reflections on the Museum,” presents a model through which the concept of the aura and technical reproduction is appropriated to that of the aura of objects preserved and displayed in a museum’s collection.\textsuperscript{19} For Korff, a museum visit is constituted by the confrontation of objects that would otherwise be other, strange, and unapproachable. By means of the curators’ framing, presentation, and explanation, these objects are forced into legibility, into association with other objects, and, in other words, made close, “creating familiarity with the

\textsuperscript{18} “…the artwork essay makes a case, not only for a recognition of the aura’s irreversible decline, but for its active demolition.” Hansen, 355.

culturally different.” The modern phenomenon of public museums as places of cultural education transforms our understanding of what we deem cultural artifacts, creating a “museumified culture” where objects of the past are torn from their being in the past and are culturally materialized in the present for the sake of accommodating “contemporary interests and perspectives.”

Just as Benjamin diagnoses the proliferation of mechanically reproduced art-objects as a symptom of modern solipsism, Korff warns in a similar tuned concern about rendering unknown mundane objects of foreign cultures into preserved and coherent narratives told through objects and framing. Korff explains a contemporary propensity to collect and display ‘antiquities’ as a resistance to the inconsistencies, fragmentation, and temporal disjunctions of contemporary culture. Suddenly, we arrive at the end of a museum exhibition, and those theretofore unknown objects we saw when entering come to provide a tidy and linear chronology (even if that chronology is thematic and not strictly temporal) that leads to our present. Further, the objects displayed take on an ascended meaning now that they are protected and preserved by those we trust as arbiters and protectors of culture. In a time of “the transitory and the fugitive,” museums provide a sense of historical time that provides us with stability within that time—through the produced closeness of the otherwise distant, mysterious, and preserved past objects presented. In many instances, our mode of perception is separated by a pane of glass, which, amongst a litany of other conservationist methods,

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20 Korff, Bendix, and Bendix, 269.
21 Ibid., 270.
22 Ibid., 268.
protects the object from being altered by factors of material decay or by the dangers of manipulation and exposure to its perceivers.

The conceptual stakes at play in what Korff calls the ‘museumification’ of a culture reframe our consideration of the aura of the preserved object. Indeed, rather than trying to make the single work of art universal, we preserve and museumify objects. This act raises the cultural significance of the object from the realm of the mundane to that of the sacred, wherein we deem the object as worthy of preservation and as imbued with symbolic capital and power. I want to argue that we can consider an inversion of Benjamin’s diagnosis of the decline of the aura in our discussion of the rise of a new auratic quality established via preservation and museumification.

Here, we should make a useful distinction between art objects preserved in a museum and the objects of folklore and mundanity that are brought to a higher state of being through their entrance into cultural institutions. It is easy to imagine that Benjamin’s suggestion regarding an art object’s aura is still theoretically possible in museums regarding the conservation of works of art. For example, one may experience an original Picasso painting or sculpture with as much aesthetic astonishment, with the sense of the distance Benjamin evokes, even if that object is framed and hung by a museum’s curator. The issue is less obvious but no less powerful when one considers the manner in which otherwise non-artistic objects—objects that were not treated with the kind of admiration, care, and respect in their everyday lives as was applied to the Picasso—take on a power comparable to the art object through their preservation, archiving, and museumification.

In Benjamin’s formulation an object’s authentic and present aura is entangled with its cult value, which is lost through its reproduction; a museumified object,
however, gains what the art object lost. Indeed, Benjamin contends that reproducing an original art object “emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual” because it devalues its cult value as something magical, to be kept secret, and accessible in only particular moments. In this discussion of ritual and aura, the secularizing function of reproduction shows most clearly. When the aura of an object becomes void, it is divested of its uniqueness and of the somewhat mystical aspects of its presence and authenticity. The museumification of an object, on the contrary, establishes a new ritual and cult value, and this is especially true in the context of everyday objects, such as the material for folklore study in which Korff is particularly interested. A shoe that was once worn, a needle once used for stitching, now can only be seen at certain hours of the week, can only be viewed when you yourself are being viewed by watchful security personnel or docents, and can never be used again—even if for demonstration of its previous function.

If Benjamin’s terminal diagnosis of the aura in modernity was correct, and the aura of the art-object was successfully destroyed by the maturation and normalization of mechanical reproduction, then what followed in what we may call post-modernity is defined by the attempt of particular cultural actors to reconstitute the lost sense of enchantment of the aura through museums, archeology, conservation projects, archives, and special collections. Moreover, while Benjamin’s conceptualization of the aura does not lend itself obviously to the problem of museums, preservation, and the archive, his vocabulary provides a means through which to talk about the ways objects are imbued with power through their framing and treatment. The special collection is

a powerful example of this proposed auratic enchantment, and by exploring the implications of a book’s entrance into the archive we may demonstrate the reconstitution of the aura in the archived object.

I offer that the aura of the book that was once a copy of Grüninger’s edition of Jakob Locher’s Latin translation of Sebastian Brant’s *Ship of Fools* has undergone a sort of transformation that we can rightly call its death as a quotidian object, which was followed by its rebirth as cherished relic. This entombment may be viewed through the lens of Derrida’s reading of Hegel’s image of semiology in the “The Pit and the Pyramid.”

Derrida relates Hegel’s signifier to a “tomb,” which “is the life of the body [distinct from the soul] as the sign of death.” Derrida also reminds us of the double meaning wherein the tomb also “shelters, maintains in reserve, capitalizes on life by marking that life continues elsewhere.” Thus, it “consecrates the disappearance of life by attesting to the perseverance of life.” The Egyptian pyramid, the sign, even as it relates to notions of the afterlife and immortality, is built on the foundation of a death from which the pyramid gains its transcendence of mortal time. After death and entombment, the sign is ensouled in what remains, that is, the tomb. I argue that the process of entering an otherwise quotidian object into a special collection follows a similar pattern of death, entombment, and enchantment, and that the same underlying theo-ontology undergirds the philosophy of history that unreflectively relies on and reveres archived works.

25 Ibid., 82.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
In naming this process, Derrida is faced with translating Hegel’s *Aufhebung*, what many English translators call ‘sublation.’ He decides on, as Alan Bass calls it in his translator notes on Derrida, the “non-translation” of *la réleve.*\(^{28}\) As Bass explains, the double meaning of the verb *relever*, to lift up and to relieve of duty or obligation, points to the aspects of elevation and negation at play in Hegel’s *Aufhebung*. We may indeed map the dual meaning of *relever* onto the transformation of the mundane book into a special object. Rather than designate a double-meaning word that describes this process, I call this transformation *archivization* so as to differentiate it from the first step of archiving (that is, placing into the archive). *Archivization* depends on the death of the everyday and temporal constraints of physical and mundane existence in order to elevate the archived object to the status of a frozen, preserved, and symbolic artifact.

To start, an examination of the location of *archivization*, the special collection, evinces the proliferation of archival desire and its realization I wish to highlight.

Special collections and archives are relative newcomers to the scene of libraries and book collections. As libraries grew more public in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, certain materials in those libraries were sequestered into private shelves. Generally, these efforts were to keep particularly fragile materials from disuse and disrepair. When university libraries expanded, so too did the division of their collection into art libraries, periodical sections, special collections, and the general stacks. The University of Michigan, for instance, opened its special collection as early

\(^{28}\) Ibid., 20.
as 1899. In his monograph on the subject of *Rare Book Librarianship*, librarian Roderick Cave defines the bar for entry into a special collection as essentially an arbitrary one:

> The material need not be old, nor rare (in the strictest sense of the term as used by the book collector) nor command a high market price…

Indeed, defining a special collection solely by the kind of materials one keeps in it runs the risk of posing a narrow definition based on anecdotal knowledge of collection-specific data. A 2013 study on “Assessing the Value Special Collections Bring to Academic Libraries,” asked “What’s So Special about Special Collections?” only to find that metric evaluations of special collections and archives in university libraries were so difficult because of this fluidity of definitions. Cave offers a useful alternative to the present problem defining a special collection via the attitude of the librarians rather than by the materials’ characteristics. Thus, a special collection consists of:

> material for which the librarian assumes his oldest role as custodian; material which is being treated differently from the rest of the stock not only because of the need to exploit it for use but because of the duty to preserve it for the future.

Just as we turned the aura away from the aspect of the material to the medium of perception of the viewer, so too does transposing our definition of special collections onto the role of the custodian-librarian help us discuss the implications for the status and the aura of an object. Thus, no matter the object, whether it be a fifteenth-century folio, a nineteenth century *livre d’artiste*, a former professor’s journals and

30 Ibid., 9.
32 Cave, *Rare Book Librarianship*, 10.
correspondences, or a relic of local history, what matters most in our consideration of the archive are the archivists themselves and their attitudes to, and framing of, their collection for their visitors and users. Cave’s diction of dedication, nearly of religious scope, exposes the normative significance of an object’s placement in the special collections—it becomes a favorite child of sorts, gaining an especially attentive guardian. As Cave describes, special collection librarians assume their “oldest role” as stewards of a cherished collection. This derives not only from a respect for the material but also from librarians’ prideful return to a supposed original function when they assume this high priest-like (guarding the holy of holies), or monastic (guarding the sacred library), position.

Entering Wesleyan’s Davison Rare Books Room, a beautifully curated nineteenth-century gentleman’s library, feels much like entering the inner sanctum of a monastery, and the librarians take on this aforementioned role of monastic caretaker. A desire to reestablish the sacred behind the veil of a secular special collection has resulted in expanding the scale and scope of these guarded library collections. A 2010 study by the Online Computer Library Center found that, since 1998, collections in the United States have experienced, on average, “a 50% increase in the mean for printed volumes and archival collections to 300% for visual and moving-image materials.”

Moreover, the development of special collections is recently becoming more involved with digitization efforts, along with offering accessibility through various visual media, which only reinforces the ways in which a special collection is an expression of a desire

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to transcend the rules and boundaries of temporality—inevitably, mortality. This institutional growth coincides with an increased librarian interest in ensuring that visitors and users of their collections leave as little a mark as possible during their visit—thereby further bolstering what William Sherman calls the “cult of the clean book.”

Thus, Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives, though only a particular example of an institutional library, shares in a larger national development, though recent, of sequestering particular materials from the general stacks—of making books special, restricting them from regular access, and ascending them to the nearly sacred status of a treasured relic.

To enter into Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives, visitors must first enter Olin Memorial Library, a grand edifice of Portland brownstone designed by Henry Bacon in 1923, a year before the dedication of his designed Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC. The library sits on a raised platform of smooth marble, which supports the building’s frontal portico sporting six full standing marble ionic columns. These columns are topped by an architrave and frieze whose marble is inscribed with the building’s name. These architectural components all ring reminiscently of ancient Greek temple architecture. Visitors enter through the lobby, whose floor is a marble mosaic, and whose center is an imposing crystal chandelier hanging over a circular inset slab of Breche Violette marble. After passing the circulation desk, visitors veer right, open a door that initiates a bell’s ring as greeting, and are welcomed by a staff worker at the front desk of the enclosed side chapel that is the Special Collection & Archives.

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The collection is open in the afternoons, four days a week, and while there, visitors are expected to follow particular guidelines of behavior. The announced mission attached to these rules echoes the sentiments (and, sometimes, the exact wording) of Cave’s claim above. Visitors must act carefully: the collection “provides materials because of their rarity, fragility or unusual format,” and “both staff and users have the obligation of preserving these materials for future use.”35 (italics mine) Only pencils are allowed past the sign-in desk, visitors may only consult one item at a time, items are either lain flat on the table or supported by foam cradles, pages are kept open with stringed book weights, pages are to be turned gently, and sometimes gloves will be required accessories for viewing.36 Above all, materials are not to be marked, leaned on, or manipulated in any way that changes the material from the product originally provided at the commencement of the visit. Once Wesleyan acquired the copy of the Grüninger Ship of Fools, no matter how richly annotated it had been, no matter how freely its previous users found its manipulability obvious, the Wesleyan archivists were to be the last to mark themselves within the book—that is, rendering it an artifact. Fascinatingly, one of the final marks within the book was by the collectors’ themselves, and it is the artifact’s accession information (Figure 6).

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36 Ibid.
If we were to use Benjamin’s vocabulary regarding the aura, then we would concede that amongst the two qualities of presence and authenticity, the book’s authenticity has experienced little dramatic change. Rather, it has been reaffirmed. Unlike in reproduction, the authenticity of an object preserved does not deteriorate. Its authenticity, in fact, is elevated and, as evidenced by the sequestration, the rules, regulations, and statements of duty and obligation, is fetishized with a kind of religious fervor. The cult and ritual value of the artifact is entirely foreign to that of the non-archived book. Taken as a unique example of a particular time, place, technology, culture, or way of reading, all of which are contingent on its being preserved, the book is archivized. Consequently, the book gains two constitutive factors of the archive, in the conceptual and etymological sense, as Jacques Derrida describes in *Archive Fever*, “commencement” and “commandment.”37 The original Greek meaning of the word, *arkhē*, includes within it both meanings. The book is given commencement insofar, as demonstrated by Figure 6, it is given a date, a place of origin, an author, and publisher. As Wesleyan’s proudly acquired example of an early modern printed book, it is also a place where historical investigations and curiosities may commence.

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Certainly, the book has acquired significant commandment as well. The book’s nomological power starts negligibly as a personal possession scribbled in, colored in, and with pasted cut-out pictures over a title page. After its archivization, the book’s use is highly regulated, and its being is for perpetuity arranged, or explained, with regards to the collection. Through it, the special collection’s custodial mission is enacted. Thus, in Derrida’s terms, it earns a “privileged topology,” and a place in the “topo-nomology” of the archive. As a consequence of this giving of an entangled place (topology) and law (nomology) to the archived object, the artifact is preserved through its domiciliation. This is what Derrida might call an archival “house arrest” under the authority and auspices of the collection. The book that was once passed between manipulating hands has now become sufficiently ‘special.’ Thus, the archivists deem it appropriate and necessary that they inscribe in it its final annotation, which dictates the book’s place amongst the collection’s other special objects: the accession number—in many ways its ascension data. By establishing the object’s historical data in the accession information through permanent inscription, the archivists confirm its status as a special object of self-authorized “authenticity,” giving it authoritative commencement. The object’s commandment, its implicit demand for reverence and respect, is justified through its given commencement. This is to say that the logic of the collection is that because this item is authentic it should be duly honored. Indeed, one of the driving reasons I am writing about Wesleyan’s Ship of Fools is because I am proscribed against writing in it.

The archivization of this object shifts the way we may approach it, thereby significantly transforming its meaning-making capacities. These conditions are not only relevant for this item, but for all archived objects of the past that are assumed as given when they are really present through the intervention of actors with particular aims and
objectives as to the use of the material. This process parallels the way historians make what may be called a “text” into a “source” through what Ethan Kleinberg, in a panel discussion on German historian Johann Martin Chladenius, called the “sourcery of the text.” While a text is mutable—that is, it can be subject to varying uses and interpretations and be part of an epistemological structure wherein meaning slippage is possible—a source possesses the theological quality of speaking to a single retrievable past. The belief in such a singular past participates in an “ontologically realist” perspective on the historical consciousness’s ability to bring presence to that past. As Kleinberg points out, the ontologically realist perspective is one that is deeply entangled, even if unwittingly, in a theological belief of the past’s singular realness. It also participates in a kind of messianic positivism wherein we believe that we must make a text a source so that we, or, perhaps more importantly, our future inheritors of the historical tradition, may apply the properly rigorous methodology of interpretation to reach a singular, enlightened, revelatory historical understanding. Further, an historian’s source may not be interrogated like a literary reader’s text, even if in both instances the material at hand is the same. Just as the text, even in the ostensibly secular realm of historical inquiry, takes on an underlying sacredness by being morphed into

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39 Kleinberg elucidates in detail the considerable entanglement between Chladenius’s ontological realist historical perspective and his theological positions in Ethan Kleinberg, *Haunting History: For a Deconstructive Approach to the Past*, Meridian: Crossing Aesthetics (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017). Even though Chladenius supported an attention and awareness of historical viewpoint in the production of historical knowledge, his framework was still grounded in an ontology of a fixed, yet allusive, past. Indeed, “Chladenius’s project of establishing a historical science that could establish the hermeneutic certainty of historical truth via the immediate sense of an author was predicated on his desire to secure the theological foundations of his faith.” Ibid., 79.
historical source, so too do we sacrifice the mutability of the everyday object into the sacred archive through preservation and sequestration. To return to the subject of this thesis, whereas there were multiple ways of reading the Grüninger Ship of Fools before its archiving, after being made into an historical relic the possible manipulations and indeed its everyday usefulness have been greatly limited.

Hannah Arendt, in “The Permanence of the World and the Work of Art” (what might be called a response to Benjamin’s art, aura, and mechanical reproduction essay), suggests that the production of unaltered, unused, and, therefore, preserved, art parallels a more profound human anxiety about mortality and mutability.⁴⁰ Indeed, in the act of preservation we make up a “world stability,”

…but that a premonition of immortality, not the immortality of the soul or of life but of something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound and to be heard, to speak and to be read.⁴¹

That is, we make objects our weapons in an albeit futile struggle against mortality. Our longing for a permanent home in this world, for the immortality of our realized short lease on the earth, inspires us to seek stability and permanence in the products of our work, such as man-made objects.

Upon consideration, it is clear that the presence of the book has been sacrificed for the sake of its authority. The archival process reveals our desire to maintain a presence of any sort of the past object for the sake of the present and the future. Even

This is done generally in unwitting ignorance of the fact that the archiving process interrupts the book’s syntax of continuity, making its aura discontinuous, in such a

⁴¹ Ibid., 173.
deistic manner that it carries with it the expectation that by archiving we may transcend the vicissitudes of historical change. The archivists freeze the book in its mutable continuity for the sake of future meaning-making, and this action is contingent on a motivating fear that the archive will deteriorate and be forgotten. This is not dissimilar to the fear of a fate inherent in the human condition more generally: “there is no archive fever without the threat of the death drive, this aggression and destruction drive.” Thus, making priests of the archivists and the archive itself a site of holy reverence, we accede to the legislation imposed by them on the material we deem as representative of the treasured, yet demandingly mysterious, past. In doing so we reaffirm a logic of false-infinity, sweeping “simple factual limits” with the “spatio-temporal conditions of conservation.” The placement of the object in the archive acts as its entombment into a reliquary to maintain the pseudo-messianic belief that the preservation of such objects will allow future generations to reach certain historical understanding and thus stability. These notions of stability, as I have demonstrated, are fraught with theological conditions that are contrary to the secular scientific or rational posture that historians take when they justify their work.

It is with this conceptual framework, and a reference back to the thesis’s introduction’s discussion of allegory, that we may make a returning and rounding gesture to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin remarks in his *Arcades Project* that the “allegorist is, as it were, the polar opposite of the collector.” As discussed above, yet in different

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44 Ibid.
terms, the archivist rids the collected materials of their original functions, brings objects together that “belong together” based on constructed “affinities and their succession in time.” The allegorist, contrastingly, “relies on his [own] profundity to illuminate their meaning” apart from their explained context. These distinctions, however, are not so clear cut as it may seem: “in every collector hides an allegorist, and in every allegorist a collector.” Archivists always see their collection as unfinished and will continue bringing objects into their fold of archivization with no possibility of satisfaction. Likewise, the allegorist relies on the collection of things amongst which to construct personal and profound meaning. I argue that the same cross-entanglement is involved in what I propose is a self-reflective “allegorical perspective” on the past.

Certainly, I am such a researcher who has benefitted from the entombment of mundane objects as artifacts and archives, and from their availability as sources and nodes of study. The artifact’s exploitation for meaning-making is exactly the project I’ve shipped off on, yet I do so also with an awareness of the fact that what I take as the book’s given observable data, along with the context of my viewing of it, are determined by the conditions and legislations of its preservation.

In the next chapter, the book’s life between the two poles heretofore presented will be explored. On the main, the exploration of the book’s life will be of the marginalia, annotations, coloring, and uses that are still evident today. The provision of these annotations, and the artifact study in which I participate, is entirely possible because of the archival violence and reincarnation the object of my study experienced. In fact, my consideration of the book’s manipulation was made more easily perceivable

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46 Ibid.
(for both the writer and readers) via the ultimate form of aura-destructive preservation, the digitization of the artifact. It is in this craggy and hard place, I argue, where most historical thinking and writing takes place. We must do some sort of violence to the object of our study to make it present in our contemporary consideration. The challenge of the historical situation is that, in the necessary compromise between a respect for the integrity of the material of the past and a fascination with gathering up as much of the past as we can to redeem us for the future, our historical consciousness is trained to prefer order; to trust stability over instability; to legislate artificial continuity rather than embrace and inhabit the discomfort of a discontinuous relationship with the past.

Amidst the complexities of these questions, we are found in the presence of an old object. The tropes of archivization seem to easily conform to a narrative in which respect for the material is equated with its sanctioned guardianship and preservation, when in sooth a deeper human desire for nomological control might be playing a much more decisive role in such decisions and decrees. A cynical approach to the past, and to the historical project more generally, would force us to resign at such a point when the givenness of the object in front of us delivers so many quandaries. An allegorical approach, however, finds these problems invigorating, develops a language to articulate them—as I’ve attempted above—and presents these difficulties squarely to the receiver of the historical readers for their informed judgment.
Chapter Three
Manipulation

When I enter Wesleyan’s Davison Rare Books Room, where the Grüninger Ship of Fools is kept, I am presented the book in a controlled setting, but the way of my reading this book is not entirely determined. As discussed before, certain regulations—whose philosophical implications render the artifact archivized—restrict me from physically interacting with the book in such a way that would in any way change its current physical state. It is placed on a foam stand and I am given stringed book weights so that my engagement with opening and reading the artifact causes the least physical manipulation possible. The book’s current regulated situation is foreign to the one it was in between its printing and its archivization, which is quickly proven by opening it and seeing the traces and marks previous owners and readers have left within it.

In the following pages, I examine the various methods through which readers may manipulate a book, and I will ground my analysis in the artifact now housed in Wesleyan’s Special Collections and Archives. Following the example of sociologists of reading, I will turn first to the content of the book itself, which gives us clues as to how Brant might have imagined an ideal reading taking place with his book and in his social milieu. Of course, no reader is ideal, but there are trends and habits of reading which may inform our perspective on the development of reading practices and their expression in the artifact. In our artifact, an early owner of the book commissioned the coloring of the book’s illustrations, which provide an introductory look into the way readers make a book their own through its manipulation. Humanist reading practices of the book are evinced by a readers’ use of the ‘manicule,’ a punctuation, or annotation
sign, that elucidates aspects of how readers took books to their hands. Writers, especially those of allegories, have little control as to how readers engage with their material. With enough temporal distance, readers may produce reaplications of an allegory that could not have been at all anticipated by the original author and readers. As a final note, we will study how a reader may have come to writing a list of names from the French Revolution into the first pages of the artifact, and how the inscription reinforces aspects of allegory that undergird this thesis.

I am thus attempting to respond to the challenge, presented by historian Roger Chartier, to understand “how the same texts can be differently apprehended, manipulated, and comprehended.”1 My focus is the “internal contradiction” between reader and text, in which the book’s aim of imposing order and stability confronts the act of reading, which is “by definition…rebellious and vagabond.”2 In the end, the reader’s liberty wins out, which is why reading tends to resemble what Michel de Certeau calls “poaching” (bracconant): “readers are travelers, like nomads poaching their way across the fields they did not write…”3 Reading always rebels against the constraints of the forms the text takes. Similarly, even for the fact that our physical manipulation of the artifact is limited, we may still engage in meaning-making with it that plays with the disjunctions of meaning that are characteristic of allegorical expression and my proposed allegorical perspective on the past.

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2 Ibid., viii.
To begin this intended investigation, we approach the artifact as a text—pregnant with possible interpretations—rather than only as an indisputable source for historical research. We look to the text itself and interrogate the content it presents to parse out what conceptions of reading it suggests.\(^4\) When referring to the text, I provide images from the artifact itself in order to render my interpretation of it more like a guided reading of the book than a purely intellectual critical examination disconnected from the material. Also, in an attempt to keep my reading of the text as universal as possible, and not entirely tied to the artifact as a source, I attempt to make reference to aspects of the text that remain consistent between the prominent Latin (Locher, and our artifact), German (through Zeydel’s translation of the first edition)\(^5\), and English (Barclay)\(^6\) versions of the text—though, I will refrain from providing each variation between the editions and translations. Thus, in these two gestures toward the artifact’s particularity and its connection to the original matrix from which it was imprinted, that is, the author’s verbal content, I further highlight the interplay between the artifact’s status as a text and source.

\(^4\) This method takes inspiration from Roger Chartier, *Inscription and Erasure: Literature and Written Culture from the Eleventh to the Eighteenth Century*, Material Texts (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). In this volume, Chartier uses key moments in various literary texts wherein the writing forms take important roles, such as Don Quixote in the printing shop, and uses them as a springboard for a broader conversation about the perception of writing forms more generally. In sum, he begins from the text itself, and his close readings of literary texts inform a broader sociological-historical argument.


Even before approaching the actual linguistic content of the first poem, we are presented with a corresponding woodcut image and the section’s title, which translates to “of useless books.” A possible initial and superficial observation we make is one that is particular to reading this Grüninger edition: the difference of typeface in the poem’s heading and in the poem itself. The header text is printed in a “gothic” typeface, which performs the function of reminding the readers of the text’s original German origin, and, also, by the time of the book’s printing, its affiliation with the didactic nature of the text would have been apparent. The main poem’s primary typeface, however, is a

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7 Though, a reader of the complete book would have noticed this variation earlier in reading the book. We, however, are only now taking note of it.
“roman” one, which was more universally legible and accessible than was the gothic counterpart. The other major genre of typeface of the era, “italic,” had not yet travelled to Strasbourg from Aldus Manutius’s Venetian workshop. It is most probable Grüninger acquired this roman typeface from his colleague, Marcus Reinhart, who would have acquired it during his unsuccessful printing venture in Lyon in the early 1480’s. Reinhart later moved to Strasbourg in 1482, where he ran a moderately successful humanist printing shop and collaborated with Grüninger on a number of books using the Lyonnaise typeface. Generally, the gothic typeface was for the most part abandoned after the early years of printing, as the roman alternative was more amenable to rationalization. Thus, the distinction in typeface is an important prelude to the experience of reading the text. Notions of elitism and erudite reference are mixed with popularizing tools for the book’s wide appeal, and old styles are mixed with emerging new ones to demonstrate the Ship of Fools’ transitional character.

Again, we may look adjacent to the linguistic content for further contextualization. An initial popularizing tool found in the poem is the accompanying woodcut, which serves an explanatory role for the issues at hand in Brant’s opening satirical vignette (Figure 7). The scene depicted is an interior, and a luxurious one at that. A man in academic garb sits in a sumptuously designed chair with gothic curvature and ornament in front of a structure that functions as both a book display case and a

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8 It is this shared typeface (and their shared names) that motivates bibliographer Robert Proctor to propose that the two print masters were brothers rather than only close collaborators, though there is scant evidence to assure any genealogical hypotheses. Proctor, “Marcus Reinhard & Johann Grüninger.”


10 Another example of the ‘transitional’ nature of the book’s printing is the use of an abbreviated form of the Latin word “que” that is reminiscent of scribal notation. An example of this abbreviation is the way the word “atque” is printed: atq.
reading stand. In this particular illustration, one can count eleven books. One can note especially the books’ range of sizes: from the large tome in the shelf to the smaller octavo tucked in the foreground of the book case. The seated figure has one hand on a book, and in his other he holds what seems a broom, or, rather, a fly-swatter. We can surmise this from the presence of the flying insects (of rather extraordinary size, but most likely depicted as such to easier catch the viewer’s attention) on the covers of two of the displayed books. If we turn to the words of the poem, we may attempt to explain the sitter’s situation: he is a collector of books, a fashioner of a personal library, who spends more time dashing away flies and dust from his volumes than reading them and gaining knowledge. Indeed, of what is inside the books (neither word nor book touch my mind.)

In the poem, the poet has the fool employ an historically referential comparison that informs the kind of folly the ‘book fool’ represents. He refers to Ptolemy, the historical book collector *par excellence*, who had *(wanted all the books of the world).* Indeed, a significant aspect of the Ptolemaic dynasty’s reign of Egypt from 300 BC to 30 BC was the establishment of the grand library of Alexandria, which sought to acquire not only every published book, or scroll, in the known world, but also to translate the entire *œuvre* into Greek.¹¹ The story of the library’s ‘vanishing’ is one of murky certainty, but its historical significance plays an important role in developing the particularities of the book fool’s predicament. Much of the library was burned during Julius Caesar’s civil war in 48 BC, and what was left

was definitively lost during the Coptic papacy of Theophilus (Theopdosius I), in the late fourth century.

In 391 AD, in response to the brewing conflict between the city’s pagans and Christians, Theophilus burnt the idolatrous temple of Serapis—also known as the “daughter library”—where the remnants of the original library were stored.\textsuperscript{12} For Brant, in the fifteenth century, the sources from the available historical record about the library’s demise would have related especially to this later moment. This may help explain why, in numerous version and translations of this poem, the fool ensures to point out Ptolemy’s lack of Christian faith, and, therefore, his inability to follow the divinely ordained law. In Locher’s Latin, the poet writes that Ptolemy (did not have the arcane law of the document). The “document” here would be the lessons from the Christian Gospels. In sum, the reference to the Library of Alexandria is important, not only because it is the first that the fools make in the entire book, but also because it underscores the dangers of overly conservative religious doctrine that leads to the destruction of the possible wisdom gleaned from the Classical era and its texts. The reference thus expresses an anxiety about a religious zeal that clouds the benefit of the Classical past, an anxiety explored in chapter one’s discussion of the early humanism typified by Grüninger and Brant, who responded such ignorance by advocating and instituting reading of the Classics through accessible illustrated editions and novel curricula. Two hundred years after Brant, the historian of the \textit{Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire} Edward Gibbon would

bemoan the final destruction of the library in similar terms. He describes Theophilus’ “pious indignation” against the book collection in the idolatrous temple:

The valuable library of Alexandria was pillaged or destroyed; and, near twenty years afterwards, the appearance of the empty shelves excited the regret and indignation of every spectator whose mind was not totally darkened by religious prejudice. The compositions of ancient genius, so many of which have irretrievably perished, might surely have been excepted...for the amusement and instruction of succeeding ages...¹³ (italics mine)

It seems, then, that the Ptolemaic library stages the conflict between religious zeal and intellectual pursuit. Of course, the Ptolemaic dynasty could not have curated the collection it did without large sums of money. Further, libraries were (and are) not only significant locations of scholarship and knowledge but are also places of public display—display of cultural capital, of social standing, and, perhaps most vitally, of wealth. As art historian Dora Thornton elucidates in her study of the Renaissance Scholar in his Study, a gentleman’s library would both demonstrate an individual’s personal wealth and “the ways in which modern...culture rivalled that of ancient Greece and Rome.”¹⁴ Though Thornton’s study is centered on Renaissance Italy, the terms in which she describes the perception and intention of the personal library remain relevant for the issues brought forth in this preliminary poem. For a book collector in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, the study acted as the conceptual marriage of overflowing royal and papal treasuries and solemn monastic spaces of reflection and study.¹⁵ The collector’s prestige was thus due to the appearance of literacy and learning and of being in an economic position in which recreational reading was possible.

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¹⁴ Dora Thornton, The Scholar in His Study: Ownership and Experience in Renaissance Italy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 2.
¹⁵ Ibid., 3.
As printing technology advanced into the sixteenth century—causing books to decline in price and general readership to broaden—the status one could earn by simply owning books diminished, and collectors moved toward developing scholarly pursuits and expanding their collection to other scholarly apparatuses, such as astronomical and geometric tools. The poet describes the fool in this first poem as in the middle of this cultural transition. The fool only recognizes the status symbol in the monetary aspect of book ownership, rather than the developing notions of attaining cultural capital through scholarship. For the fool, devoted learning is tantamount to insanity, "Qui studet affluo meum / sit studus & amens." (he who studies, in constant motion, would become (in present subjunctive) stupid and demented (amens being the appending of “out of” and “mind”).) The fool later reasons that the risk is too high: why burrow his head in books when he can simply pay others to learn for him and teach him the bare bones vocabulary of high-minded conversation? For the fool, books are always a status symbol, and his library thus serves as a vacuous sign of the owner’s scholarship.

Earlier in the poem, the poet assures his readers that it was no mistake the fool of books was the first mentioned, and we may take this to correspond to the significance the author places on approaches and attitudes of reading within the ecosystem of the text. The first example of ignorance, amongst the hundred and ten soon to be presented, is that which derives from a knowing negligence of the wisdom found in books. Even for the fact that the fool has privileged access to the books that hold within them the possibility of enlightenment, he prefers to use monetary means to posture as wise in the stead of cultivating true knowledge through study. In this way, the fool is the negative counterexample to the way of reading suggested by the poem’s prologue, that is, reading a book as if it were a mirror.
In the prologue, the poet links the book to a mirror, and it is the kind of reading associated with the mirrored perspective that the poet recommends for approaching the book. In the Latin version of the poem, the suggested approach comes in the form of the vocative command: (contemplate thus this mirror). It is important to note, however, that just as the conditions of social status through book ownership changed with the invention of the printing press (and its consequent economic and intellectual ripples) so too did the idea of a mirror’s reflection not hold a single static meaning in the fifteenth century. Thus, to say that considering a text as a mirror is tantamount to asserting that it is an exact reproduction of reality is to implant a modern notion of the mirror’s function onto an era where something quite different might have been at play. Indeed, the scholarly literature on the uses of the mirror as an image in paintings, texts, and illustrations during the periods in and around the Ship of Fools’s writing is vast and inconclusive on the matter of whether or not a mirror could be understood as a faithful representation of visual reality. The common, and perhaps reductive, understanding in both material and cultural history is that the time of Brant’s writing of the Ship of Fools was a time of transition for the meaning of the mirrored image. In the realm of literature, that is, in determining what was meant by calling a text a mirror, this transition relates to the aesthetic distinctions we may draw from the two more novel mirror technologies of Brant’s era, the convex mirror and the flatter steel glass, and an earlier model of a book as all-enveloping speculum.

16 Two important works on the subject are Herbert Grabes, The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and the English Renaissance (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) and Sabine Melchior-Bonnet, Histoire du miroir (Imago, 1994).
The *speculum* literature of the years prior to Brant implied a certain magical and ideal example coming from the reflected image. The concept may have been influenced by a skepticism—due, in part, to ineffectual mirror technology—in the artificially reflected image. This skepticism was complimented by a belief that only through spiritual means, that is, through God’s vision, could a true image of reality be produced. Readers look into a *speculum* not to see their true selves as they are, but what they must be to fulfill a heavenly ideal. Though this referent may certainly play a role in the totalizing and encyclopedic vision of the *Ship of Fools*’ satirical scope (especially if one considers the satire as a sort of inversion of the *speculum*’s mission of the positive exemplum\(^\text{17}\)), other mirror technologies may bring forth equally important considerations about the reader’s relationship with the book. For instance, a book may be a convex mirror if it is an intentional distortion of reality that exposes the intentions of the mediating force of the image’s distortion, or, the author. A book may be a mirror of steel glass insofar as it shows a more accurate image than the other mirrors but must also be regularly polished by the owner to retain its reproductive ability.\(^\text{18}\)

It is at the intersection of these three materially connected conceptions of the book as a mirror that a readership is constructed. Insofar as the book comes out of a tradition of the *speculum*, it prepares the reader for a mirror that is a total vision of the society it scorns. Projecting itself out of this tradition, the *Ship of Fools* also contains those elements that assert the reader’s engaged interaction and careful reading. A close reader

\(^{17}\) Haubenreich, “The Press, the Mirror, and the Window,” esp. 381.

will be able to determine the author's *bent* vision only by taking the book in hand and by making the mirror-book a tool for the reader's own original interpretation.

The demand for engagement is not dissimilar to Roland Barthes's delineation of two types of readers: those who consume and those who write for themselves.¹⁹ Those who "simply consume" the text for the sake of pleasure remain passive, and, in Barthes's vocabulary, ignore the 'death of the author' which allows the reader to take the meaning into their own hands. The productive reader, on the other hand, engages in "textual criticism," which is itself an act of writing and an act of asserting one's own subjectivity. The introductory 'book fool' is meant to be so repulsive to the constructed reader of the text because he treats the book as if it were simply an ornamental steel glass rondel, letting its reflection become murky for lack of polishing and engagement. From the start, then, we learn that the *Ship of Fools* is meant for manipulation. Moreover, we can surmise that what was especially disappointing about the image of the vain scholar is that he held a fly-swatter in his hand in the stead of a writing utensil.

Thus, how may one proceed to manipulate? Let us begin with the word itself. As may be obvious, the word's origins are in the hands—its Latin version, "*manipulus*" involves the appending of the Latin "*manus*" (hand) with "*plenus*" (fill). In its Roman context, the *manipule* was a military term used to denote a double company of soldiers that met under the standard of a pole surrounded by “handfuls” of wheat²⁰. Around the nineteenth century, the word took up the meaning we are familiar with today: “to

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²⁰ It was not until its adaptation in early French that it took the transitive verb form, but when it was brought to English it was meant to refer specifically to the context of mining silver ore—up until sometime in the late eighteenth, or early nineteenth, century.
handle.” The corporal meaning of the word points us to what I argue was, and still is, a vital aspect of embodiment in reading. The role of the human hand in written works is a constitutive one, and the body has always been involved in the act of reading. Reading “is not an abstract operation of the intellect,” but rather a use of the body and, when productive, an inscription in space.

As the technology of reading changes, the perceived role of the body in reading also adapts, and this sometimes creates tensions that reveal fascinating characteristics of reading and cultural practices. The early years of the printing press are especially illuminating in this discussion, as the transition from the completely hand-written manuscript (from Latin “ manus” for hand and the past participle of the “ scriber,” to write) to the printed book relates to a transition of reading practices and manipulation tactics. On the scholarly side of the question, my focus on the traces of this transitory period counters the grounding narrative shared by historians of the book like Elizabeth Eisenstein, who argue that the introduction of the printing press enacted a revolution in culture and reading practices. Accordingly, the analysis I arrive at aligns more with the narrative told by Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, that the transition between media involved much more slippage and gradual change than a total revolution. In some ways, the annotations left by humanists in early printed books are forms of individualizing rebellion against the standardized character of the mass produced printed book. Thus, by studying the traces left by readers in the early years of printing,

22 Chartier, The Order of Books, 8.
24 Febvre, The Coming of the Book.
25 “The humanist approached his book, in the first instance, as the Californian teenager of the 1950s approached a car made in Detroit.” Anthony Grafton, “The Humanist as
what many scholars call the *incunabula* era, we may point to ways that readers brought practices and traditions from the scribal and manuscript era to the new medium of the printed book.

**Hand-Coloring**

An example of this historical transition may be found in the coloring of the Grüninger *Ship of Fools*’s illustrations. Indeed, of the 117 woodcut illustrations in the book, 77 are in some manner colored by hand. The extent of this coloring varies dramatically throughout the work. At the beginning of the book, in the first twenty illustrations, the coloring seems the most professional: there are clean strokes and a clearly composed color palette of red, green, brown, blue, purple, and lighter versions of brown and red for shading and tone (Figure 9). These recall the prominent colors of the carnival in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Generally, the colors also add to the composition of the image, and sometimes connect thematically similar items—that which is plainly foolish is almost always in red, and the purple is often connected with the depiction of wisdom or the victim of folly. After these initial colored-in images, colors begin dropping off the palette, and for fifty subsequent woodcuts the only colored figure is the fool in his red robes (Figure 10). By the seventy-third illustration, there is no color at all (Figure 11), that is, until the red fool returns briefly in the ninety-eighth and ninety-ninth illustrations, and for four interspersed images near the end of the collection. The penultimate illustration of the *Ship* itself includes some hand-colored red figures blowing wind instruments and bidding the reader farewell.

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Reader,” in Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, eds., *A History of Reading in the West* (Univ of Massachusetts Press, 2003) 196.
What we know most certainly about these hand colored illustrations is that they were not done in Grüninger’s workshop: he never directly employed an illuminator, and printing workshops rarely provided such a service. It is most probable that the book was bought without binding and without color, and that the customer took it upon himself to hire a binder to bind it and an illuminator to color in the images. The gradual depletion of color may also be the result of a number of possible causes. These include a possible deal between the illuminator and the buyer that the illuminator would only use a certain amount of paint to a particular cost and ran through that sum sometime near the twentieth illustration. He may have maintained the theme of the red robe, since it may have been the cheapest, and to achieve some semblance of continuity. The same illuminator may have performed the red strikethroughs that appear across each initial (capital letter) throughout the book (Figure 12). It could also be possible that the buyer was only interested in the initial illustrations’ coloring, because these would be the most presentable pages to visitors of his book collection. Further, another possible explanation derives from the recognition that many of the non-colored images in the middle of the collection are duplicate woodcuts from the first forty pages of the book. It may be that the buyer was not particularly desirous to pay for the repeated illumination of images already expensively decorated in the earlier pages. Without a clear line of provenance, or of documentation related to this particular book’s coloring, we cannot achieve certainty related to these questions.

Further, we cannot unreflectively assume that all the coloring took place in the same location, time, or with the same owner or illuminator. A most striking example that provokes equivocation is the blue paint employed in four of the later illustrations (Figure 8). The figures in blue are colored in a relatively thin paint, and whoever filled
in the color did so with little notice to the lines the woodcut provides. The blue overflows past the outlines, which contrasts with the cleaner attention to detail in the other colored-in illustrations. Thus, we must remain in the realm of informed conjecture; yet, for sake of greater contextual understanding, we may discuss the role of image illumination in the period in which we presume that these images were painted.

The history of early printed book hand-coloring is scant at best, so this section will be brief. Fascinatingly, the most useful places to look for information about this practice are the ends of chronological studies of manuscript illumination. A prominent aspect of manuscript culture, and of scribal book networks, illumination experienced a decline through the early printing years of the fifteenth century, seeing its demise as a fringe and especially luxurious addition to a book in the sixteenth century. Illuminators would sometimes provide their services for initials in printed books, or, in some more rare cases in the early sixteenth century, sell their services as illuminators for illustrated printed books. But, as interest in illustrated books also declined in the sixteenth century—explored in the first chapter with relation to the demise of Grüninger’s workshop—so too did the labor market for scribal illuminators. Thus, the evidence presented by the Grüninger edition of hand-colored woodcut illustrations may be understood in the context of the book’s place in an era transitioning from the sumptuously illuminated books of the centuries before the advent of the printing press.

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Hand coloring is an example of the way readers may manipulate because it involves making the book their own through manual labor, whether that labor be directly from the readers’ hands or no. What proves most interesting is less who performs the manipulation than the book owners’ implicit understanding that the object they purchased from a print shop was not to be passively received. Rather, by binding it (the original binding of the Grüninger edition is no longer extant, and it is now bound in what is most probably an early nineteenth century binding) and by filling in the colorless space of the illustrations with their own paint, the readers retain the active and embodied sense of reading that is indicative of manipulation. Of course, when it comes to approaching the text itself, readers also leave physical marks of their reading in the book that further illuminate the implications of their respective manipulations.

Figure 8: Example of blue illumination in Grüninger’s Ship of Fools. Found in “de status spiritualis abatu” (of spiritual status abused).
Note especially the lack of close attention to the outlines, which has caused the paint to bleed past the lines.
Figure 9: Example of Fully colored-in illustration in Wesleyan’s Grüninger Ship of Fools.

Figure 10: Example of Partially Colored-in Illustration from Grüninger Ship of Fools.

Figure 11: Example of uncolored-in Illustration from Grüninger Ship of Fools.

Figure 12: Example of red strikethrough of initials.
THE MANICULE

The next of these traces is the most obviously corporal, and one of the most prevalent, of an early modern reader’s ways of marking a text: the ‘manicule.’ Known also as the “pointer,” “bishop’s fist,” “digit,” and an “index,” the symbol (☞) is so commonly found in the margins of early printed books that it has been nearly taken for granted, and unnoticed, in the history of reading practices. This prevalence and negligence is further evidenced by its lack of a standard name. In his chapter on proposing a history of the manicule, William Sherman argues that the manicule is the best name for the symbol because it is the “most general, accurate, and neutral description,” that also suggests that the mark is both “for” and “by” the readers. To consider the symbol, then we must also consider the kind of reading one did in the fourteenth to sixteenth century. This reading was one geared not toward only comprehension or enjoyment, but additionally to the memorization of key phrases or passages the readers could later recall in writing or in scholarly intercourse. In her discussion on the role of the book in the Book of Memory, Mary Carruthers describes how this desire to construct paradigms for memory-training involved the reader assimilating the text to his memory through making it “familiar.” This familiarization enacted the book’s transcendent inscription on the reader’s soul, and, sometimes in more corporal understandings, on the reader’s flesh itself. Thus, we may say that humanist readers rarely read casually. Pen in hand, they were ready to mark parts of the text that they would memorize, copy into a notebook kept especially for ‘memorable’ phrases, or

28 Sherman, Used Books, 29.
29 Ibid., 32
setentiae, or to leave a note in the book’s margins next to a passage that incited a personal philosophical or intellectual response.⁴¹

It is within these boundaries between the material (the book) and the intellectual (the memory) that the manicule fits as a sign for the mediating corporal act of reading. When readers constructed their “mnemonic ‘storehouses,’” they did so in the “province of the hand.”⁴² This is demonstrated as much by the manicules they drew as it is in the humanist curriculum which studied classical (Ciceronian) rhetoric’s focus on ‘pointing’ and ‘indexing’ as a means of holding attention and producing memorable gestures.⁴³ Writing in an essay in a collected catalogue, Writing on Hands, Martin Kemp asserts that the hand was an essential tool for “personal expression—for the manifestation of individual character and identity.”⁴⁴ Even a cursory glance at the eighty-three images in the aforementioned catalogue, curated by Claire Richter Sherman, shows how the hand was where “matter, mind, and spirit,” collided.⁴⁵ Even in the sixteenth century, when printers added their own standardized version of the manicule in their typographic tool chest—using the symbol to delineate important passages or breaks in the text—readers continued to draw their own hands into the margins. They did so in such distinctive ways that we may view their manicules as personalized as were signatures and monograms.⁴⁶ Hand-drawn manicules often appear directly on the

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⁴¹ Anthony Grafton, “The Humanist as Reader,” in Cavallo and Chartier, A History of Reading in the West.
⁴² Sherman, Used Books, 48
⁴³ Ibid.
⁴⁵ Ibid., 21.
⁴⁶ Sherman, 51.
outer margins of the page, which gives the impression that the hand extends from the “now invisible reader’s body off the edge of the margin.”

William Sherman likens the off-edge manicule to the late antique iconographic motif of the *manus dei*, or hand of god. This hand arrives, sans accompanying body, from off the edge of the artistic medium to point out a miracle or divinely sanctioned scene, or to bless those figures depicted. In the *Ship of Fools*, a *manus dei* appears at the top of the woodcut accompanying a poem on foolishly teaching wisdom (Figure 3). It is pointing out what may be interpreted as the idolatrous and hubristic quality of worshipping wisdom and heeding those who profess to teach it. In this sense, the manicule takes on symbolic power by embodying how readers make the book their own sovereign domain, wherein they can point to what is meaningful and worth further attention and reading.

![Figure 13: Woodcut illustration for “Of wisdom meetings,” in the Grüninger Ship of Fools. Note the manus dei coming from the sky.](image)

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37 Ibid., 37.
38 Ibid.
Because of its sheer pervasiveness, the personalized aspect of its design and placement, and the possible broader philosophical or theological implications of its use, the manicule is a difficult symbol to study with the intention of assimilating a previous reader’s reading—as represented by their annotations—to a present understanding so divorced from the past reader’s situation. Moreover, an attempt to generalize one particular set of annotations to a broader historical scheme would do a disfavor to the very personal nature of the annotations themselves. In other words, we cannot explain the Protestant Reformation from a study of the manicule. Rather, it is more fruitful to focus on the manner in which these annotations, as Anthony Grafton writes about in relation to humanist Guillaume Budé’s marginalia, “give off the scent of human flesh and blood.”

A look at annotation opens up the human world of a reader in all its complexity and idiosyncrasy. It reminds us how readers not only refuse to “be bound by authors’ efforts to fix the meaning of their texts, librarians’ efforts to regulate the behavior of their clients, or teachers’ efforts to establish right ways of reading,” but also how they refuse to be used by the inquisitive historian’s designs to make them representative or perfectly legible for our contemporary consideration.

In Wesleyan’s Grüninger copy of the Ship of Fools, a writer’s hand has left seventeen detailed manicules in the margins. Of the seventeen, fourteen point to underlined text, one points to non-underlined text, and two point to pictures. All but one of the manicules are in the same style, which is defined by a cuffed hand drawn in the form of a fist with an elongated index finger extended toward the first line of

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40 Ibid., 141.
indicated text. The back of the hand is usually drawn with a rudimentary cross-hatching that effects some depth to the drawing. An example of the more typical manicule appears in an earlier poem on (of foolish edifices began), in which a reader drew a manicule pointing to two lines of epigrammatic text (Figure 14). Broadly, the poem highlights the foolishness of improper preparation in advance for projects, and its specific focus is starting an architectural edifice without the necessary funds already laid out. The annotator points to a text that translates to “whoever dreams large, also struggles greatly to make it.” Vitally, there is no apparent system or all-encompassing continuity to the reader’s sixteen manicules. As suggested above, they mainly point to epigrammatic phrases or lines, which may have been material for memorization or, simply, for return at a later referential read. Nearly half the manicules point to the last lines of a poem, which usually include the more memorable and generalizable adages.

Why the reader points to a more practical maxim in a poem on quarrelling and court cases, then later points simply to the woodcut accompanying the poem about honoring one’s parents, may only be answerable only by the reader at his time of reading. We cannot explain, for instance, why a regular distribution of manicules in the first thirty pages of the book is followed by an absence of the annotation for nearly fifty pages. Indeed, between a poem on the foolishness of delaying duties until tomorrow
and another on being wise if one (flees insane and tasteless men), the reader leaves his manicules off the page. Readers take to hand what they perceive to be content worthy of notation, and any attempt at a faithful reconstruction of their reading would, I argue, deprive the past historical actors of the insurmountable and unthematisable idiosyncrasy of their personal reading.

In the process of constructing a presence from the traces of past historical actors, we would run the risk of tapping into what Ewa Domanska, adapting Gísli Pálsson’s theoretical vocabulary, would call the dominant paradigm of paternalistic relations with the past. Though Domanska writes primarily about this paradigm in the context of human relations with the environment and with typically non-agential objects, the discussion may be transposed to the present problem by considering the ways that historians take the human traces of the past as material that they must speak “for” and act “on behalf of.” Historians force past agents into a “paternal contract” in which they assert mastery and communicative proxy for what then becomes a figure with less autonomous independence and with more passive representativeness. A positive model out of this possibly pernicious paradigm is a relational epistemology. This involves not only knowing what Nurit Bird-David defines as understanding “the world by focusing primarily on relatedness, from a related point of view, within the shifting

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42 Ibid., 347.
43 Gabriel Kachuck, “Historical Writing and Audience,” Wesleyan University, May 2017. In possession of the author. In this paper, I transpose Domanska’s discussion of presence and the paternalistic paradigm to the question of writing histories for people that will never read them, or who may not even have the literacy necessary to read it at all.
horizons of the related viewer.” It is also an epistemology that functions reflectively under the inherent tensions and ambiguities that are involved with approximating the respective horizons of other viewers. It is, perhaps, related to the kind of knowledge we may acquire with an ‘allegorical perspective’ on the past that I support throughout this thesis.

We may glean from this enigmatic manipulation of the text the importance of embodiment in early modern reading. Representing the intersection between mind, body, and spirit, the manicule can inform an understanding about the total immersion that humanist reading involved. Now, of course, manipulation via marginalia is not the only manipulation that is possible—with the pen, especially. Indeed, to transition between the more embodied, physical reading that we see in annotation and the more ephemeral intellectual manipulation of interpretation and adaption, a look at the first apparent annotation of the Grüninger artifact will prove useful. This adaptation amounts to a projection of the allegory, out of its original temporal context, into its future, or, the present of its reader.

**ALLEGORICAL PROJECTION AND INSCRIPTION**

At the beginning of the book, we are presented with a long and numbered list of names, written in a clean French cursive hand. The list is given a title of sorts (Figure 15), in Latin, which translates to “The Ship of Philosophy that Without Being Made of True Sails Submerged in the Port of Stupidity 1795. The names of the crew, which were in the ship” (Figure 15).

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Following the title, the annotator filled the rest of that page and the entirety of the next with seventy-three numbered names that are all affiliated in some way with the French Revolution. The annotator lists major figures like Honoré Mirabeau, the finance minister Necker, and Georges Danton, and some less known figures like Ducroquet Perruquier (wigmaker), a member of Camille Desmoulins Jacobin club de cordeliers guillotined during the terror\textsuperscript{45}, and a Dutch banker also guillotined in 1794, Jean Conrad de Kock (noted in the list as “Le banquier Kock”). Unlike the previously discussed means of manipulation, we may use the historical record to explain with relative certainty some aspects of this annotation. Through research of these names, and their particular ordering and wording, it becomes clear that the annotator most probably used an article in the France section of the February 1794 edition of the Journal historique et littéraire as a reference in preparing the list.\textsuperscript{46}

\textsuperscript{45} Ernest Hamel, Précis de l'histoire de la Révolution: mai 1789-octobre 1795 (Flammarion, 1897), 578.

\textsuperscript{46} “Journal historique et littéraire,” February 1794, 219-234.
The Journal was a conservative monthly publication based in Luxembourg and Liège. It was edited between 1774 and 1794—and renamed from its original name of Clef des cabinets—by Belgian Jesuit professor of theology, François-Xavier de Feller. The articles in the Journal were primarily summaries of events, of impact in areas both historique and littéraire, around Europe. Generally, the tone and political bend of the Journal matched that of its editor, that is, conservative reaction against Enlightenment philosophy and ‘Enlightened’ political policy. In the context of Netherlandish politics and the Hapsburg monarchy, de Feller used the Journal as a way of publicizing anti-Josephist polemical writing, such as Jesuit Louis Patouillet’s version of the “Jansenist Bourgfontaine plot.”47 In an article on France in the Journal’s February 1794 edition, the writer bemoans the perceived failure of the aims of the revolutionary struggle and its leaders, especially those guillotined during the Terror or otherwise taken by the temptation of “greed” and “sin.” Through the course of its lamenting, the article references nearly all the figures mentioned in the list in our artifact, in the very same order. Additionally, the less common names of some of the included figures are used similarly in both the list and the article. Thus, equivocation regarding the connection between these two texts is quite negligible. As to determining what meaning we can then ascribe to this connection, and to the inscription of these names into the book, we must turn toward the kind of informed interpretation that has been carried out throughout this chapter.

What is fascinating about this annotated list is not only its origins, but also the kind of reapplication-oriented manipulation it enacts with regards to the allegory of the *Ship of Fools*. Of course, those living during the time of the French Revolution were no strangers to allegory. The rhetoric, personal imaginings, and political policy of the Revolution’s leading figures took up, and struggled with, the model of classical republicanism and its possible application to their own time, thereby exemplifying a political ideology deriving from *figural* allegory. Historian Harold Talbot Parker likens the revolutionary relationship with the classical past to a “cult” of antiquity, which began “as a thing of feeling among a few, then spread to the people and to the well-to-do, became a fashion and then a fad, was transformed from a thing of feeling to a thing of forms, declined and passed away.”

The stories from the Roman past served as matrices for revolutionaries’ own political action. They viewed figures like Marat and Lepeletier as not only revolutionary martyrs and saints but also as modern equivalents to Mucius Scaevola and Junius Brutus of Roman antiquity. The oath of the Horatii, allegorically depicted in the neoclassical style by Jacques Louis David, held a special place in the public imagination’s justification of revolutionary violence. As Simon Schama writes, “their France would be Rome reborn…It thus followed, surely, that for such a nation to be born, many would necessarily die.”

In his discussion of this “cult of antiquity,” Talbot sets out a chronological schema for the Revolution’s relationship with the past. It follows that from their reading

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49 Ibid., 90.
of antiquity in the collèges, and a consequent admiration for a supposed golden age of Roman republicanism, key revolutionary figures, like Desmoulins, Madame Roland, and Saint-Just, first experienced “regret” at the absence of Roman virtue and republicanism in their present era. They sought to recreate it in their own society, then went back and forth on whether the French people were even of moderate enough character to mimic Roman virtue. Finally, they attempted to develop institutional reforms to cultivate Roman character in the populous, then either saw the venture as completely failed or saw themselves as transcending the classical model. Analyzing almost all the speeches given to the Revolutionary assembly, Parker finds that the majority on the conservative side of the revolution viewed antiquity as something not to be imitated or adapted, while those on the left saw the Republic as something to be admired and emulated.51

The philosophy of the “cult of antiquity” is incumbent on a view of history that is allegorical in the figural sense that Peter Burke describes—and as discussed earlier in chapter two regarding historical parallels. The revolutionaries saw the present as the possible reenactment, or religious rebirth, of the past, which then brings the past closer through this “occult or invisible connection” of historical parallels.52 Thus, the philosophy of the day was that “history is a school where statesmen might gain wisdom…the orator, his opponent, and perhaps his listeners, took these allusions [to antiquity] more seriously than mere fugitive figures of speech are usually taken.”53 By the height of the heat of the Terror (sometime between 1792 to 1794), during the apex

51 Ibid., 84.
52 Burke, “History as Allegory,” 341.
53 Parker, Cult of Antiquity, 80.
of leadership from classical allegorists *extraordinaires* Saint-Just and Robespierre, the goal of resurrecting the virtue of antiquity morphed from a political means for establishing a republic to an “end in itself,” thus playing a part in justifying the violence and executions of the Terror. For opponents of the revolution, or of the turns it took in the late eighteenth century, the allegorizing of antiquity might have been seen as a dangerous path toward excuse of improper and apparently malicious political action.

Approaching the annotator’s use of allegory in this context of the use of historical allegory and a *prefigurative* past allows us to consider how a reader of Wesleyan’s Grüninger *Ship of Fools* saw it fit to inscribe the revolutionaries as crew members on the vessel. In brief, one may view the annotation as a conservative countervailing gesture against the idea of a resurgence of Roman virtue through a figurative philosophy of history. The annotator concedes that the revolutionaries he lists entered on a ship of philosophy, which might allude to the ways in which the Revolution was perceived as a practical application of philosophy for the betterment of the polis. The annotator adds, however, that because the ship did not have “true sails” it sank in the gate of stupidity. We may take these sails to mean a component of statecraft which catches the source of the ship’s motion, the wind, toward the intended purpose. In light of the referenced journal’s Jesuit leanings, and the fact that the “cult of antiquity” was also used as a rhetoric tool for the rise of anti-clericalism (finding expression in the Cult of Reason), the missing sails may represent what the reader would perceive as a dangerous and ill-advised emersion of secularism in politics. Further, the annotator may have very well been combining Plato’s articulation of the Ship of State, which flounders when its crew ignores true philosophy yet admires sophistry, and
Brant’s *Ship of Fools*, which sinks because of a foolishness connected to a negligence of salutary faith and religious wisdom by churchman and layman alike.

This allegorical interpretation of the French Revolution through the *Ship of Fools* may be the expression of a conservative reaction to the French Revolution. This reaction may be given philosophical articulation and context via a brief examination of thinkers like Edmund Burke and his more radical French colleague, Joseph de Maistre. While the two thinkers’ reactions to the French Revolution span far wider than their idea of the ideal role of religion in state building and statecraft, I will limit our discussion to this particular area in order highlight the possible intellectual viewpoint from which the annotator saw the philosophy of the French Revolution as lacking the directing guidance of faith, and, therefore, bound for failure in a foolish port. In his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, published in 1790, Irish statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke remarks that religion is indeed a “prejudice,” but he qualifies that it is necessary one that involves “profound and extensive wisdom.” For Burke, Man is “by his constitution a religious animal,” and the societal contracts people enter, which constitute all political collectives, should be consecrated by an affiliated religious establishment. This is necessary not only to instill a sense of possible moral perfection but also to “operate with an wholesome awe upon free citizens.”

When Burke’s argument in favor of religious establishment reached back to France, it was taken up to great avail by the Savoyard philosopher Joseph de Maistre, who expounded and expanded these “anti-Enlightenment” notions to a far more

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55 Ibid., 92.
56 Ibid.
radically conservative end.57 Indeed, de Maistre went so far as to say that no political institution is valid unless it is “sacrosanct” and ruled over by a divinely sanctioned monarchical ruler. This radicalism is affiliated with his philosophical assertion that citizens cannot make a permanent obligation based on voluntary consent. Indeed, a people submits to a sovereignty because it understands that “it is something sacred that it can neither create nor destroy.”58 de Maistre argues that in order to reach peaceful stability an imposing theological imperative to follow the codes of a particular society must play a governing role. These notions of the necessity of the sacred in governance, which might have been to the annotator’s mind left behind by the Revolution, may inform what motivated the annotator of the Grüninger *Ship of Fools* to inscribe the list of revolutionaries into the front pages. The annotation is, in this understanding, a self-inscription into the allegory of the *Ship of Fools* that also acts contrary to a popular form of the *figural* allegory in the period of seeing the past as a prefiguration of a redeemable present. The conditions of the annotator’s application of Brant’s allegory are that both the annotation and Brant’s text speak to particular ascriptions to allegorical and satirical perspectives of society rather than solely on figurative historical parallels posited by French Revolutionary rhetoric.

This list is certainly an example of the way readers may manipulate a text, especially an allegorical one, to make it their own. By taking the book in hand, and by possibly reflecting on its relevance and adaptability to his/her own time and his/her own political or philosophical stances, this eighteenth-century reader of Brant’s text

consequently took up the position of the text’s writer. He/she enacted this conceptual gesture through participatory engagement in the allegory, which presupposed an implicit understanding that a reading not possible by Brant in his time centuries before the French Revolution is still valid and inscribable.

In this chapter, I have argued that the act of reading is never simply a passive reception of unmediated transmission. Brant requests that his readers realize this notion, and many of his readers very much take up the imperative of engagement through their manipulation. This is evident from the presence of annotations in books like our artifact and most especially from the way we may articulate these annotations as gestures that affirm readers’ power to take a book in hand and make it their own. As a necessary consequence of the personal nature of these readers’ manipulations, we encounter substantial difficulties if our goal is to explain from our temporally distant position their motivations for manipulating. The readers cannot correct our presumptions and assumptions, and, perhaps, even they would not be able to perfectly explain their reasoning after the fact of localized and situational engagement. I, a reader myself, have thus taken the traces of these readers’ manipulations, which turned those readers into writers themselves, in my own hands to manipulate them into something legible for my own readers of this present thesis. I hope I have sufficiently demonstrated that if we are reflective about the ways we manipulate these traces for our ends, then we may reach the allegorical perspective that takes into account the instability of the past as an object of study.
CONCLUSION

This thesis has been dedicated to proposing what I call an allegorical perspective on the past. I have attempted to model this perspective through my approach to the artifact anchoring the study. Within this perspective, we have constructed a story to accompany this artifact, reflected on its archivization, and pointed to its manipulation by its readers. On the whole, the reasons I have provided for the necessity of considering this perspective are theoretical in character. This is because I believe that a robust conceptual framework is an indispensable component for worthwhile practical action. That is to say that even though my arguments do not amount to a manifesto for redirecting the historical discipline to more self-reflective thinking, the possible practical considerations that can arrive as consequents to my theoretical arguments and my applied model have played a significant part in the narrative I have written and in the arguments I have put forth.

My landscape view of historical thinking and writing is from the position of an undergraduate who has pursued an ‘un-disciplined’ path of study guided by a fascination with our relationship with the past. My perspective and positioning are certainly particular to my situation. I feel it imperative to note nonetheless that from this standpoint the historical discipline seems lost to serving life in any way that is anything other than a never-truly-moving revolving door of accumulated facts, figures, and tidy explanations that are written—then perpetually rewritten with more ostensible subtlety—through the ‘discovery’ of ‘new’ archived sources. In sum, life in the lens of
today’s history seems much more mummified than preserved and celebrated.\(^1\) An overvaluing of the methodology of historical study, bolstered with a bad faith belief that the historical consciousness is capable of grasping and transmitting the past with the ‘purity’ of pseudo-scientific objectivity and without transformative mediation, affects a great disservice to the complexities of human life, to the wonderful idiosyncrasies of the human experience in time, and it disarms the historical consciousness of the possible self-affirmation that arrives from a reflective and subjective—in other words, an allegorical—perspective.

We cannot escape history, and we very well should not, because otherwise unreflective solipsism will produce a kind of pernicious presentism we certainly do not want to experience fully assimilated into our consciousness or embodied in our actions.\(^2\) An earnest consideration of the past in the allegorical perspective might prove to be the germ of further manipulation of our relationship with the past that works within, rather than entirely without, the inherited and accepted traditions and methods of historical writing. It might also properly dialogue with the necessary and interruptive challenges the implications of the human experience in time imposes on those very traditions.

Katherine Anne Porter preludes her 1962 novel, *Ship of Fools*, with a profoundly simple humanist realization. It is a point that Brant never seems to make in his *Narrenschiff*, that Bosch perhaps hints to through his inclusion of the enigmatic owl in the mast of his *Nef de Fous*. It is the reminder that “I am a passenger on that ship.”\(^3\)

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\(^1\) The vocabulary of this sentiment comes from a reading of, and reflection on, Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Use and Abuse of History*, (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1957).

\(^2\) We want this kind of solipsism neither in the lecture halls and libraries of universities nor amongst the chambers of our governments.

Whether the ship sinks or not is entirely up to us, and once we wrest control of it we may redirect it somewhere else than the foolish port to which we seem to be heading. We should strive to refuse to cynically resign in the face of the current situation. We should also reject any notion of perceived ‘lateness’ to understanding our predicament, hopelessly bemoaning that the ship seems already so far off what we deem its proper course. All this does is rationalize a quietist retreat to the comfortable caves of critique.

The poet-protagonist, and satirized fool himself, of The Grateful Dead’s “Ship of Fools” perhaps best typifies this cynical stance. From this negative satirical—yet also tragic—example, we may construct a countervailing positive and optimistic model through interpretation. Likewise, if we take up the model of the allegorical perspective, then we may share in the roaring laughter of the perspicacious satirist whilst also engaging in the dogged allegorist’s devotion of constructing worthwhile meaning from the awesome quagmire of human experience. We end here, sailing off to Jerry Garcia’s lamenting chorus over the moaning minor chords of Keith Godchaux’s organ:

Ship of Fools:
On a cruel sea;
Ship of Fools:
Sail away from me.
It was later then I thought
When I first believed you;
Now I cannot share your laughter.
: Ship of Fools

Robert Hunter et al., eds., The Complete Annotated Grateful Dead Lyrics: The Collected Lyrics of Robert Hunter and John Barlow, Lyrics to All Original Songs, with Selected Traditional and Cover Songs (New York: Free Press, 2005), 222-223.

The punctuation is my own. The reference to the Dead is inspired by the loving memory of the author’s beloved uncle and devoted deadhead, Jon Hoffman (1952-2011).
A Note on the Type

This thesis was set in Baskerville, a type named in compliment to John Baskerville (1706-1775), a master printer and type-founder of eighteenth century England. Baskerville’s type is recognized in historical retrospect as a ‘transitional roman style,’ between the ‘old style’, such as Garamond and Palatino, and the ‘modern style’, typified by Didot and Bodoni. Key characteristics of his typeface are the high stroke contrast and the flourishing italics, such as the italic J with a horizontal center bar.

Along with his innovations in type, John Baskerville was also an inventive printer. He introduced the Netherlandish use of brass plates and ‘stones,’ and is known especially for ‘glazing,’ or pressing, his printed sheets with hot copper plates to give the paper the impression of a copper engraving.

Finally, and most relevant to this thesis, Baskerville’s first published sample of his typeface was his 1757 edition of Virgil’s works, the success of which earned him the position of University Printer at Cambridge the following year. He later printed a popular octavo edition of Milton’s Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained in 1758 and a folio Bible in 1763.6

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6 Josiah H. Benton, John Baskerville: Type-Founder and Printer, 1706-1775 (Boston: 1914).
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