ENIGMATIC SPACES AND ILLUSIVE MAPS:
DECIPHERING THE EPIGRAPH IN CATHERINE FISHER'S INCARCERON AND
SAPPHIQUE

By

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To my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ

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SAPPHIQUE

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Published in 2007 and 2008, Catherine Fisher's duology *Incarceron* and

Sapphique follows the pursuit of several individuals' attempt to escape the oppression,

control and murderous nature of the prison called their home—Incarceron. Over the

span of two novels, Young Finn, Claudia and the prison desperately search for the

origins of their identity, which seems to be tangled within a constructed culture and

forgotten history. In both form and content, *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* offer novel ways

of thinking about identity, memory and history. Like the narratives' characters,

Incarceron and *Sapphique* are a compilation of many identities and constructions. The

texts function as a site of merger, in which reader identity and text identity are explored.

A combined replica of social science fiction, the dystopian future and the cyberpunk

text, Fisher's novels repurpose the dystopian classic in order to address key issues

engaged by postmodernists—namely questions of existence, identity and reality.

In this paper, I will focus on the main device that structures our reading, the

epigraphs that begin each chapter. Insofar as the content of the epigraph invites its

readers to question how they define what it means to be human and how the

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distinctions between the human and artificial intelligence may be more complex than they might have presumed. *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* in turn call these readers to consider the categories and beliefs that structure their perceptions of self and of the world around them. On the reader's behalf, the novels' use of the epigraph allows for interpretive freedom and varies ways of reading the text. The mere presence of the epigraph, as parallel narratives to Fisher's main narrative, forces readers to become active participants in the construction of *Incarceron* and *Sapphique.* In deciphering these epigraphs, the texts show that the relationship between human (reader) and machine (text) is necessary to construct the meaning of both narratives.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

I wanted to explore all our uncertainties about ourselves in this sequel to Incarceron. Who are we? Can we do the things others expect of us? And can we ever escape ourselves?

—Catherine Fisher, *Sapphique*

Opening Statements

Catherine Fisher's novels, *Incarceron* (2007) and *Sapphique* (2008), draw on traditions of cyberpunk, steampunk, and social science fiction in order to depict the repercussions of a social-scientific experiment – specifically, a prison that exhibits characteristics of what has come to be called artificial intelligence (AI). Fisher's novels depict the AI called Incarceron, which was created to civilize and correct society's dissidents while simulating a botanic paradise. The artificial intelligence that Fisher's novels depict was created in the first installment of Fisher's duology, entitled simply *Incarceron*. The novel's protagonist, Finn, is a prisoner who is unsure of his identity and who periodically has unexplainable dreams and visions that suggest a previous existence outside of the prison. In the course of the narrative, Finn travels through the vast and intricate space of the prison with his companions Keiro, Attia, and Gildas, and together, they attempt to escape Incarceron's controlling and murderous grasp. Along the way, Finn discovers a key which allows him to peer into the outside world, an ostensible paradise called the Realm; in so doing, he spies Claudia, daughter to the warden of Incarceron and heir to the prison. By the novel's end, Finn escapes the prison only to enter another imperfect world governed by conflict, oppression, and ruin. Ultimately, Finn learns that he cannot attain freedom, and that what he thought a better reality is a bitter illusion.

Fisher's second installment in the series, *Sapphique*, follows Incarceron's attempt to build itself a body. The novel chronicles this system's quest to become human and, in this way, to escape the entity it was initially designed to become. Driven by this desire to become human, Incarceron begins ruthlessly killing and extracting its prisoners' human flesh in order to build itself a body. By the novel's conclusion, Incarceron fails in its efforts and the prison is once again forced to submit to the authority of its creators, the authority of the Realm.

Both *Incarceon* and *Sapphique* can be read as offering models of reality. They suggest that a desired or imagined reality is just as valuable and reliable as actual reality. Obtaining life in the Realm appears to Finn and his companions as constituting freedom – an accepted paradise – because both the inhabitants of the Realm and Incarceron know nothing better than their environments. Fisher's novels use allusions to the complex relationship between human and machine to engage with various dichotomies ranging from this notion of authority versus freedom to real versus imaginary. Both dichotomies are made evident through the novels' complex portrayal of the relationship between human and machine. Moreover, Fisher's novels build upon this relationship to show that any sense of human sovereignty, free-will, or self-control is but an illusion. Both *Incarceron's* and *Sapphique's* formal and stylistic craftsmanship open this space of uncertainty, perplexity, and doubt.

In terms of the novels' style, specifically its use of paratexual devices, *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* presume that adolescent readers are active participants in today's technological age. Likewise, the novels' juxtaposition of the visual presentation of the text and its narrative content suggest that adolescent identity is constructed through

environment. The text asks the reader to pay attention to visual elements, such as typography and framing devices, in order to decipher the meaning of the main narrative. The text foregrounds the mediated relationship of reader to text, rather than presenting the text as direct avenue to its fictional worlds. We can think about these visual mediations as "machines," devices necessary in order at once to initiate our reading and disrupt it. Furthermore, the mechanic structure reflects the questions concerning human identity raised in the primary narrative.

In what follows, I will focus on one of the main devices that structure our reading, the epigraphs that open each chapter. Insofar as the content of the epigraph invites its readers to question what it means to be. The device calls readers to acknowledge that distinctions between human and artificial intelligence might be more complex than they might have presumed. *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* prompt their readers to consider the categories and beliefs that structure their perceptions of self and the world around them. In turn, the novels' use of the epigraph allows its readers interpretive freedom and varied ways of reading the text. The mere presence of the epigraph, as parallel narratives, forces readers to become active participants in the construction of the texts. The reader's ability to decipher these epigraphs show that the relationship between human (reader) and machine (text) is necessary to construct meaning.

Reclaiming Conventions and Understanding Traditions

The epigraph is a paratextual device used as "a short quotation or pithy sentence placed at the commencement of a work, a chapter, etc. to indicate the leading idea or sentiment; a motto" (OED). The term "epigraph" originates from the Greek terms, *ἐπιγραφή* and *ἐπιγράφειν*, meaning "inscription" and "to write upon." The terms originally referred to "an inscription placed upon a building, tomb, or statue to indicate its name or

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destination" (OED). According to Rainier Grutman, a famous example of the device is in Dante Alighieri's 14th century epic masterpiece, *Inferno*. In Canto 3 and verses 1 through 9, for example, Dante sees the inscription above the gate of hell: *"per me si va nella citta` dolente … Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate"* (139). In his 1954 translation of Dante's *Inferno*, John Ciardia renders the Italian as: "I am the way into the city of woe… Abandon all hope ye who enter here." (42)[1] In this example, the epigraph acts as a cautionary warning, providing individuals with a description of what lies behind the gate.

By the eighteenth century, the term "epigraph" had shifted in meaning, though to some degree it retained its Greek roots. Samuel Johnson, literary critic and author of the *Dictionary of the English Language*, defined "motto" (commonly equated with the term epigraph) as "a sentence or word added to a device or prefixed to anything written" (1785, vol.2, p.156). Not only did Johnson establish a definition for the term that correlates to our contemporary denotation, he was an enthusiastic user of the device himself. According to Gurtman, it was because of Johnson that people began to understand the epigraph as a witty and pithy saying.

Both its meanings as an inscription and a quote to commence a work suggest that those who continue to use the epigraph do not do so at random, but are guided by some larger sentiment or agenda. Readers have only to consider the uses of the epigraph in the nineteenth-century. Edgar Allen Poe, for example used the device to preface his poetry and to provide further description to his titles. Mary Anne Evans,

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[1]   In the original version of Dante's Inferno, the inscription written above the gate of hell found in canto 3.1-9 reads: "*per me si va nella città dolente…Lasciate ogne speranza, voi ch'intrate*". John Ciardi's 1954 translation of the Inscription reads: "I am the way into the city of woe… Abandon all hope ye who enter here". This is one the first literary texts in which we see the epigraph being used to represent a literal inscription upon an object.

whose pen-name was George Elliot, used what had at this point become a popular

device to reference other literary works, music, and art. In Lev Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*

(1878) [2] the epigraph functions as a thematic device that referred to key passages of

the Bible and in turn validated Tolstoy's overarching motif of vengeance, which plagues

the consciousness of his characters. As the Romantic gave way to the Modernist era,

the epigraph took on further resonance. Andrei's Bely's *Petersburg* (1913)[3]—which,

according to Vladimir Nabokov, is one of the West's most acclaimed works of fiction,

and considerably one of the most important works of the 20th century[4]—draws its

epigraph from the Russian historical archive in order to tell an alternative history of the

1905 Russian Revolution.

  As the above examples make clear, the epigraph as a literary device draws

attention to the narrative in its entirety. As a result, readers may assume that the

epigraph serves to place into relief key aspects of the main narrative by providing clarity

and guiding the reader's understanding. However, epigraphs have a divergent

potential: instead of helping readers to move freely though the narrative plot, epigraphs

can lead readers astray, much like deceptive narrators. In this way, the epigraph has

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[2] The epigraph in reference here is Lev Tolstoy's opening statement: "Vengeance is mine; I will repay." If one knows the premise behind Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* it becomes obvious that Tolstoy's preceding statement frames his narrative of *Anna Karenina* in its entirety. *Anna Karenina* follows the destruction of a young woman's life and marriage because of her affair with another man. It should also be noted that the epigraph is drawn from Romans 12: 19, which reads: "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." As did many writers of his time, Tolstoy uses a biblical text to frame his narrative.

[3] Andrei Bely's *Petersburg* begins each chapter with epigraphic material in the form of historical poetry or a general reference to the Russian historical archive. Like his predecessor Tolstoy, Bely's epigraphs are often used to frame the corresponding chapter. What's interesting about Bely's use of the epigraph is this indirect correlation to the narrative. The epigraph may be so far removed from the text, although they encourage and refer back to Bely's overarching themes, that readers have to refers to the outside work being reference to understand its correlation to the narrative fully.

[4] Cited in the introduction to Andrei's Bely's *Petersburg* (1913), Nabokov esteems Bely's texts with Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922)

the potential of creating an alternative ironic narrative, contrary to the one the reader is supposed to embrace. The use of playful, obscure and ironic epigraphs to produce divergent narratives is evident in both of Catherine Fisher's young adult texts.

As we have seen in the preceding examples, the traditional use of the epigraph may serve as a preface, summary, counter-example or a method to link the text to a larger discussion. To a certain extent, Fisher's novels subscribe to this traditional use of the epigraph insofar as they precede each chapter's content. Crucially, however, the epigraphs in Fisher's novels are not gathered from extratextual sources outside the universe of her novels. Rather, these epigraphs derive from the same fictional space the novels construct. Fisher's employment of epigraphs departs from traditional uses of this form, because they never refer—with one significant exception, to be discussed below—to texts that exist outside her novels' fictional universe. The epigraphs in *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* refer to imaginary texts attributed to the same novels' fictional characters (e.g., Sapphique, and Incarceron). In turn, these epigraphs imply multiple layers and various parallel narratives, and also signify the novels' concern with the relationship between human (reader) and machine (text). The text is analogous to the machine as it offers readers a means to engage with the author's thoughts through the constructed form of the narrative. The reader's relationship to the text is significant because without the text/machine, the materiality of the author's thoughts, and other cultural literary traces the reader cannot construct or conceive a meaning of the text. My following section, will explore the epigraph's dual characteristic as a visual emblem and source of narration in order to argue that these two characteristics come together to invite the reader into a space of complexity and uncertainty.

CHAPTER 2
STRANGE CIPHERS

In various ways, the novels' epigraphs suggest, a greater depth to Fisher's novels even as their visual structure reflects the physical architecture of Incarceron. Further, the epigraphic content provides visual documentation regarding the history of the novels' fictional universe. Although the authors of these epigraphs have little to no significance within the main narrative, their testimonies are essential to grasping the complex relationship that the novels develop between Incarceron and the Realm.
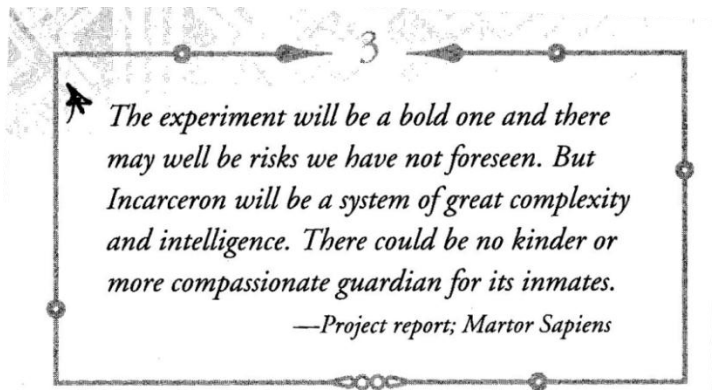

Figure 2-1. Project Report; Martor Sapiens

In order to appreciate the significance of the epigraph in Fisher's novels, it may be helpful to perform a close reading of two exemplary epigraphs taken from *Incarceron*. First, I would like to draw attention to the visual construction of the epigraph. The epigraph that precedes Fisher's third chapter, for example, describes the prison as a complex and intelligent system. The epigraph implies that the prison's design and engineered intelligence governs and shelters its inmates. The description of Incarceron as both a complex and intelligent system is comparable to the epigraph's mysterious visual design. As its visual design mimics the complexity of the prison, making it to appear to be "a compassionate guardian for its" readers, it has the potential to lure

readers into its narrative content. Once readers engage with the narrative contained within the epigraphic space, they struggle to find a correlation between Fisher's epigraphic content and the main narrative. The epigraph's presence does more than complicate interpretation; it mimics and reflects the novel's construction of Incarceron. The epigraph's stylistic structure and framing reflects the text's construction of the prison. Fisher does not let her additional content stand alone; instead, each of her epigraphs is embellished by two arrows that circle and entraps the fragmented text. These arrows come together to encase the information provided before each chapter. The arrows do not completely intersect. We are left with a tiny space which allows readers and the chapter number to enter into and exit the space of the epigraph. In addition, the fluidity of each arrow is disrupted by tiny circles that potentially redirect us, and enigmatic symbols that complicate our course of surveillance at the bottom of the box.

Not insignificantly, the text's presentation of epigraphs uncannily resembles the narrative's description of Incarceron. Incarceron too is a contained enigmatic space: it is at once the size of a tiny cube and as vast as an entire world. Moreover, even as the arrows appear infinite and continuous so does the vast space of the prison, "which contains [metallic] mountains, forests of silver trees, and cities of raged people" (412). The prison is built as a metallic maze with metal chambers, corridors, circuits, and wiring that controls and consumes prisoners. Similarly, Fisher's epigraphs have the power to consume our attention, controlling how we read the text.

In the first encounter with the epigraph, readers may not be aware of the epigraph's visual presentation and how it affects the reading of the novel. Because of

the epigraphic framing, readers may be lured into approaching its material from top to bottom. When approaching the epigraph from top to bottom, we notice that arrows allow for an open space, inviting readers into epigraph's narrative content. After readers are lured into this rather peculiar space, only then are readers permitted to read the epigraph's content. Subsequently, readers continue to the narrative of the specified chapter with an expectation of a correlation to the epigraph. However to an unclear relationship between the content of the chapter and the epigraph, immediate comprehension does not occur. As a result, readers are, brought back to the epigraphic space.

The epigraph's visual presentation introduces a paradox insofar as it alerts readers to the ambiguity and lack of clarity within a text they might otherwise consider a straight-forward narration. This ambiguity also invites richer interpretations. If the reader pays attention to the epigraphic material, not only acknowledging its visual presence but also working to determine the significance of its design, then s/he may discover further more complex ways to read the novels. Reading the epigraphs is thus necessary to construct a richer interpretation of the text.

In order to grasp the relationship between narrative content and visual presentation, readers must acknowledge that any text "is more than the sum of its parts" (Grutman 144). For example, the epigraphs in Fisher's novels derive their significance from other elements such as typography and the visual boarder that encases them. In addition it can be acknowledged that Fisher's epigraphs derive their meaning from their "function and position relative to other elements" (Grutman 144) contained within the text, such as page design and typography. Grutman suggests that the presence or

absence of any "given element, like the epigraph, has repercussions for the text as a whole" (Grutman 144). As a result readers should assume that the structural design of the epigraph will affect interpretation. However, I would like to suggest that the epigraph does more than complicate interpretation; it mimics and reflects the novels' construction of Incarceron. The epigraph's structure imitates visually the prison's complex structure.

The epigraph to Fisher's third chapter gestures simultaneously to the prison's design and to the function of the epigraph. Based on this reading, readers may infer that Incarceron is designed to be "guardian" (Fisher 23) of the Realm's dissidents, similar to the way the epigraph, due to its placement before the opening of each chapter shepherds the novels' readers. The Realm's need for an "intelligent and complex system" (Fisher 23) not only suggests a desire for an intellectually sophisticated prison but a desire for cultural or societal change. Insofar as Incarceron is a differential space from that of the Realm, the epigraph likewise is a space set a part from the main narrative. Both epigraph and prison are composed of a weaving of material, the epigraph that of previously composed narrations, stories and histories —a compilation of fictional and non-fictional works—and Incarceron of human flesh and metal. This comparison signals that there is more to be discovered about the narratives contained within the epigraph's unique visual space.

Chapter nine's epigraphic content expounds upon the internal physical nature of the prison and its prisoners, thus drawing further attention to the correlation between the epigraph as a weaving of additional narrative material and the novel's characters. The correlation between the epigraphs and the characters further suggests that neither is organic in form. Fisher's epigraphs are indeed references to other authors' narrations

just as the prisoners of Incarceron are internally a synthesis of metal and organic human flesh.

Chapter nine's epigraph, pictured at the bottom left, is an account taken from the "Songs of Sapphique," one of the many fictional sources referred to in Fisher's novels. The author, Sapphique, a legendary figure who escaped from Incarceron, states that he was born from Incarceron's pain and that his bones are steel, his veins are circuits, and his heart is a vault of iron (109). Sapphique's song can be read as either a literal description of Sapphique's internal composition or a figure of his personality. However, it is not until readers encounter chapter thirteen and revisit chapter five of *Incarceon* that s/he learns the implications of chapter nine's epigraphic content.

Chapters five and thirteen of *Incarceron* allude to and expand upon chapter nine's epigraphic content. The epigraph is a description of Sapphique's physical nature, his internal being.

You are my father, Incarceron.
I was born from your pain.
Bones of steel; circuits for veins.
My heart a vault of iron.
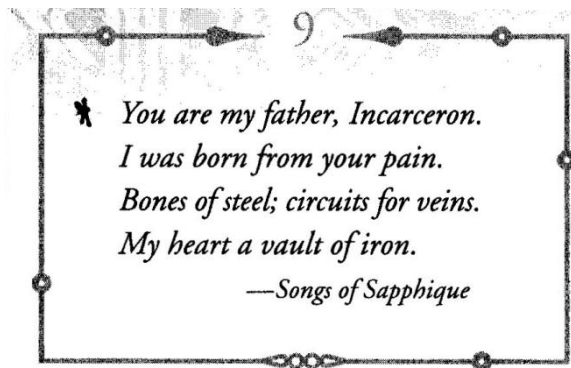   —Songs of Sapphique

Figure 2-2. Songs of Sapphique

In Chapter five, Finn and Keiro, Finn's Oath-brother and fellow prisoner of Incarceron, talk about a group of prisoners who appear to be half machine and half human. Because Finn fears the possibility of being bred from the prison's wires, he says that he was born outside of Incarceron's walls in a place called "The Realm." When Keiro

claims that Finn was born in the prison, Finn insists that he was not "bred out of some artificial womb of wires and chemicals" (67).

Once readers recognize what is at stake in Finn's assertion that he was born outside of the prison, readers can in turn begin to decipher the importance of chapter nine's epigraph. Sapphique, as the epigraph I suggests, is a genetically modified being composed of machine and organic human flesh. In chapter five, Finn defends his status as a human who can trace his origins to organic reproduction, rather than as a product of recycled circuitry produced within the limited confines of the prison. Crucially, Finn's defense of his organic rather than synthetic humanity takes on additional significance once it is considered in light of the epigraph that precedes chapter nine. After all, chapter nine's epigraph suggests to readers that not all of Incarceron's inmates are organically human. The image of "bones of steel and circuits of veins" (109), readers realize is a literal reference to the metallic material running through the bodies of Incarceron's prisoners. The epigraph suggests that Incarceron really does breed its own species of humans, named "halfmen" (400), individuals composed of both organic human material and metal components and fibers available within confines of the prison. Moreover, once the reader puts into dialogue Finn's statements and the information they glean from the epigraph, s/he will infer that the prison in which Finn lives is not merely a storage facility for society's apostates but a living entity capable of reproducing. As the epigraph implies, Incarceron is an artificial intelligence that has the power to replicate human flesh. Thus, when we are told in the epigraph that Incarceron is Sapphique's father, the implication is that Sapphique is literally embedded with steel and "circuitry for veins" (167).

Chapter thirteen qualifies chapter nine's epigraphic content and Finn's fear by introducing a number of characters who appear to be inorganic in nature. Chapter thirteen describes one such prisoner as "a patchwork of metal, with [metal] threaded veins and cartilage" (167). The language used to describe the interlocking of metal and flesh in both the creature's and Sapphique's bodies shows that Finn and his companions' perception of what is human is often partial at best. The creatures of the prison and Sapphique are both described as having "threads" of metal intertwined within their circulatory system and "patch works of metal concealed by their skin" (167). At this moment, the narrative invites readers to re-evaluate how they define the "human" and how their definitions of the human may falter in light of key information given by the text. The narrative prompts readers to question how much of the prisoners' flesh is enmeshed with the metallic composition of the prison, and in turn, to what degree such individuals could still be considered human.

Neil Badmington states that it is "impossible to maintain a clear distinction between the human and the inhuman (machine) because given enough organs, a machine would be capable of responding in a manner utterly indistinguishable from that of a human being" (18). Certainly, Badmington's discussion of the human and the machine challenges conventional wisdom. For example, according to the OED's definition, there is a clear distinction between the human and inhuman. The definition reads that: the human is "of the nature of, relating to, or concerning human beings in their activities, as contrasted (both positively and negatively) with things commonly regarded as impersonal or mechanical, as machines, systems, and processes." The OED definition explicitly asserts a distinction between the human and machine, while Badmington

suggest otherwise. The progression of various lines of thoughts ranging from Kantian to Post-humanist philosophy concerning human identity has shown that the human is an entity that relies on various technological agents and machines. Human existence and progression hinges on the very existence of the machine.

Rene Descartes' discussion of the idea of the human in *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences* (1637), compares the human to its synthetic counterpart, the machine, which he refers to as the automaton. The automaton is, simply, a machine fabricated by human industry. Descartes argues that "if there were machines bearing the image of our bodies, and capable of imitating our actions as far as it is morally possible," (chapter 5) the machine would be unable to produce and articulate language and possess reason. The machine could never be equated with the human because it lacks the ability to formulate "words or other signs arranged in such a manner" (chapter 5). In addition to this first distinction, the machine is a programed entity and hence does not act on its own volition. Descartes recognizes that while the machine may carry out actions in a more efficient manner than its human counter-part, it does not act from an innate knowledge, "but solely from the disposition of its organs" (Chapter 5) or what we call programing. For Descartes, the human is any species that has the ability to articulate thoughts in such a way that others can receive while demonstrating the ability to reason and process multiple potentialities before carrying out an action. For Descartes, the human is a product of reason, logic, and knowledge all of which the machine is not.

Descartes's discourse on the human stands in stark contrast to what Badmington claims is "human". Badmington suggests that if a machine were to attempt to simulate

humans with all human faculties intact, then there would be no distinction. Badmington argues that the machine has civilized and preserved the human species and is hence a necessary asset to human existence and development. He states:

> Why, if the computer has "moved in," should there be a
> human witness? What might such an onlooker reveal
> about the apparent apocalypse? If technology has truly
> sped "us" outside and beyond the space of humanism,
> why is "Man" still at "our" side? If "Man" is present at "his"
> own funeral, how can "he" possibly be dead? What looks
> on lives on. The end of "Man" was suddenly in doubt. (13)

Unlike Descartes and other Humanist who find "reason" to be the major factor in distinguishing the human from the inhuman, Badmington finds the machine to be very much a part of human existence. For Badmington, the human is an internal compilation of mechanic properties and a being that relies upon the machine for living and interactions with fellow humans.

Badmington's re-conceptualization of the human helps us better understand the nature of Incarceron's synthetic human species. As both the novel's description of the "halfman" and the epigraphs suggest "the straightforward distinction between inside and outside is not always that straightforward" (Badmington 19). Just as the prisoners of Incarceron are deceived by their apparent organic nature, readers are affected by the epigraphs style, function, and purpose. Readers have to question the inorganic nature of Fisher's texts and consider how much of the author's narration is being manipulated and altered by the epigraph's presence.

There exists an interesting correlation between the novel's "halfmen" and Fisher's use of the epigraph. This juxtaposition between human and machine, implied by both the description of the prisoner and Sapphique's vision of himself, relates to the author's

ability to construct her narratives through the uses of technology, including stylistic devices such as the epigraph. Like the "threaded" metallic material that runs through the veins and body of Incarceron's prisoners, Fisher's novels are a compilation of interlaced epigraphs operating under the surface of the narrative. The narratives are an inorganic manifestation of human thought conveyed through the mechanics of style and paratextual devices. The threaded metallic material that runs through the veins of Incarceron's prisoners suggests an analogical relationship to the novel's larger concern with the juncture between the human and the machine. This analogy links together the text's form and content. Similar to the metal hidden in the flesh of Incarceron's prisoners, the epigraphs are integral parts of the novels' narrative script. The epigraph is necessary to interpreting the novel, as it opens up new ways of reading. As Incarceron's prisoners learn of their true inorganic nature, the epigraph makes clear the inorganic nature of the text. The novel uses the epigraph to disrupt the process of linear reading by offering an explanation of the epigraph's content in divergent chapters. The epigraphs are strategically placed out of sequence so that readers must work to conjoin the epigraphs to form a cohesive narrative. Readers must discard linear reading and re-visit different parts of the text. In this way, the epigraphs prompt readers to become active and circular readers.

The novel's incorporation of misplaced and seemingly superfluous epigraphs not only challenges traditional linear ways of reading, the epigraph's content also challenges the notion of the human. The epigraph in chapter nine shows that human identity is not singular, atomic, nor unaffected by social environmental influences. Rather human identity is "threaded through" with cultural and literary knowledge. The

epigraph makes reference to the metallic material that runs through the bodies of Incraceron's prisoners; it also suggests that the dominant Western conceptualization of the human as an organic, natural and pure being is misguided and illusory. The epigraph's content suggests that the human, as Badmington argues, is instead manufactured, and conditioned by various agents such as environment, art, literature and technology. Further, the epigraph implies that the human and machine are inseparable because they work symbiotically to produce understanding and meaning. The novels' theme regarding the relationship between human (reader) and machine (text), as validated in chapter nine's epigraph, implies that the human reader is a being who is both dependent upon and guided by the materiality of the texts' form.

The analogy between the "threaded" character of the epigraph and the "threaded" identity of humans establishes a deep parallel between the novel's characters and its readers. As the prisoners of Incarceron come to rely on their "bones of steel" to give structure to their flesh and "their circuitry of veins" to supply blood to their bodies, readers depend on the epigraphs to provide insight into the novels' complex and multi-layered narrative. However, the reader's dependence on the epigraph suggests that readers' can't develop an understanding of Fisher's texts without trusting the epigraph as a device to provide clarity to the story it precedes. The analogy between the novel's characters as a compilation of human flesh and metallic material, and the reader as a being who relies on the materiality of the text for an appropriate interpretation, places much at stake. As the traditional notion of human identity, as organic, is challenged, Fisher's novels force readers to ponder whether or not a pure human species, outside of technological influences, has ever existed.

CHAPTER 3
METAMORPHIC SYSTEMS

The epigraph resembles a machine in that it stores and encases information and human tradition— a tradition that links readers to other thoughts and narratives. Moreover, the epigraph shows "human identity" as one dependent on and sustained by machine. The epigraph not only invites other stories into the main narrative space, it allows readers to interact with previous mappings of human existence by introducing them to other cultures, times, and places. Epigraphs, as Grutman argues, "signal culture in a way that footprints signal human presence, i.e. they are traces of culture" (145). The cultural traces that Grutman refers to are evident in Fisher's novels as Fisher's epigraphic content provides readers with other literary genres and histories that precede Fisher's fictional narrative. Fisher's epigraphs are maps of previous human existence. Although Fisher's novel's epigraphs are from fictional sources, these fictional sources are clearly constructed from traces of Western narrative tradition. For example, some of the epigraphs in *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* allude to Ovid's *Metamorpheses* (8AD), a text "threaded" beneath the surface of the novels' narrative. Thus, the epigraphs stress that Ovid's work must be taken into account even though neither novel explicitly mentions the poet.

Ovid's *Metamorpheses* is a collection of poetry regarding humanity's attempts to achieve perfection. Escape, freedom, and paradise are pivotal themes throughout Ovid's text. These stories are centered on the limited mortal nature of humanity and our confinement to a created environment. If we read Fisher's epigraphs closely, we will reveal how they retell the stories of Orpheus, and Icarus's and Daedalus's attempt to escape their self-constructed prisons. In Ovid's poems, these prisons are

representations of the characters anxiety and discontentment with themselves and their external surroundings, especially that of their own creation. Like the characters of Ovid's poems, Sapphique and Incarceron struggle to escape the prisons which contain them. Sapphique's prison is, in essence, his creation, as his predecessors designed and implemented Incarceron to civilize the human species. However, Incarceron's prison is himself, and much of *Sapphique* tells of Incarceron's desperate attempt to escape the prison he has become. Sapphique's character thus mimics the god-like ambition of Orpheus and Icarus, an ambition marked by a desire to obtain a perfect external space and to reclaim lost life and freedom. Incarceron is also a representation of Daedalus, a being trapped within a human-constructed prison. Although Incarceron was fashioned by individuals of the Realm, like Daedalus, Incarceon is reflected and constituted within the space of the prison.

The story of Orpehus relates his attempt to transcend death. Orpheus descends into the underworld to rescue his beloved Eurydice. However Persephone, the wife of Hades, ruler of the Underworld, is reluctant to let Orpehus be reunited with his bride. In response to Persephone, the bard Orpheus plucks his strings and thereby seduces Persephone and Hades into submitting to his desires. Like Orpheus, Sapphique has the ability to seduce Incarceron. Manipulating the prison with his words, Sapphique convinces Incarceron of a world better than that to which they are accustomed. Sapphique ignites a desire for both Incarceron and himself to escape the prison. It is in the epigraphs entitled "Songs of Sapphique" that readers learn the significance of Sapphique's seductive powers. In them, readers are told that Sapphique is the only prisoner to ever move the "mouth of Hell" (Incarceron 143). The last epigraph in

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Sapphique tells of the song that Sapphique sings, a song that like Orpheus, has the power to seduce and manipulate those in the world around him,

> He sang his last song. And the words of that have never
> been written down. But it was sweet and of great beauty,
> and those that heard it were changed utterly.
>   Some say it was the song that moves the stars. (453)

Sapphique's ability to transform those around him through music mimics Orpheus' ability to call to life his surroundings, both natural and celestial realms. Orpheus,

> The heaven-born bard, sat there and touched his strings,
> Shade came in plenty. Every tree was there:
> Dodona's holy durmast, poplars once
> The Sun's sad daughters, oaks with lofty leaves. (227)

Ovid's description of Orpheus as the "heaven-born bard" whose music captivated every tree, leaf, and the Sun's daughters resonates with Fisher's description of Sapphique's ability to change those around him with his song's "sweet and great beauty" (453). The change that both figures evoke is one of spiritual connectivity. Sapphique and Orpheus both possess the ability to bring their external surroundings into connection to their emotional temperament. They prompt the sun, stars and other celestial objects to empathize with their emotions.

It is the last part of both bard's songs, with the reference to the stars, that connects Fisher's fictional universe to that of Ovid's. The unscripted author's last words, in *Sapphique*, regarding Sapphique's song that "it was the song to move the stars" and Orpheus' poetic line, "the sun's sad daughters" suggest that Sapphique is a re-invention of Orpheus. Both possess the talent to move the celestial sphere. For Sapphique, like Orpheus, the ability to "move the stars" does not refer to a physical skill; rather, it suggests an emotional ability. Readers are told that both Sapphique's and Orpheus' songs resonate with the heart and metaphysical being of their celestial environment.

Moreover both Sapphique and Orpheus are able to disrupt the invisible plane that separates the mortal and immortal world. Through Sapphique's last song, the stars –a figure of immortality—are able to feel and experience a human's plight. Sapphique's words similarly conjoin the immortal with the mortal, resulting in the immortals (stars) ability to empathize with mortals, in this case, Sapphique's pain, happiness, and humanness. The end of *Songs of Sapphique* states that as a result the stars "were changed utterly" (453).

The story of Orpheus isn't the only part of Ovid's *Metamorpheses* that makes its way into Fisher's novels' epigraphic material. The story of the winged man and his father is dispersed throughout the pages of both *Incarceron* and *Sapphique*. Ovid recounts the story of Daedalus's and Icarus's desperate attempt to escape their prison in Crete. This particular moment in Ovid's text is repeated, with a difference, in Fisher's epigraphs, as they recount Sapphique's attempt to escape from Incarceron. In Ovid's original tale, Daedalus, longing to escape the "imprisoned" space of Crete, builds himself and his son wings out of bird feathers and "fragrant" wax. (Ovid 176) Placing his winged invention on his sons back, Daedalus warns young Icarus to "fly middle course" between the sea and sun. (Ovid 177) Failing to heed his father's warning and flying too close to the "scorching sun", the wax attached to his wings melts and both his feathers and body floats gracefully to the sea. (Ovid 178)

Like the ambitious Daedalus, Fisher's Sapphique builds himself wings to escape his own prison. However, like Icarus, Sapphique ignores his father's (Incarceron's) warning, and is struck down to the depths of the prison. The following epigraph from the series entitled "Legends of Sapphique" (a fictional text that is quoted intermittently in key

epigraphs preceding chapters of *Incarceron*) gestures to Daedalus' ambition and

desires to escape his prison and to Icarus's fall. In it, Fisher's Sapphique becomes a

representation of both Daedalus's ambition and Icarus's physical transformation. The

epigraph tells of Sapphique's, labor and effort to escape the prison that has housed his

mortal body

> He worked night and day. He made a coat that would
> transform him; he would be more than a man; a winged
> creature, beautiful as light. All the birds brought him
> feathers. Even the eagle. Even the Swan. (301)

Just as in Ovid's original tale, Sapphique works religiously "night and day" to arrange

"feathered wings" that might transform him into a "winged creature." The conclusion of

this tale ends much like Ovid's, insofar as Incarceron strikes Sapphique down for his

ambition and reminds Sapphique of his mortality.

Crucially, however, Fisher's "Legends of Sapphique*"* do not subscribe to the

original ending that Ovid composed for Icarus and Daedalus. Instead, the series offers

an alternative to Ovid's tale. Fisher's allusion to Ovid's epic ends with Sapphique's

challenge to the heavens, which in this case is the perimeter of the prison. It is crucial to

take into account the differences between Fisher's reconstruction of Ovid's tale and

Ovid's original epic. The break between Ovid's epic and Fisher's narrative is significant

because the epigraph makes apparent that through Sapphique's defiance Fisher's

novels drift between two narrative worlds, Fisher's fictional universe and that of Ovid's.

The following epigraph, relates Fisher's alternative ending to Icarus's tale:

> Sapphique strapped the wings to his arms and flew, over
> oceans and plains, over glass cities and mountains of gold.
> animals fled; people pointed up. He flew so far, he saw the
> sky above him and the sky said, "Turn back, my son, for
> you have climbed too high." Sapphique laughed, as he

rarely did. "Not this time. This time I beat you till you open." (341)

Unlike Icarus, Sapphique does not plummet to his death, but "falls into a pit of darkness" (392). Readers can only assume that this pit of darkness refers to the depths of the prison. One way in which readers can identify how Fisher's novels operate in multiple fictional universes is to evaluate Fisher's equation of Icarus's death with Sapphique's fall. Sapphique does not experience a physical death as does Icarus, but instead experiences a psychological death. Sapphique's attempt to reach the stars, to defy mortality, and "beat" the prison—his master and authority—is disrupted by the prison. Consequently, as a later epigraph in *Sapphique* suggests, "after his fall, his mind was bruised and he plunged into despair—he crawled into the tunnel of madness" (7). In this case, Incarceron became a representation of Daedalus, as it is Daedalus's ambition that causes Icarus' fall. However, unlike Daedalus, Incarceron intends to wound Sapphique's pride to remind Sapphique that he remains in the prison's power and control.

Significantly, this retelling of the Daedalus and Icarus story begins in the middle of *Sapphique*, the second installment, and concludes in her first novel *Incarceron*. The strategic placement of the Icarus and Daedalus myth in the middle of Fisher's second text and the conclusion of the epic in *Incarceron* is another example of the novels' disruption of normative linear reading. Not only does this particular emplotment of Ovid's epics disrupt linear reading strategies, the very nature in which these tales are constituted within the novels prompts readers to be aware of the function of the text as machine. Like an apparatus used to transport objects to varying locations, Fisher's references to Ovid's tales transports readers in two ways. First, they encourage a more

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complex reading of her narrative. Moreover, the novels, in their very construction, move readers through the space of the narrative in a manner that enables a logical and cohesive narrative to change. Not only do the novels transport readers to various fictional universes, the materiality of Fisher's thoughts allows readers to conceive a valid cohesive text. In its effort to imitate a machine, Fisher's novels encourage readers to pay particular attention to the parallel narrative developing within the epigraphic space. The novels' structure encourages readers not only to interpret the available content but to construct meaning. Beginning with *Sapphqiue* and ending with *Incarceron*, Fisher tells of Sapphique's transformation and his attempt to escape his imprisonment.

In his essay, "*The Death of the Author*", Roland Barthes argues against the authority that is attributed to an author's "genius" (221) to produce a fictional universe solely from their creativity. The literary text, Barthes argues, cannot and should not be attributed to a specific "genius" who has ultimate "authority" over the text. Rather, Barthes mentions, the text is a "tissue of citations" (223) much like the "threaded" human beings of Incarceron. Barthes's metaphor of the text as a "tissue of citations" demonstrates that the text /machine is interwoven with human thoughts, ideas, and narrative. This reveals that the relationship between human and machine is a symbiotic one. We are reminded that it is not only the characters of Fisher's novels who are inorganic in form, and who depend on their internal mechanical structure to give them life, but the text as well, which relies on its "tissues of citations" or human thought that give the text meaning. The text/machine is a database that stores citations from various sources permitting the reader to fulfill the task of reading the text while making connections to other narrative worlds.

In addition, Barthes's model of the text as a "tissue of citations" suggests two things. Frist that Fisher's *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* are not simply Fisher's literary creations, but a compilation of various texts and discourses that precedes Fisher's narration. Insofar as Fisher's texts function as a "tissues of citations," the allusions to *Metamorpheses* become crucial, as they solidify the interdependent relationship between human and machine. This demonstrates that neither can exist independent of the other. The reader cannot exist without the materiality of the text, and the text is meaningless without the reader. Secondly, both *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* put into relief the ways the very characters in Fisher's novels are "tissues" of metallic fabric. The "tissued" form of Fisher's novels thus complement their depiction of the "threaded" or "tissue-like" formation of human identity, and reinforce the notion of human identity as synthetic rather than organic.

Embedding the narratives of Orpheus, and Daedalus and Icarus into the pages of both novels, Fisher's texts unfold simultaneously in the world of Incarceron and that constructed by Ovid. The texts act as sites of merger, a space where various narratives interact and conjoin to form a unique literary universe. In this way, Fisher's fictional universe bears out Barthes's characterization of the literary text as a tissue of citations containing multiple voices. As Barthes argues, "literature is precisely the invention of this 'indiscernible' voice to which we cannot assign an origin; literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique, into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (221). According to Barthes, the literary text is a space where multiple subjects or other texts reside, live, and thrive. If we recognize Fisher's novels as "a space of many dimensions, a tissue of

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citations, resulting from the thousand sources for culture" (224), then it would be appropriate to say that Fisher is not the sole proprietor of her novels. Rather, *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* are texts that demonstrate the extent to which any narrative is influenced by others that precede and inform its production. Indeed, Fisher's decision to gesture toward Ovid in the epigraph signals her recognition that her novels are not self-enclosed or atomic texts. Moreover, Fisher's self-conscious recognition of her debt to Ovid invites readers to consider how other textual sources inform the logic of her narrative.

To be sure, there exist certain parallels between Barthes's arguments concerning intertextuality and Fisher's depictions of the synthetic human who is made of "bones of steel" and "circuits for veins." Not unlike Incarceron's inhabitants, Fisher's text is composed of a myriad of texts – both those whose influence she explicitly acknowledges and those of whose existence she might not even be aware. Both of Fisher's novels are a compilation of various texts and narratives. In this way, *Incarceron* and *Sapphique* are "threaded" with other narratives.

Furthermore, Barthes's characterization of a literary text as a "tissue of citations" places into relief the possible reasons why Fisher does not explicitly cite Ovid in the epigraph I have discussed above. By not citing or giving credit to outside sources, Fisher creates the illusion that her texts operate solely within her own constructed fictional space. However, just as material traces of Incarceron are woven through the bodies of its inhabitants, Fisher's narratives are embedded with other narratives. Fisher's novels are thus themselves like the inhabitants of Incarceron, insofar as the other texts course through her narrative, only occasionally announcing their presence to

readers. If the reader combs Fisher's twin narratives carefully for cultural traces, s/he

might discover literary influences heretofore not acknowledged in Fisher's novels.

CHAPTER 4
CONCLUSION

Fisher's novels disrupt normative linear reading, logic and reasoning. Readers are challenged to read in circles, returning repeatedly to various points in the text. After reading the epigraph before each chapter, readers search for a connection between the epigraph and the chapter's content. The "interminable circles" that outlines the novels' epigraphs gestures to a non-linear way of reading both *Incarceron* and *Sapphique*. Although this non-linear method of reading keeps readers engaged with the text, it is not "kind or compassionate" but a vicious cycle that entraps readers and gives them the illusion that they can master the narrative space. Complexity leads to perplexity. In engaging with Fisher's texts, readers become participants in a maze or game they long to conquer. Janet Murray argues that any text that employs multiple plot line and varying integrated narratives often leaves readers with more to be discovered. Murray observes:

> As [readers] navigate the [text's] tangled, anxiety-laden
> paths, enclosed within its shape-fitting borders, we are
> both the exasperated parent longing for closure and
> separation and the enthralled child, lingering forever
> in an unfolding process that is deeply comforting
> because it can never end. (134).

What prompts this "lingering" as Murray calls it are the many ways in which the narratives can be interpreted. The reader places herself in the confines of the text only to experience something richer. The reader becomes creator allowing for the narrative to come alive. Readers who disregard the epigraphs in Fisher's texts miss the complexity of both novels. Like Incarceron, the texts' main narrative promises a resolution and happy ending. However upon concluding the texts, readers realize that Fisher's novels do not differ from her fabricated prison. Both novels become a tangible

manifestation of Fisher's Incarceron, and readers are consumed by the texts' narrative

space.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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