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# The Labyrinth as a Structural Principle in Narrative Texts

Werner Senn

Critics seem increasingly fond of referring to texts metaphorically as labyrinths or mazes. Northrop Frye, in *The Anatomy of Criticism*, speaks of the mythical view of literature as giving a necessary centre without which archetypal criticism is “an endless labyrinth without an outlet.”<sup>1</sup> Derrida’s critique of the notion of centred structure, it has been noted, leads to an “interplay of signification *ad infinitum*” and urges us “to stay inside the labyrinth of discourse.”<sup>2</sup> J. Hillis Miller, in an article entitled “Ariadne’s Thread,” explicates the critic’s unavoidable entanglement in the text he analyses. David Lodge refers to texts like Pynchon’s *Crying of Lot 49* or Fowles’ *The Magus* as “labyrinths without exits.” Angus Fletcher sees the narrative structure of *Tristram Shandy* informed by the labyrinth. The same has been said of *The Canterbury Tales*.<sup>3</sup> What is striking in many of these instances is the loose metaphorical use of the term “labyrinth,” which makes it critically meaningless. Yet writ-

<sup>1</sup> Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> J. Hillis Miller, “Ariadne’s Thread,” *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1976) p. 74; David Lodge, *The Modes of Modern Writing* (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 226; Angus Fletcher, “The Image of Lost Direction,” in *Centre and Labyrinth: Essays in Honour of Northrop Frye*. Ed. Eleanor Cook et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 329 (henceforth cited as Fletcher in the text). Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), esp. pp. 327–332 (I am grateful to Professor Paul Taylor, Geneva, for drawing my attention to this book). Geoffrey Hartman, “The Maze of Modernism,” in *Beyond Formalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970); Bernard Sharratt, *The Literary Labyrinth: Contemporary Critical Discourse* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984). For further recent examples, see Lentricchia, op. cit., chapter 5.

ers continue to be fascinated by the labyrinth as motif, metaphor and mythical symbol. Among contemporaries, the first that come to mind are Borges, Dürrenmatt, Robbe-Grillet, but there are many also in the English-speaking world.<sup>4</sup> A few contrastive examples, from the Elizabethan and the modern periods respectively, are going to be examined here.

This paper addresses itself to the question of how the labyrinth motif, widely current as an "image of lost direction" (Frye), as a metaphor denoting confusion, intricacy, or chaos, can be made to function as a structuring device or structural principle in narrative texts. How can a narrative structure be said to "imitate" a labyrinth design, how far can its intricacy, complexity and discontinuity be pushed for it to be still perceived as a structure, as a labyrinth rather than a chaos?

Independently of the labyrinth mythology, the labyrinth as motif primarily evokes a visual idea of some more or less intricate arrangement and division of space seen from above. If any analogy with the literary medium can be drawn, it can hardly be in the imitation of the vertical, synoptic view but only in the reader's horizontal, sequential experience of confusion. The story-line may well be tangled, "knotted, repetitive, doubled, broken, phantasmal," but the *narrative discourse* may be wholly linear, continuous, consistently focussed through a single narrating instance.<sup>5</sup> One might say, for example, that *Tristram Shandy*, for all its intricacy of structure, insofar as it is concerned with narration, is perfectly continuous, and that its single narrative voice constitutes the thread

<sup>4</sup> Among novels, see e. g. Helen Rose Hull, *Labyrinth* (New York: Macmillan, 1923); Cecil Roberts, *The Labyrinth* (New York: Doubleday, 1944); Lawrence Durrell, *The Dark Labyrinth* (London: Faber, 1958); Michael Ayrton, *The Maze Maker* (London: Longmans, 1967); Philip José Farmer, *The Magic Labyrinth* (New York: Berkley Publishing Corporation, 1980). For non-English examples see also: Ludmila Kapschutschenko, *El laberinto en la narrativa hispanoamericana contemporánea* (London: Tamesis Books, 1981); Anton Krätschi, "Labyrinthe und Höhlen: Beobachtungen an der deutsch-schweizerischen Gegenwartsliteratur," *Neue Rundschau*, 4 (1984), 71–87. For criticism in addition to Fletcher's article, see: G. R. Hocke, *Die Welt als Labyrinth* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1957); Ernest H. Redekop, "Labyrinths in Time and Space," *Mosaic*, 13 (1980), 95–113; T. M. Evans, "The Vernacular Labyrinth: Mazes and Amazement in Shakespeare and Peele," *Shakespeare Jahrbuch West* (1980), 165–73; Joseph Leo Koerner, *Die Suche nach dem Labyrinth* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983); Werner Senn, "Reading Melville's Mazes: An Aspect of the Short Stories," *English Studies*, 65 (1984), 27–35.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, loc. cit., p. 69.

The hundredth time he sighted, though,  
 A bush he left an hour ago,  
 He halted where four alleys crossed  
 And recognized that he was lost.<sup>9</sup>

This recognition would seem to be the crucial point of the labyrinth experience: "it is not so much a trial of strength as a kind of perceptual skill... To a degree the labyrinth leaves the traveller with nothing much but state of mind" (Fletcher, p. 330). The writer who, without necessarily using the labyrinth as setting, wants to exploit the labyrinth experience, has to place such perceptual clues. Readers more apt than *anthropos apteros* may not need a hundred of them, but the principle of repetition is a basic means of provoking this consciousness of loss of direction.

Before pursuing the analogies of labyrinth and narrative structure, a typological distinction needs to be made: art historians and archaeologists distinguish sharply between two basic types of labyrinths. The unicursal, Daedalian or Cretan-type labyrinth as represented pictorially since the second millennium B. C. is a type which has no intersections and no blind alleys but leads inevitably, though in an endlessly roundabout way, to the centre, and from which the way out is an exact duplication of the way in.<sup>10</sup> While in this type the ultimate goal is never in danger of being missed, the frequent reversals of direction nevertheless result "in a vertiginous loss of clarity as to what 'forward' means" (Fletcher, p. 336).

The other type, the multicursal maze of popular lore – like the Hampton Court Maze – is best defined by the *OED* entry for "labyrinth:" "A structure consisting of a number of intercommunicating passages arranged in bewildering complexity...". This is obviously the type envisaged in Auden's poem. Every traveller through the first, the Cretan type, retraces exactly the same path, repeats a single structure, whereas in the second, the choice of path traced is entirely arbitrary, determined by the law of chance and hence a kind of game of trial and error. It is tempting though premature to attribute the first type of structural analogy to texts of the pre-modern era, the second to those of the modern and postmodern. We may recall here the fact that Joyce, when he was writing the "Wandering Rocks" section of *Ulysses*, to which he explicitly assigned a labyrinth technique, bought a game called "Labyrinth-Spiel", which "he played every evening for a time with his

<sup>9</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*. Ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1976), p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> See Hermann Kern, "Labyrinth Cities – City Labyrinths", *Daidalos*, 3 (1982), p. 10. Cf. also Kern's monumental *Labyrinthe: Erscheinungsformen und Deutungen* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1982).

daughter [to find out and] to catalogue six main errors of judgement into which one might fall in choosing a right, left or centre way out of the maze.”<sup>11</sup>

The archetypal experience of loss of direction is exemplified by Spenser's Redcross Knight as he enters the Maze of Error which is placed at the beginning of *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser's first point is that entering the maze is an unavoidable but unintentional act: Redcross and the veiled lady, who is Una, the Truth, seek shelter from a sudden shower in a nearby grove, which they find suitable for purpose:

And all within were pathes and alleies wide,  
With footing worne, and leading inward farre:  
Faire harbour that them seemes; so in they entred arre.<sup>12</sup>

The grammatical ambiguity of tense and voice here suggests that the transition from outside to inside has been made unwittingly. Once inside, they proceed blithely, unawares, “led with delight,”

Vntill the blustring storme is ouerblowne;  
When weening to returne, whence they did stray,  
They cannot finde that path, which first was shounne,  
But wander too and fro in wayes vnknowne,  
Furthest from end then, when they neerest weene,  
That makes them doubt, their wits be not their owne:  
So many paths, so many turnings seene  
That which of them to take, in diuerse doubt they been.  
(I.i.10)

This is the thinking oneself into one's state of mind that the labyrinth experience characteristically induces, an experience “of thought experiencing itself” (Fletcher, p. 330). There is a degree of self-consciousness and self-reflectiveness inherent in the labyrinth motif that distinguishes it from other geometrical motifs which have also become basic human symbols, such as the circle or the cross. It is this quality, too, that seems to make the labyrinth an ideal figure for the technique of *mise en abyme*, i. e. for thematizing mimetic as well as diegetic concerns.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'*. 1934 (London: OUP, 1972), p. 125. Cf. also Koerner, op. cit., pp. 171–72. Budgen's account suggests that Joyce was here interested in the structuring as much as in the symbolic or mythical functions of the labyrinth.

<sup>12</sup> *The Faerie Queene*. Ed. Thomas P. Roche (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), I.i.7. All references in the text are to this edition.

<sup>13</sup> Hutcheon, op. cit. p. 53.

Spenser uses the motif here to establish a concrete visual image in the first place, to bring home fully its perplexing and paradoxical nature:<sup>14</sup>

At last resoluing forward still to fare,  
Till that some end they finde or in or out,  
That path they take, that beaten seemd most bare,  
And like to lead the labyrinth about;  
Which when by tract they hunted had throughout,  
At length it brought them to a hollow cave,  
Amid the thickest woods. (I.i.11)

The broad beaten path paradoxically leads not outward but inward, to further entanglement, to “Errors den.” The well-trodden path suggests that Redcross’ experience is representative. Spenser could draw on a rich iconographic tradition of the labyrinth as a symbol of the world or of human life, but also on contemporary critical discussion of the labyrinth as a principle of narrative design and structure, a point relevant to my discussion.

When Philip Sidney revised his original *Arcadia*, he increased its bulk, diversity and complexity not merely by adding a few “new stories dovetailed into the principal one, after the manner of Spanish romances,” but by changing a simple action involving only a few characters and told in a straightforward manner, into “a Chinese puzzle of enormous intricacy,” a vast design of manifold actions and multiplied characters held together in an intricate structural network of corresponding exemplary stories.<sup>15</sup> The complex and involved narration, in which narrating instances keep changing – the “over-seer of the print” (probably Fulke Greville) in his chapter headings often draws attention to these “interruptions” – is given coherence neither in the mimetic nor the diegetic mode but through the fact that all the stories are “parts in an emblematic moral spectrum.”<sup>16</sup>

It seems that in revising his text, Sidney was modelling it on the pattern of Heliodorus’ romance *Aethiopica*, published in an English

<sup>14</sup> One of those “enigmatic images whose main purpose is to tease the reader into thought,” as Maurice Evans writes (quoted in *The Faerie Queene: A Selection of Critical Essays*. Ed. Peter Bayley (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 109).

<sup>15</sup> See Walter R. Davis and Richard A. Lanham, *Sidney’s Arcadia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 55. The two quotes are from: Albert Feuillerat, ed. *Arcadia* (Cambridge: CUP, 1922), p. viii; Mona Wilson, *Sir Philip Sidney* (London: Duckworth, 1931), p. 140. References to the *New Arcadia* are to Feuillerat’s edition.

<sup>16</sup> Jon S. Lawry, *Sidney’s Two ‘Arcadias’: Pattern and Proceeding* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 155. Cf. also Nancy Lindheim, *The Structures of Sidney’s Arcadia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

translation about 1577 and praised by John Harington in the following terms:

The delicacy of the invention and variety of accidents, strange yet possible, leads the curious reader, by a baited appetite, with a methodical intricateness, through a labyrinth of labours, entertaining his expectation till he come unto an end, which he must seek that he may understand the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

The methodical intricateness of the *New Arcadia* is certainly no less deliberate than that of the *Aethiopica*, its complexity and apparently chaotic proliferation of incident no less informed by a moral aim. The narration subjects the reader to what has been called a "processional principle of action," digressive and diversionary in practice.<sup>18</sup> Like Spenser, Sidney placed an emblematic labyrinth, in the form of a garden maze, at the beginning of his story; it is evoked through the experience of the characters traversing it:

...the backeside of the house was neyther field, garden, nor orchard; or rather it was both field, garden, and orchard: for as soon as the descending of the stayres had delivered them downe, they came into a place cunninglie set with trees of the moste tast-pleasing fruites: but scarcelie they had taken that into their consideration, but that they were suddainely stept into a delicate greene, of each side of the greene a thicket bend, behinde the thickets againe newe beddes of flowers, which being under the trees, the trees were to them a Pavilion, and they to the trees a mosaical floore: so that it seemed that arte therein would needes be delightfull by counterfaiting his enemie error, and making order in confusion (p. 17).

This emblematic image displays the characteristic of the literary labyrinth: its equivocal nature as a signifier. It is none of several things and yet all of them together, it is discrete and yet unified, conceals order by imitating disorder and hints at order in apparent confusion, drawing attention to itself as a locus which provokes recognition and insight.<sup>19</sup>

Fulke Greville made an interesting point about structure: in commenting on the multiplicity of events in the *New Arcadia* he said that "[Sidney's] end in them was not vanishing pleasure alone, but morall images, and Examples (as directing threds) to guide every man through the confused *Labyrinth* of his own desires, and life."<sup>20</sup> The moral pur-

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Wilson, op. cit., p. 140.

<sup>18</sup> Lawry, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>19</sup> According to Koerner, op. cit., p. 35, the image of the labyrinth embodies both chaos and order, confusion and knowledge.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Joan Rees, *Fulke Greville, Lord Brooke, 1554-1628* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 52.

pose, and the referential nature, of the work of art are clearly hinted at in the centre of Sidney's own labyrinth image, as he continues:

In the middest of all the place, was a faire ponde, whose shaking christall was a perfect mirrour to all the other beauties, so that it bare shewe of two gardens: one in deede, the other in shaddowes (p. 17).

This is an icon, as it were, conveying the notion that the entire fiction "shadows forth," to use Spenser's term, an ulterior truth: the labyrinth of life through which Christians have to wander as a necessary condition of their salvation.

Spenser's image of the labyrinth, placed strategically like Sidney's, at the beginning of the narrative, serves much the same purpose of producing that insight, recognition of loss of direction, thus initiating the reader into the art of reading the work – the literary maze – he has imaginatively entered. It "foreshadows emblematically" the later development of the narrative, with Redcross soon lost "all in amaze" (I.ii.5) in the false trail of Archimago.<sup>21</sup> It anticipates the whole multiplex structure with its endless doubling and permutation of characters and events, its "entrelacement" of stories from canto to canto and from book to book.<sup>22</sup> The labyrinth image, thus foregrounded or "mis en abyme," attracts sufficient attention to itself to induce an awareness of the labyrinth structure of the whole text, to suggest to the reader an awareness of order in apparent confusion. While to William Hazlitt, e. g., *The Faerie Queene* was "a labyrinth of sweet sounds [whose] undulations are infinite" and tend to make us forget the moral purpose, the modern critic, looking deeper, perceives the purposeful labyrinthine structure and recognizes the labyrinth as the "imaginative source" and the basic structural image of the work.<sup>23</sup>

While the specifically Christian connotations of the labyrinth motif in *The Faerie Queene* and the *New Arcadia* have lost their significance in our time, its mythical and symbolic potential continues to be explored and exploited in modern narrative texts. We can deal here with only two examples. In both Michael Ayrton's sadly neglected novel *The Maze*

<sup>21</sup> A. C. Hamilton, *The Structure of Allegory in 'The Faerie Queene'* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), p. 40.

<sup>22</sup> The term "entrelacement" is used by Rosemond Tuve, quoted in Bayley, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>23</sup> Angus Fletcher, *The Prophetic Moment: An Essay on Spenser* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 31; Koerner thinks that for Spenser the labyrinth is the symbol of the experience of the world (op. cit., p. 74). Hazlitt's view is quoted in Bayley, op. cit., p. 40.

*Maker* (1967) and John Hawkes' *Virginie* (1981) the protagonists tell their own life stories, both novels are evidently concerned with the fictitiousness of their narratives, and in both, the labyrinth motif serves to structure the fiction and thematize the fiction-making process.

The professional maze maker, Daedalus, who modestly calls himself "technician" (p. 4), asserts at the beginning that in telling his story he is trying to understand "the pattern of [his] life," through which he has blundered as "in a maze" (p. 3):

I did not know until now that in places the walls of this maze were cunningly polished so that the perils I have endured, my fears and hopes and the joy I have taken in my tasks have time and again been reflected in one another ... In all my life I never learned from one experience how to encounter its reflected twin (p. 3).

Not surprisingly, the labyrinth appears to Daedalus to be the adequate metaphor of his life (e. g. pp. 4, 64, 217, 282), but then, as he knows, "a maze is a map of ironies, a pattern of paradox" (p. 253), and thus retracing his life by writing it produces another labyrinth of his own making, full of ironies and paradoxes not this time under his control. In an attempt to create order and impose control, he tries to find out how the events of his life reflect one another, not as shadow and reality, but as repetitions of homological structures.<sup>24</sup> Even a relationship of binary opposition is preferable to chaos, but if the resulting labyrinth serves to create or reveal order in confusion, it also emphasizes the relationship between its elements and de-emphasizes their individual significance, their reference: the self-reflectiveness of the labyrinth seems inescapable.

Daedalus' concern with structuring and ordering is part of a wider concern with the processes of artistic creation, with fiction-making and myth-making. This covert diegetic narcissism is in evidence throughout and takes various characteristic forms.<sup>25</sup> Thus over a time gap of more than 3000 years, Daedalus frequently addresses us, his readers, to dismiss with impatience some of the more absurd myths we have fashioned around his person (e. g. pp. 102, 210). The favourite device of *mise en abyme* is also repeatedly employed in a variety of ways, e. g. when Daedalus describes how, in the bronze doors he made for the temple of Apollo at Cumae, he pictured the main episodes of his life, including the

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Simone Oettli, "The Maze Maker," *Kenyon Review*, N.S. 5 (1983), 67-84. In Oettli's view, the labyrinth provides not only the matrix for the relationships between characters but also "the organic pattern of the novel" as a whole (p. 79).

<sup>25</sup> See Hutcheon, op. cit., p. 23.

maze he had built at Knossos. Extended structural analogies with a labyrinth which we are induced to create ourselves rather than to perceive in the given product are evoked throughout in covertly diegetic passages:

The labyrinth is not merely a dancing floor, nor a complex of passages nor a web of air; it is a field of force. Its architect, as I have learned, embarks upon the construction of a maze, believing that its force lies within his control only to discover that the field is held in equilibrium by opposed forces, at once containing and excluding, and his life's labyrinth has the laugh on him (pp. 253–54).

We even find overt, direct thematizing of the story-telling concern:

How entangled the memories of memories can become! I write them down, in an effort to establish some sort of sequence of events and my recollections proliferate and intertwine so that they bind me like a net ... it seems I am so skilled in making mazes that I block the true paths through my own past and wander down false trails. They are trails I planned myself but I lose my way in them (pp. 217–218).

As one who, by his own admission, “prefer[s] cognition to revelation” (p. 117), Daedalus must content himself with a final insight into the paradox of the maze he built, which is also that of his life and his story:

All this long burrowing and building, to protect or to imprison, this flight through the sky and tunnelling in the earth, seems to me now to add up to no more than the parts of a single great maze which is my life ... Its shape identifies me. It has been my goal and my sanctuary, my journey and its destination ... Toy, trial and torment, the topology of my labyrinth remains ambiguous. Its materials are at once dense, impenetrable, translucent and illusory (p. 282).

For the narrator, structure and experience, product and process have become interchangeable. Re-tracing the way through the maze, the reader can appreciate both in their dialectical relationship, without being able to disentangle them. Like Daedalus, ultimately, the reader finds it easier to note a correspondence between discrete events than to assess their individual significance.

Even more radically than Ayrton, Hawkes, in *Virginie Her Two Lives*, makes repetition, reflection of signifiers, a principle of his narration. The novel consists of the two journals which the 11-year-old Virginie kept in her two lives, one in 1740, when she lives in Seigneur's château called “Dédale” (French for labyrinth of the Cretan type), the other in 1945, when she lives in a rather run-down Parisian flat owned by Bocage, a taxidriver. The phallocratic Seigneur, whose noble vocation is to train five young women in the art of true womanhood, bears a

faint resemblance to the Marquis de Sade (1740 is the year of Sade's birth). Bocage, a goodnatured giant of a man, has surrounded himself with five Parisian girls and some male friends who stage what they call charades of love. In both lives Virginie witnesses a large amount of erotic display pandering to male fantasies. Spectator and willing stagehand, she describes it with perfect, uncanny innocence in beautifully transparent prose. The episodes from the two journals alternate and are obviously made to reflect each other. Virginie, however, betrays only the faintest awareness of the identity of the two narrating instances, which the reader assumes as a matter of course despite its logical impossibility.

Although the journal form makes for one of the most authenticating narrative situations, its fictitiousness is openly declared here at the very beginning, with the diegetic self-consciousness characteristic of postmodern fiction.<sup>26</sup> The novel opens with an anticipation of its own end, as Virginie records how at this moment, while she is being made love to by Bocage, the house, her dress, her journals are burning; "thus I am as impossible a child as the story I tell" (p. 9). It ends with her account of how she throws herself into the fire in which Seigneur has been condemned to die. With the conventions of story-telling thus undermined and made unreal, we are left with two signifying chains made to reflect one another in an elaborate network of correspondences, in which the clarity of the fictional design is as evident as the enigmatic ambiguity of reference.

Hawkes thematizes this ambiguity by using the labyrinth motif as a metaphor, an extended structural image, and a *mise en abyme* in all possible variants.<sup>27</sup> Virginie, the author of the unreal journals, admits finding comfort in reading her own journal, and in both narratives she teases us with hints of an awareness of her other existence, as the subject of another life and author of another journal. Musing on the labyrinth that is "Dédale," she is able to see it both from within and without (p. 51), combining vertical synopsis with horizontal sequence, present desire with memory (p. 59).

The most striking *mise en abyme* occurs in Seigneur's extended allegory of the Land of Love, in which the Citadel of the Desire to Please is situated, with the Labyrinth of Surrender All at its centre:

<sup>26</sup> Hutcheon, p. 53. Cf. also David Lodge, "Mimesis and Diegesis in Modern Fiction," in *Contemporary Approaches to Narrative*, SPELL 1. Ed. Anthony Mortimer (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1984); pp. 89–108. All references to *Virginie* are to the Arena edition (London: Arrow Books, 1984).

<sup>27</sup> Hutcheon, op. cit., pp. 54–55.

Obviously there can be no pleasing without surrender, no surrender that does not please. The labyrinth is to the citadel as the fountain is to the park. The garden of green confusion, which it initially appears to be, is in fact as orderly as the citadel itself; the greenness of the labyrinth determines all. Everything in the citadel is held in its proper place, attains its balance and hence its meaning (p. 100).

Although this occurs in a discourse on sexual love, it is difficult not to read it as a metafictional statement, and not to relate it to the narrative itself, in which events are made to reflect each other in correlated structures (labyrinth to citadel as fountain to park!), where every element derives its meaning only from its place and its relation to others and *not* through external reference: as a labyrinth, the text is self-referential and self-reflective.

To conclude: in both the Elizabethan and the modern texts, the inherent dual nature of the labyrinth – as perceived, for instance, by Sidney – allows for generating complex response. We note a kind of dialectic of vertical synopsis (emphasizing, through structure, the product, the signified, the significance), and of horizontal sequence (emphasizing, through experience, the writing and reading process, the signifier). It is fair to say that the Elizabethan texts favour the former mode and are hence associated structurally with the Cretan type of labyrinth figuring in the Renaissance emblem books, with its firm *arche* and *telos*, whereas the modern texts have structural affinities with the confusing, discontinuous and multicursal maze of random intersections and dead ends, where choices are entirely arbitrary and the way itself, not the goal (centre, exit) to be reached, provides the focus of interest. While these distinctions are general enough to hold true for the examples discussed here, it should nevertheless have become clear that the dialectic of outside/inside, horizontal/vertical, and sequential/synoptic prevents any rigid taxonomy and reductive closure but offers rich possibilities of complex narrative structuring.