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Meaning arises through
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The Hand Behind the Hand

*Ars Ipsa Loquitur, Reassigned Authorship, and Interpretive Jurisdiction in The
Fourth Winter*



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Abstract

This essay examines *The Fourth Winter* as a work in which authorship itself becomes compositional material. It argues that Quinn Tyler Jackson's reassignment of earlier prose and visual art to fictional makers—most notably Cohen Benjamin, Conrad Kirk, and Cyrus Drake—does not retrospectively disclose the “true” motives of the source works, but constructs new diegetic objects with altered chronologies, biographies, publication histories, motives, and fields of interpretive authority. The essay situates this procedure within a compositional practice visible decades before *The Fourth Winter*, tracing the migration of independently published pieces such as “Redemption,” “Staircases,” “Paladin,” and “Elsbeth Stood at the Edge” through *Janus Incubus*, *Midnight at the Arcanum*, and later reassignment. These recursions establish re-authoring without rewriting as a longstanding method rather than a late metafictional device. The essay further argues that the novel's unusually articulate characters do not overdetermine its meaning: their explanations are constituent acts within the artwork, not authoritative glosses upon it. Through Cyrus's painting, Conrad's partial provenance for “Elsbeth,” Valery's critique of *No Hero Over New York*, Cohen's orchard exchange, and *Fragments in Amber*, the novel distinguishes intention from jurisdiction and articulation from adjudication. *Ars ipsa loquitur* therefore names the sovereignty of the completed novel, while reader sovereignty survives in the obligation to judge among persuasive interpretations without treating any one of them as final.

Keywords: *ars ipsa loquitur*; reassigned authorship; diegetic authorship; re-authoring without rewriting; interpretive jurisdiction; reader sovereignty; authorial intention; textual recursion; genetic criticism; paratext; metafiction; projection space; third object; *Fragments in Amber*; *The Fourth Winter*

The cover of *The Fourth Winter* contains, in miniature, one of the novel's most consequential formal operations. *Elysium in post Tempestatem* was painted by Quinn Tyler Jackson, and the book says so plainly; within the novel, however, the same painting belongs to Cyrus Drake. Jackson does not hide his physical authorship so that a fictional painter can impersonate him. He takes an object made by his own hand and gives that hand, within another artwork, to a character whose biography, intentions, relationships, and artistic history are not Jackson's.

The operation is more radical than a pseudonym and more exact than simple metafiction. The material image persists while its attributed maker changes, and with that change come another chronology, another motive, another circle of witnesses, another history of ownership, and another field of possible interpretation. Jackson's actual brushstrokes become Cyrus Drake's diegetic brushstrokes without ceasing to be Jackson's actual ones. Both propositions can remain true because they belong to different representational levels.

The Fourth Winter performs the same operation upon prose. The narrative portion of *The Ancestral Sea* becomes Cohen Benjamin's *No Hero Over New York*; the narrative portion of *Midnight at the Arcanum* becomes Conrad Kirk's *Janus Moon*; *Passing Through* and *Ashes at Closing Time* become works in Cohen's bibliography. What changes is therefore not merely a title or name on a fictional dust jacket. Authorship, chronology, publication history, biography, motive, and the relationship between writer and represented person are all shifted into another projection space.

This transformation matters because *The Fourth Winter* is crowded with explanation. Valery Rockford can analyze Cohen's fiction with formidable precision; Cyrus can speak intelligently about his painting and about Cohen; Conrad can discuss the possible sources of his stories; Brett Lloyd-Ronan can hear the defensive architecture inside Cohen's self-analysis; Cohen himself can eventually describe his failures with alarming lucidity. A reader accustomed to equating thematic articulation with authorial adjudication may therefore feel that the novel has supplied its own criticism in advance.

That impression depends upon putting the speech at the wrong ontological level. Valery's arguments are not notes attached to *The Fourth Winter*; they are *The Fourth Winter*. Cohen's explanations are not Jackson stepping outside the novel to explain Cohen; they are acts performed by Cohen. Cyrus, Brett, Conrad, the documents, the fragments, the poems, the paintings, and the arguments about art are all constituents of the artwork rather than commentary hovering above it. The *ars* in *ars ipsa loquitur* is the novel entire.

The characters speak because they are part of the art. What they do not acquire merely by speaking well is jurisdiction over the whole.

Before *The Fourth Winter*: A Method Already in Motion

The reassignment undertaken by *The Fourth Winter* is new in scale, but not in method. Jackson's publication history shows a compositional practice extending back more than two decades in which independent pieces are repeatedly absorbed into larger structures, assigned to altered characters, supplied with new causal histories, and allowed to acquire different functions without erasing their previous publication states.

Midnight at the Arcanum announces this genealogy rather than concealing it. Its copyright and credits pages state that portions of the monograph were "developed from earlier forms" and list among those sources *Janus Incubus*, *Empty Rooms*, and an extensive series of separately published short stories, including "Clean," "Wake Up Steven," "Barefoot Sonata," "When a Stranger Wandered In," "Midnight at the Arcanum," "In the Shadow of Clay Pigeons," "Elspeth Stood on the Edge," and "Redemption." The Author's Foreword is still more explicit: Jackson describes taking his own previously published work and "restructured, reconsidered, and conflated it," while observing that some of the same work of revision and conflation had already been done in producing *Janus Incubus* in 2002.

The table of contents shows what this does formally. "Midnight," "Zero," "Neck and Neck," "Elspeth Stood at the Edge," "In the Shadow of Clay Pigeons," "Wake Up!," "When a Stranger Wandered In," "Clean," and "Barefoot Sonata" appear not as an appendix of old stories but as titled units within the novel portion of *Midnight at the Arcanum*. The book even tells readers that those pieces may be encountered "as such" or as chapters, depending upon the chosen order of reading.

The publication record makes the prior independent existence of much of this material recoverable. "Elspeth Stood on the Edge" appeared in *Apotheosis* in 2001; "Redemption" in *The Ampersand* in June 2001; "In the Shadow of Clay Pigeons" in *Ubiquity* in April 2002; "Midnight at the Arcanum" in *Apotheosis* in December 2006; "When a Stranger Wandered In" and "Barefoot Sonata" in 2007; "Wake Up Steven" in 2011; and "Clean" in 2013. Jackson's formal bibliography preserves these as publications before *Midnight* turns them into parts of a later narrative architecture.

"Zero" provides an unusually clean genetic example because its earlier title is not obvious from the later table of contents. In *Selected Works*, "Redemption" begins with a sleepless Montreal narrator lying in an abandoned bed, dragging a hand across his chest, feeling a mandolin charm at his neck, smelling the departed lover in the sheets, hearing the "tick of powered time," and listening to Parc Avenue traffic turn imaginatively into a river. In *The Fourth Winter's* Fragment VII, the same textual skeleton appears as Conrad Kirk's "Zero": the bed, perfume, powered time, Montreal heat, Avenue du Parc, river, counting, cold hardwood, and distorted body remain, while

the mandolin has become the saxophone charm appropriate to Conrad and additional numerical imagery has entered the passage.

The story has therefore not merely been reprinted. It has been recast into another character's symbolic equipment and another narrative identity. Jackson first writes "Redemption"; the material is subsequently drawn into the larger *Janus/Midnight* line; *Midnight* recasts it as "Zero"; *The Fourth Winter* then takes the containing novel and declares it Conrad Kirk's *Janus Moon*. The later work does not invent textual portability. It makes an already longstanding practice recursively visible.

The same pattern can be seen in "Staircases" and "Paladin," both of which appeared independently in 2002. Jackson's publication record places "Staircases" in *Ubiquity* in April and "Paladin" in *The Kudzu Monthly* in May, alongside the 2002 publication of *Janus Incubus*. These pieces are especially useful because they show two different kinds of migration: one primarily through identity and point of view, the other through moral role and interpretive allocation.

"Staircases" originally organizes the Seine rescue and Himalayan descent around Nolan and Lloyd. Its later incorporation into *Janus Incubus* changes the principal identities and extends the rescue material into the novel's larger machinery of substituted identity; the old rescue plot is no longer doing precisely the same work because the people carrying it have changed. The same genetic material returns again in *The Fourth Winter*, where Cohen resumes writing in San Francisco and eventually reconstructs Paris and the Seine through Conrad's first-person consciousness before Valery challenges him for having once again dressed his material in somebody else's interior voice.

The result is not a straight line from draft to definitive form. It is a sequence of changes in who experiences the event, who tells it, who survives it, what it is taken to mean, and eventually who is said to have authored the account at all. "Staircases" begins as an independent short, becomes load-bearing material in *Janus Incubus*, is absent from the later *Janus Moon* configuration in precisely the form *Fourth* needs to question, and returns as material Cohen writes about Conrad. The textual ancestry has become part of the ethical drama.

"Paladin" migrates differently. The short already contains Cohen, Cyrus, Salomeh, *Returning*, the problem of heroism, the betrayal, the painting, and Cyrus's refusal to enact the expected retaliatory violence. The material is then expanded in *Janus Incubus* and ultimately contributes to the Cyrus-Cohen-Salomeh structure that *The Ancestral Sea* inherits and revises. Jackson's publication chronology confirms that "Paladin" and *Janus Incubus* were contemporaneous 2002 forms rather than material invented retrospectively for *Fourth*.

When *The Fourth Winter* later makes the relevant *Ancestral* narrative Cohen's *No Hero Over New York*, that older moral architecture changes status again. It is no longer only a sequence Jackson once wrote about Cyrus, Cohen, and Salomeh; inside the new novel it is something Cohen himself has arranged, and Cohen can now be held answerable for the distribution of heroism, abjection, forgiveness, motive, and interiority that the text contains.

This history changes how *The Fourth Winter* should be understood. Its diegetic authorship reassignments are not a late metafictional trick imposed upon an otherwise conventional corpus; they are the point at which an old compositional habit becomes self-recursive. Jackson has long moved material among stories, novels, identities, narrators, and interpretive circumstances. *Fourth* takes the entire history of those transformations and makes the question of who performed them part of the fiction.

Re-authoring Without Rewriting

Once that genealogy is visible, *The Fourth Winter's* most unusual operation can be stated more exactly. Jackson is not simply interpreting his prior texts anew; he is manufacturing fictional acts of authorship for them.

If a literary object is represented not merely by its words but by something like

$$T = (\text{text,author,date,biography,publication history,motive,audience}),$$

then *The Fourth Winter* can preserve much of the first coordinate while radically transforming the rest. The words may survive, but the person who supposedly selected them, the life from which they supposedly emerged, the people supposedly represented by them, and the reasons for their publication all change.

That is why the transformation of *The Ancestral Sea* into *No Hero Over New York* cannot function as Jackson's retrospective explanation of what *Ancestral* "really meant." The Cohenian act of authorship did not cause the historical Jackson text. *The Fourth Winter* creates Cohen's authorship afterward and places the old textual surface inside a new fictional causal history.

Valery's criticism of *No Hero* must therefore be read within that later projection space. When she accuses Cohen of using invention not merely to protect privacy but to fill gaps in his knowledge with a better story, she is interpreting a book that *The Fourth Winter* has made Cohen write. Her criticism can tell us about Valery, about Cohen, about *No Hero*, and about the later novel's ethics of representation. It cannot reach backward through the diegetic reassignment and become a secret confession of what motivated Jackson when he wrote *The Ancestral Sea*.

The difference is not subtle because *Fourth* has altered too many coordinates. *No Hero* has its own publication history, its own relation to Vaila House, its own identifiable models, its own reception by Valery, Brett, and Cyrus, and its own moral consequences inside the narrative. Cyrus can read it and complain that Cohen has made him too heroic; Brett can read it and follow the artistic clues toward Cyrus's paintings; Valery can recognize herself as a transformed red-haired figure and object to what Cohen presumed to know. The older Jackson text has become raw material for a new literary object whose attributed hand is itself character evidence.

The same is true, differently, for *Passing Through* and *Ashes at Closing Time*. Once *Fourth* places those works wholly in Cohen's bibliography, their existing formal properties become things Cohen can be said to have done. A sophisticated multiperspectival technique in *Passing Through* can be brought against Cohen when he claims difficulty entering another consciousness honestly, because within the diegesis his own earlier work demonstrates that he understands epistemic positioning perfectly well. The operation does not alter Jackson's historical motive for writing the source text; it manufactures a Cohenian artistic history in which the old text becomes evidence about a fictional writer.

The older works have become tubes of paint.

The Third Object

The phrase “re-authoring without rewriting” does not mean that the old work is erased. *The Ancestral Sea* remains *The Ancestral Sea*, with the circumstances and intentions of its own composition; *No Hero Over New York* simultaneously becomes available as a diegetic object constructed from its narrative material. Neither can simply replace the other because they occupy different representational levels.



Elysium in post Tempestatem, painted by Quinn Tyler Jackson and attributed within *The Fourth Winter* to Cyrus Drake.

The same verbal passage can therefore support two incompatible but legitimate provenance structures. Read as Jackson’s *Ancestral Sea*, a scene belongs to one history of revision, characterization, and literary intention. Read inside *The Fourth Winter* as Cohen’s *No Hero*, that same scene may become evidence that Cohen presumed to narrate Cyrus’s mind, redistributed Salomeh’s agency, romanticized his own guilt, or transformed retrospective interpretation into apparent inevitability.

What arises is a third object produced by superposition. The sentences have not become a new set of sentences merely because a fictional hand is painted behind them, but neither are they experientially identical once their attributed authorship changes. The reader now has the old text and the later fictionalized authorship simultaneously available, and neither plane can completely absorb the other.

This is more radical than ordinary revision because ordinary revision generally asks which state supersedes another. *The Fourth Winter* allows the states to remain mutually visible. The earlier book is not corrected out of existence; the later novel changes the conditions under which the reader may return to it.

That is also why the transfer of *Elysium in post Tempestatem* matters so much. Jackson does not merely describe an imaginary Cyrus painting; he takes his own actual painting and assigns it to Cyrus. The relationship between Jackson and Cyrus is therefore structurally analogous to the relationship between *The Ancestral Sea* and *No Hero*: the same material object can occupy two authorial regimes at once without requiring either regime to be declared unreal.

“Elspeth” and Partial Provenance

“Elspeth Stood at the Edge” is perhaps the strongest control against treating this method as disguised autobiography because *Midnight at the Arcanum* preserves Jackson’s own account of the story’s genesis before *The Fourth Winter* gives the work a Conradian history. Jackson describes a childhood near-drowning in which his sister Corinna entered the water after him and his brother Shane helped pull him out, then explicitly identifies the experience as an impetus for “Elspeth Stood at the Edge.”

The novel portion of *Midnight* supplies another compositional frame. Immediately before the story appears, the protagonist returns home after a difficult encounter with Vanessa, sits at his typewriter, and begins assembling the pieces of their relationship in a form designed to read as though written by someone else about something else. The story therefore already has multiple layers of source inside *Midnight* itself: Jackson’s explicit autobiographical account outside the novel, the protagonist’s fictional compositional occasion inside it, and the published short-story history preserved in the credits.

The Fourth Winter adds still another. Cohen assumes that “Elspeth” can be decoded as Conrad writing about the Paris rescue in which Cohen pulled him from the Seine. Conrad does not dismiss the reading as nonsense; he refuses its exclusivity. His sister, he says, also once saved him from drowning, and the story may therefore be something larger than either man’s preferred autobiographical mapping.

The overlap is deliberate but partial. Sibling rescue survives from Jackson’s documented history into Conrad’s invented history, while Cohen’s rescue of Conrad, Paris, the Seine, the journey to India, and the ensuing decades belong to a fictional biography that is not Jackson’s. Jackson has never travelled outside North America; Conrad’s authored life, by contrast, is made to depend upon Europe and India. The later provenance therefore cannot be a belated factual disclosure of the earlier one.

This partial preservation is more revealing than total replacement would have been. Had Jackson merely substituted an entirely different biography, *Janus Moon* could be treated as a clean alternate-world relabelling. By conserving the drowning and sibling-rescue structure while introducing biographical facts that cannot belong to Jackson, the novel leaves the seam visible. The reader can see that old material has been selected, carried forward, and made to do new work.

Conrad’s response to Cohen is consequently not merely a lesson in modesty. Cohen wants art to yield a private key because finding himself in the source would make him central to the work’s explanation. Conrad answers with a larger conception of artistic transformation: perhaps Cohen is there, perhaps his sister is there, perhaps both are there, but the completed story is not obliged to collapse back into either life.

Source is evidence. Source is not jurisdiction.

Cyrus and the Painting

Cyrus provides the visual analogue with unusual clarity. During his final meeting with Cohen, he can say that he was trying to paint “whatever survives,” explain why the *post* in the title matters, and even discuss why impending mortality caused him to work in acrylic rather than his customary oil. Yet when Cohen asks for the painting’s meaning, Cyrus withdraws from the role of authorized interpreter: what the title means to Cohen is Cohen’s “burden to discover,” not Cyrus’s to dictate.

Nothing in the exchange requires Cyrus to deny intentionality. He plainly possesses privileged information about what he attempted to make, how he made it, and what circumstances shaped those decisions. What he refuses is the additional claim that privileged knowledge of composition turns into comprehensive authority over the finished painting.

The distinction survives after his death. Cohen later stands before *Elysium* at the memorial showing and experiences the same pigments and brushstrokes differently because Cyrus is gone. The painting itself has not materially changed; the viewer and the conditions of viewing have. Later still it hangs in Cohen and Valery’s home, where another consciousness brings India, Iran, Gabriola, grief, persistence, and domestic continuity to the same surface.

Jackson’s own authorship is implicated in every one of these acts because his is the actual painted surface. The book therefore establishes its authorial problem materially rather than only theoretically: Jackson knows why he painted *Elysium*, yet he has made a novel in which the physical artifact acquires another painter, another intention, and an afterlife among fictional viewers.

The historical hand remains. The diegetic hand has been added.

Valery and the Reassigned *No Hero*

Valery’s position is especially complicated because she is not a character invented only for *The Fourth Winter*. She already exists in the earlier fictional line reaching back through *The Succubus Sea* and *The Ancestral Sea*. When Jackson later makes the *Ancestral* narrative Cohen’s *No Hero Over New York*, he effectively places an older representation of Valery into the hands of another character and then allows the represented woman to answer him.

That is a major shift of projection space. The question is no longer simply how Jackson once wrote Valery; the later novel asks what it means for Cohen to have written a transformed woman from his own life and then arranged her actions and interiority according to his literary needs.

Valery can therefore accuse Cohen of constructing a flattering or exculpatory moral architecture without that accusation becoming a confession about Jackson’s historical motive. The later novel has already changed the author, the chronology, the publication history, the relationship between writer and subject, and the circumstances under which the book was received. The object under Valery’s criticism is *No Hero*, not a transparent conduit back to Jackson’s original act of composing *Ancestral*.

This matters particularly when she attacks Cohen’s use of the Fifth Wall. Her distinction between protective invention and epistemic invention is both an aesthetic proposition and a personal act: she is telling a writer who once represented her what conditions would have to govern any renewed intimacy or collaboration. Her analysis can be exactly right at the level of Cohen’s book while remaining one voice inside the larger novel.

Nor does the novel require her to be wrong in order to preserve openness. Reader sovereignty would be a rather weak principle if it survived only because every articulate character was secretly mistaken.

Articulation Without Adjudication

The deeper wager of *The Fourth Winter* is that intelligent characters can say true things without becoming mouthpieces for the novel's final truth. This places a greater burden on the reader than the simpler technique of keeping everyone slightly inarticulate so that thematic relations remain safely implicit.

Cohen has a genuine faculty for insight. Cyrus tells him as much shortly before dying, but the praise is edged with indictment: Cohen's recurring failure is not that he cannot see what he is doing but that he can observe himself with such fluency that observation becomes a substitute for inhabiting the consequences. "Life is for living, not gawking at," Cyrus tells him, before warning him to change before somebody else pays for his next insight.

Brett makes a related distinction between recognition and the longer labour of living according to what has been recognized. Valery repeatedly identifies moments when Cohen's language is accurate but suspiciously complete. Cohen himself eventually becomes capable of synthesizing much of what they have told him.

If the novel were fundamentally about discovering the correct interpretation of Cohen Benjamin, this convergence would indeed become overdetermining. Its harder question begins only once correct interpretation has been achieved: what does being right about oneself actually authorize, repair, or change?

The answer cannot be supplied by a better paragraph.

The Orchard

The orchard scene makes this limit explicit. Cohen offers Valery an unusually coherent account of how earlier acts of courage and love became moral capital in his own mind, how he polished memories until they functioned like a medal, how he confused withdrawal from harmful action with right action, and how impermanence became an excuse to avoid risking an ordinary future.

Valery does not need to tell him that the analysis is false. Her concern is sharper: "How can I know that? You have a gift for words, Cohen." She has made a career of reading past rhetoric and recognizes that the beauty and completeness of the speech are precisely what prevent the speech from certifying itself.

Her challenge can be extended to the reader's relation with every articulate person in the book. A persuasive explanation may be true, but persuasion is not proof. A character may possess the right vocabulary, even the right diagnosis, without thereby acquiring authority over the interpretation of the whole artwork in which that diagnosis occurs.

Cohen's reply is effectively *ars ipsa loquitur* translated from aesthetics into conduct. Whether his words are more than fine words, he tells Valery, can only be learned by watching what he does next. The claim submits itself to what follows rather than attempting to authenticate itself through further rhetoric.

Jackson then refuses to end the novel at the moment of understanding. The coda advances nearly two years and provides ordinary evidence: a shared home, unfinished household projects, books still waiting for shelves, Valery beginning a book of her own that Cohen does not yet know about, and Cohen returning from a brief trip with the modest luggage appropriate to the trip he

actually took. The ending does not declare that the orchard speech was permanently true; it gives the reader some subsequent conduct and leaves futurity open.

The ethical structure mirrors the aesthetic one. Cohen's explanation cannot speak for his future life any more than Cyrus's explanation can speak exhaustively for his painting.

Reader Sovereignty Requires a Vocabulary

A curious assumption often lies behind complaints that a literary work "tells the reader what to think": that reader autonomy is best protected when characters are prevented from formulating sophisticated interpretations. Under that model, ambiguity depends upon silence, confusion, or a certain strategic impoverishment of vocabulary.

The Fourth Winter assumes something more demanding. It assumes the reader can hear an intelligent argument without surrendering judgment to the person who made it.

Valery may be devastatingly perceptive. Brett may formulate an elegant distinction. Cyrus may understand Cohen in ways Cohen cannot yet understand himself. His Eminence may supply exactly the conceptual vocabulary Cohen needs. None of this injures reader sovereignty unless the reader is presumed incapable of distinguishing the force of an interpretation from its jurisdiction.

The novel's long 2014 sequence between Cohen and Valery makes the distinction practical. Their relationship does not develop because either delivers a definitive speech about what they are becoming. It gathers through bread, dinners, dishes, silence, photographs, paintings, walks, weather, phone calls, and the gradual disappearance of formal scheduling. The two people who possess perhaps the novel's most elaborate vocabularies nevertheless come together through repeated conduct before they finally name what the conduct might mean.

That structure matters because it places eloquence beside other forms of evidence. People speak; people also act. Sometimes the two align, sometimes they do not, and sometimes ordinary recurrence reveals something before either character chooses to formulate it.

The reader is not protected from ideas. The reader is trusted with them.

The Fragments and the Old Words

Fragments in Amber extends the same trust materially. The book reproduces eight excerpts from the four diegetic works—*No Hero Over New York*, *Passing Through*, *Ashes at Closing Time*, and *Janus Moon*—and makes them available after the main narrative while also pointing toward them from earlier scenes.

The fragments therefore do not operate as an answer key. A reader may encounter one immediately when a character invokes it, may wait until after the coda and *Puck's Epilogue*, or may never consult it at all. The textual evidence stays fixed while the interpretive position of the person encountering it changes.

This reproduces, at the level of book navigation, the older compositional history visible in the corpus. The same words can occupy different contexts without becoming the same reading. "Redemption" is not experientially identical to "Zero" merely because the later text carries so much of its verbal and imagistic structure; "Elspeth" is not exhausted by either Jackson's autobiographical account or Conrad's fictional provenance; the betrayal material does not do exactly the same work in "Paladin," *Janus Incubus*, *The Ancestral Sea*, *No Hero*, and *The Fourth Winter*.

The old text remains. The reader changes, and the hand attributed to the text may change with it.

“Amber” is therefore an unusually exact name. Amber preserves an earlier arrangement by arresting it; what survives can be inspected because it can no longer move, revise itself, or answer back. The fragments preserve old textual states, but *The Fourth Winter* surrounds them with living characters who can dispute what those states have done.

The archive is not final because the people are still speaking.

The Hand Behind the Hand

Puck's Epilogue eventually reminds the reader that every written truth has known a hand. The proposition might ordinarily encourage biographical recovery: find the hand, reconstruct the intention, and perhaps the text yields its secret.

The Fourth Winter makes that movement impossible to complete.

The hand matters enormously. Attribution changes ethical questions. A passage read as neutral third-person narration becomes something else when the novel asks us to imagine Cohen choosing those details about Cyrus or Valery. A story changes when it becomes Conrad's rather than Jackson's. A painting changes when the reader knows that Jackson physically painted it but Cyrus fictionally did.

Yet discovering the hand does not finish the work. Conrad may know something about where “Elspeth” came from without owning what it means. Cyrus may tell us what he tried to paint without closing the canvas. Valery may know exactly what Cohen did to her representation without becoming the final interpreter of *No Hero*, much less of *The Fourth Winter*.

Jackson's hand is the outermost hand available to us, and it remains everywhere. He wrote the older stories, the prior novels, the new novel, the characters' arguments, the reassigned bibliographies, and the scenes in which those bibliographies are disputed. He painted *Elysium*. Nothing in *ars ipsa loquitur* requires him to deny any of that.

What the novel denies is the inference from authorship to sovereignty.

The artist has responsibility for making the object. The artist can know more than anyone about the circumstances of that making. Neither fact requires every later interpretation to become subordinate to the artist's explanation.

That principle is not merely stated in *The Fourth Winter*. Jackson has built the corpus history into its demonstration.

The Fabrication of Overdetermination

Once the representational levels are kept separate, much of the apparent overdetermination surrounding *The Fourth Winter* proves to be fabricated by category collapse. An articulate character is treated as an authorial gloss; a fictional motive assigned to Cohen is mistaken for Jackson's historical motive; a later fictional publication history is treated as revelation about an earlier real publication; the transformation of an old text is confused with a correction of what that text “really was.”

The publication history resists every one of these collapses. Jackson's independently published stories visibly predate the later narrative containers that absorb them. *Midnight at the Arcanum* openly credits those previous states while transforming them into the novel's structure. “Redemption” becomes visible again as “Zero” under changed symbolic furniture; “Elspeth” carries both an explicit Jackson-level autobiographical genesis and a later Conrad-level one; “Staircases” and “Paladin” show identity, plot, and moral function moving before *Fourth* ever exists.

The Fourth Winter does not suddenly begin interpreting a static archive. It inherits an archive that has always been mobile.

The 2026 innovation is to make that mobility itself diegetic. The novel takes the previous containers and paints new hands behind them, then lets the people supposedly represented by those hands object, reinterpret, remember differently, or decline to be finished by the representation.

The explanations are therefore not explanations external to the artwork. They are additional strokes in the new composition.

Ars Ipsa Loquitur

The Ravensvale motto acquires its full force only when *ars* is understood at the correct scale. The art that speaks for itself is not Cohen's orchard speech, Valery's Fifth Wall, Cyrus's account of painting, Conrad's theory of "Elspeth," Brett's aphorisms, or the Rinpoche's teaching taken separately. The art is *The Fourth Winter* entire, and all those speeches belong inside it.

This means that highly articulate characters are not a concession against reader sovereignty. Their intelligence is the test of it. Jackson does not preserve the reader's freedom by making the people inside the novel incapable of naming what they see; he assumes the reader has enough vocabulary to hear them at their strongest and still decide what authority their words deserve.

Valery can be right. Cohen can be right. Cyrus can be right. Conrad can be right about different parts of the same story, and their correctness still need not settle the novel.

The orchard gives the principle its clearest form. Valery hears Cohen make an extraordinarily persuasive account of himself and asks whether persuasive language is precisely the danger; Cohen can answer only by turning from explanation toward future evidence. The exchange does not impoverish language. It locates the point at which language has done all it can.

The same point is reached at the outer edge of the novel. Jackson can explain his compositional process; the publication history can document the genetic relationships; the earlier stories can be laid beside the later chapters; the changing names, motives, biographies, and narrative functions can be mapped with considerable precision. None of that converts explanation into final jurisdiction.

Jackson will eventually be absent from the conversation in the ordinary mortal sense. Cohen Benjamin, Conrad Kirk, Cyrus Drake, Valery Rockford, and the books and paintings attributed to them will remain available in ink, permanently capable of being encountered by readers who were never present for their making.

That is the final paradox of the hand behind the hand. The real author can surrender fictional authorship without surrendering responsibility, and the fictional author can acquire a permanently recorded intention without thereby acquiring sovereignty over the work attributed to him. The text remains while the reader continues to arrive.

Ars ipsa loquitur does not mean that nobody explains. It means that after every explanation has spoken, the artwork has not been exhausted by any of them.

