

Excerpt from *THE LIVING BOOKS OF PAUL BOWLES*

In: Zsuzsanna Váradi-Kalmár, *The Cultic Code*, Buda, Hungary, 2015. ISBN 978-963-12-2131-2

INTRODUCTION

A search for the essence: extraction of substance from shadows

*What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?
Since every one hath, every one, one shade,
And you, but one, can every shadow lend.* – Shakespeare, Sonnet LIII

The genre of this research may be formally termed analytical-analogical criticism, but I propose it primarily as a mental adventure, a **treasure hunt: a search for substance**, for a liberating certainty and a certain liberation in the dark labyrinth of the world, of art, and of literature in particular. The mysterious, counterpointal double metaphor of *shadow and substance* is my guide. (As it arises from and leads back to the intuitive unconscious, its academic or religious discourse is avoided in order to let its direct sensuality speak for itself, and reveal its reflection within the reader. After all, we are looking at something which is primarily of the spirit, emerging as a sense.) The quest is both literary/literal and metaphoric. While searching for meaning on the external, objective phenomenal plane, we may come to the source of meaning bursting from under ground, and realise the original, greater reality of the inner, subjective noumenal realm. The interconnectedness of the two different dimensions of reality may allow us to see the common structure, the sacral or magical code which connects them. I believe art has always been based on the recognition that what is invisible in an image is what gives its form. Let us clarify that substance is, in other words, this invisible essence: the juice, the light of things, not abstracted but constantly present behind the surface. The magic of art lies in its ability to reveal to the audience what is not seen but hides in narrative, mundane reality. The heart of art, the essence of a timeless masterpiece not only holds a mirror to conscience, but by opening our eyes to the world, gives vision, clairvoyance. Such a masterpiece, its guiding light found and held within, may change one's life completely, and indeed may change the course of history. We must not forget, that art is originally rite, cult, initiation. Temporarily, books relieve readers from their burdens, re-establish their integrity, and establish new, higher grounds from which to move on. So the magic lies in a sequence of transmissions between written word and lived life. The mechanism of the cultic agency is revelation. What we are witnessing is the spirit of a book revealing itself as text, in other words, the structural manifestation of a subtle body.¹

The essence of ritualistic books can be extracted and observed textually, its attributes categorised both autonomously and in comparison to non-essence. It is for this comparative reason, that talking about the essence throughout, I maintain the term substance. This extracted substance has a specific order, a specific way of behaving, and a specific structure. It is organized in an analogous-

¹ The subtle body, i.e. the original form and energy of phenomena is what I believe alchemy terms *materia prima*: the primary fusion of pure matter and pure force, arriving directly from their timeless, spaceless single source. In mythical terms, it may be understood as the divine Virgin Mother, carrying the fruit of the primal creative conception hidden in her womb. The fruit manifest is the universal Man, the creative nominal-verbal Word. In this sense, the Mother and the Son the two aspects of the same substance, one concealed, the other revealed.

hologramic way, and shows compatibility with key human phenomena, as well as with natural and cosmic phenomena.²

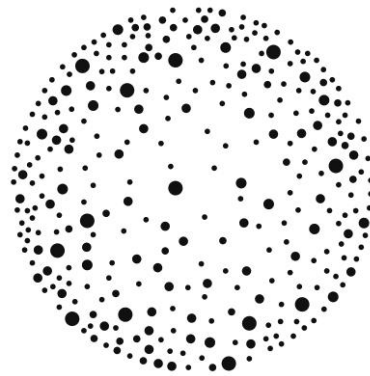


Figure 1. The hologramic cosmos of substance. This external image depicts what I find as a metanarrative field in the novel quartet of Paul Bowles.

To come to this boundless field of analogical perspective requires a real and proper inner quest and metanoia, individual and paradigmatic, for the initial empirical observation of the substance of things is concealment. Common universal substance is supremely, constantly present, but by nature hidden, in order to require, to urge, to draw its revelation. “For there is nothing hid, which shall not be manifested; neither was any thing kept secret, but that it should come abroad.” (Mk.4:22) It must be this initial dynamism between the hidden nature and revelative impetus of substance, which generates the flow of time and stories, starts us on the quest, on the rite of passage which is life itself, and which keeps us aimed at the constant promise and occasional sense of existential fulfilment: that we do not live in vain, we are not foreigners in life, not lost in the dark.

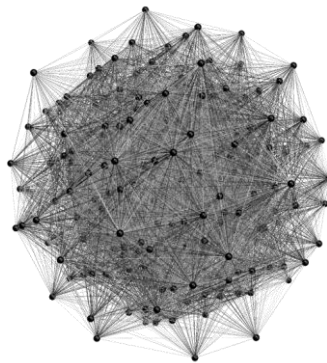


Figure 2. The hologramic cosmos of substance, revealing its web of strings. It represents the complexity of objective vision waiting at the end of this rough analytical road: seeing that each substantive aspect is connected to the other.

² I use the term analogy in the sense of substantive identity, e.g. the life of human beings is analogous with the life of natural and cosmic beings. By the term hologram I refer to a non-linear system of reality where the particular, autonomous units and the whole unit are analogous, e.g. each natural, human, and cosmic body is both part of and identical with the hologram of the Universe, which, I think, is the personal singularity we generally call God. In other words, every organic entity is not only connected but also essentially one with all other organic entities, regardless of scale. Organic is their operation, nature, and structure, and it is this triadic code which defines this universal model, as we will see.

Finding and observing substance may result in surprising results, for although it is, as we will see, the basis of spatial-temporal (narrative, textual, physical) stability as well as change, we hardly know anything about it. I have recognised that literary textual substance shows definite **vital signs**, and operates in a logic not merely anti-structural³, but **super-structural**, leading “to another way of thinking, noncausal.”⁴ This way of thinking leads beyond the waves of narrative space-time, not to the uncontrolled, unstructured subconscious underworld of our 20th century, but to a highly structured magical, proto-, or meta-realism. This altered way of understanding may bring the words of timeless winds gushing in through an opened passage, and eventually a whole new text emerges from the book. I believe the spirit of Hamlet is asleep in the collective dream of Europe. The recognition of his actuality depends only on our mode of perception and interpretation: either narrative, or metanarrative. Switching to the metanarrative mode, a network of living textual substance emerges: organic, autonomous, and dynamic.

1.Shadow and substance

1.1 Definition

Let us first consider in common theory what the search is for, and what its conditions and stakes are. Let us clarify further that golden substance is in other words the **gravity and relevance** of things. We may say that ultimately every human effort is focused on **integration and creation**, the **centring of the individual and the rounding of the world**. The reason for this, both logical and poetic, may be that the elemental organic imprint of life is centred and round. This vital imprint which defines human consciousness is the operative, natural, and structural code of the organic entity, from the physical/biological atomic particle to cosmic units. Its direct experience is what I specify as the presence of substance, whereas its indirect conditions, temporal, spatial, and causal, are what I specify as the differentiation of the basic figure of substance into a flow of its shadows. Life, we may say, consists of both ends, as a story also has two ends, a narrative and a metanarrative one, but is rooted and crowned in the latter, at once end and beginning. A most basic example for the apparently invisible but all-defining “**transcending fact of the living individual**” (*Let It*, 194) is biological conception, where the spirit of life enters into the primal matter, the perfect, pure total elemental structure. Other types of conception also take place during a lifetime, where energies, roles, ways of seeing, thinking, speaking and acting may be renewed, improved, re-substantiated. These are ritual opportunities not only to see ourselves in truth, in evolution, but to experience the pure and real quality of existence, “**to become conscious of the substance of that life.**” (*Let It*, 194) The facts suggest that this substance, at once matter and experience, is of the same “stuff” as the unmoving mover, the a-causal primal cause of life. I will demonstrate that substance does not only appear on particularly special, rare occasions and upon high pedestals, and not only is it the abstract source of all sense and meaning, gravity and relevance, but that it hides and appears directly in cultic bodies, texts of art and language as well, where it allows us to observe it.⁵ In other words, everything that is alive has substance, and everything with substance is alive. To define life as substance, its inner centre and outer sphere should be found. In text, the centre of effect is the supreme liminal point of breakthrough, the nucleus of the story. Transmitting the effect through its temporal border, this core generates and catalyses the linear movement of concentric narrative waves.

Substance emotionally **consoles** the reader and intellectually **resolves** narrative knots. This, one might say, is a properly positivist intuitive and conscious mode of structuring the reading

³ See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process – Structure and Anti-Structure*.

⁴ Gena Dagele Caponi (ed.), *Conversations with Paul Bowles*, 97.

⁵ A basic linguistic problem permeates the talking about substance: “it” is alive, organic, having at once feminine and masculine attributes (in being static and dynamic, birth-giving and impregnating at the very same time). It is the unfortunate conditioning of the English language which makes it impossible to use a non-gendered personal pronoun for substance, so I consent to use the dead but at least neutral form “it”.

experience. According to this, for example the substance of William Shakespeare's drama of Hamlet lies not in its tragic avalanche, but in the unconditioned, fragmented reflections and reactions of the Prince. These occur in flashes of "interim"⁶ free of fate. It is even less doubtless that the substance of James Joyce's *Portrait* is the clearly defined long passage of Dedalus's epiphany by the sea⁷, the substance of *Ulysses* is Molly's long monologue at the end of the novel, as C.G. Jung also recognises⁸. These examples show that substance is at least potentially **constructive** for the participants of the literary rite of passage, regardless of the circumstances and events weighing them down. Another way of substance appearing is exemplified in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Here even more than Marlow's compassion and Buddha-like repose, Kurtz's "Intended" presents the only source of light in the entire book⁹:

with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illuminated by the unextinguishable light of belief and love (...) the faith that was in her, (...) that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness.¹⁰

What is to be seen in these cases is some kind of saving grace of substance, apparently isolated from story, as if different dimensional qualities of reality were interwoven. What remains illusory for Marlow is inextinguishable life for the woman: the struggle for light, the effort to see the ideal in the man, to see substance in the shadows.

Shadow and substance in literature differ in **position, structure, and extensivity**. The shadow realm is horizontal and linear, projecting causality, literacy, historicity, aesthetics. Once this is suspended, substance will prove to effect the narrative plane **vertically**, and is self-structured **concentrically**. The phenomenal reality of shadows is that they are temporally, spatially extensive entities. What we are in search of are **textual units presenting the non-extensive, unconditioned dimension** of the book. As narrative waves dissolve in places of substance, conditioned existence dissolves in the singular totality of unconditioned, substantive existence. The former is not disintegrated or eliminated but rather integrated into the latter, like a stream flowing into the sea. Streams of conditions cannot be grasped without revelations of a hidden yet ever-present, unconditioned totality.

As there is an immanent paradox here, the reader's and critic's leap of intuition is required. An example for this paradox in its most condensed form is Hamlet's "one:" "...a man's life no more than to say 'one'." (Hamlet, v.ii.74) This single utterance of the hero holds together and resolves the entire play.¹¹ In this "one" of entity and unity, Hamlet as the prism, the centre of the play unites himself with all participants as his hologramic aspects. It is the magic of art that the unity becomes not only theoretical, but ontological reality. This identity, however, cannot be explicated. It is the audience who have to discover for themselves that they are, each and every one, Hamlet.¹² The dogmatic clarification of this identity breaks the spell of discovery, unravelling, revelation, which is a most intimate experience. It requires a mimetic approach: its opening needs participation, should intuitively be accepted, and rationally facilitated. Therefore the veiled nature of substance seems to induce, through

⁶ "...the interim is mine." (*Hamlet*, v.ii.74)

⁷ James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 148-154.

⁸ James Joyce, *Ulysses*, 690-732. Cf. C.G.Jung, *Ulysses Monologue*.

⁹ N.B. This key scene is an element missing from the film adaptation *Apocalypse Now* (1979) by F.F.Coppola

¹⁰ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 97-8.

¹¹ Cf. Ralph Berry: "I propose a term which is strictly not metaphorical at all, but which Shakespeare uses as the binding agent : *one*." (Berry, *The Shakespearean Metaphor*, 6.)

¹² This is exactly what Flaubert means by saying "I am Madame Bovary." All members of the audience should be able to say, "I am madam Bovary," and "I am Hamlet."

the necessity of unveiling, the thrill of anamnesis, the sudden exuberance of recognition: not that we are doomed to share in the tragic fate of Hamlet, but that we may be elevated to share in his timeless character appeal and moral victory. Accepting and facilitating this substantive identity with literary identification, the protagonist automatically generates a mode of perception which I associate with what Aldous Huxley calls “the sacramental vision of reality”.¹³ This mode of vision we aim to arrive at is no more and no less than organic vision i.e. to see the work as an autonomous unit of life, stable, balanced, harmonious, but also as part of larger units of stability, balance, harmony.

1.2 Problem

The distinction of substance from shadows is a **general problem** of being in the world. Perhaps it is the key question of Western arts and sciences, and the basic challenge of human cognition and perception. How to tell the “one” from the “seems”?¹⁴ Primarily, surface and depth, physical and metaphysical, phenomenal and noumenal, attributive and essential should be distinguished. N.B. The prefix *meta-*, I suggest, has been misinterpreted since the Greek colonial empire, due to the appearance of the divided mind in Europe. I argue that *meta-* is an inclusive term: meaning both inside and outside, here and beyond. This notion is key in all aspects of this thesis, see in more detail in the *Etymological notes*.

Secondly, the **characteristics, function and relation** of shadow and substance should be clarified in all fields of enquiry. The main confine is that their difference cannot be explored from within dialectic duality. They are not in binary opposition, because they are qualitatively different, and for the same reason they cannot be compared. To explore the problem, such material should be observed which is at once objective, fixed, and subjective, experiential. Literature, particularly narrative literature provides perfect grounds for this exploration, especially since here the ratio and interplay of shadow and substance may be the proportionate reflection of life. Here, amidst currents of events i.e. shadows, lies the mysterious spirit of the book i.e. the substance. What happens in a book is not the direct point of its reference, not the interface of its relevance for the reader. “Telling what happened does not necessarily make a good story,”¹⁵ says Bowles. This definitive substance of reference and relevance is the “stuff” of **absolution, resolution**, and ultimately perhaps **salvation**. It breaks through the veil of events in fragments, phrases of insight. “The play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king,”¹⁶ in other words, the work of art is constructed to unveil the conscience and consciousness of the reader. While this book offers an objectified documentation of substance breaking through the veil of “seems,” it must be emphasised and remembered throughout, that both its physical matter and mental meaning is lifeless without its experience, which comes only from participation: excitement, recognition, and thrill in reading literature. In literary scholarship as well as in all scientific enquiries it becomes increasingly clear that a purely phenomenological approach is insufficient, and the opening of a broader, noumenological perspective is necessary, in which the phenomenon (shadow) reveals itself as deriving from and tending towards its noumenal (substantive) resolution.

The terminological basis of this book is that narrative is shadow, and what may properly be called **metanarrative** is substance. N.B. Disambiguation. It is unfortunate that the term metanarrative has been appropriated by postmodern criticism. Through misinterpretation, it has officially come to mean a political, historical “grand narrative”, an arbitrary categorisation and qualification of stories, and as such, dismissed. As the term metaphysical in no way refers to a large body, but to something qualitatively beyond the physical dimension, so metanarrative can in no way refer to a quantitatively larger narrative. The postmodern, poststructuralist misuse of the term is nowhere more apparent than

¹³ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception*, 10.

¹⁴ Cf. “I know not ‘seems,’” (*Hamlet*, i.ii.76)

¹⁵ *WS*, 367.

¹⁶ *Hamlet*, ii.ii.566-7.

in the plural form “metanarratives”, in which the original entity of the singular substance, the “one” of all stories is disintegrated and relativised.¹⁷ What is above all embezzled by the misuse is the value of the invisible. Contrary to pragmatist, structuralist, cynical ideologies, the metanarrative or concealed record, the story of stories does exist.¹⁸ Not even does it exist in the abstract or arbitrary classification of narrative events, but as the unconditioned source and goal of all eventuality, as will be demonstrated. Genuine art, gushing forth from the very same fountain we attempt to observe as it surfaces in text, is such a record-bearer. Therefore I attempt to liberate the corrupted term, and re-establish its definition. The metanarrative explicated here has no horizontal temporal extension as beginning, middle, and end, but finds its synonyms in the liminal, ritual, transgressive or transcendent, the phases of which are vertical, driven away from historical time, and towards timelessness or total time.

The philosophical observations of substance as metanarrative e.g. its temporal and ontological aspects, or the reconstruction of its morphogenetic process requires more space than provided in this work. Here it suffices to note two main features. First, *meta-* proves to signify something which is explicit in poetry and religion: that a textual substance is at once objective and subjective, here and beyond. Meta-type material is universally understandable but requires individual participation in the act of presencing.¹⁹ The metaphysical artist makes the participant see that which is only implicitly present, and thus opens our eyes to essentiality, to essence as such. The second feature is that the most directly observable effect of a book’s substance is existential: from being concealed by conditions of a human story, unconditionment is to be revealed with the cathartic release of beneficial energy for the reader. A good book can strike a deep emotional chord, and can contribute to the achievement of mental degrees. The aim of my research is to enquire by what means and in what way this happens.

The general problem of distinction between substance and shadow is reflected in a **specifically critical problem**. For while the formal and thematic i.e. exterior operation, nature, and structure of literature is amply dealt with, the informal, essential i.e. interior is being left in oblivion. Not only is its primacy ignored, but even its mere existence. It is in postmodernism that the insufficiency of the narrative-based approach becomes particularly apparent. In resolving and relating to stories of alienation, narratives provide no healthy choice of solution for the reader or the critic. For the original aim of literature i.e. healing and teaching cannot be abandoned by sane consideration, neither on the expressive, nor on the receptive side. Points of orientation, forces of existential affirmation, words of emotional and intellectual uplifting and enrichment should in all literary works be left and found, even if in traces or fragments.²⁰ To express the triumph of human life over narrative trials, the timeless treasures of an ever-passing world, is by definition the resolution and *raison d’être* of all literature. This original motive of art, “**to triumph over** pain, and by extension, over **death itself**,”²¹ is truly ritualistic. This elevation, perhaps transubstantiation, as a single force is what substance comes to mean through this research. And it is all the more difficult, challenging, and rewarding to find in tales

¹⁷ I believe the same official relativising and commercialising of values is responsible for the destabilisation of humanity, as the technologising and materialising of life is responsible for the destruction of our ecosystem.

¹⁸ This is the Akasha, a Sanskrit notion originally meaning “the ethereal” or “language of the sky,” understood as a central generative fifth element (first in sequence) in several religious and philosophical systems. In Western circles the concept is translated as God’s Book of Remembrance, the Universal Radio, the Subliminal Cassette, the Cloud Doctrine, Diaries of the Radar etc. Bowles is said to have described it as “God’s home movies.” I understand it as the super-conscious field of reference where narrative events echo. The definitive property of Akasha is sound, which, as we will see, is the major agent of transmission in the works of Bowles.

¹⁹ Cf. Heidegger’s term presencing (*Anwesen*)

²⁰ Futility, alienation, disintegration cannot possibly be the outcome of culture, such destructive tendencies can only be called anti-humanist anti-culture. Here, however, a critique of such so-called art is not intended, the thesis is limited to the general critique of scholarship which fails to recognise and process substance where it undoubtedly exists.

²¹ Paul Bowles, *Africa Minor*, in: *THAG*, 28.

of apparent desolation. What is called for is not merely “higher criticism,” but a deeply humanistic criticism.

2. Paul Bowles

The work of the American writer, poet, composer **Paul Bowles** (1910-1999) is the labyrinth of this thesis, where the true gold of metanarrative awaits to be discovered, upheld and interpreted. After several earlier attempts at finding a doctoral grip and hold on substance in the world of Anglo-Saxon literature, I came to recognise Bowles as the ideal provider of material, even beyond my expectations. The track of hermeneutic considerations led to literary figures and themes of extreme dislocation. It became clear that in order to find the sense of home, to find existential reintegration and reason to be in the world, i.e. to find substance, the writer, the protagonist, as well as the reader and critic must be immersed in completely foreign, uncontrollable circumstances. The **biographical and narrative themes of foreignness**, incomprehension, the loss of orientation, and some kind of self-sacrifice seems to be the necessary stimulus for the transformation of perception and cognition, to become able to recognise and process **substance**. In other words, in order to get to the interior of things (substance), it is first necessary to be overcome by the exterior world (shadows). In a letter, Bowles writes: “No barriers can stop the decay of the spirit as it spreads throughout the earth. Salvation is for the individual who is willing to risk **destruction at the hands of society** in order to savour the **consciousness of being alive**.”²²

In interviews, Bowles explicitly expressed his aim to arrive at “**organic form**”²³ in his writing, by blending the free intuitive method and conscious planning. As I did not take his use of the word organic so seriously at first, I cannot be sure how verbatim he himself meant the term. It merely seemed as a general reference to a natural or pure style of story-telling. His scholars have so far not given this organic aspect any attention, as even his affinity with the magic of the Maghreb remains to be considered as a vague and mystified passion for the exotic. Thanks to the hidden genius of Bowles, his works are organic and magical in the most direct and original sense of these terms, mediating the archaic spirit of the Maghreb with absolute truthfulness and ingenuity at the same time.

2.1 One song

It is crucial to first explore the author’s life-changing experience of the Maghreb, its spirit and customs. It is a place which has kept not only its archaic undivided, sacramental world view, but according to common belief is ruled by a spirit of special magic and intensity. Coming under the overwhelming influence of the *genius loci*, of a non-Western, clearly metanarrative mode of cognition and perception, the strong presence of substance permeates all understanding and experience of the shadow realm. What was strong influence for Bowles is danger, trap, dead-end, destructive shock for his unprepared Western protagonists. It was in Morocco that Bowles found the most perfectly intact forms of cultic substance, which were to bring to life the single song of his entire oeuvre: the song of his life. “Everybody really sings his song, no matter in what medium, he’s always singing the **same song** somehow.”²⁴ My aim is not to explain, but to present this song, at once individual (Bowlesian), culture-dependent (American, European, and Maghrebi), and universal (for all readers to relate). The systematisation of its form allows insight and synopsis not only into its harmonies, but into recognising that all of his works, particularly his four novels, are aspects of the same one song.

2.2 Four novels

²²Gena Dagal Caponi, *Paul Bowles: Romantic Savage*, 157.

²³ Paul Bowles, Evans interview, in: Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa*, 86., also Caponi-interview in Gena Dagal Caponi (ed.), “*Conversations with Paul Bowles*,” 57.

²⁴ Lawrence D. Stewart, *Paul Bowles: The Illumination of North Africa*, 20.

Bowles's works of fiction, his short stories as well as the novels, are intensely disturbing and alluring i.e. captivating already at first sight. They seem to be postcolonial **stories of alienation, of journeys running into dead ends**. Their narrative reflects nothing other than negative existentialism, futility, and de-centeredness. The Western protagonist, in entirely foreign territory, crumbles under the pressure of coming face to face with the "great unknown", the world as *terra incognita*, whether natural, cultural, or personal. At the same time, there are also immediately traces of the uplifting substance in all of his works, where human integration is upheld in positive existentialism, affirmation, re-centeredness. Certain passages stand out, where the protagonist suddenly relates to his/her predicament directly, where he/she finds him/herself. It takes place in a flash, while the flow of events is suspended. Through these textual traces, the reader is challenged to gain insight, through intuition, into a non-narrative level of the story: into the innermost centre, the living spirit of the characters in transformation. First only marking textual places, then collecting, and finally systematizing traces, an entire world of metanarrative substance reveals itself. My long-time awareness of the figure and works of Bowles brought its real fruit only after I managed to reconstruct more or less fully the metanarrative world of his four published novels, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), *Let It Come Down* (1952), *The Spider's House* (1955), and *Up Above the World* (1966). In the light of the results demonstrated in my textual analyses, and the light of this illuminated need for literary substance, I venture to suggest that Bowles is one of the masters of metanarrativity. What may be found sporadically even in the greatest of Western writers, Bowles takes to another level by building his intricate tales upon an entire system of metanarrative foundation. Thus the formal, generic unit of the four novels configures into a qualitative unit of substance, where narrative and metanarrative contents are precisely coordinated in repetitions and variations.

Based on the metanarrative textual analyses of the novels, a model may be drawn up, demonstrating the self-organisation of substance into a pattern of points and circles, constellations and fields, held together and generating stories by a metanarrative bind. The new critical method and view of the works culminates in the analysis of the titles, offering specific solutions to the novels as riddles through these enigmas. Here it becomes clarified that they are different aspects of indeed the same song of Bowles, the same substance of his art. The four enigmatic tales are sketched here with particular focus on points of illumination where substance breaks through the veil of alienation. The thematic edge of the stories foreshadows that surface and depth are in curious symbiosis. What connects them is the thirst of all protagonists for the substance of life. They are all seekers of that spring-well, and clearly only one of them finds it as a permanent source: the one who is content with its magical solitude, royal poverty, and triumphant self-sacrifice.

In the first novel, *The Sheltering Sky* (1949), an estranged couple, liberal intellectuals from New York, are travelling in colonial Maghreb. In the gradually opening space of the Sahara, they both lose ground and fall off "the earth's sharp edge," one in death, the other in insanity. The husband, Port seeks separation, differentiation to the point of total abstraction. He is the one who wilfully and consciously takes his life to an existential breaking point, diving boldly into the unknown, the Absolute, and is devoured by it. He is entirely under the spell of distinct and continuous illuminations. His dreams, visions of light, evocations of darkness, of *nothing* provide metanarrative signs along his journey. The wife, Kit on the other hand seeks conjunction as her elemental need is to connect, which through total loss turns into a vacant existence. Without connection, she herself, and finally her mind too, is lost in alienation. Yet her isolated pseudo-religious belief system of omens, and the private baptismal ceremony brace and initiate her into a deeper sense of existence.

In *Let It Come Down* (1952), the second novel, another rootless American enters then escapes the labyrinthine life of corruption in the International Zone of post-war Tangier. He gains a chance of new life through a series of purifying and illuminating experiences, but as he has no moral value system to handle the internal liberation, falls into a vortex of crime. Like Kit from madness, Dyar is

not saved from his sin by the substance he receives as a gift from the *genius loci*. In fact, his initiation into the substance of life, instead of integrating him, disturbs him to run amok, far outside of all bounds he was to conquer. It is the misconception that money sets one free that runs its course, all the way into complete inhumanity, where in a fit of paranoia Dyar kills his metaphoric brother, and thus irreversibly exiles himself from freedom.

The Spider's House (1955) is set amid the internally divided Moroccan uprising against political division and subordination. The plot features personal and historical heavens and hells, and the tight-rope above two abysses: colonialism and nationalism. It is a story of divisions and intrigue, fidelity and entunement. A charismatic, blessed Moroccan boy and an orientalist enthusiast American writer are challenged by each other's culture and capacity for compassion. Stenham's attention is diverted by a woman, but the boy keeps his hearing fixed on the transcendent music of faith in their friendship. Amar is a socially-narratively liminal figure, who would dwell permanently in the garden of the Absolute, would work and heal, if events were not to drag him away from his immanent totality of peace, joy, and inner strength. Amar is the Galahad of the Bowlesian quest for substance.

In the last and darkest novel *Up Above the World* (1966), the human masquerade takes a macabre turn in the Latin-American colonies. The relativity of apparent positions is resolved by the fact that protagonist and antagonist, victim and murderer both search for the exit, for light in their existential darkness, in the shadow of looming tragedy. Grover Soto the wealthy, brilliant and amoral golden boy lures an American traveller Day and her husband into his intricate web of conspiracy. Their elimination is inevitable by Satanic Soto and his executive accomplice Thorny. What is represented is a greed- and fear-based system exponentially growing mass-destructive. The orthodox method of the mastermind removing himself from present participation is suspended, and his motive unveiled only when he is unconscious: in his dream he is an insecure child. His counterpart and victim, Day, however, has the empathic capacity to attain one decisive moment of substantial contact with him. Their moment of non-verbal union is the single yet all-redeeming vital affirmation of the novel.

3. Process of research

Tracing back the narrow passage of this research, it has been a combination of intuitive immediacy and gradual, thorough processing. I had first read *Let It Come Down* many years before I recognised I had anything to do with Bowles, apart from cherishing indirect acquaintance. The book's intensity and violence had shocked me, but as a habit, I had marked pages and lines where I had found something, a poetic fragment, a hidden consolation to be remembered. It was: "to become conscious of the substance of life," and "the transcending fact of the living individual." (*Let It* 194) I had also read *Sheltering*, in which I automatically marked the break-through passage of Port's death experience: "Point of darkness and gateway to repose. Reach out, pierce the fine fabric of the sheltering sky, take repose." (*Sheltering* 250) A good while had passed in doctoral preparation, with several poets and worlds researched and reflected on. Also in the meantime, I had conceived and worked out a screenplay, from which a creative allegorical documentary film, *A Sense of a Maze* (2010) grew out. Besides being set in the labyrinthine old medina of Fez, Morocco, the double entendre of its title, the different layers of its reality, and the concentric structural pattern of its flux make the film congruous with the metanarrative organism. This analogy has been rationalised and analysed only later, along the present research. When one morning I awoke with Bowles on my mind again, I knew with certainty that it was him I had really been seeking for the doctoral work. He presented the perfect mystery case of the Western paradigm, elegantly pulling it through the eye of the needle by seeing it through the momentary revelation of substance. When I returned to his books, holding the thread of that quality I had found initially, of consoling, liberating substance, a whole tapestry of such parts began to unravel. Then once I realised it was a cohesive material of substance, I had to find a way to process it. I gradually established and followed my own method of analysis, and reconstructed the four novels of

Bowles based on what I found in interest-free reading to be their hidden **affirmative** substance: what **integrates, sustains, and inspires** the book, the reader, and our unity i.e. the reading experience. With very definite results but no terminological support system, I then read the compulsory critical background, and looked for further authors and scholars, movements, fields where echoes could be heard. I processed the secondary literature, the key works of the handful relevant thinkers, and the one school of thought which considers **literature as live material**. Then came the second intuitive phase, where I made a wide panoramic research of interdisciplinary fields concerned with the same substance, and added the further analysis of Bowles's other genres. What resulted was an enormous amount of rough material, an endless list of significant aspects, a great number of various terms, and a bottomless well of understanding the noumenal phenomenon I consent to call substance. It has been a real adventure, a proper hunt not only for the invaluable treasure, but for ways to handle and present it. From the many conclusions of the whole project, one stands out as palpable and exact: **the axiomatic metanarrative model, presented as the cultic organism**.

The first part of this thesis (Chapters 1-2) is concerned with the **separation** of narrative, and observing its metanarrative tendencies. The second part (Chapter 3) is concerned with **identifying** metanarrative, and observing it as it organises itself. The third part (Chapter 4) deals with **resolving** the apparent divide between shadow and substance. By this step the line of thought comes full circle, as the horizontal plane of narrative proves to be not linear but the perimeter of a greater cycle. N.B. The analogy between history and narrativity is not without interest. It is through two channels between the narrative and metanarrative levels that their complementary functions and relation is clarified. The first bridge is objective, the second subjective. The first is the title, the name of the book, which infuses substance with narrative, and vice versa. The title as enigma can only be fully understood through the threshold of substantive passages, and its understanding immediately feeds back into the narrative. The second bridge is the metanarrative mode of reading a book. This is provided by some form of personal initiation into the work's substance, by gaining direct insight into it, through intuition. This metanarrative mode bears all the characteristics of a rite of passage, so a distinct claim of the thesis is that **the way in which the substance of a literary work may be personalised or internalised is a properly ritual way**. The metanarrative mode is not only inclusive but also illuminative of the linear narrative mode of reading (which is not true vice versa). The thesis places special emphasis on exploring this latter connection between shadow and substance, because its subjective force field is such an underestimated yet vast one. Therefore cultural, literary, and broader inter-disciplinary analogies and references are invited in order to reveal still only a small section of relevance substance holds, and seems always to have held in art and science.

The **conclusion** of my research suggests that the bind between shadow and substance gives narrative its resolution, relevance and perspective, and gives metanarrative its human-scale space, time, and causal extension. While shadow does not exist without substance, the substantive level seems to be a constant, unconditioned dimension. The result of this is that the qualitative difference between shadow and substance proves to be but a **functional split** within the stories, since both concealment and revelation are vital in the human, historical and literary rite of passage which does not force dogmatic morals, but leads to personal realisation. In philosophical terms, narrative and metanarrative are analogous with the dynamic aspect (movement) and the static aspect (fulfilment) of time, respectively. The **line or rather circle of thought** behind the thesis is drawn by the three stages, separation, identification, and reintegration of substance. These illuminate metanarrative autonomy as source, its concentricity of self-structure, and its cyclicity within the narrative context.²⁵

4. The live material of literature

²⁵ See the phases of passage in anthropology as "preliminal rites (rites of separation), liminal rites (rites of transition), and postliminal rites (rites of incorporation)," in: Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, 11.

Through metanarrative analysis, substance reveals itself as live, organically structured material. **Live material**, it may be said, is that which is at once independent, and at the same time capable of effecting and being effected by other live entities. An axiomatic metanarrative model is presented as the total and organic form of the novels. **Organic form** is a central and spheric, autonomous and connective unit, consisting and being part of analogous and hologramic smaller and larger units. The organic structure of the novel quartet contains on the one hand the outer zone of concentric narrative waves, on the other hand the inner circle of central situations and their still centers. Bowles coded substance in his novels in the form of a specific yet universal **cultic model**. Cultic is the category of total forms of culture, ritualistic in process (requiring some sort of a rite of passage), and **organic** in structure. Bowles supersedes the Western literary tradition, emerging with a systematically coherent vision of art and life: he adopted the cultic forms of the Maghreb whereby substance may be directly presented to the audience, the treasure found by the protagonist, to be also found by the reader.

The significance of organic structure in art is immense. Let us remember our last European Renaissance, the message of which was, that it is perspective which projects space and time, which makes a narrative, a history. For a full narrative perspective, the participant must stand in his/her own inner centre, the de-conditioned common source of being.

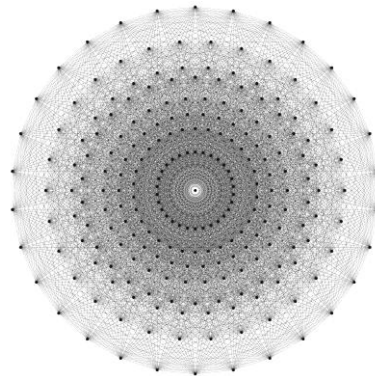


Figure 3. The centred cosmos of substance. This inner cosmic structure is the cross-section of the undivided mould or model. This seed-structure defines the metanarrative, metaphysical mode of seeing perspective in art, in nature, and in space-time. Religions, languages, cults, matter born from this mould may be called organic.

Perspective requires a stable stance in the focal or vanishing point, where the participant must stand in order to understand (and literally under-stand) that space. Modern general structuralism plays the philosophical trick of denying the inner centre, the invisible Sun. But our last springtime revival was precisely the rise of centrally ordered consciousness. (In my view, it is the spirit of eradicated traditional and Gnostic communities which comes to life in great periods of artistic awakening.) For in no way can the key Renaissance compositions be taken in, unless by identifying with their focal Christian and mythical deities. Structure itself carries, and thus contains the coded message: **organic form is itself the message, the code of thought, sense, and conduct**. “The onlooker must stand directly in the centre of the painting, for the composition is highly coherent, and this unity is achieved by the rigorous use of a single vanishing point.”²⁶ Let us remember to give credit to the source of artistic precision: “if it were not for Alberti’s work [i.e. studies of architecture] we would not be able

²⁶ Alessandro Angelini, *Piero della Francesca*, 37.

to understand Piero [della Francesca's] scientific methods of arranging his figures within his compositions.”²⁷ Bowles owes his scientific methods to the cultic tradition of the Maghreb.

4.1 Critical background

The theoretical support of this thesis is provided by philosophical and philological **hermeneutics**, where the work of art is considered a complete entity, a “total form”²⁸ which requires the complex perspective of objectivity and subjectivity. According to hermeneutics, “the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience that changes the person who experiences it.”²⁹ This change in the beholder stems from the fact that the work itself embodies a process of transformation, a rite of change by integration. According to Gadamer, “in deciphering and interpreting [literature], a miracle takes place: the **transformation** of something alien and dead into total contemporaneity and familiarity.”³⁰ In analysis, this transformation is also from a horizontal following of story to its vertical, inner vision. The transformation is only apparently objective: the change takes place in our subjective vision, in our regard of the book. What seemed like linear process is but the perimeter of a larger metanarrative cycle or sphere.

The hermeneutic claim is that the goal of the writer is the **transformation of perception** and interpretation: to change the vision of the reader from narrative to synoptic. This synopsis is exactly the result of the metanarrative mode. Ricoeur claims that the goal of the writer is (as the goal of the critic should also be) to “extract a configuration from a succession.”³¹ Synopsis, therefore, is the vision of substance. The transformation of a succession of shadows into a **configuration** of substance involves a special effect: “The presentation of the essence is **necessarily revelatory**.”³² His revelatory mode is identical with Frye’s kerygmatic mode.³³ This is not only the mode of expression and perception, but concerns the ontology of art. “The kind of time characteristic of ... the work of art [is] **‘fulfilled’ or ‘autonomous’ time**.”³⁴ This fulfilment of time takes place in metanarrative centres of works, where substance reveals itself. A significance of my research may be to demonstrate the effectivity and necessity of this apparently mystical (synoptic, revelatory, sacramental) mode of substance in a perfectly material (text-based), rational (methodological), accessible context of analysis. Ricoeur also assists in bringing substance back from abstraction, by noting that what we are searching for “marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader.”³⁵ This intersection is the point of identification, where the text opens for the reader to identify with the hero. The thesis offers to complete the hermeneutic tasks of **reconstruction and integration** through the theoretical and textual analysis of the metanarrative found in the body of Bowles’s four novels.

4.2 Revelativity

Insightful and synoptic vision is required for the interpretation of narratives which manifest signs of metanarrativity. This approach, however, goes beyond interpretive strategies, as it is the single mode of resolving the irresolvable problems of story. Insight pierces through the thick material of plot, straight to the **hidden texture of substance** i.e. specific points and passages. Synopsis sees the cohesion of these points and passages, as the **subtle body of substance** in concealment i.e. the emerging illuminated and illuminating character of the book.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 118.

²⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102.

³⁰ Ibid., 163.

³¹ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:66.

³² Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 115.

³³ see Chapter Four II. Myth

³⁴ Gadamer, *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, 42.

³⁵ Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 1:71. This again invites the analogy of liminality, the study of which is particularly current.

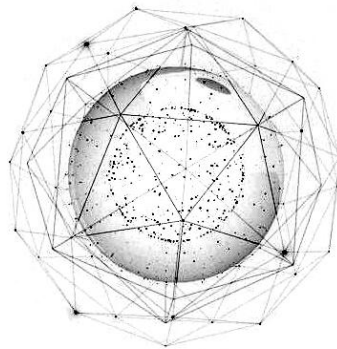


Figure 4. The sphere of the organic entity, revealing both the objective string structure and the subjective inner strata. The same structure of synoptic vision is promised Bowles's reader who dares stand awhile under his sheltering sky.

As source and resolution, substance proves to have absolute, undisputable priority over shadow, which, strictly speaking, is merely its projection into an aspectually divided time. The projection of the present into past and future is possible because substance in itself is by no means static: it merely seems so, compared to the rush of shadows. Bowles leads us to see that metanarrative experience has its own dynamic inner time, a much more intense, boundless yet harmonious and precisely choreographed flow than anything narrative has to offer. It is due to this inner dynamism of substance that its external shadow projections gain momentum. Therefore substance is really analogous, even perhaps synonymous with time: at once static and dynamic. N.B. Here the misconception that time is a constant ticking loses validity. Inwards, this experience or nuomenon is a total world (hence the sense of wholeness), while outwards, it has full potential (hence the sense of rebirth). What this means to the protagonist is not only a single flash of real inner life, but a chance to start building a new outer life. This is the very heart of brightness in these works of literature, and as they should be read at once objectively and subjectively, it means the same to the reader. Therefore it may be concluded that the protagonists' fictive rites of passage are the readers' potential rituals of **initiation**. This revelative potential of books is activated at once there is a clear grasp of substance. This thesis offers a broad view, a number of approaches, and a scientific model of the literary textual substance which is ritually revealed. I believe that the scientific observation of the spirit of books does not take away from its sense, but that knowledge of it deepens its effect further. The warning should be added to products of substance such as the books of Bowles: in involvement, the necessitated self-reflection may cause possible reverberations in morality and mentality. The **revelativity** of a certain cultic text, therefore, is an immanent potentiality, its effect depends only on the intensity and depth of participation. This term was coined and proven adequate during my research, but it opens endless further perspectives. The vision of revelativity offers an alternative to the theory of relativity.