



New Testaments: Cognition, Closure, and the Figural Logic of the Sequel, 1660-1740

Michael W. Austin

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In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, popular works of literature attracted—as they attract today—sequels, prequels, franchises, continuations, and parodies. Sequels of all kinds demonstrate the economic realities of the literary marketplace. That they can do so, however, represents something fundamental about the way that human beings process narrative information. We crave narrative closure, but we also resist its finality, making such closure both inevitable and inadequate in human narratives. Many cultures have incorporated this fundamental ambiguity towards closure in the mythic framework that fuels their narrative imaginations.

New Testaments examines both the inevitability and the inadequacy of closure in the sequels to four major works of literature written in England between 1660 and 1740: *Paradise Lost*, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Pamela*. Each of these works spawned sequels that, while often very different from the original works, connected themselves to those works work through rhetorical strategies that can be loosely defined as figural. Such strategies came directly from the culture's two dominant religious narratives: the Old and the New Testaments of the Christian Bible—two vastly dissimilar works that were universally seen as complementary parts of a unified and coherent narrative.

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