

The ambiguous relationship between the genre of the novel and that of the epic constitutes one of the important aspects of the development of modern literature in the West. *Satyricon*, *Don Quixote*, *Eugene Onegin*, *Ulysses*, are examples of such novelistic confrontation with the tradition of the epic. *The Incomplete Manuscript*, a novel by Kamal Abdulla (and its translation into English by Anne Thompson) presents arguably the most radical, most self-conscious confrontation with this tradition – to a large extent a tradition of the separation of genres, periods, and cultures – as well as with the hermeneutic mode that accompanies it, that is, the mode of the "reconstitution" or "recovery of meaning" of an authoritative text.¹ Indeed, the ostensible topic of *The Incomplete Manuscript* is such hermeneutic process, a patient reading of an ancient manuscript, supposedly preparatory notes for a great epic: "Perhaps you have realised that I am talking about the ancient Azerbaijani epic, *The Book of Dada Gorgud*," writes the narrator at the beginning of the novel (p. 7). He provides an informative scholarly note, presenting the Azerbaijani epic, and marking its importance for

¹ See for example Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, ed. Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974) p. 270; *Le conflit des interprétations: essais d'herméneutique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969), p. 266: "récupération du sens."

all the Turkic peoples. *The Incomplete Manuscript* as a whole will claim the important place for this tradition, for the epic, and on the other hand will offer its novelistic ("dialogical," "interrupting") comprehension, well beyond the strict generic, ethnic, and cultural boundaries.

At the outset of the novel, the narrator-reader introduces the title hero of the epic text and its supposed author: a bard, a soothsayer, and a holy man, Dada or Father Gorgud, the pivotal figure in the epic, and even more so in the incomplete manuscript (and in *The Incomplete Manuscript*). One can say that the novel of Kamal Abdulla enacts and problematizes this confrontation between the ancient epic mythical tradition and its modern "deconstruction." Indeed, in the words of the narrator, the novel is based on the comparison between "the text of the literary version of the Epic and the Incomplete Manuscript" (p. 8), that is, the "notes" and the "observations" "written in the first person" (p. 7). The two modes of writing are professedly juxtaposed; they are nevertheless included in another first-person narrative (besides being "hidden" within a historical description of the Ganja's earthquake) in what we might call, with Mikhail Bakhtin a "polyphonic" novel.²

The reading of the ancient manuscript within the plot of *The Incomplete Manuscript* is apparently conducted as a scholarly work in an academic setting of

² See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), especially the chapter "Dostoevsky's Polyphonic Novel and Its Treatment in Critical Literature," pp. 7 et passim; М. М. Бахтин, *Проблемы Поэтики Достоевского* (Киев: NEXТ, 1994), "Полифонический Роман Достоевского ...," pp. 14, 209 et passim.

the Medieval Department of the National Manuscripts Institute (Foundation): among "rows of bookcases, their shelves stacked with dusty manuscripts, old and new" (p. 3). Some details of this part of the library system are provided in the novel: the procedure of acquiring manuscripts, of their preservation, restoration, and of their availability for reading (the necessity of a mediation – a transcription by a specialist, an Orientalist), including the precise catalogue number of the manuscript in question: A 21/733. There is also a brief description of the condition in which our manuscript has been found; it bears some marks of time: fire and earth, human carelessness, the result of which is certain incompleteness and partial illegibility. Still it is pretty clear that the manuscript originates from the 12th century CE and refers to the Ganja earthquake in 1139, even though it does not give much new information about this event. This is in fact the reason why there is apparently not much interest in the study of this manuscript among scholars-historians.

In spite of the impression of a detailed scholarly procedure already early in the novel, its reader receives an impression that the reader of the manuscript, that is, the narrator of the novel, might be a stranger to the strictly academic preoccupation, to the scholarly truth, and that his curiosity might be of a different kind: "perhaps these academics, and this young Orientalist too," he writes "think they have lost an interesting dissertation subject? Perhaps they see me as a rival? In any case, I was an outsider, and these thoughts disturbed my peace of mind" (p. 5); and towards the end of the novel he still worries that the

librarians and other researchers "might get the wrong end of this stick and think that [he is] planning some investigative research. God forbid" (p. 268). Neither does the apparent commentary-structure of *The Incomplete Manuscript* impose a scholarly rigor in the ordinary sense of the term on the process of reading: "A prior commentary has claims to be a scientific introduction and we are a long way from making any such claims" (p. 15). On the contrary, the narrator-reader claims to focus on and to problematize "the places where the Incomplete Manuscript is cut off or leaves something unsaid" (p. 15). In this way, the reader of the manuscript, and hence the reader of the novel, will soon find themselves in a position of re-writing (the text turns out to be eminently "*scriptible*" or "writerly" in Roland Barthes' sense),³ that is, attempting to complete what turns out incomplete in the manuscript, even if with the awareness of the difficulty, perhaps of the impossibility, nay, of the hermeneutic hubris of this task.

It is a scholar – the librarian of the Institute – who, in the beginning of the reading adventure of the narrator, affirms: "the manuscript is incomplete. It doesn't have a beginning or an end"; and he adds, peremptorily, obviously in order to discourage his research: "You won't find it of any interest" (p. 3). The narrator confirms the incompleteness after the first rapid reading of the

³ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang), p. 4: "which texts would I consent to write (to re-write), to desire, to put forth as a force in this world of mine? What evaluation finds is precisely this value: what can be written (rewritten) today: the *writerly*." *S/Z* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1970), p. 10: "*quels textes accepterais-je d'écrire (de ré-écrire), de désirer, d'avancer comme une force dans ce monde qui est le mien? Ce que l'évaluation trouve, c'est cette valeur-ci: ce qui peut être aujourd'hui écrit (ré-écrit): le scriptible.*"

manuscript, but it is precisely this particular incompleteness that arouses his interest – to be sure a different kind of interest, poles apart from the strictly scholarly one. He is fascinated with the enigma and the uniqueness of his text (even among the genre of incomplete manuscripts). This two-sided incompleteness appears to the narrator as the distinctive mark of the manuscript: "Maybe our Incomplete Manuscript has one main difference from all other incomplete manuscripts – our Manuscript has neither beginning nor end" (p. 17). His own tentative explanation of the incompleteness at this point is seemingly of a traditional scholarly, historical-natural and literary-theoretical (narratological), kind: "Maybe it is a souvenir of the time of the Ganja earthquake – it may also be because the Author of the Manuscript did not conceive the text as a linear novel, orderly and systematic, with a meaning that we could understand" (p. 17). Only after the careful rereading, "rewriting," of the Manuscript another, ontological, existential explanation of its incompleteness will appear to the narrator: "Everything now bears the mark of incompleteness, like our Incomplete Manuscript" (p. 269). The Manuscript is incomplete because it reflects (exemplifies) the essential incompleteness of the world, or rather *worlds*. Indeed, towards the end of his adventure the reader of the manuscript realizes that paradoxically the heroes of the epic do not live in a common world, and that "each of them is talking to the other in their own world #; Bayindir Khan had his own Gorgud in his world, while Gorgud had his own Bayindir Khan in his world. They are not in the same place for one another" (p. 268).

This strange discovery of the narrator-reader is para-doxical, of course, in respect to the epic tradition because it is the unity of the world, "the world of myth" that characterizes the genre of the epic. In Mikhail Bakhtin's influential opposition between the novel and the epic, for example, the latter is distinguished by the unity and the coherence of its world, "the world of the epic" (мир эпопеи), which is "the world of memory" (мир памяти),⁴ located in the "absolute past,"⁵ and walled off from the historical, "modern" temporality – the novelistic temporality, in Bakhtin's view.⁶ The world of the epic has always already been "past," enclosed in the national, ethnic tradition (in the Book), it has never been "contemporary," opened to (ex)change as the novel has been: it presents a unified world of the fathers and the founders of families (p. 13), who are "first and best" (первые и лучшие, p. 456, which might translate ἀρχαίοι καὶ ἀρίστοι in the Hellenic view of the epic and myth); their time is the summit of the national history that will always remain the model and the standard of comparison, to which the descendents could hardly live up.⁷ The essential

⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 12; М. М. Бахтин, *Вопросы Литературы и Эстетики*, (Москва: Художественная литература, 1975), p. 456.

⁵ Bakhtin refers to "Goethe's and Schiller's terminology as the source of his notion; in *Über epische und dramatische Dichtung*, Goethe opposes indeed the action in epic as *vollkommen vergangen* to the action in drama, which is *vollkommen gegenwärtig* – Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 36, 149-152.

⁶ To be sure, Bakhtin uses also, exceptionally, the expression "world of the novel" (p. 14; романный [мир], p. 457) but strictly speaking the development of the "genre" of the novel is distinguished by the plurality of worlds.

⁷ No reader of *The Iliad* or *The Book of Dada Gorgud*, for example, would fail to notice the pertinence of this remark as to the stature of the heroes in the epic; see e.g., Nestor's speech in the first book of *The Iliad*, Agamemnon's review of troupes and his comparison

characteristic of the epic is its concentration on the past as an ideal, a unified ideal past.

Thus, the proper reading of an epic text has to be carried out within the hermeneutic of the recovery of meaning, the meaning of the Father; and it has to combine the reverential distance with a certain sense of community between the descendants and the "fathers." The reverential awareness of remoteness has to be accompanied by a sense of continuity and of the community of the "we."⁸ The narrator of *The Incomplete Manuscript* is confronting these requirements of the hermeneutic of recovery when he expresses his admiration and the seeming nostalgia of the reader of the epic (who feels, however, somewhat estranged from the mythical tradition) after his third, definite reading of the manuscript. His "surprise and admiration" for the author of the manuscript (and of the epic) and for the world that he described (created) "had no limits," he is sorry that "this society no longer exists," that it "remains in antiquity, far away and out of reach," and he complains that "little today connects us with antiquity" (p. 6).

Some of the "commentaries" of the narrator which accompany his reading of the manuscript seem to express the same nostalgic mood, related to the incompleteness of the manuscript in its role of a testimony of the epic events

of Diomedes to his father Tydeus in the fourth; as well as Dada Gorgud's *naming* of Bamsi Beyrak, Bamsi the Bold, and Basat the Dominant, the emphatic admiration of Gazan for Bayrak's courage, etc. (the latter are presented in the epic and reiterated in *The Incomplete Manuscript*).

⁸ This "communal" nature of the myth and of the epic has often been linked to the "warmth" of orality (as opposed to the coldness of writing); see for example Daniel Madelénat, *L'épopée* (Paris: PUF, 1986), p. 27.

("epic truth"). They mark the ostensible failure of the hermeneutics of the recovery of meaning, at least in its straightforward version: "... and unfortunately we will never know what it was that Dada Gorgud remembered" (p. 54); "[h]ere two or three pages written in Dada Gorgud's hand can be considered lost to us forever" (p. 58); "[d]oes Aruz really say this or not? We shall never know" (p. 231); "[h]ere, at this sad moment the text about Shah Ismail breaks off for the last time and ends ... Nobody can ever say for certain whether what is described here truly happened or is simply the product of the imagination" (p. 251). The latter eventuality – the imagination of the author, the artistic imagination, the imagination of art and literature – will tend to impose itself as the novelistic confrontation with the epic, historical and mythological tradition progresses in *The Incomplete Manuscript*.⁹ It will end by dominating the reception of this tradition in the conclusion of the novel.

To be sure, in modern times, the awareness of the loss of the world of the heroes does not lead to the abandonment of historical research and of an attempt at the reconstruction of the past. Even though nobody would ever know for certain "how it really was" (*wie es wirklich war*) – in the words of the founder of

⁹ For an insightful discussion of Kamal Abdulla's *The Incomplete Manuscript*, from the point of view of the complex relationship between the truth of historical chronicle and that of literary fiction, see Rahilya Geybullayeva, "History, Myths and Recycling Cultures and K. Abdulla's *Uncompleted Manuscript*," in *Interlitteraria* (Tartu University), Issue 13 vol. I, 2008, pp. 148-163.

modern historiography, Leopold von Ranke¹⁰ – one feels that one could still obtain an independent historical verification of the heroic deeds from epic tales and thus carry out the "completion" of "incomplete manuscripts." Other manuscripts can be discovered (in libraries, in the sand, or anywhere, for that matter, for example "on the security guard's table," as in our novel).

Archeological searches have unearthed traces of the downfall of the Mycenaean culture around the turn of the 12th century BCE ("the fall of Troy"), or of the crisis of the Oghuz culture in the 12 century BC (around the time of the Ganja earthquake). But such finds could not really interfere with the history of the origins, a "monumental history," as Nietzsche calls it, or with the epic that it has produced (the epic, which has confirmed, and to a large extent, produced it in return). Nietzsche is right to question the possibility of a clear distinction between the monumental history, on one hand, and myth, on the other: "there have been ages," he writes in chapter 2 of the second *Untimely Meditation*, "quite incapable of distinguishing between a monumental past and a mythical fiction, because precisely the same stimuli can be derived from the one world as from the other."¹¹ Those stimuli have always been the ones directed toward the

¹⁰ Leopold von Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1514* (Leipzig: Verlag von Duncker & Humblot, 1885), p. vii: (" *wie es eigentlich gewesen*"). The incomplete manuscript refers to this ideal of modern historiography but transposes it into the framework of the structural incompleteness and the artistic/literary response to it; see p. 14 below and p. 9 of the novel.

¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History to Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 70; "Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben," in *Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin/New York: Walter de

foundation and preservation of a unified world, the world of a national, cultural unity. And it has been Memory (*Mnēmosynē* of the Greeks), rather than science/knowledge or history in the strict sense, that presided over this process of unification.

The status of writing in this confrontation with myth and history (in the form of mytho-graphy and of historio-graphy) has often been seen as ambiguous. On the one hand, the written texts have often fixed the mythic tradition and allowed its preservation and transmission (for example, the Homeric text in 6th century BCE and *Oghuz Namah* in 14th century CE); on the other hand, writing threatens the tradition by hardening it.¹² It might be considered inimical to the Truth of Memory and to the mythic tradition. Plato disclosed and stigmatized the illusory claim of writing to support memory in the *Phaedrus*,¹³ and in our time the narrator of Mikhail Bulgakov's novel – to whom the narrator of *The Incomplete Manuscript* refers in his Prologue (p. 10) – seems to express the same view when he shows the inutility of the manuscript for the support of the Master's true novel (which might be in a sense considered a kind of "true myth").

Gruyter GmbH, 1999), p. 262: "...ja es gibt Zeiten, die zwischen einer monumentalischen Vergangenheit und einer mythischen Fiction gar nicht zu unterscheiden vermögen: weil aus der einen Welt genau dieselben Antriebe entnommen werden können, wie aus der anderen."

¹² The narrator of *The Incomplete Manuscript* refers to this phenomenon as the "frozen immobility" of the "statuesque" epic characters (p. 15).

¹³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), pp. 506 ff.; *Phaedrus*, in *Platonis Opera*, ed. Ioannes Burnet (1901; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 227 ff.

To be sure "manuscripts do not burn" (рукописи не горят),¹⁴ but even if they did, the word would be preserved since the Master, just like an ancient bard – Homer or Dada Gorgud – remembers his "novel" by heart (p. 452). To Margarita's question about his remembering the *word* (слово, that is, λόγος, or ἔπος, or μῦθος, as in "Слово о полку Игореве"), the Master replies: "Don't worry! Now I shall never forget anything."¹⁵ Thus the Master attempts to preserve (create) the divine, epic word of myth.

Dada Gorgud, agrees that "in the beginning was the word,"¹⁶ but he seems to foresee a particular power of the written word when he says/writes in one of his aphorism: "Nothing happens if it was not already written in the beginning."¹⁷ And Kamal Abdulla draws all the consequences of the deconstructing potential of writing, the potential to confront the authority of the epic word, of the *logos* and *muthos* of the absolute past and monumental history in *The Incomplete*

¹⁴ Mikhail Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, trans. Diana Burgin and Katherine Tiernan O'Connor (New York: Vintage International, 1996), p. 245; М. А. Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита* (Москва: Астрель Аст, 2007), p. 349;

¹⁵ Bulgakov, *The Master and Margarita*, p. 314; М. А. Булгаков, *Мастер и Маргарита*, p. 452: "Но ты ни слова... ни слова из него не забудешь? ... Не беспокойся! Я теперь ничего и никогда не забуду."

¹⁶ It is this opening of the Gospel of Saint John that (in some of its interpretations) came to epitomize the logo-centrism (or epo-, mytho-centrism) of Western culture: Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος – Κατὰ Ἰωάννην" in *The Greek New Testament*, Institute for New Testament Textual Research (Münster/Westphalia, 1966 by United Bible Societies), p. 320; "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," – "The Gospel According to St. John," in *The Holy Bible: King James Version* (New York: A Meridian Book, 1974), p. 82.

¹⁷ *The Book of Dede Korkut*, trans. Faruk Sümer, Ahmet E. Uysal, Warren S. Walker (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1972), p. 4.; *Le livre de Dede Korkut: Récit de la Geste Oghuz*, trans. Louis Bazin, Altan Gokalp (Paris: Gallimar, 1998), p. 55: "Nul accident n'atteint les créatures, qui n'ait été écrit de toute éternité."

Manuscript. Indeed, writing might be viewed not only as useless in the case of living epic memory; it might be considered dangerous (a "dangerous supplement" in Derrida's words),¹⁸ and unsettling the rigid legality of the tradition. Manuscripts neither simply burn nor are ever preserved intact. We have always to deal with pages marked by "scorched marks," by "stains," even pages "torn to shreds," or altogether missing. Of course, in a simple sense some of these *lacunae* can be completed in the process of a scholarly research. But in another (ontological) sense – the sense of Derrida and Kamal Abdulla – they are marks (traces) of the essential indecidability and incompleteness (finitude) of human life and of its representation. In this sense, incompleteness is *inscribed* in human existence.

Kamal Abdulla develops the thought of essential inscription of human finitude when he brings together writing and secrecy under the common notion of what Derrida calls "ichnography" (from ἵχνοϛ or footprint, trace, clue; and γραφή or writing).¹⁹ His "writerly" narrator knows that "manuscripts keep their own secrets in their script" (p. 4), and Dada Gorgud's manuscript is particularly "secretive" in this respect since it is mysteriously joint to another manuscript – that of the story of Shah Ismail²⁰ – both being hidden within the remains of a

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974/6), pp. 141ff.; *De la Grammatologie* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1967), pp. 203ff.

¹⁹ Cf. Kamal Abdulla, *Epic Full of Secrets or Latent Dede Gorgud* (Baki: Elm, 1999).

²⁰ Shah Ismail Khata'i, was the ruler of Azerbaijan and Persian the first half of 16th century; he was also a poet (unless it was his impersonator, as the incomplete manuscript would suggest).

description of Ganja earthquake. When the narrator rejects his identity as a writer – together with that of a scholar-historian – he certainly distinguishes, just like Derrida does, between two kinds of writing: one ("good"), an inscription in the soul according to the mode of (epic) memory (*anamnēsis*); and the other ("bad" or badly slighted, as Nietzsche would say), disrupting, secretive writing in the mode of (supposed) aide-memoires, "notes" and "observations" (*hupomnēmata* or *memorabilia*, *memoranda*, *commentarii*). The "good writing" tends to form a book: "The idea of the book is the idea of a totality," which is not the same, and can even oppose the idea of (essential, incomplete) writing: "The idea of the book, which always refers to a natural totality, is profoundly alien to the sense of writing."²¹ Thus, it would be tempting to oppose the wholeness of *The Book of Dada Gorgud* – the recorded text of the epic, the image of the closed mythic world of the ancient Oghuz society – to the incompleteness of both the ancient and the modern manuscript (the writerly novel). The ideal continuity and wholeness of the book could thus be undermined, "interrupted" by the essential, "original" *lacunae* of the manuscripts (essential, "arche-writing" [*archi-écriture*] as "arche-trace" [*archi-trace*]).²² And indeed, the phenomenon of the "interruption of myth" is one of the possible definitions of literature.²³ But Kamal Abdulla's novel seems

²¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18; *De la Grammatologie*, p. 30-31. Cf. *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981), p. 149; *La Dissémination* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil), 1972, p. 187; and Jacques Derrida and Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), p. 8.

²² Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 60ff; *De la Grammatologie*, p. 88ff.

²³ See Jean Luc Nancy, "Myth Interrupted," in *The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), pp. 43ff.; "Le Myth

to thwart this definition when it displays a text that is at the same time more "original" and more writerly – indecidible, secretive, incomplete, that is, always already "interrupted" – than the epic, namely, the "notes" and "observations," "preparatory work for an epic that is to be written" (p. 7). In fact, Nancy's eventual formulation of the relationship between myth and literature does not contradict this view: "In the work, there is a share of myth and a share of literature or writing. The latter interrupts the former, it 'reveals' precisely through its interruption of the myth (through the incompleteness of the story or the narrative)"²⁴ But this "interruption of myth is no doubt as ancient as its emergence or its designation as 'myth'" (p. 72). The relationship between myth and literature, as well as the question of the "origin" (the ἀρχή of the Greeks) is extremely complex, and it would be difficult to imagine a text better displaying this complexity than *The Incomplete Manuscript*. Indeed, the original event of composing an epic is here always already marked by the inter-ruption and incompleteness of the "tentative" notes and observations. And, as we have already noted, the epic itself may contain – in its introductory aphorism – the seed of its writerly deconstruction. Of course this "aphoristic energy" can only appear after

interrompu," in *La communauté désœuvrée* (Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1986), pp. 107ff.

²⁴ Jean Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 63; *La communauté désœuvrée*, p. 159: "Il y a dans l'œuvre la part du mythe et la part de la littérature ou de l'écriture. La seconde interrompt le premier, elle 'révèle' précisément par l'interruption du premier (par l'inachèvement du récit ou du discours)."

the work of (un)veiling, performed by the narrator and the readers of *The Incomplete Manuscript*, is (provisionally) "completed."²⁵

When Kamal Abdulla's narrator emphasizes his greediness for a secret, he does display a certain "dis-ruption of writing," an "aphoristic energy," of which Derrida speaks.²⁶ And in this sense he might be considered an offspring of Dada Gorgud, or rather the character of Dada Gorgud in the novel might be considered to be his writerly projection. Indeed, in the novel of Kamal Abdulla, Dada Gorgud is not only the secretary of Bayindir Khan, he is also a *secretary* in the strongest sense of the term: not only the writer-narrator but also "the keeper of the secrets" (p. 63); everyone in Oghuz society "knows that a secret told to Dada will be kept safe" (p. 63). However, as John Caputo pertinently says/writes, "the secret is divulged as soon as it is kept; it is divulged by being kept."²⁷ In that sense, not only the secret of Beyrak's heroism is revealed to Bayindir Khan, and thus to the reader of the ancient incomplete manuscript – and to the reader of *The Incomplete Manuscript* – but a "divulgment," an "unveiling" of the secret happens each time when a certain incompleteness of the manuscript manifests itself. The veil is in fact the crucial image for the incomplete manuscript, both the novel and the epic notes – the veil as the image of the play between concealment and unconcealment of the secret, that is to say,

²⁵ For the notion of "aphoristic energy," see Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 18; *De la Grammatologie*, p. 30-31.

²⁶ Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Cinquante-deux aphorismes pour un avant-propos," in *Psyché, Invention de l'autre* (Paris: Galilée, 1987/2003).

²⁷ John D. Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), p. 33.

the image of its/their truth, or the truth of the emerging artistic image: "Dada Gorgud's preparatory notes, observations and sketches open like a gauze curtain to reveal ideas and meanings that have lost their true outline and become the invention of the artist - when the clouds disappear from the sky, the blue depths of infinity look greater, and you come nearer to God, to the greater, higher Truth" (p. 15).

This work of truth as veiling/unveiling - the *Ἀλήθεια* of the Greeks, and of the Heideggerian theory of art, or the essential "original" incompleteness (novelistic *незавершенность*, in Bakhtin's theory of the novel, *op. cit.*, p. 451) - constitutes then a major difference between Dada Gorgud's preparatory notes for the epic and the final, "familiar text of the epic." The latter would not differ from the former so much by the content of its political view, the ideological content that might better suit the need of the patron of the epic (for example "the concept of statehood... so fashionable today," p. 16), as by its incompleteness, that is, its openness to unveiling in the process of constant rewriting. The dramatic question of the narrator as to the connection between the two historically disconnected texts within the same manuscript, namely the tales of Dada Gorgud on the one hand, and the story of the Shah Ismail, on the other hand, might thus be answered - incompletely, to be sure - with the reference to the same play of veiling/unveiling of the process of political (Machiavelian) expediency, that is, to its truth.

Given the major difference between the preparatory notes for the epic and the final "text" of the epic, that is, the difference between the mythological, ideological establishment of the world on one hand, and its writerly, novelistic play between familiarization and defamiliarization, on the other hand, one might wonder – as the narrator of *The Incomplete Manuscript* does – why the preparatory notes and observations have been preserved (how such a preservation is possible at all?), rather than the text of the "complete" epic. After all, the forms of the latter have always had better chances to be preserved by the powers that be (cf. for example the fate of Homeric epics or Virgil's *Aeneid* in comparison with that of the so-called Menippean satires). Kamal Abdulla's narrator, in a sense an offspring of Dada Gorgud – a *secretary* – says that this is "God's secret!" But is this not the devil's (or rather the artist's, Mikhail Bulgakov's, Kamal Abdulla's himself) secret as well – the secret concerning the persistence of writing (and of art), namely, the claim that "manuscripts do not burn" in its "divine" sense?

Indeed, one might be tempted to understand the supposed strength of manuscripts within the purview of "that force which would do evil evermore, and yet creates the good."²⁸ But this would be to ignore Kamal Abdulla's "principle" of "original" incompleteness of writing. As we have already noted, manuscripts neither burn entirely nor ever remain intact; they always leave

²⁸ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, 1335-36; *Faust* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1998), vol. 3, 1335-36: "Ein Teil von jener Kraft, die stets das Böse will und stets das Gute schafft"; one might notice that the master's "novel" is eventually completed – with the devil's help? – in Bulgakov's novel: *Master and Margarita*, p. 324; *Macmep u Mapzapuma*, p. 465.

traces, the traces of the epic desire of wholeness, on the one hand – "a complete whole in our imagination" says the narrator of *The Incomplete Manuscript* (p. 13) – and of its "original" frustration, marked in the *hupomnemata* or *memorabilia*: "the preparatory notes and observations," on the other hand. Once again, Kamal Abdulla's stroke of genius consists in situating the incompleteness of writing at the very origin of the epic endeavour, which is supposed to found, to "establish" a culture. Indeed, Dada Gorgud is discovered/imagined in *The Incomplete Manuscript* as the author of *both* the epic and the notes and observations, and it is in the latter that the truth is revealed: "'This is really how it was!' the Incomplete Manuscript says" (p. 9). The truth of the ideological, mythological function of the "complete" epic is revealed at the same time as a strict, dogmatic hermeneutic rule: "'But future generations must understand and accept it like this,' the Epic seems to say" (ibid.). And, most importantly, the authority of the notes and observations as to the historical and mythical truth of their affirmations is ultimately undermined on the authority of a great Azerbaijani poet Huseyn Javid (an authority to end all authorities): "But the reality presented by this text can also be doubted. Huseyn Javid's saying 'a man is right to doubt' lives today and will live on in future" (p. 15). The serious "political" function of the incomplete manuscript (and of *The Incomplete Manuscript*) is not so much an affirmation of the hermeneutic of suspicion, as the patient *unveiling* of the hermeneutic process (with its constant "self-interruption").²⁹ Thus incompleteness is shown to be the

²⁹ It is in this sense that *The Incomplete Manuscript* is "literature (writing) and not myth."

very principle of interpretation. To paraphrase Nietzsche's famous aphorism: there are no complete manuscripts – only (incomplete) interpretations;³⁰ for (incomplete) manuscripts are always calls for interpretations. And in order to preserve the "incomplete manuscripts" from falling (back) into the epic unity and completeness, a great interpretive/artistic force is needed. Only such force is able to release the epic heroes from their "frozen immobility," so that they "begin to live – to love, to hate, to be faithful, to cheat, to scheme, to laugh, to cry" (p. 15). Displaying their living (and mortal) nature (as opposed to the quasi-divine nature of the heroes), Kamal Abdulla transports the "noblemen and sons of noblemen, khans and sons of khans" from the epic world of myth to the "untimely" world of the novel. The past loses its "absoluteness," but gains its contemporary relevance: "Ancient Oghuz society begins to be seen in its real, spiritual context" (ibid.). Thus the counterpart of the re-vitalization of the traditional, "statuesque," epic heroes must be the re-activation of the reader, who (re)discovers his/her spiritual affinity with them: s/he ceases to be a passive receiver of the tradition or a dispassionate scholar, and becomes a participant, a writer – a "secretary" – eventually an offspring of Dada Gorgud.

Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, p. 72; *La communauté désœuvrée*, p. 179: "littérature (écriture) et non mythe."

³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), p. 267 (481, 1883-1888): "No, facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations"; *Der Wille zur Macht* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1996), p. 337: "nein, gerade Tatsachen gibt es nicht, nur Interpretationen."

One might be tempted to say of the novel of Kamal Abdulla what its narrator says of the ancient, incomplete manuscript, that "despite its deceptive incompleteness, [it] will make great changes to Gorgud studies" (p. 14), except that it is as much – if not more – "because of" its *incompleteness* that *The Incomplete Manuscript* will have this impact – and not only on Gorgud studies, but on the reading and study of modern literature and its relationship to the ancient (epic, mythical) tradition, as well as its affinity with other traditions.

Prof. Max Statkiewicz,

University of Wisconsin-Madison