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**The Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism
Volume X**

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A Letter From the Editors

The history of literary criticism is full of self-analysis. From Matthew Arnold to Alfred Kazin to Terry Eagleton, critics of various stripes and sensibilities have all been compelled to reconsider the function of their practice within the cultural establishment and society at large.

As students of literary criticism, we entered the year with a similar yet humbler mission to reimagine our role in the literary community on this campus. The original purpose of *The Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism* was to offer a forum for undergraduate scholarship and interdisciplinary critique in literary studies. We have by no means disowned that invaluable goal; but we have tried to broaden the scope and redirect the aims of our organization.

This volume exhibits our attempt to balance academic and journalistic criticism. We thought it important to include both through an eclectic mix of academic pieces, book reviews, and interviews. The latter, it is important to note, feature discussions with George Scialabba and Chad Harbach, two figures who in different ways demonstrate a commitment to literary journalism and public intellectualism.

Meanwhile, as we remain sheltered in the relative safety of the academy, millions of Americans continue to suffer the worst effects of recession-era economics, plutocratic rule, and social insecurity. In light of this, we have tried to do our part in linking literary criticism with political engagement. This spring, we organized a two-part series entitled “Framing Indignation,” and we are glad to report that these events drew large, diverse audiences and generated lively discussion.

We hope you enjoy this new volume of CJLC. We would also like to thank the Department of English and Comparative Literature here at Columbia for their incredible support. In particular, we thank our faculty adviser, Nicholas Dames, who helped us tremendously at every step of the publishing process.

Sincerely,
Thomas Bettridge
&
Puya Gerami

Michel Houellebecq's *The Map and the Territory*

Thomas Bettridge

Michel Houellebecq's newly translated novel, *The Map and the Territory*, begins with a description of a painting entitled *Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons Dividing Up the Art Market*:

Jeff Koons had just got up from his chair, enthusiastically throwing his arms out in front of him. Sitting opposite him, slightly hunched up, on a white leather sofa partly draped with silks, Damien Hirst seemed to be about to express an objection; his face was flushed, morose. Both of them were wearing black suits—Koons's had fine pinstripes—and white shirts and black ties. Between them, on the coffee table, was a basket of candied fruits that neither paid any attention to. Hirst was drinking a Bud Light.

Painted by the novel's artist-hero, Jed Martin, the scene puts forth what seems like a humorously barbed satirical vision. It prepares us for another one of Houellebecq's tours through the culturally diseased condition of late capitalism. But as *The Map and the Territory* unravels, we discover that both Houellebecq and Martin's artistic statements depart from the cynical detachment we expect from each of them.

Jed Martin's artistic mission to comprehensively depict the features of modern industry is more earnest than it initially appears. He is guided by an almost unfashionably straightforward desire to "simply represent" the world around him. Socially inept yet artistically prolific, Martin devotes his life to the production of an encyclopedic catalogue of the early 21st century comprised of both photographs and paintings.

However, *Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons Dividing Up the Art Market* poses a challenge to Martin that sends his work into crisis. He is unable to render the likeness of Jeff Koons, whose face he describes as being as difficult to paint as a “Mormon pornographer.” Unable to capture Koons “beyond the appearance of a Chevrolet convertible salesman,” Martin destroys the painting in a fit of frustration. But the specters of Hirst and Koons haunt the remainder of the novel, establishing themselves at the center of Martin’s saga.

The Map and the Territory places the figures of Hirst and Koons—two of the world’s most financially successful living artists—in a Zoroastrian opposition: one concerned with death, the other with life; one a proprietor of embalmed livestock, the other of gigantic balloon animals; one clinical, the other kitsch. Martin glimpses a reflection of the pair while standing on a deserted street in Zurich between a euthanasia clinic (Hirst) and a brothel (Koons). He notes to himself how the former has become more commercially viable than the latter.

After abandoning his work on Hirst and Koons, Martin moves on to painting a hylomorphic composite of the two: the thinly veiled character of Houellebecq himself. Strands of both Koons’s and Hirst’s orders can be easily located throughout Houellebecq’s work. While his novels explore the necromancy of social decay, they also vividly depict the euphoria of tourism and commercial exchange. As a character in his own novel, Houellebecq compounds this dualism.

The relationship between Martin and Houellebecq unfolds episodically through a series of visits to the author’s home. In one, Houellebecq rests paralyzed in a depressive torpor, a comedic parody of his public image. He binges on South American wine and charcuterie while he waxes poetic to Martin about the cruelty of consumer capitalism’s constant renewal of product lines. As Houellebecq mourns the outmoding of his beloved “Camel Legend Parka,” his monologue climaxes in a burst of tears:

It’s brutal, you know, it’s terribly brutal. While the most insignificant animal species take thousands, sometimes millions of years to disappear, manufactured products are wiped off the surface of the globe in a few days; they’re never given a second chance, they can only suffer, powerless, the irresponsible and fascistic diktat of product-line managers who of course know better than anyone else what the customer wants, who claim to capture an *expectation*

of novelty in the consumer, and who in reality just turn his life into one exhausting and desperate quest, an endless wandering between eternally modified product lines.

The humor of this moment is impossible to ignore: a drunk and raving Houellebecq scratching at his athlete's foot while discussing the "genocide" of obsolescent parkas and laptop printers. There is, however, an unavoidable gravity to this rant.

Often in Houellebecq's novels, supermarkets, brothels, and travel agencies are the only institutions tethering his lonely wanderers to society. A sincere, Koons-like pleasure can be found in Houellebecq's descriptions of strolling down the aisles of a Monoprix or driving on an empty highway in a German-designed luxury car. Houellebecq identifies sites of purchasing power as the last bastion of pleasure in a wilting social milieu. The fact that these consumer joys are the only delights possible makes the inevitable death of product lines an event that dooms Houellebecq and his characters to eternal sadness. It cements the intolerability of living within late capitalist society.

It is easy to peg *The Map and the Territory* as a radical break from Houellebecq's previously consistent body of work. Moving away from his usual formula, he shifts his object of focus from sexual exploits to committed labor, from mid-level bureaucrats to famous artists, and from meandering depression to obsessive passion. Nonetheless, what *The Map and the Territory* shares with the rest of Houellebecq's oeuvre is the way in which it locates a world on the cusp of a radical paradigm shift.

All of Houellebecq's stories take place in a world mired in convoluted mating rituals and monotonous post-Fordist labor. His novels chronicle the downfall of society's losers—the lonely masturbators, the impotent white-collar paper-pushers, the perpetually depressed—and extrapolates their condition to the population at large. In a world in which both economic and sexual production have become nearly impossible, existence itself borders on the intolerable.

This condition foments a sense of dire urgency. It becomes clear that something drastic must be done in order to change the world entirely. For Houellebecq, these changes usually take shape through a radical reversal of the liberal-humanist project. The protagonist of *The Elementary Particles* singlehandedly upends the biopolitical order—the "sexual free-market" of contemporary society—by making monumental advancements in cloning, while the hero of *Platform* attempts to do the same by pro-

moting sexual tourism. The presence of adolescent folly in both efforts is palpable, but a lingering feeling remains that the world before these drastic changes (our world) is a sinking ship.

Jed Martin, by contrast, has an entirely passive role in the social change that takes place in *The Map and the Territory*. After being forced into a twenty-year hermitage, Martin leaves his isolated retreat to discover that the social make-up of France has been completely reorganized. The rural countryside, once occupied by xenophobic agrarians, has become the home of a completely different class. White-collar labor, along with industrial manufacturing, has all but ended, and those who once lived and worked in the city have become the proprietors of crafty stores, organic groceries, and quaint bed-and-breakfasts. He discovers that factories have become museums and that France at large has turned into a Disney Land perversion of pre-modern society. The change is drastic, but Martin is not surprised. During this period, his work changes accordingly to time-lapse films of vegetation growing over and consuming industrial objects. The sudden and total reversal of the social condition that Martin spent his life fastidiously representing is met with disinterested resignation, as though reported from some far-away place or time.

To express the inevitability of a widespread social shift, Houellebecq often writes his novels from the vantage point of an epoch in the near future, assuming a historical posture that allows him to take the looming demise of late capitalism as a given. In *The Map and the Territory*, Houellebecq addresses this authorial stance by expressing admiration for, and kinship with, the social historian Alexis de Tocqueville. Like Tocqueville, Houellebecq presents the inevitability of social change with a distinct trace of mournful ambivalence. Perched on the brink of a new mode of social relations, both authors assume a position of scientific detachment while waving goodbye to the stagnant decadence of the bygone period in which they were born.

In this sense, Houellebecq's work shares a great deal with the representational project of his character Jed Martin. Both share the social-scientific motivation of the time-capsule: the mission to objectively represent a world that can no longer exist. But the objectivity of this mission is rendered impossible by the stake that these two artists still have in this world. Their work remains suspended between nostalgia and disdain, between pleasure and death, between Koons and Hirst.

Weather, After the Rain

Pauline W. Weissman

With the posthumous release of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Weather in Proust*, Duke University Press concludes a twenty-year tenure as publisher nonpareil for academic titles in queer theory and gay studies. Looking back on the label that founded a discipline, Series Q includes the company of Lauren Berlant, Lee Edelman, Guy Hocquenghem, Joseph Litvak, and Richard Rambuss, to name only a few. Not without ceremony, however, the series closes as it began: with Sedgwick. Comprised of the critic's late writing on Proust, affect, and living with terminal cancer, this final volume of essays comes full circle on the broad arc of a career cut short.

Best known as the subject of her annual seminar at the CUNY Grad Center, the first section of *The Weather in Proust* has accrued something of a totemic reputation among devotees. Picking up where her earlier work on Kleinian object relations leaves off, Sedgwick engages closely with British psychoanalysis to transpose the Proustian universe into a sort of large-scale "holding environment." Here, the meteorological dynamics and "queer little gods" that organize the world of *À la recherche du temps perdu* suspend Proust's narrator in an endlessly reparative logic of "surprise and refreshment," endowing him with the capacity to inhabit a subjective position outside of the spatial and temporal metrics of Oedipal organization. In addition to Proust's invocations of wildly disparate mystic, Neoplatonic, Judeo-Christian, Ovidian, and Buddhist traditions, these "queer little gods" reappear in the periperformative lyrics

of C.P. Cavafy.

Chapter Three, “Making Things, Practicing Emptiness,” expands the final essay of *Touching Feeling* to comment on the role of Buddhism and East Asian aesthetics in Sedgwick’s own visual and textile art. “The sense of touch,” she writes, “makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity.” Once again, her tactile sensitivity to the rich interiority and emptiness of “non-being” lands Sedgwick only a stone’s throw away from Klein, coolly anticipatory of the “reality and realization” of her own diagnosis.

The subsequent pair of essays revisits the Kleinian depressive position with a compelling application of affect theory and Theory of Mind to Proust’s fifth volume, *La Prisonnière*. Lifting Theory of Mind from the lexicon of cognitive and behavioral psychology, Sedgwick offers it as a response to the grounding provocation of *Epistemology of the Closet*: “Axiom #1: People are different.” Sedgwick challenges the workability of theory itself by suggesting a cooperative negotiation of the two concepts: affect theory resting at the analog end of the spectrum for Massumi, Frank, and Tompkins, and Theory of Mind as its fixed, but not fruitless, digital counterpart. These two essays doubtless accompany “Shame in the Cybernetic Fold” on the greatest hits list for Sedgwick’s work on affect.

The second half of *The Weather in Proust* resumes the project *Epistemology and Tendencies* started. In these four essays, readers will recognize the familiar urgency of Sedgwick’s earlier, angrier work. Expanding on the political and discursive implications of generic anality and queer disciplinarity, Sedgwick reclaims the intensity of a homo-historicism born out of epidemic culture and institutional homophobia. Born, too, of the author’s turn to Tibetan Buddhism in the final years of her life, this intensity culminates in the book’s arresting coda, “Reality and Realization.” And yet, despite the incredible introspection that closes *The Weather in Proust*, its place in a larger critical lineage remains an open question. That this volume marks the end of a long sentence for Sedgwick’s bibliography will not be a contentious observation to make. What that period marks in the history of the field, however, may provoke more productive discussion.

Historically, the “sentence” of queer theory has meant two things—the closet or death. Sedgwick contributed immensely to scholarship on both. Indeed, the import

and urgency of her earliest work grew out of an epidemic crisis too immediate to ignore. As artist and activist Gregg Bordowitz remarked in 1992, “We’ve a good reason to be preoccupied with the possibilities of illness, death, and loss.” Though these possibilities continue to haunt the discipline today, the landscape looks different. The cultural moment of the AIDS crisis has since fallen out of the critical present, and “we’ve” good reason to be preoccupied with other objects.

We might start by directing our attention locally—how specifically to situate *The Weather in Proust* within a post-AIDS, post-Sedgwick present. Regrettably, extant criticism on the late author has produced detached critique as exception only. At once nostalgic and confessional, the bulk of the conversation reeks of stale melancholy, freshest perhaps in moments where nominal familiarity gives way to stock gestural intimacy. (I challenge any skeptical reader to find a critical body that refers to the seminal work of “Judy” or “Michel.”) If queer theory has taught us anything, it’s that affective investment—even “masquerading as catharsis”—is not nothing, and that we might read this symptom pedagogically. Rather, the yet dissolved optimism of this milieu reflects the failure to properly mourn “the long moment” of Sedgwick’s death as a generic misrecognition of her cancer as an AIDS-related casualty. Regardless of etiology, we have seen the gravity of this misrecognition—political or pathological—dramatized at a moment when both object and event are nowhere to be found.

Then, as now, scholars in the field write as witness. For Agamben’s survivor, giving an account of oneself and of one’s event—one’s trauma—involves a negotiation between testis and superstes, between the imperative and the interpretive. Trauma complicates the task of the critic. Certainly, however, performing and re-performing the circumstantial congruities that made Sedgwick’s case resemble a belated AIDS event makes only minor headway in advancing the project of reading Sedgwick after Sedgwick. For the challenge of reading theory after AIDS, the progress is even less so. The forecast looks grim in either scenario.

Worse still, it requires only minimal imagination to envision a future in which perpetuated affective and temporal circumscription “take over the conditions of possibility of the original text.” Such was, at least, Sedgwick’s portent against the hermeneutic foreclosure compelled by paranoid reading practices. A charge that, in this case, implicates the question of an archive—for Derrida, “the question of the future, the question of a response.” To take seriously this claim is to take seriously the project of

archiving in the impasse. It is to resituate the proximity at which our scenes of grieving and reading converge. The reception of *The Weather in Proust* appears at a precarious moment for queer theory. As it stands, the drama of a discipline may depend on whether or not the compromise is even possible.

An Interview with George Scialabba

Puya Gerami

George Scialabba is a literary critic who lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts. A prolific writer, in the past thirty-two years he has published essays and reviews in countless publications, including The American Prospect, The Boston Review, Dissent, In These Times, The Nation, n+1, and The Village Voice, and since 1994 he has served as a regular columnist for The Boston Globe. His elegant prose style and wide-ranging intellect have garnered praise from the likes of Barbara Ehrenreich, James Wood, Norman Rush, and Richard Rorty.

In his first collection of essays and reviews, What Are Intellectuals Good For? (Boston: Pressed Wafer 2009), Scialabba wrote about the complicated legacy of twentieth-century intellectual culture. In his most recent collection, The Modern Predicament, now available from Pressed Wafer, Scialabba eloquently and eruditely grapples with perplexing questions concerning modernity, progress, and the continuing intellectual divisions within the American Left.

I recently sat down with Mr. Scialabba to discuss his work.

Puya Gerami: I'm hoping we might begin our discussion by briefly talking about the literary and political tradition, particularly that of the New York Intellectuals, that has influenced your work. Your first collection of essays and reviews, *What Are Intel-*

lectuals Good For?, seems, in part, a salute to the vibrant literary culture that thrived during the mid-twentieth century. Can you describe the major features of style and content that characterize the writings of the New York Intellectuals?

George Scialabba: Irving Howe has limned the lineaments of this intellectual culture in a marvelous essay called “The New York Intellectuals”. He emphasizes above all that they were amateurs, non-specialists, non-professionals, generalists – “luftmenschen of the mind,” as he puts it. It was perhaps the last time in modern cultural history that one could aspire to be a generalist—well, of course one can always aspire to be a generalist, and sometimes one can achieve a great deal in that line—but still, they managed to be authoritative about virtually everything. Admittedly, part of their success may have been their extraordinary gift for sounding authoritative, whether or not they actually knew what they were talking about; but in truth they had an enormous range and versatility. I’m sure it had something to do with New York being the throbbing heart of a great world power, and also something to do with their being newly emancipated Jews, and therefore bringing the passion and resources of that long-suppressed and hedged-in culture and ethnicity to bear freely on their environment for the first time, being able to speak to and about their society as full members, as they rarely had in any previous society. So I’m sure there were things about them that made their extraordinary range and universality possible. But it was also the fact that it was still possible to marshal the resources of the canonical Western literary and philosophical tradition and bring it to bear on politics and society more or less directly.

But that capacity couldn’t last forever. As the US evolved from a yeoman republic in the mid-nineteenth century to a mass society, as industrial production in particular became the dominant form of economic relations, the new society needed a workforce that was trained up in new skills. So mass education was inaugurated. Now, one of the dangers of mass education, or education of any kind, is that it empowers the educated. It suggests potentially subversive questions about their relation to authority. From the point of view of the owners of society, inquiry of that sort had to be cut off at the knees, or at least, had to be carefully managed. And so new ideologies and techniques of social control, popular management, and the manufacture of consent were developed in the form of the advertising industry, the science of marketing, and public relations as a new aspect of politics and public management.

One of the tools of the manufacture of consent was expertise. Public relations involved finding engineers, scientists, and social scientists who could make the ruling class's case persuasively. Formerly, all you needed to criticize American foreign policy and corporate policy effectively was a good ear for bullshit. Because government and business propagandists were basically amateurs, their critics could be amateurs. But the new techniques of social control called into being a whole new cohort of intellectuals – one might call them anti-public intellectuals: intellectuals in the service of power rather than in the service of the public. They deployed expertise, which in turn required that they be countered with expertise. But expertise takes time and effort to acquire; and it proved difficult to combine this time and effort with what had formerly been the chief activity of public intellectuals, that is, the cultivation of the humanities. Literary intellectuals like Randolph Bourne or Mark Twain, or philosophers like William James, could muster perfectly adequate critiques of American foreign policy in the early industrial age. But when the ruling class got smarter and better at hiring its apologists, the public needed experts of its own. And these tended to be investigative journalists—I.F. Stone, Seymour Hersh, Glenn Greenwald—or maverick scholars, like Noam Chomsky, Howard Zinn, John Kenneth Galbraith, Christopher Lasch, or William Appleman Williams.

PG: So *What Are Intellectuals Good For?* isn't necessarily a lament for the demise of the generalist intellectual. Rather, you suggest that the growing complexity of propaganda today requires the public intellectual to practice a form of social criticism quite different from that which had been developed by the New York Intellectuals.

GS: Well, I'm basically a literary and philosophical humanist myself, not a journalist or scholar or expert of any kind, so I do personally regret that people like me don't have and never again will have the cultural authority that the New York Intellectuals had. But history has moved on, and there's still a place, after all, for us humanists to practice the honorable activity of applying the really matchless moral resources of literature and the philosophical tradition to criticizing society and culture. Still, the work on the front lines now needs to be done by others, the investigative journalists and maverick scholars, people who can do deep reporting or work in the archives. Those are activities that classical public intellectuals—Bourne, Russell, Camus, Sartre, Silone, Nicola Chiaromonte—didn't have the time or the temperament for. So even though I personally will never be a Glenn Greenwald or a Noam Chomsky, I'm supremely grateful to them. They're doing what I think needs above all to be done.

Cultivating and expounding the humanities will always be essential to the moral health of society. But politically speaking, the literary intellectual is now a kind of auxiliary.

PG: In one essay, you quote Chomsky: “I’ve always been resistant to consciously allowing literature to influence my beliefs and attitudes with regard to society and history.” This resistance to literature practiced by many of today’s specialist intellectuals seems to me a tragic loss.

GS: Yes, I guess I’d say that once the chief apologists for policy were no longer younger sons of aristocratic families but instead people like McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara, and Henry Kissinger, i.e., people with credentials, it was easier for them to shrug off or dismiss criticisms by literary intellectuals like Susan Sontag, Norman Mailer, or Robert Lowell, even though those criticisms were cogent and true, because the literary intellectuals didn’t have credentials themselves. They weren’t experts. And this impressed the media, who reported the controversy in a way that privileged expertise. But the counter-expertise of people like Chomsky and Zinn couldn’t be shrugged off in quite the same way. These counter-experts refuted, in detail and on its own terms, what pretended to be an authoritative expert case for government and corporate policy, in a way that literary people – even those who were perfectly right, like Mailer, Sontag, and Lowell – couldn’t do. Obviously, the literary intellectuals had learned a certain amount about American foreign policy and about Vietnamese or Latin American history – their criticisms were largely true, after all. But to sway public opinion, the appearance of expertise backed by a large bureaucracy had to be countered not merely by lone individuals who mostly produced works of fiction, poetry, or literary criticism, and occasionally dabbled in politics. What was needed were people who deployed the same scholarly or investigative expertise and skills as did the anti-public intellectuals.

PG: How does academic specialization fit into this transition from the generalist to the specialist intellectual? At the same time that you laud the rise of the specialist as a sign of genuine cultural progress, you have eloquently attacked a culture of academic specialization whose abstruse language guarantees public irrelevance and political impotence.

GS: Of course, where specialization is a necessary part of the practice, as in the sci-

ences, I have nothing but approval and praise. It was possible in the early twentieth century for a powerful mind to take in very nearly the whole of science and mathematics: to have a strong sense of how they developed, where they were going, what the frontier problems were, and so on. Now, you can't even do that for molecular biology or the cognitive sciences: even individual disciplines are simply too much for any one person to get his or her mind around. That's painful to adjust to, but you can't regret it: it really is genuine progress.

On the other hand, I don't think specialization or expertise in the humanities or the social/ideological sciences is entitled to the same *prima facie* legitimacy. In a market society, competition is inescapable, and competition means product differentiation. Translated into academic terms, that means one has to carve out a niche, or revise old understandings, or invent a new vocabulary. But it's not inconceivable that in some cases – literary criticism, for example, or political theory – the old vocabulary is perfectly adequate. Alas, you can't tell that to a university administrator. They need to justify budget allocations to higher-ups, and they're used to justifying them in the “new and improved” language of corporate administration and marketing. Universities have become more like businesses—perhaps that's inevitable in a market society, but the cost is that they are run internally more like businesses. That involves hiring people with business backgrounds as university presidents and deans, and such people will ask: “Well, how can I justify raising salaries in this department? Are they offering something new, something that the competition isn't doing, something that will bring in more customers, something that I can sell to the President or the Board?” Where innovation is spontaneous and auto-generated, we rightly honor it. But where it's artificial and generated largely or purely by the pressures of competition, it often leads to spurious innovation.

I'm not an academic myself, so my acquaintance with the jargon of political science, sociology, economics, or literary criticism and theory, is a little rusty. But I certainly read complaints about them – you can hardly avoid doing so. Policymakers leaving office – most famously, Robert McNamara – sometimes look back and say, “My God! What a lot of absurdities I subscribed to!” Likewise, once academics are sufficiently eminent, they sometimes say, “My God! The profession really is getting to be a crock!” Of course it's not for me, an outsider, to dismiss all of contemporary scholarship in the social sciences and humanities as a crock. But a lot of it does seem like innovation for the sake of innovation.

Another thought about specialization. I myself have never been professionally attached to an academic or journalistic institution. I've had a clerical job (in a university, as it happens) for more than thirty years now, which has paid the bills. It's relatively undemanding, but it's also rather dull. It's thirty hours a week, and I'm awfully sorry that I have to spend so much of my life at that damned desk. But I'm also awfully glad that I've never had to write looking over my shoulder. It has never crossed my mind – as it must inevitably cross the mind of even the most independent-minded and brave young academic – to wonder what a dean or department chairman or tenure committee is going to think about what I have to say, or where I write, or what I've chosen to write about. Even a staff writer at a relatively independent magazine or newspaper has to make compromises, has to work out a beat and a style with an editor, a boss. You can learn from a boss sometimes, when the enterprise is a healthy and an honorable one, but it's also constraining. Some people have told me, perhaps too generously, that I've achieved a gratifyingly direct voice, a common style. I'm glad—it's certainly what I've hoped to do. But to the extent that I have, I'm pretty sure that I couldn't have done it if I had been subject to the ordinary pressures that most young academics and journalists are subject to today. So there's that to be said against specialization.

PG: And yet, for students of the humanities, the only route after undergraduate education is the pursuit of an advanced degree. Not that this is a bad option at all; it's simply the only option. It's nearly impossible now for a young intellectual to do what you do.

GS: I think the best explanation I've come across for their plight is Russell Jacoby's *The Last Intellectuals*. He highlights not just developments internal to the world of ideas and culture but also the material conditions of culture. It's hard to have public intellectuals when urban real estate is out of sight. Rent control arguably underwrote New York intellectual life for a long time. How do you live in New York today without an income of sixty or seventy thousand dollars a year? You can do it in your twenties, maybe, you can share or scrimp, but pretty soon, you're going to start being obsessed by the thought: "My God, how can I persuade somebody to give me sixty or seventy thousand dollars a year?" Well, perhaps you can go to the Maine woods or the Nebraska prairie, now that those places are wired up to the Net. But yes, the choices and constraints facing young intellectuals now are stark. They certainly would

have stymied me.

PG: You just mentioned the Internet. In the last essay of *What Are Intellectuals Good For?*, you write: “At this stage of our political and cultural development, electronic collectivization would produce not new, marvelously complex and efficient forms of cognition and communication, but historical amnesia and mass manipulation.” In recent years, numerous commentators have suggested that cyberspace can offer an unprecedented, globalized forum for social and cultural debate. Do you find this plausible, or will electronic collectivization erode civic virtues and our linguistic tradition?

GS: This line of argument was put best, at least by my lights, in Sven Birkerts’s *The Gutenberg Elegies*. Though the book is now twenty years old, developments since then have only confirmed that changes in the physical form of reading gradually, on a molecular level and scale and pace, do indeed alter our psychic metabolism. One of the great virtues of Birkerts’s book is its evocation of the spiritual and imaginative possibilities of deep reading. The book is a phenomenology of deep reading, of the way that immersion in a great and demanding text, piece of music, or piece of visual art can activate deep and previously untouched capacities and allow connections to be made among our cultural neurons, which can only happen in relative stillness and isolation.

PG: In solitude.

GS: In solitude. That’s his argument; and I’m persuaded. The second part of the argument is that stillness and solitude are just what life online makes increasingly difficult. Since *The Gutenberg Elegies* was published, Nicholas Carr has written *The Shallows*, which makes something of the same case, without Birkerts’s literary flair but with a certain amount of reporting on recent developments in cognitive science.

The book in its physical form probably can’t last forever. It’s not part of my or Birkerts’s hope or brief that it should. But deep reading, imaginative immersion: those things do need to last forever. The printed book can be lost and left behind, but the spiritual habitus Birkerts is describing can’t, or mustn’t, be left behind – it’s the royal road to the very best that any individual can achieve. And it’s at risk in our current mental ecology. Here, as elsewhere, how to preserve the best of the old in the course

of vast changes is a perennial problem.

PG: I suppose we're talking about the modern predicament.

GS: (*Smiles*) "The modern predicament" – an excellent phrase!

PG: In your 1999 *Dissent* review of Ellen Willis's *Don't Think, Smile* you write: "As the global economy and mass culture lay siege to inwardness, plow up our psychic root system, and alter the very grain and contour of our being, conservation increasingly becomes a radical imperative." What exactly—what institutions, perhaps—ought leftists or social critics seek to conserve in the face of these vast changes associated with modernity, and in response to the claims made by cultural radicals like Ellen Willis?

GS: The terms in which I see and approach the problem were formulated largely by left-wing anti-modernists like Christopher Lasch and Jackson Lears. I spoke before about the social and political consequences of mass production, that great watershed in American history – another way to look at the consequences of that shift is to trace, as Lasch does, the effects of mass production and the growth of medical, psychological, and educational expertise and bureaucracies on individual character structure. We humans have an evolutionary history. We have a specific, somewhat plastic but not infinitely plastic biological endowment. We have a specific gestational history and an early developmental history. It matters to creatures who have this, or any, kind of body and biology, what scale they live and grow on. From time immemorial, children grew up with two main, and a great many other auxiliary, authority figures, who corresponded to figures in their infantile fantasy life—initially overwhelming, terrifying figures. Gradually, as children became more familiar with those figures, as they watched their parents and other adults cope with daily life, their fantasies gradually shrank down to manageable proportions. That, to simplify quite a bit, is a description of human psychological maturation.

PG: And this is according to Lasch's psychoanalytic critique of modernity.

GS: Yes—I think Lasch is a matchless interpreter of Freud. As he tells the story, what happens in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is that, first, the father is taken out of the home, out of the child's immediate environment and off to the fac-

tory. He doesn't go to work next door in the field, shop, or forge. The child can't just come and watch and play nearby and see his father make mistakes on the job and win or lose arguments with customers – all of which tended to humanize him. Now the father's activity is all beyond the horizon. It's mysterious, obscure. The child gathers that his father is not in charge of his own life, that he is a subordinate. An abstract force called the company, corporation, agency, or state is what controls his father. As for the mother, instead of being the individual woman, making use of whatever traditions she absorbed from her own mother and the older women in her circle, it's again the distant state, in the form of the school system, medical system, and social welfare bureaucracy, that wields ultimate authority.

As authority becomes more remote and abstract in real life, there's no way for it to be whittled down to human scale and manageable proportions in the child's fantasy life. But fantasy life—this is Lasch and Freud's crucial premise—is fundamental to how our character develops. Because primitive fantasies cannot be reduced to human scale, as they used to be – since authority is now distant, obscure, remote, mysterious, and omnipotent – the individual grows up fatally ambivalent – either enraged or passive – toward authority. That is the classical definition of narcissism. Parents, as it used to become clear to the child from firsthand observation, are fallible and limited. As the child grew, she eventually became as strong and as smart as her parents, and finally more so. That was individuation and maturation. But you can't measure yourself against an abstract entity like the state or the corporation.

PG: So Lasch's suggested preservation of local, formative authority would foster the individual's ability to challenge and overcome authority in general.

GS: Yes, exactly. Just as the infant does in fantasy life, so the growing adolescent does in real life. You can't grow up without the experience of overcoming prejudice and arbitrary authority; you have to live through them and live them down. In any case, some arbitrary authority is simply necessary for every child's safety and every pupil's formation. But of course, arbitrary authority has a checkered record historically, as cultural radicals are quite right to point out. And those who feel that oppressive history especially keenly are women and minorities, which is why a large proportion of leading cultural radicals are women and minorities.

PG: It seems like, in order to avoid what you deem “the twin specters of antimodern-

ist fundamentalism and postmodernist nihilism,” we must proceed gradually through modernity, or in other words: we can’t skip steps, out of respect for our evolutionary history and psychic ecology. While Lasch’s critique of modernity and skepticism of so-called “progress” is indeed persuasive and compelling, his idea of an alternative model for social organization is conspicuously lacking. This might go some way in explaining the frequent charge that he is somehow conservative or regressive, or that he would prefer to revert back to pre-modern institutions like craft labor and traditional concepts like the intrinsic value of individual work. His brilliant analysis of modernity notwithstanding, it doesn’t seem like he offers an alternative to replace what is undoubtedly a problematic state of affairs.

GS: I think it’s a pity that both Lasch and Ellen Willis died too young to thrash out some of these issues between them. I know Lasch had a brief but warm correspondence with Barbara Ehrenreich, who certainly was not likely to blink at any anti-feminist implications of this critique of modernity. Yes, it’s true that the hegemony of mass society is virtually complete nowadays. You mentioned craft, the value of work, as a premodern tradition. Well, I know that by “pre-modern” you didn’t mean that there was something necessarily archaic about them. There isn’t. The point is to preserve under modern conditions the essence of those ideals: craftsmanship, autonomy at work, individual responsibility. The responsibility of the shopkeeper, the craftsman, the proprietor, the farmer to stand behind his work – this was identical, in pre-industrial America, with being a full citizen.

This is something there’s almost no scope for, or motivation for, in the contemporary workplace. In the sciences, yes; or among autonomous professionals or other people who are the privileged elite of the modern economy, yes. But even among those who are lucky enough to have regular employment, most no longer have any autonomy at work. Everyone knows that responsibility at work simply means thinking “How can I meet the company’s goals better (or successfully pretend that I am)?” rather than thinking vain thoughts like “Should I even be doing this at all? Should the company be doing this at all?” The job’s goals, techniques, and materials are defined by management; the history and internal requirements of the practice count for nothing.

PG: Lasch’s critique seems to have gained relevance and urgency with the rise of neoliberal individualism and the unprecedented flexibility of labor and capital.

GS: Nowadays, of course, “flexible labor” means the complete freedom of management to deploy labor as it sees fit, when it seems fit. Any flexibility on the part of the worker to define his own pace or purpose or approach is simply inconceivable. Try discussing the question with economists – blank stares.

Even the Left has largely abandoned all concern over the degradation of work. Lasch traces the course of two different kinds of working-class resistance to 19th-century industrialization. One, organized labor under the guidance of socialists in the European tradition, focused almost entirely on compensation and benefits and job security – which, it goes without saying, are valuable in and of themselves. But he distinguished this approach from that of the Populists, who were protesting against their loss of autonomy, the loss of work which they valued for its own sake.

PG: He lionizes the Populist movement in America, isn't that so?

GS: He does. Perhaps “lionize” might suggest that he idealizes or overvalues it, but I think he's responding to a tradition of undervaluing the Populists, which was given special force by Richard Hofstadter and other mid-century historians.

Nowadays, when subsistence for fifteen or twenty percent of the population is an issue, and two to three million people in the past few years have lost their homes, how do you raise demands for work that has value again, or for craftsmanship, or the autonomy of the worker? It sounds absurd, almost fantastic. Bare subsistence and minimum economic security are and must be the issues of the day. But once we get past austerity— and unfortunately, it looks like we're in for a very long spell, which apparently suits the financial elites just fine—these aspirations, these values, have to be reasserted.

The only vision I've encountered of how to organize a modern society from the ground up in a way that values the ideals of craftsmanship, of sexual equality, of sustainability, and of citizenship, is Ernest Callenbach's *Ecotopia*. It was published in 1975 and was a sort of underground classic in the seventies and eighties. It's rarely referred to now, but it's awfully good, and I hope the ideas in it will resurface on the Left in the future.

PG: My impression of your larger argument is that we must stall or perhaps prolong

modernity. We're going at far too past a pace, and we must universalize what we have already. You quote Matthew Arnold, who says, "The secret of the life of the future is civilization made pervasive and general." We shouldn't move forward toward a post-modern future—whatever that might look like—on a planet with such staggering inequality.

GS: Amen. By all means, let's move forward someday, toward postmodernity or wherever. But together.

PG: A final question: in your writings you have argued that the overabundance of information and staggering breadth of the cultural and political conversation today has made it increasingly difficult for anyone to develop "a position on everything." Because there are far more texts than one will ever have the time or ability to read, many students struggle, even, to find a place to begin. What do you think students of literature and politics should be reading today? Alternatively, what shouldn't they be reading?

GS: For native English speakers, the single greatest moral resource in the language is the nineteenth-century novel. I taught for a few semesters at a writing program and would always ask my students how many of them had read *Middlemarch* or *Bleak House* or *Portrait of a Lady*. It was a top-tier writing program, all highly competitive, excellent students, but a distressing number hadn't read some or even any of these books. Austen, Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, Meredith, Trollope, James, Hardy, and Conrad are, together with Balzac, Stendhal, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Chekhov, a matchlessly deep and precious trove of wisdom.

Every language's poetic tradition is rich, but ours in English is very rich. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English verse is a source of many, many exquisite pleasures. You do have to work a little—the language is not colloquial twentieth-century English—but it's the root of our English. And then, the King James Version of the Bible. My favorite twentieth-century writer, D.H. Lawrence, wrote a lovely essay on growing up with the Bible called "Hymns in a Man's Life." The KJV Bible is even richer than Shakespeare, both psychologically and linguistically. (I don't mention Shakespeare only because I don't think your readers will need my recommendation.)

Well, that's a bare minimum. As for other writers besides novelists or poets, I would

recommend Nietzsche, my favorite philosopher, as well as John Stuart Mill. Appreciating those two simultaneously is the challenge of a lifetime.

As for what not to read, I would say don't read your e-mail, or most of it. Don't read text messages, or tweets, or ads. Stay off Facebook. We all waste so much of our lives chatting, shopping, being assaulted by ads. And don't watch television. Television is an enormous realm, and there's a lot that's good—but it's very hard, almost impossible, not to find oneself relaxing into flabby, promiscuous spectatorship, just as it's very hard to eat only one or two potato chips.

An Interview with Chad Harbach

Kat Balkoski, Thomas Bettridge, and Pauline Weissman

*Chad Harbach is the author of the recently released novel *The Art of Fielding*, now available from Little, Brown and Company. This novel, Harbach's first, tells the enthralling story of a young baseball star named Henry Skrimshander and his struggle to overcome his anxieties on and off the field. At the same time, we learn of the complicated relationships between Henry's diverse collection of friends and mentors. *The Art of Fielding* brilliantly gestures toward a variety of literary genres, including the baseball novel, the campus novel, and the work of the nineteenth-century American Renaissance, and in the months since its release it has received a great deal of critical acclaim.*

*Harbach is also well-known for his central role in the development of *n+1*, a widely celebrated avant-garde journal of politics, literature, and culture. As a co-editor for *n+1*, Harbach has written a number of articles on everything from the novels of David Foster Wallace to the urgency of addressing our global environmental crisis.*

Three of our editors talked with Chad recently to talk about his recent novel, the smell of apple pie, and his advice to aspiring fiction-writers.

Pauline Weissman: How did you start writing fiction?

Chad Harbach: Well, I went to college. I was an English major at Harvard. I didn't take any creative writing classes and I didn't spend any time writing fiction when I was at school. I was busy writing academic papers all the time. And then I graduated and decided—or had already half-decided—that I wanted to write fiction. I was very bad at it, so I spent the next four years living in various places—Milwaukee,

San Francisco, and back at Cambridge. I worked a series of terrible, and sometimes strange, jobs. But I focused on writing fiction. After these odd jobs, I would go home every night and try to sit there and write for several hours while my friends were having fun. After four years of that, I was very tired and reluctantly decided to apply to MFA programs.

Thomas Bettridge: Why reluctantly?

CH: Keith [Gessen, a friend and co-editor of *n+1*] and I did this at the same time, and we were equally reluctant but also tired of what we were up to, which was a lot of work with very little reward. When I was applying at the end of 2000—I went to the University of Virginia at the end of 2001—it was around the end of the era of widespread skepticism about MFA programs. Also, the writing culture in which students apply to MFA programs as soon as they graduate college hadn't yet emerged. That didn't happen at the time. Keith and I just felt like it was a superfluous, if not nerdy, thing to do. Or, that there were some weaknesses associated with it and that, if you could become a writer without going into an MFA program, you should probably do so. I'll stop there.

Kat Balkoski: You're an author of both fiction and non-fiction. How do you balance these two forms of writing?

CH: It was never an ideal situation in terms of time because for many years we were working on *n+1* non-stop: editing and doing various business-related and party-related tasks. I also had a job that paid me money. So while I was trying to make progress on the book, there was always something going on and something to do at *n+1* and I had to go to my regular job. The book very frequently got short shrift. I would have long periods of time where I wouldn't get to work on it.

The process of writing for *n+1* is just so different from the process of writing fiction. They inform each other in some ways; but they involve totally different parts of your brain and totally different sets of thoughts. When you write non-fiction, you sit around, read a lot of books, have a loosely related series of thoughts that you try to scribble down. It's kind of an easier process because you're cobbling something together and you might not know where it's headed but you have to think about where it's headed. Whereas writing fiction is much [*pauses*] stranger. It's a more alchemical

thing to do.

PW: One thing that struck me about *The Art of Fielding* is its grounding Americana aesthetic. It *smells* like apple pie. [*All laugh.*] Did you plan this strong presence from the outset, or did this develop as you were writing?

CH: Well, it would be a great marketing strategy if the book actually smelled like apple pie. [*All laugh.*] It never occurred to me that I was writing a book about America, or Americana, or something one more remove from Americana. But certainly, in retrospect, there were many American topics from the start: the Midwestern setting, and of course all the literary touchstones of the book are central American Renaissance-type books, and then you have baseball. It was never a conscious decision, but all those things came together in a way that made sense to me from the start.

Another thing that I always had in the back of my mind—this was never terribly explicit either—was that I wanted to write a novel that was going to be comprehensible, and maybe even entertaining, to the kinds of people that I grew up with. I think, in some ways, that although I wasn't writing for any particular audience in any explicit way I always wanted a book that would appeal to my friends from Wisconsin, people who don't necessarily read a lot of novels. So that may contribute to the smell that you were experiencing.

TB: Do you think the novel's relationship to nineteenth-century American literature is restricted to its content, or does it also inform narrative style and form?

CH: I think it did inform narrative style and form. I always conceived of the book as a kind of meta-nineteenth-century novel, if that makes any sense. I wanted the book to be recognizably contemporary; but I think the characters in my book are nineteenth-century characters. The way we live our lives is still deeply influenced by nineteenth-century novels. A major way in which we experience our lives is through—even if we haven't read all those books—the lens that they provide. So I always thought of this book as a contemporary response to the nineteenth-century novel.

TB: It seems to me that the novel has a certain anachronistic quality. Sometimes it feels like it's set in the 1950s or 1960s, and then all of a sudden someone checks their cell phone and the reader is sucked into the present. Did you intend for this effect,

or did it naturally happen?

CH: Well, part of it is an accident of the fact that I'm very old. [*All laugh.*] I went to college in an era when being in college might as well have felt like you were living in 1850. Looking back at my college experience, my friends and I lived a very anachronistic sort of life. We had very little contact with the outside world, and we had very little contact with one another outside of face-to-face communication. I think this quality you refer to is in some ways a feature of being in college and being at a place like Westish, which is cut off from the world in some ways. But this experience could be dwindling.

KB: I found it interesting that, in such a readable work, the novel's protagonist, Henry Skrimshander, is such a laconic, or even inarticulate, character. I wonder if he is intended as a cipher, an empty character who serves a structural role in the novel, rather than as a psychological representation.

TB: Like Melville's *Bartleby*.

CH: I don't think that was the point, or something I wanted to do, but I think that was one of the challenges. Let me put it this way: to me, a lot of the story in the book is the story of Henry coming into consciousness. He is a totally naïve and inarticulate and kind of prodigy-like figure in the beginning of the book. He's not a fully developed, or highly conscious, human being. So part of the progress of the book is Henry being forced into consciousness by the things that happen to him. Henry becomes a pretty interesting guy by the end of the book, but part of the challenge for me while writing the story was writing the early stages when he's not so interesting outside of his talent. I think that Henry is a bit of a cipher earlier in the book, but that was less something that I was interested in than something I had to figure out how to deal with.

TB: In one passage I liked, Guert Affenlight, the President of Westish College, is sitting in the bleachers, sandwiched between two retired baseball players, ruminating about the idea that Bill Blass—and other players who suddenly and inexplicably lost their talent—is part of “a postmodern condition of baseball.” He thinks about this for some time until snapping out of it and realizing that his studies in literature have made him something of an asshole. It's funny to think about, considering that this

interview is for a journal of literary criticism. [*All laugh.*] Is this an idea, or an anxiety, that came up while writing a novel about characters who don't read novels? Were you afraid of over-intellectualizing your characters?

CH: It's hard to say. I have nothing against intellectualizing, or even over-intellectualizing, but when Affenlight says that thing about literature turning you into an asshole, I think it's true in some ways. What I have in mind is not so much a process of intellectualization but this way in which one begins to treat other people as instruments of one's intellectual faculties, as objects of one's discourse. I see that in how people transport their attitudes into their dealings with actual humans who do mind.

PW: This makes me wonder about how your undergraduate education motivated you to write fiction. What advice would you give to undergraduates who write fiction or who want to begin writing fiction?

CH: I think the simplest and most obvious piece of advice is to read and read and read. You know, I think that reading in an academic environment has an indirect relation to writing fiction. For me, having been an English major and having taken all these academic English classes as an undergraduate, you become versed in a certain way of reading—some version of close reading—in which you're taking apart books and you're discovering undercurrents. I knew that process when I turned to writing fiction and I tried to reverse that process. I tried to write things that were subtle, because my idea of a novel is something that contains all these themes and undercurrents. You need to create something that contains all this stuff. But not to the extent that no one knows what you're talking about. Something doesn't become subtle because you make it so, it becomes subtle because you're trying to do everything in the clearest way possible but what you're trying to talk about is actually quite complicated.

PW: I think you put that nicely—reversing the process of close reading that the academic seminar room encourages. Are there any specific instances in which you've been conscious of doing this?

CH: It's hard to talk about books that influenced you because often they're not the ones that you know have influenced you. Or: the writers that have influenced you most might be the writers who you yourself as a writer are most unlike, but they end

up nudging you in a slightly different direction. Certainly there is a lot of Melville in my book. I think that, one of the most beautiful things about *Moby Dick* is that it has a kind of sonic and rhythmic logic that continues throughout the book. It's a musical logic that I never thought I could match because it's the most musical book ever written. But I think there were times in my book when I was trying to get into the same rhythmic register as *Moby Dick*. So that was one thing that was consciously on my mind at times when I was writing.

TB: We have one last question, a meta-question that came to mind while conducting this interview.

CH: Sure.

TB: You've probably been interviewed about *The Art of Fielding* many times.

CH: That is a fact.

TB: Have you grown tired of talking about it and of hearing people like us ask about ideas we've superimposed onto the text? During your writing process, you probably never imagined talking about the book over and over. What has that been like?

CH: For one thing, I think that you develop a useful amnesia about it. Oftentimes after doing an interview, I get off the phone and walk away and I can't remember a single thing that was said. And that probably comes in part from the fact that someone else is tape-recording it so you don't need to remember, but it's also useful because when you read the interview again, you don't remember that you answered the exact same questions as usual. For me, it's fun. A lot of what you get asked in interviews can be tedious. But I still haven't exhausted my willingness to talk to people about the book itself.

TB: Have you learned new things about the book having had to orally revisit it so many times?

CH: I guess I have. I probably couldn't tell you what they are, but it's equally weird to work on something for nine or ten years and never talk about it. In a way that's the weird and strenuous thing because when you're really immersed in a private project

like that you become the dullest possible person. You think about one thing all the time, and it's not a thing that makes for decent polite conversation. So in some ways it's more fun to be able to talk about it. But then, of course, at a certain point you need to stop talking about it and go do something with your life.

“Why This Book is Written as It Is”

Techniques of Truth and Trauma in Charlotte Delbo and Tim O’Brien

Kat Balkoski

Who are you who will read these words and study these photographs, and through what cause, by what chance, and for what purpose, and by what right do you qualify to, and what will you do about it?

– James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*¹

“Il faut donner à voir.”

– Charlotte Delbo²

The question remains unanswerable in the abstract: wherein lies the intersection of literature and truth? Despite the difficulties the question poses, this comparative analysis of the testimonial writings of Charlotte Delbo and Tim O’Brien aims to elucidate the space of literary truth through close attention to narrative strategies and self-situation. In O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* and Delbo’s *Auschwitz and After*—generically different works that both narrativize and theorize the persistence and the failings of memory—literary production can be analyzed as a restructuring of sensory experience, consciousness and memory. Clearly the very process of writing mediates and re-imagines experience, regardless of a work’s status as “memoir” or “fiction.” Both writers participate in sites of collective memory, but they occupy

different positions on the testimonial spectrum, as neither Delbo nor O'Brien fit perfectly within the categories of "victim" or "perpetrator": Delbo, as a non-Jewish political prisoner, preserved more agency than many of her fellow prisoners, while O'Brien, as a young draftee, was shipped off to a distant hell of which he wanted no part. Still, there remains a huge experiential and moral discrepancy between the heightened sensations of life and death in the jungles of Vietnam and the freezing annihilation in the snows of Auschwitz. While O'Brien can afford to speak of "moral indifference," Delbo cannot. While *The Things They Carried* overflows with vivid and often entertaining stories, *Auschwitz and After* is arresting and haunting.

Delbo and O'Brien destabilize normative binaries of the real and the imagined, the internal and the external, subject and object, and now and then. The beauty that these texts exhibit and provoke should not shock us in relation to their subject matter, for to remove narratives of trauma from the aesthetics of literature is to fatally undermine the potential of testimony. Not to analyze, not to engage textually and hence, aesthetically, with the literature of the camp or the battlefield is to imply that a stale compassion and falsely reverential silence are adequate responses to acts of witnessing.

War stories rarely stray from the form of the sensationalist narrative. They dramatize the body in pain, transferring the shadow of this pain to the reader. "A true story, if truly told, makes the stomach believe," writes Tim O'Brien, on the subject of embodied truth.³ Within this conception of "truth," storytelling becomes a process of corporeal transference, a bodily economy by which the reader comes to mirror the pain of the witness/victim/author. However, both Delbo and O'Brien repeatedly substitute human bodies in pain with non-human symbolic bodies, including animals and inanimate objects. One of Delbo's most affective and effective passages, "One Day," describes a young woman's searching for clean snow "which turns in her mouth into a handful of salt"—a bitter transformation of the pure to the painful reminiscent of the theological trope of the vinegar given to a crucified Christ.

But the more shocking metamorphosis within this passage is from woman to dog to corpse, as the dying woman's ragged yellow coat sparks Delbo's memory of Flac, her childhood dog. She remembers that the dog, too, was the object of a macabre transformation; as he became sickly, he began to look "like the skeleton of a bird" and then died. The juxtaposition and textual interweaving of these two deaths is such

that they become blurred, melting into a single site of trauma: “She is huddling in the snow. His backbone arched, Flac is going to die—the first creature I ever saw die.”⁴ No semantic markers differentiate these two deaths, which are (re)experienced simultaneously. This (re)experience exemplifies the traumatic collapse of temporality and dream and perception into Delbo’s work. The symbolism of this juxtaposition/substitution is heightened when the dying woman/dog is attacked by an SS guard dog and dies, reduced to a bloody stump. The other dog, the SS dog, is left with “blood on his muzzle,” a bodily symbol of animal guilt and animal violence.⁵ The intense double trauma of these violent juxtapositions is cut short by Delbo’s last sentence in this section: “And now I am sitting in a café, writing this text,”⁶ in which the simultaneous experience of traumatic memory is inscribed within the text’s own non-linearity.

The baby water buffalo brutally tortured by a group of grieving soldiers in O’Brien’s “How to Tell a True War Story” occupies a similar role, becoming a sacrificial substitute for the body of a fallen comrade. “There wasn’t a great deal of sympathy for the baby water buffalo. Curt Lemon was dead.”⁷ With this subtle parataxis, O’Brien points to a logic of equivalence or interchangeability between the buffalo and the dead man. This logic is integrated into the narrative fabric more literally than Delbo’s juxtaposition of dying dogs and dying women, and corpses and dummies. These metaphorical substitutions emphasize the animality of the body and dramatize the pain experienced by the body depicted, transferred to the witness, and subsequently to the reader.

But the “whole story” of his and Delbo’s portrayal of the body in pain is even more complex than this mirroring. These substitutions dramatize the shuttling between “real” and “imaginary” and create a gaping absence under the dual spectral presence of human and animal. These bodies in pain are themselves metonyms for the larger structural violence of History, which is narrativized and made visible through a focus on particular, embodied violence. The imaginative movements of these substitutions enable the inevitable slippage between embodied and disembodied truth—one that must occur in a remembrance or retelling.

The otherworldly landscapes that serve as settings for *The Things They Carried* and *Auschwitz and After* are also imbued with metaphorical significance. They write themselves onto the bodies of inmates or soldiers, and, in turn, are poetically engraved by

these bodies. In Delbo's text, frozen corpses and not-quite-dead bodies become part of the landscape of the camps, often in fragmented and undistinguishable pieces: "Lengthening shadows spread over the whole yard. Nothing was left but one illuminated row of heads touched by the last rays of the dying day."⁸ The "dying" of the day is a rhetorical transference with regard to the dying of the bodies. Sometimes bodies become engulfed within a predatory hostile landscape: "Standing motionless since the middle of the night, we had grown so heavy on our legs that we sank into the earth, the ice, unable to fight off the numbness."⁹

O'Brien, too, tells several stories of engulfment: the disappearance of Mary Anne into the land in the symbolically charged "Sweetheart of the Song Tra Bong" and Kiowa's literal sinking into the shit-field. The witness, too, is engulfed and left behind: "In a way, maybe, I'd gone under with Kiowa."¹⁰ As was the case with the water buffalo, the symbiotic (or perhaps parasitic) relationship between land and body in O'Brien is more fully explored than in Delbo's work, where land and body are instead related metaphorically. The sinking of Kiowa is accorded the full status of "story truth" within its narrative encasement, while the sinking of Delbo's companions remains imagistic, hallucinatory, and not narrated to the full extent of its literary potential.

But both metaphor and narrative enable particular kinds of literary truth, because they endow the landscape with violent potential, hence rendering trauma visible. Tina Chen describes *The Things They Carried* as displaying an "embodied poetics of displacement" and a "reconceptualization of landscape" as Vietnam becomes, paradoxically, an "imagined homeland" that replaces an equally fictive nostalgia for the United States.¹¹ Because of this intermixing of bodies with landscape, Vietnam and Auschwitz become zones partially severed from time and space, zones from which a full return becomes impossible: some part of the self has been left behind and continues to die: "As far as I'm concerned / I'm still there / dying there / a little more each day / dying over again / the death of those who died."¹²

"We are in a place where time is abolished," Delbo writes, describing the loss of points of temporal reference in Auschwitz, and the self's inability to make sense of the world within which it is trapped.¹³ The site of trauma is one outside temporality, but the return to "reality" reestablishes temporality as a confused "floating present," in which embodied existence is only half experienced. Return may be a necessary step in the process of becoming a survivor, of bearing witness, but Delbo also represents it

as an illusion, a fading away into ghostliness in “The Return.”

As authors, Delbo and O’Brien somehow remain stuck in their sites of trauma (having both written numerous works on these sites other than the ones discussed in this essay) and address the eternal return of atemporalized trauma. While entrapment is symptomatic of trauma, neither author is passively retraumatized, but rather actively engages in a process of writing. This process remains faithful to the repetitive collapse of time associated with trauma, yet creates an artistic testament that both exploits and preserves bodily memory and the experience of time. “You can tell a true war story by the way it never seems to end. Not then, not ever,” O’Brien writes.¹⁴

This “never ending” quality as a marker of “truth” resonates with what Marguerite Duras has written about the paradoxically articulated “non-story” of her life: “The story of my life doesn’t exist. Does not exist. There’s never any center to it. No path, no line. There are great spaces where you pretend there used to be someone, but it’s not true, there was no one.”¹⁵ Delbo’s style has been associated with the *nouveau roman* and compared to that of Duras. The same refusal of “story” or *histoire* might be said of Delbo’s relationship to her own life and memories in *Auschwitz and After*. Still, a book is produced, even if it is not a “history” and has no “center.”

O’Brien reminds us that his own destructureings and restructureings are central to the construction and destruction of identity and truth: “But it’s not a game. It’s a form. Right here, now, as I invent myself, I’m thinking of all I want to tell you about why this book is written as it is.”¹⁶ While Bowker’s circling around the lake in “Speaking of Courage” creates an artificial narrative center, it is quickly displaced by O’Brien’s admission of its fictitiousness, as the stories themselves revolve around centers that remain concealed or imaginary. O’Brien is a master of telling and retelling, perpetually, undoing the narrative framework we inevitably establish as we read.

Everything talks in Vietnam, while Auschwitz has the “silence of a dream.” Nonetheless, both O’Brien and Delbo weave into their works a plurality of voices. Dialogue is written into their narratives as a way of easing the communal experience of trauma and is incorporated into the very structure of their works, both of which are composed of short stories or fragments that seem to support or contradict one another. In several of the sections of the third volume of *Auschwitz and After*, “Measure of Our Days,” Delbo writes herself into the narratives as a listener, an addressee in the sec-

and person. As an author, she inhabits the testimony of her companions, but within the truth of narrative she gives these women a voice, performing the role of listener herself while she retains the creative position of author.

Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, the pioneering authors of *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, have emphasized the necessity of an “empathic listener” or “addressable other” for the constitution of narrative and the externalization of trauma. Both listening and the failure to listen are narrativized in *The Things They Carried*. In “How to Tell a True War Story,” the unreceptive listener (the sister who never wrote back) and the misguided listener (the “older woman of kindly temperament and humane politics”) are both dismissed as “dumb coozes.” For O’Brien, stories are also about listeners (and by extension readers) and about the inevitable failure of listening.

The character of Norman Bowker, on the other hand, acts as a narrative performance of the inability to bear witness. He is unable to tell his story: “I’d write it myself except I can’t ever find any words, if you know what I mean.”¹⁷ O’Brien tells us that he first took it upon himself to tell Bowker’s story but shaped it for his own creative ends, ultimately leaving out the core drama and disappointing Bowker. Bowker’s suicide is a dramatization of the failure to bear witness by proxy; “Speaking of Courage” is rewritten in order to “make good” on Bowker’s silence and death, and to atone for O’Brien’s failure to tell the right story.

Even as they repeatedly point to the impossibility of transmission, both O’Brien and Delbo found their voices and told their stories. Even if true war stories are about “people who never listen”¹⁸ since “after all / better not to believe / these ghostly tales,”¹⁹ both authors fundamentally believe in the imperative of bearing witness. “The survivor must undertake to regain his memory”²⁰ as part of a near-miraculous process of rediscovering humanity and the ability to live, while the veteran must go on and tell stories as “partly catharsis, partly communication.”

But writing for both authors is much more than therapy: it is a practice that shapes a freer relationship with others and with history. Georges Perec has argued that our unwillingness to consider camp literature “true literature” is in bad faith:

But it is clear that these books are carefully distinguished from ‘true’ literature, such that one is no longer sure whether the basis

of this attitude is an excessive respect for (or bad conscience about) the phenomenon of the camps, pushed to the extent of thinking that literature can never give anything other than an inauthentic and impotent expression of it, or the belief that a deportee's experience is in itself not capable of giving birth to a work of art. It is unclear, that is, whether literature is disdained in the name of the camps, or the camps in the name of literature.²¹

Either form of "disdain," whether of the literary form or of the content of testimony itself, significantly diminishes the possibility of communicating trauma. Perec's analysis of the literary techniques of Robert Antelme's *The Human Race* ring true for *Auschwitz and After*: "The narrative is interrupted at any moment; consciousness works its way into consciousness and deepens it; and this moment of the camp becomes terribly heavy, changes meaning, exhausts the camp for an instant, then opens onto another memory."²² Methods of "literary creation" externalize, perform, and restructure traumatic camp experiences so that the author can try and fulfill the ethical imperative to decipher signs and disentangle the world. The author molds literature as an "expression of the inexpressible" which "establishes that fundamental relationship between the individual and History."²³ Literature is "a transformation that allows the individual to become conscious by speaking to others"²⁴ and thus becomes a necessary component of the process of acquiring self-awareness. Here, trauma theory is reintegrated as a fluid shaping of the chaotic perception of the sensible into a wider theory of literature, and restructuring of the self and world.

We must remember to ask ourselves these difficult questions about our rights and responsibilities as readers. But to engage in an ethical practice of reading is not to shun aesthetic appreciation or serious philological work. Take "How to Tell a True War Story," one of the more explicitly theoretical stories in *The Things They Carried*. The "tell" of the title is purposely ambiguous, pointing to both the "recounting" of a true war story and the "recognizing" of a true war story, the telling and the listening. Similarly, "truth" in the abstract is displaced by the active telling of truth. Calling a story "true" becomes a sort of performative truism. Take Delbo's enigmatic epigraph: "Aujourd'hui, je ne suis pas sûre que ce que j'ai écrit soit vrai. Je suis sûre que c'est véridique," translated as, "Today I am not sure that what I wrote is true. I am certain it is truthful." This translation is problematic insofar as the diction implied by "véridique" should not be associated with the project of documentary historiography.²⁵ Delbo's opening of a narrative space between the "vrai" and the "véridique" and O'Brien's provocative assertion that stories can be "truer than the truth" both

demonstrate how these authors exceed the generic limitations of “memoir” or “auto-fiction.”²⁶ Delbo and O’Brien both reach towards the imperative, “Il faut donner à voir.” They have given us something to see. The onus remains on us to see it.

NOTES

1. James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001).
2. Difficult to translate, this impersonal construction could be rendered in English as “It must be given to see,” or “One must give to be seen.” It is the “ruling principle” of Delbo’s work, according to Lawrence Langer.
3. Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990), 84.
4. Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont, intro. Lawrence Langer (New Haven: Yale UP, 1995), 27.
5. *Ibid.*, 29.
6. *Ibid.*, 29.
7. O’Brien, 85.
8. Delbo, 50.
9. *Ibid.*, 25.
10. O’Brien, 212.
11. See Tina Chen, “‘Unraveling the Deeper Meaning’: Exile and the Embodied Poetics of Displacement in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*,” *Contemporary Literature* 39.1 (Spring, 1998), pp. 77-98, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1208922>.
12. Delbo, 224.
13. *Ibid.*, 32.
14. O’Brien, 83.
15. Marguerite Duras, *The Lover*, trans. Barbara Bray (New York: Pantheon, 1985).
16. O’Brien, 203.
17. *Ibid.*, 179.
18. O’Brien, 91.
19. Delbo, 230.
20. *Ibid.*, 255.
21. Georges Perec, “Robert Antelme, or the Truth of Literature,” in *On Robert Antelme’s The Human Race: Essays and Commentary*, ed. Daniel Dobbels, trans. Jeffrey

Haight, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2003), 139.

22. Delbo, 143.

23. Ibid., 151.

24. Delbo, 151.

25. Thomas Tresize, "The Question of Community in Charlotte Delbo's *Auschwitz and After*" MLN 117.4 (Sept 2002), 858-886. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/mln/summary/v117/117.4trezise.html>.

26. O'Brien, 89.

Spectator Dynamics in Greek Tragedy

Samantha Moffett

To some extent, film theory, which contemplates the role and experience of the spectator, may be extrapolated to staged drama. But among performance genres, Greek tragedy is exceptional in two notable respects: there is a limited number of actors and there is an absence of voyeuristic satisfaction with respect to female bodies or violence. These features render the dynamics of its audience-experience resistant to the application of modern interpretive paradigms. The aim of this analysis will be a re-vision of cinematic scholarship, in particular Laura Mulvey's "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," to accommodate the unique dynamics of Athenian stage spectatorship. It will find that just as the spectator's alienation from the action is occasioned by women in film, it is occasioned by dramatic irony in Greek tragedy. In the model of the modern gaze, I will establish a revised formulation of the *pathos* (pity) and *phobos* (fear) that, according to Aristotle, define the Greek genre.

In his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I," Jacques Lacan proposes that the identification with foreign, external bodies is an extension of the developmental milestone during infancy when a child recognizes itself outside itself—that is, in a mirror. The acceptance of a seen body as Self comprises, thereafter, an "imaginary order" which permits projected subjectivity, the fluidity between image and self-image.¹ This phenomenon explains the ability to forget oneself when watching a movie: just as an infant recognizes a connection between its mind and a foreign body in the mirror, the spectator connects his mind to the body of a dramatic character, engaging in

the plot, sharing the character's motivations, and even wincing when the character suffers bodily harm. However, there is one experiential subtlety that significantly contextualizes the baby's revelation as it relates to spectatorship. The child observes his complete embodiment at a time that is, developmentally, one of frustration and fragmentation, confinement and impotence. The child cannot yet will his body to perform every movement he intends or actualize every outcome he imagines. Therefore, when recognizing his lackless image externally, he is enthralled—he becomes Little Narcissus, idealizing his reflection. The first experience of identification, then, is characterized by glorification of the image-ego, but only in devastating opposition to the failure of the experienced, internal ego. Initially, the seen body is preferable to the felt mind—and this preference is the precedent for “visual pleasure.”

Mulvey contends that spectatorship occurs in two forms: identification (passive looking at a male protagonist) and objectification (active looking at a female character). Identification is characterized both by the spectator's “forgetting the world as the I” and his recognizing in the protagonist “his like.”² Conversely, Mulvey argues that audience members view peripheral female characters as designed for display. They are displays that elicit anxiety by virtue of their lack of penises, their essential difference that cannot be extricated from the castration threat they archetypically signify. The spectator compensates for this discomfort either by fetishizing the woman's body by “transforming it[s physical beauty] into something satisfying in itself” or voyeuristically exacting revenge on the guilty object, observing her punishment and conquest in the context of the film's narrative.³ The former avenue, Mulvey notes, does not require the support of the plot—it can be accomplished, for instance, by a flattering close-up that fragments the female body. For the most part, the woman's “visual presence tends to work against the development of a story-line, to freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.”⁴

Mulvey's formulation of self-forgetting through the protagonist is directly applicable to Greek tragedy, in which identification with such male characters as Oedipus, Ajax, and Orestes, or with such liminal female characters as Athena and Antigone, is comfortable and ego-syntonic, if not ego-elevating. The eroticized and anxiety-provoking peripheral female Mulvey considers seems at first glance to have no tragic complement. There are, of course, no eroticized female bodies on the Greek stage. Only the effect of Mulvey's female seems experientially familiar: the audience frequently undergoes contemplative, extra-diegetic moments of anxiety. But rather than result-

ing from engagement with a female Other which re-conjures the Self, these disruptions result principally from a disparity in knowledge. When an audience member becomes aware that his own judgments or knowledge exceeds those of the dramatic character, he can no longer comfortably identify and is thrown back into his seat with self-awareness.⁵ He is reflecting on the action rather than identifying with the action. This self-awareness disrupts both the narrative flow and the logic as contained by the world of the stage. In the Greek theater, then, Mulvey's dynamic of identification and alienation cannot manifest as diffusely as it does on the modern screen; it occurs in relation to a single character, who at once serves as the locus of vicarious idealization and anxious, self-aware observation.

Just as both ego-affiliated and ego-alienated visual relationships ultimately enhance the cinematic observer's pleasure, identification and its counterpart, self-awareness, also contribute to audience empowerment within Greek tragedy. While the mode of empowerment vis-à-vis a rational, strong-willed, and sympathetic protagonist is rather self-evident and indistinct from that posited in canonical theorizations of cinema, the mechanism of diegetic interruption must differ. I propose that this interruption is written as dramatic irony. When characters (i) ponder their uncertain futures, (ii) make predictions which ironically contradict their fates as known to the audience, or (iii) accept meretricious evidence, the audience cannot help but reflect privately (as the playwright intends for them to) on the knowledge that the dramatic character would fain have. So the goal of the playwright is, temporarily, failure: by preventing the spectator's immersion in the scene and identification with the dominant character, he ensures the ultimate success of his creation. He calls attention to and then surmounts the mirror-stage corollary of self-projection—frustration.

Sophocles, perhaps even more than Aeschylus or Euripides, exploited the potential of dramatic irony to achieve spectator apotheosis. In his most familiar work, *Oedipus Tyrannus*, the spectator identifies with Oedipus, a beloved king who dominates the stage. Alienation from the protagonist occurs, however, each time he calls ironic attention to his monstrous identity. Although audience members have perpetual access to this knowledge, it only thrusts them into self-awareness when they are afforded, by the very language of the play, the opportunity to reflect. For example, when Oedipus worries that "The killer, whoever it may be, could kill again / And lay those deadly hands on me," he first temptingly poses a question ("whoever it may be") that the audience necessarily answers by recalling knowledge of his guilt, and

then, if they perhaps quickly recover from that interruption, Oedipus expresses an all-too-prophetic fear (“could...lay those deadly hands on me”) that augurs his impending self-blinding.⁶ While the former disruption of dramatic immersion results from disparate information, the latter is far more unsettling. The narrative’s present, the period in which the spectator should theoretically immerse himself, occurs after Laius’ murder but prior to Oedipus’ self-injury. If the play were bound to forward-moving time, the spectator would necessarily progress in the story with Oedipus, engaging with his investigation, and, at worst, considering with fuller knowledge events in his narrative past (i.e., his patricide and incestuous marriage). But any comment that conjures the narrative future introduces anachronism: it preserves the spectator’s present, reminding him of the world and chronology beyond the stage. This is a world that Sophocles could as easily conceal, one which the audience is predisposed to allow him to conceal, but which he exposes forcefully.

Sophocles achieves these same anachronistic results even more dramatically when, rather than recalling an event in Oedipus’ future, the characters explicitly recall one in the spectator’s past: “Let it never be remembered / That you [Oedipus] once raised us up, only to let us fall.”⁷ The audience is prompted to recall Oedipus in memory—considering the man’s infamy historically. The spectator thus becomes aware not just of existing chronologically ahead of the story, but of his and the play’s characters existence on opposite ends of a timeline. This distance shatters perfect identification soon after Oedipus’ first speech. By intermittently returning the audience member to a time he more naturally inhabits, and forcing him to reflect on a fuller set of knowledge, Sophocles repeatedly transforms him from projected subject inhabiting the kingly character to a man in his own mind and body, an agent who is self-aware but impotent to affect the action.

Each time Oedipus requests to know the identity of the murderer, the audience becomes cognizant of the answer and, consequently, of themselves as spectators. Sophocles foments this awareness by limiting Oedipus to the use of a singular suspect even after Creon refers to a “pack of thieves.”⁸ At other times, Oedipus obliviously curses himself—perhaps most ironically when he cries, “I damn myself, if I should come to know / That he shares my hearth and home— / Then I call this curse to fall on me.”⁹ Of course, the murderer not only shares Oedipus’ home; he *is* Oedipus. Most frustrating, apart from frequent, ironic turns of phrase which recall the pathetic truth (see, e.g., Goldhill, 2009), the characters themselves are equipped to know Oe-

dipus' lineage and transgressions for approximately 470 lines before it is understood. Beginning with Jocasta's revelation of Apollo's priests' prophecy in lines 707-722, Oedipus has all of the information which would be required for a reasonable person to discern the truth of his origin. Even when he considers that he might be Laius' murderer, he does not recognize the complementary nature of his and Jocasta's oracles or the clue of his infirmity when Jocasta confesses that Laius "yoked [the] feet" of their baby. At each of these alienating, narrative-halting moments of frustration, the self-aware audience member considers one of the play's un-realized or un-actualized truths. These considerations disrupt the narrative, and correlatively disrupt the spectator's pleasurable, passive identification with an external ego. They lock him within his body, frustrated and fragmented, confined and impotent, such that, like the baby at the time of the mirror stage, he incessantly thinks the end but cannot cause it.

This frustration persists only until the on-stage reversal of Oedipus's fortune. As Oedipus finds himself "exposed—born to forbidden parents, joined/In forbidden marriage, I brought forbidden death," he becomes abominable even to himself.¹⁰ Identification with such a character, a wretchedly unfortunate man, no longer appeals to the audience, though they may pity him. Mulvey might speculate at this point that the audience voyeuristically requires sadistic punishment of their erstwhile externalization—they desire to overcome the humiliation and anxiety Oedipus represents by seeing him injured within the narrative. This certainly occurs. But a more fundamental experience in the theater exists not in relation to Oedipus, but to the spectators themselves.

From the moment of Oedipus' revelation, the private prophecies and impotent imaginings that the spectator made throughout the play are vindicated as accomplishment: that which the spectator envisioned has been actualized. It is as if the infant, whose countenance in the mirror has suddenly become hideous to him, then found that he could control with spectacular efficacy not only his body as he wishes, but the whole world. Just as Oedipus falls, becoming an unpleasant prospect for projected subjectivity, the spectator's own ego triumphs. The stage for this triumph, in turn, has been set by each and every disruption of the Athenian drama, each instance of dramatic irony and corresponding audience-alienation. When Oedipus realizes his ignorance, that which the audience has been imagining manifest itself.

Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* serves as a useful introduction to this spectator dynamic.

The dynamic, however, is not limited to that play; in fact, I contend that it is the operating principle of the genre. It may be useful to consider a less familiar example. In Sophocles' *The Women of Trachis*, Deianira is for the most part a comfortable subject of identification: she speaks well, admirably suffers without "giv[ing] way to rage," and wishes "never...to [be] bad and bold."^{11, 12} However, when she begins to agonize over the use of the monster Nessus' blood to keep her husband faithful, wondering whether she is acting "rashly" and reflecting that she has "never brought [the charm] to the test," the audience recalls the fate belied by her name (literally, "man-destroyer").^{13, 14} The audience then becomes self-aware in order to respond, albeit silently, to her debate. After Deinira coats her husband's garb in blood, Sophocles conjures Heracles' brutal end again in her promise: "I would dress him in this robe to appear before / the Gods to make new sacrifice in new clothing."¹⁵ These self-aware predictions of Heracles' demise will occasion, as in *Oedipus Tyrannus*, satisfaction to the audience at the very moment the play's characters most suffer, simply because ego competence successfully supplants ego-idealization, once the latter, as identification, can no longer occur.

A distinct incarnation of dramatic irony is false accusation, which occurs in the *Women of Trachis* when Heracles wrongly suspects Deianira of malicious intent and in Euripides' *Hippolytus* when Theseus accuses his celibate son of rape. The audience answers both charges with silent, self-situated protest, perhaps lamenting or railing against the injustice, but favoring cognizance of the Truth to identification with either the misinformed accuser or the helplessly accused. The moment of justice is bittersweet for the play's characters. They experience deep, wrenching regret. For the audience, however, justice represents an actualization of that which they have been desperately imagining and what they have impotently wished to communicate. Justice within these plays, then, is as much a triumph for the spectator's ego as it is for the dramatic polis.

Aristotle posits that great tragedy is characterized by the evocation of pity and fear in the audience. But perhaps "fear" can be re-contextualized as an emotion for which foresight, or ironic knowledge, is a prerequisite. Without disputing Aristotle, I would argue that the emotional resonance of tragedy does not lie within pity and fear per se, but rather that these signify the experience of alienation, which does, far more than identification, occasion the pleasure of the spectator-ego in theater. In revision of the psycho-experiential pleasure of cinema, the visual medium of Greek tragedy is one

which at once exploits the possibility for external identification, displaying inhabitable bodies and situations on the stage, only to ultimately favor the experience not of vicarious power but of the apotheosis of the internal, spectator ego.

NOTES

1. Jacques Lacan, *The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I* (lecture, 1936).
2. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 (1975): 62.
3. *Ibid.*, 65.
4. *Ibid.*, 65.
5. It is significant to note that the Greek tragedies were dramatizations of well-known stories and that playwrights presumed audience familiarity with the characters and events.
6. Sophocles, "Oedipus Tyrannus," *Theban Plays*, trans. Peter Meineck and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 2003), 139.
7. *Ibid.*, 50-51.
8. *Ibid.*, compare 112 to 124, 139, 229, 246.
9. *Ibid.*, 249-251.
10. *Ibid.*, 182-5.
11. Sophocles, "The Women of Trachis," *Sophocles II*, trans. Michael Jameson, ed. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1969), 553.
12. *Ibid.*, 583.
13. *Ibid.*, 587.
14. *Ibid.*, 591.
15. *Ibid.*, 612-3, emphasis added.

Deletion, Erasure, and Fragmentation in the Work of Marcel Broodthaers

Lex Brown

Critics should not be too certain in attributing thoughts to Broodthaers, even when they quote extracts from his own words. And too many have tried to fit him in the mold of the thought of fashionable theorists... I myself have no master key to his work. Any explanation that I may offer will be equally partial. I can only offer the phrase: 'L'esprit est la racine de la forme.' (The spirit [mind, with intelligence] is the root of the form.)

– Maria Gilissen¹

I.

Marcel Broodthaers is written about in two ways:

ONE “Broodthaers is perhaps best known for his foundational role in the development of ‘institutional critique,’ art that takes as its target both the institutions of art and the larger questions of how institutions work, what they are, and how they form us as publics.”²

TWO “Let me tell you the truth about Marcel! He was greater dead than alive! That makes him a true artist, in the classical sense of the word... The value of many of his works really consists in the description that was made of them. If he were alive now he could have reached a broader social spectrum of people... Some people did really hate him. Frustrated people hated him... That also makes him a true artist, in the classical sense of the word.”³

The first approach aims to explain Broodthaers within the typical language and framework of art history and criticism. For most scholars taking this approach, it seems difficult to explain his works without analysis becoming slippery and elusive. At some point in their writing, these scholars must attempt a lucid explication of Broodthaers's elliptical oeuvre. The result is often much like two mirrors being turned toward each other: when the mirror of scholarly criticism is turned toward its own reflection in Broodthaers's work, the image that arises contains reanimations of the peripheral elements, but the central point remains out of grasp. This metaphor expresses the seemingly limitless, inconclusive, and illusory space Broodthaers's work creates for examination. In the creation of this space, the same peripheral qualities – those that can be grasped, named, and known – reappear in the texts written about him. Thus, any scholar who is writing about Broodthaers is both pulling from and contributing to a pool of highly complex and nuanced scholarship that deals with an already self-aware body of work.

Just the opposite effect occurs with the second approach. I have found that the few critics who have written about Broodthaers in a detectably performative and satirical manner better convey the general tone of his work by adopting his strategies. While this method is less critical, and perhaps less academic, it is more apt at communicating the central point of the work without making it explicit. The writer seems like he or she “gets the joke” in Broodthaers's work, and the reader feels the same in turn. Because Broodthaers plays with language, documents, and the written word, it becomes possible for those writing in this manner to address Broodthaers on his own terms, by mimicking his own circuitous logic.

Broodthaers is known for being a shamanistic figure, and much of this rests on his inaccessibility, making him both a “legend” and, for some, an icon for the elitism and exclusivity of the art world at large. He has a reputation as a cerebral, hermetic, and idiosyncratic artist.⁴ Apropos to the specific and essential role that language plays in Broodthaers's work, I propose that it is uniquely useful for scholars to approach Broodthaers by combining traditional art historical methods *and* by utilizing his own meta sensibility. In writing a paper about an artist who played an instrumental role in institutional critique, I feel that it is both fitting and beneficial to approach purposefully Broodthaers in this dual way, with the hope that I may reveal some truths about the artist – and the criticism of him – in the in-between spaces: between the written and the written's recognition of itself.

II.

There are many curious things about Broodthaers: his recurring use of eggshells and mussels, his relationship to Duchamp's readymade, his commentary on colonialism in his later works, or even the "unfriendliness" of his pieces to the general public. However, the element that pervades most of his work is a reassessment of visual communication. By deleting, erasing, and fragmenting written phrases, words, and alphabets, Broodthaers appropriates familiar symbols with designated significance



Figure 1 Marcel Broodthaers

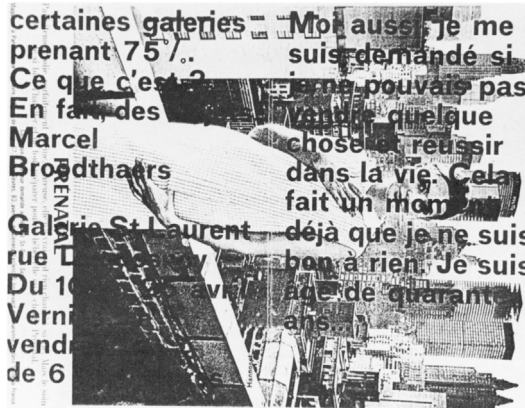


Figure 2 Exhibition announcement for Galerie Saint-Laurent (1964)

but avoids investing them with meaning. Understanding Broodthaers's manipulation of language – in all of its forms – is an essential part of understanding his importance in conceptual art.

On the exhibition announcement for his first show at Galerie Saint-Laurent in 1964 (fig. 2):

I, too, wondered if I couldn't sell something and succeed in life. I had for quite a little while been good for nothing. I am forty years old. . . . The idea of inventing something insincere finally crossed my mind and I set to work at once. At the end of three months I showed what I'd done to Ph. Edouard Toussain, the owner of the

Galerie Saint-Laurent. “But this is art,” he said, “and I will gladly show it all,” . . . What is it? In fact, only some objects!⁵

In most introductions to Broodthaers, this statement is mentioned at least in part, with the focus usually on his “invention of something insincere.” The subject of this loaded statement generates the primary context in which we see Broodthaers: as a poet turned visual artist who self-admittedly and openly used art to reach success. However, when we view this statement as an object of fabrication—as a strategically constructed posture—we must question the sincerity of the statement in itself. It is akin to the liar’s paradox: his professed insincerity makes the honesty of the statement dubious.

This textual statement, which one could say constitutes his first work of art, acquires the reliability and reproducibility of a mass publication. His appropriation of these cultural forms transforms the exhibition announcement from an informational document into an art object. Attention must be paid to the background, though, for it yields a second layer of complexity.

Printed over magazine advertisements, Broodthaers’s statement trades on the efficient commercial language of the magazine advertisement while still stripping it of its original commercial purpose. These words are a statement about advertising, but they are also advertising a statement: he is selling something, and he is being sold.

Like other artists of the 1960s, he integrates the backstage activities and functions of the commercialization and institutionalization of art into explicit pantomimes of his own authorship.⁶ In his work we see the manipulation of contradiction most frequently in the case of “editioning.”

The purpose of the multiple as a visual conceit functions much differently than in industrial production. A repeated image in an individual work can speak to the sublime, the banal, or the commodified. Serialization can serve to trivialize violence (as in Warhol’s *Death and Disaster Series*, fig. 3), or increase the power. Multiplicity, then, tends to reinforce the social and political attitudes towards a particular image. Such is the case with the 1964 exhibition announcement where Broodthaers’s fraudulent tone confirms society’s suspicious view that artists are all phonies.



Figure 3 Andy Warhol, *Saturday Disaster* (1964)

In production, the practice of printing multiple, individual works, serves as a tool for dispersing information: the purpose of editing in newspapers, posters, and political resistance art seems to be unambiguous. However, Broodthaers's usage of a popular format is rendered less egalitarian by the statement's reference to a traditionally privileged space – the gallery.

It is possible, by considering the contradictions of the object's medium and circula-

tion, to conclude that Broodthaers was making a cynical statement about art's inability to be more than a mark of distinction representing high society. It is also possible to conclude that Broodthaers saw his work as taking a subversive stance towards these very distinctions. This object, and many others in his oeuvre, oscillates between the absence of meaning and its presence. His works' enigma lies in their suspension between these two points.

This state of suspension might be related to inertia: the artist frequently voiced his doubt of the kind of "progress in art" that is linked to progress in science, technology, and politics.⁷ As Benjamin Buchloh writes, "As a consequence, his work has been frequently accused of remaining ultimately within the domain of the poetic, of being a 'literary' practice – a quality for which the work is reproached even now by many 'professionals' of the visual."⁸ Engaging only off-handedly in the political, Broodthaers work resides on the more immutable shore of aesthetic meta-investigations.

As art objects, his writings, plaques, and publications are devised to prohibit the readings and interpretations they imply. By using contractions, multiples, and visual voids, the language refuses to function: words and punctuation no longer signify anything meaningful. His work simultaneously investigates the process by which a visual sign goes from functional cultural object to reified art object: the process by which things that are "only some objects" become art.

The investigation of this transformation from sign to cultural object to art object is manifested in a text that Broodthaers composed ten years later in his career for *Interfunktionen* magazine. The following text was printed sequentially in French, German, and English on the cover of the issue:

View according to which an artistic theory will function for the artistic product in the same way that the artistic product functions as advertising for the order under which it is produced.⁹

Putting aside the difficult word "view," the basic analogy is that art theory advertises an art object in the same way an art object advertises its production.¹⁰

His choice of the word "advertise" seems like an inaccurate way of saying that art theory analyzes, explains, or talks about an art object, but the real inaccuracy lies in perceiving the function of art theory as purely interpretive. Art theory also serves to

add cultural and exchange value to the work it criticizes. Perhaps more importantly, in the sense of the adage “there’s no such thing as bad press,” even art theory that criticizes a controversial art object only serves to advertise it: it makes it more visible and subsequently more interesting. In addition, the art product also serves as advertisement for its production. If the art is the ad, then the artist is the product – a conclusion that dovetails with Broodthaers’s exhibition announcement.

Since this text is in a context of relatively large production and distribution, and is written in three languages, it really *does* function as advertising in the most conventional sense: it tells the viewer what to think about a certain “product.” What Broodthaers highlights is the parallax gap between the theory that advertises the object, the view that advertises the possibility of this theory, and the way that seeing and understanding are situated so as to allow this view.¹¹

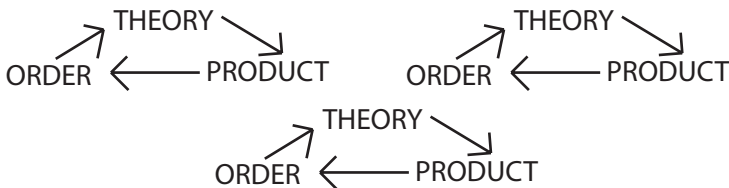
What does all this tell us? Perhaps a better question is: *how* does all this tell us? “What” is not the word for Broodthaers – it is too one-dimensional. “Whats” are things with definite places. As the reader must sense by now, it is difficult to pin down the mechanics of Broodthaers to one location. Understanding ways, means, and methods is more meaningful than to ask “what” is being told to us. “How” can summon an instructional method, and to clarify a particular mannerism.

If we project this schema of art advertising on to the 1964 exhibition announcement, we can understand it to be an advertisement for Broodthaers’s general strategy, one which generates products that advertise their order of production.

ORDER – noun

10. customary mode of procedure; established practice or usage.

Assuming that Broodthaers was producing objects and texts under the same order in 1974 as he was in 1964, we can look at his 1964 announcement as embodying an order of production that is motivated by an underlying theory.



Herein lies the circuitousness of Broodthaers. His strategy of theory-product-object-advertisement is advertised by the order in which his works are made. It is unremarkable for an artistic practice to correlate with a theory of production. The difference with Broodthaers, however, is that his use of the written word allows for the *form* of the order of production to be identical to the form of the theory. Yet, he never wrote a manifesto: his theories are inseparable from the work.

III.

Pense-Bête (fig. 4) was exhibited in 1964 at Galerie Saint-Laurent among several drawings, sculptures, and assemblages that incorporated plaster, eggshells, and other household objects.¹² It consists of three pieces bound together: the last fifty editions of Broodthaers's poetic work, a ball-like form, and a grotesque trail of plaster. The title is a French idiomatic expression that means a "reminder" or a note to oneself in the future. Before casting the books in plaster, Broodthaers pasted rectangles of colored paper on top of the poems, embedding the books with another layer of prohibition.

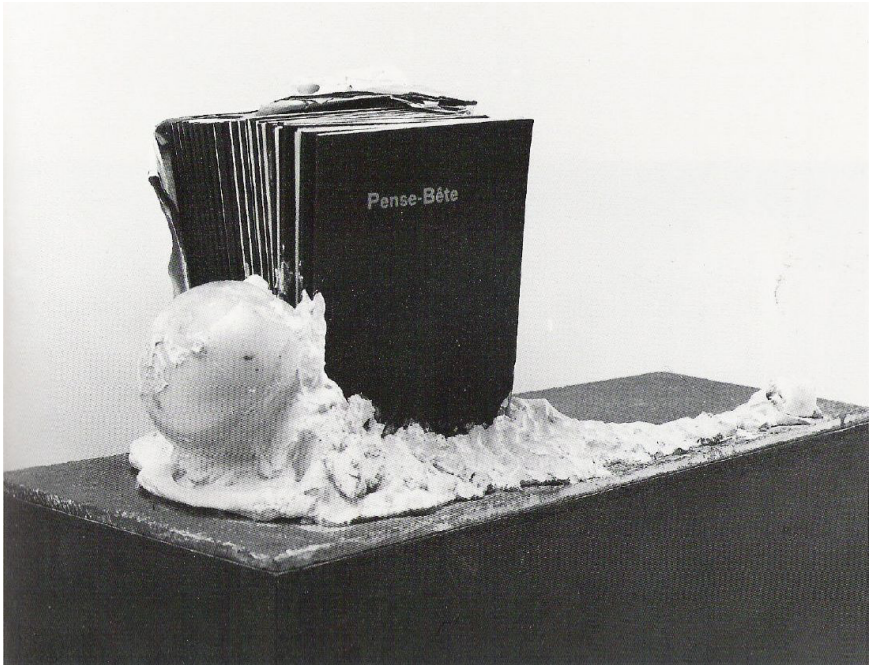


Figure 4 Marcel Broodthaers, *Pense-Bête* (1964)

The plaster pedestal serves three purposes. First, it denies the salability of the books and prevents their reading. Second, the use of plaster establishes a relationship with older artistic practices. Third, the plaster pedestal refuses any relation to surrealism and the readymade—if it were a surrealist work of art, the poetry would have remained accessible to the viewer, and if it were a readymade, the books would not have been written by Broodthaers.¹³

With the readymade—for example, the other Marcel's *Bicycle Wheel*—the real object is disguised as an art object by means of presentation and situational context. By contrast, *Pense-Bête* is comprised of a framing device, which is not a readymade but rather a plastic material and the books, which are repurposed works, not found objects. Here there is much more human presence, and subsequently much more narrative than in a readymade. Rachel Haidu writes:

In art history, modernist teleologies link the development of collage, montage, and abstraction as well as Duchamp's invention of the ready-made to the development of mass production. But the inevitable remainder of such teleologies is authorship: the avant-garde author of these artistic developments does not cease to be identified by the original, elite, and non-mass-marketable nature of his art practice, regardless of how notions of originality mutate in the commercial marketplace. *Pense-Bête* shifts the coordinates of any such history of the avant-garde through its gross mishandling of books.¹⁴

While plaster functions as a support for the poetry, it decidedly imposes on its value. This move gives power to art over poetry and echoes Broodthaers's statement of abandoning poetry for a career in which he could have been more successful. Fittingly, *Pense-Bête* the sculpture is actually more acclaimed than *Pense-Bête* the collection of poems. Broodthaers was definitely on to something with the simplicity and triviality of this gesture.

Destruction, replacement, disorganization, and the removal of the sign effectively distort the word's relationship with the object. Inhibiting the functionality of the book repurposes its ability to transfer information. *Pense-Bête* is no longer about what we can read in it, but what we cannot read. *Pense-Bête* simultaneously reifies and buries Broodthaers's status as a "literary author."

IV.

Neither Surrealist, nor Pop Artist, nor Nouveau Realiste, nor Dadaist, Broodthaers remains a rogue artist and may appear to some as an isolated subject of study. Art history thrives on its ability to connect individual artists with larger social movements, political events, and technological innovations. Broodthaers did not work in a vacuum, but his work is categorically evasive.



It seems that the unspoken consensus among scholars lies with Buchloh: “His work appears to be confronted with the alternative of oblivion exhumation. At the same time, it seems almost impossible to avoid the consecration implied in a commemorative project such as this one. But neither oblivion, nor canonization, neither margin nor center are appropriate to Broodthaers’s work.”¹⁵

For every word that Marcel Broodthaers obscured, removed, repeated, or deleted, someone else has written hundreds to replace what was left unsaid. I suspect there is some fear that his works would lose their enigmatic qualities if they became more available, more analyzed. The most enigmatic quality Broodthaers produces is the power to catalyze a process of reflexivity, circularity, and myth in the writing that addresses him. His works succeed in their ability to generate words for the viewer or critic; they also challenge language’s ability to cope with the visual. Having explored Broodthaers’s strategies, I would say it is more illuminating to write about him than it is to read about him:

Apropos to the specific and essential role that language plays in Broodthaers’s work, I propose that it is uniquely illuminating for scholars to approach Broodthaers by combining traditional art historical methods *and* by utilizing his own meta sensibility. In writing a paper about an artist who played in instrumental role in institutional critique, I feel that it is both fitting and beneficial to purposefully approach Broodthaers in this way, with the hope that [it] may reveal some truths about Broodthaers, and the criticism

of him, in the in-between spaces: between the written and the written's recognition of itself.¹⁶

NOTES

1. Maria Gilissen, *Marcel Broodthaers*, ed. Michael Compton (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1989), 7.
2. Rachel Haidu, *The Absence of Work: Marcel Broodthaers, 1964-1976* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010), xvii.
3. Jota Castro, "A Beer in Schuman," *Flash Art* 42 (2009): 60.
4. Haidu, xvii.
5. Buchloh, October, 71.
6. Haidu, 50.
7. Buchloh, October, 69.
8. Buchloh, October, 69.
9. Gean Moreno, "Display Time: Art's Recess Within Advertising," *ArtUS* 13 (2006): 32.
10. "Presumably chosen to introduce some ambiguity in relation to perception," the word 'view' can be interpreted as a noun ("There is a view according to which...") or as an imperative verb ("View [this text] according to..."). Notwithstanding the invisible referent of "which" in the latter case, reading the text with 'view' as a verb suggests that this sentence is a theory—an advertisement for his art product.
11. Moreno, 32.
12. Dieter Schwarz, "'Look! Books in Plaster!': On the First Phase of the Work of Marcel Broodthaers," *October* 42 (1987): 59.
13. Schwarz, 60.
14. Haidu, 47.
15. Benjamin Buchloh, "Introductory Note," *October* 42 (1987): 5.
16. Alexis Brown, "Deletion, Erasure, and Fragmentation in the Work of Marcel Broodthaers" (New York: 2012).

The Human Type

Character in the Work of Djuna Barnes and H.D.

Isabel Siskin

Even the simple act which we describe as ‘seeing someone we know’ is, to some extent, an intellectual process. We pack the outline of the creature we see with all the ideas we have already formed about him, and in the complete picture of him which we compose in our minds those ideas have certainly the principal place. In the end they come to fill out so completely the curve of his cheeks, to follow so exactly the line of his nose, they blend so harmoniously in the sound of his voice that these seem to be no more than a transparent envelope, so that each time we see the face or hear the voice it is our own ideas of him which we recognize and to which we listen.

– Marcel Proust, *Du côté du chez Swann*¹

1. To Begin With

The narrator of *À la recherche du temps perdu* exposes a common foible of the human race when he comments on his family’s blindness to their old friend Swann’s secret life. The passage indicates that “seeing someone we know” is a process in which the seer first constructs an abstract notion of the acquaintance, which he then projects arbitrarily onto all of the acquaintance’s attributes, imbuing them with artificial meaning. The combination of the “outline of the creature” with the viewer’s ideas of that creature determines every interaction between them. It is the idea, not the self or the soul, of a human.²

Indeed, the central challenge of fiction is presenting this idea. Invented characters are endowed with specific sets of traits—such as kindness, straight teeth, or a Russian accent—made available to the reader. Acting as signs, these traits refer to the existence of a singular, unified self, with consistent behaviors, creating a simulacrum of a hu-

man being. Character is a device through which this cohesion happens.

When a text concerns itself with a realistic rendering, it endows characters with identifiable traits shared by the reader so that he or she may recognize the world of the story as similar to his or her own world. In her essay on character, H  l  ne Cixous notes that a realist text is governed by a coding process that assures its communicability; through ‘character’

is established the identification circuit with the reader: the more ‘character’ fulfills the norms, the better the reader recognizes it and recognizes himself. The commerce established between book and reader is thus facilitated.³

This realist ontology rests on the assumption that any person is the same from moment to moment—that the human being is ruled by a single Ego. This “commerce”, established between text and reader, exposes the reader’s expectation of an internal and singular self by way of descriptive, perceptible characteristics. In other words, the words describing a character will gather together to explain a character’s actions and establish an Ego.

This paper will examine the way in which character is dismantled in three works of Djuna Barnes and H.D.—*Ryder*, *Nightwood*, and *Helen in Egypt*. These works court dissonance and disjunction, especially in the rendering of characters, in order to reveal not only that the true author of meaning is the reader, but also that such authorship arises out of inherent necessity. Barnes and H.D.’s female characters bring into conflict an index of character that is indescribable and necessarily ‘other’. In doing so, the reader is forced to negotiate the relationship between aesthetics and ontology, and the classical tradition on which this literature rests.

In literature, language serves to systematize and render communicable a world that is obscured by a multiplicity of forms and constant transformation. In his work on character, J. Hillis Miller writes of language that, “Man makes up the name ‘leaf’ for what does not exist, since no two leaves are the same, nor does any one remain the same from moment to moment.”⁴ In his description, language is a way of organizing and understanding a world that is otherwise incommunicable. Within this system, character becomes a way of systematizing and communicating a sense of reality.

Feminist theorists often assert that literature has been a masculine institution that upholds the patriarchal order. By challenging character, such theorists challenge the very foundations upon which a male-centric literature rests. In ‘The Laugh of the Medusa,’ Cixous writes:

I maintain unequivocally that there is such a thing as *marked* writing; that, until now, far more extensively and repressively than is ever suspected or admitted, writing has been run by a libidinal and cultural—hence political, typically masculine—economy; that this is a locus where the repression of women has been perpetuated, over and over, more or less consciously, and in a manner that’s frightening since it’s often hidden or adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction; that this locus has grossly exaggerated all the signs of sexual opposition (and not sexual difference), where woman has never *her* turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely *the very possibility of change*.⁵

Following Cixous, this paper argues that H.D. and Djuna Barnes significantly undermine this oppressive system through the use of character, making transparent the pillars of that system—meaning and language.

2. The Image in Djuna Barnes

In her two novels *Ryder* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936), Djuna Barnes explores this discontinuity of character. In *Ryder*, Barnes fictionalizes her family history, through a series of parodies that take aim at the language of the canon, from Chaucer to Browning. Barnes’s own illustrations accompany many of the chapters in *Ryder*. Generally, illustrations are supposed to help the reader comprehend the story by providing a visual accompaniment to the text. In *Ryder*, however, illustrations serve no such purpose. If anything, they confuse and obscure, rejecting the notion that visual signs should clarify the story.

An example of this is the family tree at the beginning of the text. By rendering the family tree as a physical object dissociated from the Ryder’s familial genealogy, this illustration confuses the reader rather than allow the easy assignation of patriarch, daughter, etc. The sign of the “family tree” thus comes to symbolize nothing more than what it is: a tree with a family in it, expressing the literal rather than the figura-

tive meaning of the phrase. By literalizing the sign of the family tree, Barnes subverts traditional perceptions of patriarchal and biological descent. The tree does not allow the reader to understand a character's traits as hereditary. Thus, the idea of descent and its dependence on biological linearity is rejected. This is the function of illustration throughout *Ryder*. These images are often literal renderings of the chapters, which themselves seem obliquely metaphorical, both excluding and calling attention to the processes of reading and interpretation.

Similar to this exegetical challenge, the characters' engagement with Robin from Barnes's later novel *Nightwood* dramatizes the urge to "read" a character's outward traits as signifying the presence of an Ego. Superficially, Robin possesses a coherent set of human traits, but she is actually "a woman who is beast turning human."⁶ She is motivated by "something unseen," what Jenny Petherbridge terms "unclean spirits."⁷ And yet, in spite of, or because of this, Robin is endlessly fascinating to all who encounter her.

The best way to understand this attraction is through Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection. Because Robin does not act according to the symbolic order, she is, as Kristeva might argue, engaged with what is "abject" in society—its enthrallment to desire, its beastly origins, and its association with death. Kristeva writes:

The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. A certain 'ego' that merged with its master, a superego, has flatly driven it away. It lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the latter's rules of the game.⁸

As opposed to an "object" to which a reader assigns traits, the abject rejects meaning altogether and must be ejected from society. Society's abject include the "traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior."⁹

As the "beast who is turning human," Robin treads the boundary between the socially acceptable and the abject. Her pseudo-legitimate doctor, Matthew O'Connor,

describes her as “the eternal momentary—Robin who was always the second person singular,” commenting implicitly upon Robin’s character in the book—she only speaks twice. Rather than present herself in a particular way, she is told what she is. Her lovers attempt to include her within the symbolic order, as mother, wife, or lover, but because she is also abject, her animal essence rejects these placements.

Because Robin has no readable “self,” this opens space for “spectators” to assign to her whatever image, whatever desire, they harbor. For Felix, Robin is the woman who can give birth to a noble son. For Nora, Robin is the love of her life. For Jenny, Robin is the way to historical significance, the path to co-opting a memorable love. As a blank slate, her image is endlessly attractive.

The act of viewing Robin is “as insupportable a joy as would be the vision of an eland coming down an aisle of trees, chapleted with orange blossoms and bridal veil, a hoof raised in the economy of fear, stepping in the trepidation of flesh that will become myth,”¹⁰ This comparison indicates Robin’s dual nature as well as the spectator’s desire to possess her, to reinstall abjection within the symbolic order. The eland is a beast and yet it is outfitted with traces of humanity, particularly in the conceit’s allusion to marriage. The simile emphasizes the impossibility of incorporating a beast into the symbolic order, focusing on the “fear” and “trepidation” of the eland. The passage foreshadows Robin’s future, as she unsuccessfully weds Felix soon after.

At the same time, Robin’s ungovernable actions undermine the meanings projected onto her image. The final chapter of *Nightwood* presents Kristeva’s “place where meaning collapses” as Robin tosses off the image of acceptable humanity. In the last three paragraphs of the novel, Nora looks on as Robin confronts Nora’s dog, falling to her hands and knees and assuming the stature of a dog. The rest of the narration omits Nora’s perspective, indicating that the moment is beyond her understanding.

When Robin confronts the dog, his first reaction is fear: he trembles, his “hackle” stands. As Robin moves toward him, the dog attempts to stand on his hind legs, an act of human performance. Robin advances and then hits the dog’s side, at which point the dog begins to respond and the two act in tandem. They seem locked in a dance:

She began to bark also, crawling after him—barking in a fit of laughter, obscene and touching. Crouching, the dog began to run

with her, head-on with her head... He ran this way and that, low down in his throat crying, and she grinning and crying with him; crying in shorter and shorter spaces, moving head to head, until she gave up, lying out, her hands beside her, her face turned and weeping; and the dog too gave up then, and lay down, his eyes bloodshot, his head flat along her knees.¹¹

This passage emphasizes the parallelism between Robin and the dog by repetitive descriptions of their movements (“head to head,” “crying”) and conjunctive phrases (“also,” “with,” and “too”). The narration is primarily physical—the only evaluative words included in this description are Robin’s “obscene and touching” barking, uncannily similar to human laughter. The word “touching” suggests an affective thrust to the scene, but is also juxtaposed with Barnes’s use of “obscene.” These final moments demonstrate what the rest of the novel has implied: an uncovering of Robin’s surface appearance. She has always been motivated by a bestial impulse, but it is only her human character traits that are legible. In her abjection, her actions directly conflict with societal mores that attempt to conceal its bestial origins.

3. The Hieroglyphics of *Helen in Egypt*

H.D.’s *Helen in Egypt* is based on an alternative myth to the Homeric cycle, which asserts that Helen was never actually in Troy. H.D. takes her cue from Stesichorus and revises the logistics of Helen’s abduction, so that while she is in Egypt for the duration of the war, an eidolon assumes her place in Troy.¹² In Egypt, Helen meets Achilles, her true love, and encounters her past lovers.

The book consistently interrogates the meaning and power of visual signs, for example when Achilles asks, “How are Helen in Egypt / and Helen upon the ramparts, / together yet separate?”¹³ Achilles’ question is the central trope of the book: the conflation of Helen and her eidolon.

In a sense, this distinction is arbitrary—it is her form, rather than her self that sparks the war: “The Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion.” The eidolon has all the external signs of a human in possession of a self, but crucially lacks a self, not unlike Robin in *Nightwood*. As Mihoko Suzuki points out in her book on the figure of Helen:

The warriors in a sense fight over Helen's phantom, for they have transformed her into an emblem, a construct of their own minds: on Helen, goddesslike beauty and scourge of war, they project their ambivalence toward the apparently self-generating and self-sustaining war that brings both glory and death.¹⁴

It is not a result of Helen's actions or her "true" self that creates the war. Rather, her figure acts as a receptacle for the soldier's projections. In this moment, what is important is the feigned existence of external character traits.

This emphasis on the absence of relation between visual sign and meaning is echoed throughout the text, particularly in Helen's readings of the hieroglyphs, and the formal dissonance between the prose headings and the poetry.

At the beginning of the poem, Helen is surrounded by hieroglyphs in an Egyptian temple. She attempts to translate or find meaning in the characters etched into the wall, although the prose headings suggest that she does not understand the Egyptian hieroglyphs intellectually but rather intuitively. One of the prose headings claims:

Helen herself denies an actual intellectual knowledge of the temple-symbols. But she is nearer to them than the instructed scribe; for her, the secret of the stone-writing is repeated in natural or human symbols. She herself is the writing.¹⁵

She endows the symbols with meaning from her own story, inflecting them with a personal rather than a social valence, thus demonstrating the mutability of language's functions. Like the eidolon, the hieroglyphs are symbols which direct the reader's attention to the constructed aspect of "essential" meanings given to signs.

The hieroglyph is shown to be only a sign, the meaning of which must be externally provided. For instance, the thousand-petalled lily comes to represent the thousand ships of the Greek fleet that sailed to Troy to recapture Helen. In this moment, when "She herself is the writing," we also see how definitions of the word "character" become fraught—Helen projects her internal character onto the physical "characters" on the wall.

Furthermore, each section of the poem contains a prose heading, often out of sync or

completely unrelated to the material it introduces. While the formation of the page implies that the prose and the poetry are tied to each other, the onus of making these connections is on the reader. The reader's engagement with the poem parallels Helen's with the hieroglyphics. In doing so, H.D. destabilizes the relation between sign and image, and by revising the myth of the notorious face that launched a thousand ships she interrogates both the historical moment of the Trojan War as well as generic repressive notions about women.

4. And So...

Helen in Egypt is based on a foundational Western text, the *Iliad*. Although the "Helens" that appear throughout literature remain discrete, there is also an allusive, intertextual Helen who exists within Western culture and within the reader.¹⁶ Therefore, each time Helen is used as a character in a text, the intertextual Helen, the constellation of different Helens existing in literature, is profoundly changed. One cannot re-read the *Iliad* having read *Helen in Egypt* and retain the same understanding of Helen. The signs that constitute Helen are not only constructed in their meaning but also constantly changing, pointing to a mutable and ahistorical ontology.

Paralleling Helen's transformations, every literary act of translation and imitation constitutes an alteration to the canon.¹⁷ Both Barnes and H.D. write re-visions, as Adrienne Rich terms it, into the canon that they have inherited. Using irony, these authors distance themselves from classical referents allied to a patriarchal tradition, and in doing so rewrite these traditions in order to mobilize modern agendas.¹⁸ The moment of reading or understanding this distanced imitation alters the original text for the reader so that, like Helen in the *Iliad*, it may never be read in the same way again.

Writing, drawing, and dramatizing the separation of the image of a character from his or her internal life was an integral project of Modernism, especially for female writers. Within a predominantly male field, the literary production of female character is analogous to Virginia Woolf's "odd monster... a worm winged like an eagle," an idealized vision of a repressed existence.¹⁹ The authenticity of this character derives from external constructed traits. In their work, Barnes and H.D. demonstrate that this approach is inadequate and its interpretation subjective. By destabilizing the cor-

respondence between a woman's image and her self, they deny the epistemological claim to women based on an arbitrary assignment of meaning.

NOTES

1. Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Penguin Books, 1957).
2. For the purposes of this essay, "image" is meant to signify the aspects of a person or character that can be perceived by a viewer. I see the "image" as being made up of primarily sensory perceptions, although sight is particularly important. Also, I consider certain attributes that are based upon a consistent series of actions to be included, for instance to be fashionable or to be boring. The "image" is all that the subject can understand of the object.
3. Hélène Cixous and K. Cohen, "The Character of Character," *New Literary History* 2 (1974): 385.
4. J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1992), 40.
5. Cixous, 879.
6. Djuna Barnes, *Ryder* (Illinois: Dalkey Archive Press, 1990), 37.
7. *Ibid.*, 168.
8. Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York: Columbia UP, 1982), 1-2.
9. *Ibid.*, 4.
10. Barnes, 37.
11. *Ibid.*, 169-170.
12. An eidolon is a phantom-like copy of a human form. The tradition asserts that Hermes fashioned Helen's eidolon out of clouds at Zeus' (Helen's father) request.
13. Hilda Doolittle, *Helen in Egypt*, (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 63.
14. Mihoko Suzuki, *Metamorphoses of Helen: Authority, Difference, and the Epic* (New York: Cornell UP, 1989), 16.
15. Doolittle, 22.
16. Kristeva describes the intersection of the reader and society in "Word, Dialogue and Novel": "The addressee [the reader], however, is included within a book's discursive universe only as discourse itself. He thus fuses with this other discourse, this other book, in relation to which the writer has written his own text. Hence horizontal axis (subject-addressee) and vertical axis (text-context) coincide, bringing to light an

important fact: each word (text) is an intersection of word (text) where at least one other word (text) can be read...any text constructed is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (Kristeva 37). Here, Kristeva emphasizes how the reader and his or her cultural context, which includes the whole of preceding literature, are inextricable and a text or a word is therefore always multiple.

17. T.S. Eliot articulates this idea in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”: “What happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered...” (T.S. Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” <<http://www.bartleby.com/200/sw4.html>>, 5.

18. “Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” <<http://www.nbu.bg/webs/amb/american/5/rich/writing.htm>>.

19. Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, <<http://gutenberg.net.au/eb-ooks02/0200791.txt>>, 44.

“The Labyrinth of Reflection”

Female Spectatorship and Subject Formation in *Daniel Deronda*

Jason Bell

If George Eliot is intensely Victorian, she insists, in her novels, upon frequent vacations from period convention. Eliot's works are books of many genres; however, for every generic derby or mantle, there exists a corresponding and critical mirror. As soon as Eliot introduces the genre trope, she enters a tertiary register, a kind of heavenly or omniscient perch, from which she comments on the action. Therefore, the fugal exposition of any “plot” has its attendant notation, and all developments are further complicated by a sense of necessary scrutiny. Catherine Gallagher, in her landmark essay, “George Eliot: Immanent Victorian,” refers to this phenomenon as an exploitation of the standard assumptions of the novel. That is, the novel assumes a simultaneous commitment to generic diversity and generic conventionality.

Perhaps the most iconic “plot” of the Eliot oeuvre, the so-called “marriage plot,” proves the most important for understanding Eliot's novelistic intentions. Insofar as the marriage plot defines the early 19th century novel, particularly sentimental fiction and the novel of manners, Eliot remains unsatisfied with its standard employment, and rightly so. The Austenian canon haunts Eliot's fiction, and Eliot's attempts to break away from her precursor are often visible. Nevertheless, the “marriage plot” was unsustainable as a transgenerational formula, because the novel depends on

originality. Boring, old, and staid schematics do not generate novelistic capital. Therein, Eliot's innovations around the "marriage plot" could be read as a function of novelistic necessity.

In *Daniel Deronda*, two primary marriage plots—which at one point intersect—captivate the reader's attention. Gwendolen Harleth, facing a moneyless future, seeks marital and financial bliss in the form of Henleigh Grandcourt, while Daniel Deronda falls in love with a Jewess, Mirah. While the novel's title suggests a focus on the latter character and scenario, Gwendolen's story resonates more deeply with the contemporary reader. Gwendolen is not only a more charismatic figure, but she also struggles more with the generic conventions of marriage as a novelistic form. Whereas Daniel's objection to marriage—the reluctance to marry a Jew—is short-circuited by the revelation that Daniel himself is a Jew, Eliot treats Gwendolen's dissatisfaction *within* the marriage institution with greater hesitation and reflection. Daniel is always an autonomous subject, but Gwendolen's subjectivity comes under extreme pressure throughout her marriage.

Eliot herself appears unsure as to the "best" model for female subject formation in her own novel. *Daniel Deronda* can be read as an experiment with many alternatives for female subjectivity, all operative under the auspices of the capitalized male character or title. Eliot chooses three modes of female subject formation in order to reach a verdict on the viability of the marriage plot itself as a site of female subjectivity: fantasy of female mastery over the male, a disciplining of the female by the male, and a destruction of the male by the female.

I. The Transgendered Spectator

Daniel Deronda begins in a moment of ambiguous spectatorship. "Was she beautiful or not beautiful?" an anonymous, genderless onlooker asks.¹ The speaker is none other than Daniel Deronda, the object of his gaze, Gwendolen Harleth. Gwendolen commands Daniel's eye, infecting him with "the wish to look again."² As Gwendolen gambles, she looks "round her with a survey too markedly cold and neutral not to have in it a little of that nature which we call art concealing an inward exultation."³ Gwendolen's status as art object is clearly defined here as artifice concealing inner libidinal energy. When:

[H]er eyes met Deronda's, and instead of averting them as she would have desired to do, she was unpleasantly conscious that they were arrested—how long? The darting sense that he was measuring her and looking down on her as an inferior, that he was of different quality from the human dross around her, that he felt himself in a region outside and above her, and was examining her as a specimen of a lower order, roused a tingling resentment which stretched the moment with conflict [...] She controlled herself by the help of an inward defiance, and without other sign of emotion than this lip-paleness turned to her play. But Deronda's gaze seemed to have acted as an evil eye. Her stake was gone.⁴

Eliot constructs a complex system of spectatorship, wherein Gwendolen's questionable aesthetic value—was she beautiful?—compels Daniel to gaze, and, in turn, induces Gwendolen's reciprocation. Despite its emphasis on reciprocity, this passage figures Gwendolen as an unequal spectatorial partner to Daniel, for his gaze lowers, degrades, and subjugates her, while her own spectatorship fails to express resistance. Under Daniel's curse, Gwendolen proceeds to lose her stake. In response, "In five seconds Gwendolen turned from the table, but turned resolutely with her face towards Deronda and looked at him. There was a smile of irony in his eyes as their glances met."⁵ While Gwendolen acknowledges Daniel's mystical power over Providence, she simultaneously inspects his spectatorship. Gwendolen's female spectatorship intends to determine whether Daniel admires "her spirit as well as her person"; she believes that he does, despite his "superciliousness and irony," for Gwendolen takes "for granted that she knew what was admirable and that she herself was admired."⁶ Female spectatorship serves to ascertain the female spectator's attractiveness in the eyes of her spectator, and so it functions as a vicarious process—the subject position must shift to the object, and the subject must retrospectively look at herself. Thus, female spectatorship of men is represented as a transgendering self-spectatorship: the female transforms into the male in order to self-inspect. The transgendered spectator then evaluates the prospects of the female within the social game of marriage. The legitimacy of the female subject and her liberation from the marital institution are at stake in this proposition.

Film theory is the source of most extant critical discourse on female spectatorship.⁷ In the filmic conception of female spectatorship, the female spectator functions "as the site of an oscillation between a feminine position and a masculine position,

invoking the metaphor of the transvestite.” Laura Mulvey calls this phenomenon the “masculinisation of spectatorship.”⁸ For Mulvey, “pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female,” and this structure demands a corresponding distribution of power.⁹ To look is to be active and powerful; to be looked at is to be subjugated.

Here, the organizing metaphor is transvestitism—a pretending at or performance of otherness. In order to compensate for the absence of gendered identity underneath the transvestite’s costume, the female must establish herself as an aesthetic object. Transvestitism separates the female from the self, opening a space for self-observation.

There is a difference, however, between transvestitism and transgendering, and one must question the presumption that the female must *perform* “male-ness.” Instead, the female gaze momentarily *transforms* the female into the male, allowing her to fully occupy the male position and evacuate its secret force—the ability to “know” the female without risk of the female knowing the male. The male comes to “know” the female as an aesthetic object, as a site of visual pleasure; the male aestheticizes the female to fetishize her and gain power over her future prospects. In effect, the male acts as a providential power that delimits the female’s marriage prospects, activating her marriageability or foreclosing her capacity to succeed within the marriage game. If the female played the transvestite part, then she would merely perform male-ness, imagining the male gaze on the female. In fact, the female actually becomes male, knows the male gaze on the female, and so inverts the power structure between the man that looks and the female that is looked at.

When Gwendolen gazes back at Daniel, she regurgitates and re-projects the male gaze, becoming male in a way that denies the male impulse to know her. The transvestite’s power to perform and alter gender is an epistemological power—the performance provides the transvestite with unique knowledge of the self. Becoming-male exacts a force over the male object, jamming his knowledge of the originally female subject. And so female spectatorship may restore the power of knowledge to the female—but this validation of the subject ultimately serves an institution of subject de-formation, marriage.

Consequently, *Daniel Deronda* posits three modalities of female subject formation: location of the subject within the fantasy of female mastery, its location within the

discipline of marriage, and its location within the fantasy of female murder.

II. The Mirror and the Panel

All female spectatorship in *Daniel Deronda* fixates on two moments: the opening of the first chapter and Gwendolen's self-spectatorship in the second. After Gwendolen receives the letter detailing the loss of her family fortune she stands:

motionless for a few minutes, then tossed off her hat and automatically looked in the glass. The coils of her smooth light-brown hair were still in order perfect enough for a ball-room; and as on other nights, Gwendolen might have looked lingeringly at herself for pleasure (surely an allowable indulgence); but now she took no conscious note of her reflected beauty, and simply stared right before her as if she had been jarred by a hateful sound and was waiting for any sign of its cause.¹⁰

Contrary to expectations, self-spectatorship is disrupted in this passage. Just before Gwendolen looks in the mirror, she struggles to understand that “her position had become one of poverty and humiliating dependence, as it would have been to get into the strong current of her blooming life the chill sense that her death would really come.”¹¹ Normally, the mirror offers aesthetic delights, a pleasure and an indulgence that derive from an affirmation of her “blooming life.” Gwendolen's beauty, and by association, sexual attractiveness, evolve from this essential life energy. As Gwendolen evaluates her beauty, she begins in a feminine position. But the pleasurable response to that beauty would ordinarily transpose her into the male position, for it is the male spectator who admires the female form—it is Daniel who gazes on Gwendolen as an aesthetic being. In fact, Gwendolen's imagination locates her at a ball, where she looks on herself in a way a man who searches for a partner might.

Gwendolen has just been confronted with her poverty, her dependence on the male paternal substitute (“your uncle Gascoigne”), her eventual dependence on a moneyed husband, and her own mortality.¹² Her ability to look from the male position is immediately disordered because that fateful letter has confirmed her fate as a subjugated, soon-to-be-married female. This delimitation of fate prevents the spectatorial transit of gender. Ironically, Gwendolen cannot look from any subject position other than the male—she cannot even see herself in the mirror and instead

stares ahead with no recognition. Female self-spectatorship ordinarily transforms the female into the male in order to evaluate marriage prospects, but once Gwendolen is confronted with an inescapable financial need to marry, she actively resists, refusing to consider herself as marriageable. The reality of dependence on the male husband forecloses the female spectator's functionality. Abnegating the social game abnegates the power of sight; abandoning female spectatorship abandons subjectivity because "the flickering between the dynamics of 'seeing' and the objectifying mechanisms at work in 'being seen' operate in such a way that the I and the eye are intricately and inseparably related."¹³

A few hours later, Gwendolen prepares to leave Leubronn and happens "to be seated sideways before the long strip of mirror between her two windows [and] she turned to look at herself, leaning her elbow on the back of the chair in an attitude that might have been chosen for her portrait."¹⁴ What has changed over the course of an evening? The text asserts that:

it is possible to have a strong self-love without any self-satisfaction, rather with a self-discontent which is the more intense because one's own little core of egoistic sensibility is a supreme care; but Gwendolen knew nothing of such inward strife. She had a naïve delight in her fortunate self, which any but the harshest saintliness will have some indulgence for in a girl who had every day seen a pleasant reflection of that self in her friends' flattery as well as in the looking-glass... Her beautiful lips curled into a more and more decided smile, till at last she took off her hat, leaned forward and kissed the cold glass which had looked so warm.¹⁵

Unlike in the previous scene, Gwendolen now successfully self-observes. She intentionally adopts a pose for portraiture, framing herself as an aesthetic object. Gwendolen's self-love expresses itself as an aesthetic appreciation, and a peculiarly masculine admiration for that aesthetic. Just as Gwendolen configures herself as an art object, the painting in the frame, a portrait of herself even, her spectatorship transforms her body into a female object that she, in her "becoming male," approaches as something to be loved for its aesthetic value. Narrative tension builds into unbearable sexual longing—"at last" she must kiss her own image as though it were another "warm" body. Self-love then constitutes love of a self-constructed, aestheticized, sexualized other. To consummate self-love, to kiss the glass that shows an image of the self, is to express a male desire for a female body.

When Gwendolen returns to Offendene, a beautiful portrait she sketches in the Leubronn mirror contrasts with an alternative image. Gwendolen's sister Isabel reveals a hidden panel that "disclosed the picture of an upturned dead face, from which an obscure figure seemed to be fleeing with outstretched arms."¹⁶ The panel's image represents Gwendolen's true fate—to watch her husband, Henleigh Grandcourt, drown. This grotesque and Gothic vision is juxtaposed with Gwendolen's fantasy of fortune—that her beauty will coerce a man whom she can dominate into marrying her—that self-spectatorship propagates. Spectating on Gwendolen's self-spectatorship, Mrs. Davilow understands the vacuity of the fantasy. She tells Gwendolen that "any nose will do to be miserable with in this world,"¹⁷ suggesting the universality of her unhappy fate, regardless of aesthetics. Predictably, Gwendolen interprets this comment as an expression of Mrs. Davilow's unhappiness and wishes that her mother felt happy (a wish that will land Gwendolen in an unhappy marriage). Ironically, Mrs. Davilow asserts, "Marriage is the only happy state for a woman, as I trust you will prove."¹⁸ This statement, the nexus of *Daniel Deronda's* plot, demonstrates why female (and thus, transgendered) spectatorship is not subversive. The gratification of spectatorship is psychic happiness of an imagined, idealized marriage (Daniel with Mordecai/Mirah), a marriage of female mastery over male.

Spectatorship alone is not enough to actualize this, as is evident in Gwendolen and Grandcourt's marriage. The location of the female subject within a fantasy of female mastery is an elliptical process that conjures a fetishistic subject, since subjectivity evolves from transgenering. The fantastically masterful subject dominates the masculine with an aesthetic force that insulates the interior; the production of the interior is a self-affirmation or actualization of the aesthetic.

III. Spectatorship, Subjection, Subjectivity

Gwendolen's fantasy of aesthetic mastery in marriage soon evaporates. The valued variables discoverable in self-spectatorship—charm, cleverness, resolution—seem meaningless in the context of providential power which is at first the gambling tables and finally becomes Grandcourt. Gwendolen hates Grandcourt "for being what had hindered her from marrying him, angry with him as the cause of her present dreary lot."¹⁹ Grandcourt's loathsome affair with Lydia initially precludes any possible

marriage with Gwendolen. Therein, Gwendolen reads Grandcourt as the fate-maker whose sordid past unravels her own prospects. As Gwendolen exhausts her prospects for independence, however, she returns to the fantasy of female aesthetic mastery.

While waiting to meet with Grandcourt:

Gwendolen was seated before the mirror while her mother gathered up the lengthy mass of light-brown hair. . . they were both looking at the reflection in the glass. It was impossible for them not to notice that the eyes looked brighter than they had done of late, that there seemed to be a shadow lifted from the face, leaving all the lines once more in their placid youthfulness. The mother drew some inferences that made her voice rather cheerful.²⁰

Mrs. Davilow infers that Gwendolen looks forward to her reunion with Grandcourt. In reality, Gwendolen remains unsure of whether she will accept Grandcourt's inevitable proposal. Both Mrs. Davilow and Gwendolen gaze on the image in the mirror from the male subject position—how attractive is the image to the male suitor? Gwendolen's aesthetic reformation follows from a reuptake of the marriage fantasy. *Daniel Deronda* oscillates between two states: the fragmentation of the fantasy and the reformation of the fantasy. What the text refuses to authorize, however, is a reification of fantasy. The realities of the marriage institution overwhelm the delusion of female self-spectatorship. Female mastery and the actualization of the female subject constitute impossible wishes in the schematic of marriage.

Just as Gwendolen performs the opening scene with Grandcourt in their early, "innocent" flirtations, she rehearses it again in this infinitely graver confrontation. Grandcourt asks her whether there is "some attraction—some engagement [...] any man who stands between us?" Inwardly the answer frames itself, 'No, but there is a woman,' yet how could she utter this?²¹ Ostensibly, Gwendolen refers to Lydia, Grandcourt's ex-fling and moral barrier to a new marriage. While Gwendolen wants to keep her knowledge of Lydia concealed, the "woman" in question references a second identity: Gwendolen herself. The unspeakable element in Gwendolen's syntagm is its fantastical content—the woman that stands between Gwendolen and Grandcourt is the woman of Gwendolen's transgendered spectatorship, the fantasy of female mastery that warns Gwendolen not to marry. Gwendolen's expressions of aesthetic and sexual desire for her own image—most notably, kissing the glass—signify a female amity that would normally prefigure the marriage plot. Sharon Marcus notes that an

“interdependence of marriage and female friendship in Victorian fiction suggests that a challenge to one would seriously perturb the other. No female friendship without marriage in the Victorian novel—and by the same token, no marriage without female friendship.”²² In Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*, “the novel’s failure to end in marriage has less to do, however, with the heroine’s desire for women than with her idiosyncratic rejection of female friendship”: female friendship and queer desire can coexist, but “Lucy’s queerness is distinctly Victorian: it inheres in an anomalous distaste for other women’s amity, not in a transgressive preference for women’s love.”²³ Queer structures frame Ginevra as Lucy’s heterosexual rival, a competitive bond that overrides “the plot of female amity” in which “women who love the same man refuse to compete for him and thus smooth the way for marriage by affirming the femininity that Victorians equated with altruism and reciprocity.”²⁴ Marcus’s “plot of female amity” and its converse in *Villette*, the “plot of female rivalry,” explain the dynamic of Gwendolen’s other “woman.” Gwendolen’s rivalry with Lydia ends in Gwendolen’s immediate victory and Lydia’s long-term gain, since Grandcourt’s death triggers the devolution of a fortune onto Lydia’s illegitimate son. Female rivalry between Gwendolen and the “first” woman then does preclude the formulation of a successful marriage plot. The second order of competition, however, exists between Gwendolen and her fantastical mirror image. This rivalry plays out in a battle between the “real” woman and the aesthetic image that the transgendered spectator constructs. If the “real” woman wins, then the marriage is “productive,” insofar as it produces an heir; if the fantasy wins, then the marriage is “unproductive,” because the fantasy, by definition, cannot be reified, and so the marriage implodes. The very existence of rivalry between the spectator and the image discounts Marcus’s “plot of female amity,” leaving only the “plot of female rivalry” and the failed marriage. So Gwendolen must necessarily kiss a cold glass, a mirror world that stands in opposition to a productive (albeit desubjectifying) reality.

Of course, Gwendolen’s marriage to Grandcourt constitutes the opposite of her fantasy. Grandcourt commands her as his slave, and Gwendolen’s “confidence in herself and her destiny had turned into remorse and dread.”²⁵ At the New Year’s Eve ball, Gwendolen:

was necessarily the cynosure of all eyes; and less than a year before, if some magic mirror could have shown Gwendolen her actual position, she would have imagined herself moving in it with a glow of triumphant pleasure, conscious that she held in her hands a life

full of favourable chances which her cleverness and spirit would enable her to make the best of. And now she was wondering that she could get so little joy out of the exaltation to which she had been suddenly lifted, away from the distasteful petty empire of her girlhood with its irksome lack of distinction and superfluity of sisters. She would have been glad to be even unreasonably elated, and to forget everything but the flattery of the moment; but she was like one courting sleep, in whom thoughts insist like willful tormentors.²⁶

Recall the frame of Gwendolen's first self-spectatorship: the ballroom. Here, the reflective fantasy of marriage proves false, and Grandcourt's lotus-eating infects Gwendolen with "dullness"—male mastery over the female wife affects a withdrawal from the world of sensation, a forced refusal of transgendered spectatorship's aesthetic pleasures. Before her marriage, Gwendolen's "magic mirror" would have signaled a fantasy of female mastery over all obstacles, an ineffable happiness that emerges from feminine perfection.

Aesthetic pleasure remains a distant unreality, for the pleasure of the lotus-eater is a kind of stupefaction, a narcotic slumber that erases the aesthetic image and replaces it with a broken slave. On a visit to Offendene—without Grandcourt's accompaniment—Gwendolen learns that her immediate family plans to move closer to the Rectory. Mrs. Davilow informs Gwendolen that the marriage has made Mrs. Davilow "rather rich."²⁷ Suddenly, Gwendolen realizes that her marriage to Grandcourt has made her mother better off.²⁸ Gwendolen goes upstairs and throws "herself into a chair in front of the glass with a little groan as of bodily fatigue."²⁹

Here the cause of Gwendolen's emotional outburst splits. Either Gwendolen laments the loss of Offendene or she despairs at her marriage. But "Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories!"³⁰ The text selects out the alternate meaning—Gwendolen bemoans a marriage in which she feels "herself watched in that party by the exacting eyes of a husband who had found a motive to exercise his tenacity—that of making his marriage answer all the ends he chose, and with the more completeness the more he discerned any opposing will in her."³¹ Sitting in front of the glass without partaking in the image, Gwendolen can no longer fabricate the fantasy of female mastery in marriage. That fantasy has been destroyed by her real marriage, and so the glass is opaque. In effect, Gwendolen's marriage constitutes a unique transaction: Grandcourt masters her, and in exchange

Grandcourt supports her and her dependent family. While Gwendolen resists this transaction, claiming that she married Grandcourt not only to please her mother, but also because it pleased herself, Grandcourt overrides even her internalized revolt. Grandcourt “magnified her inner resistance, but that did not lessen his satisfaction in the mastery of it” —and what is it that Grandcourt masters but Gwendolen’s as a spectator.^{32, 33} No longer can Gwendolen locate herself in the glass. It is the great irony of female spectatorship that the transgendered spectator discovers a fetishistic subject in a fantasy of female mastery, but the inevitable product of female spectatorship, marriage, ablates the fantasy and the subject.

As Gwendolen gradually falls in love with Daniel (and his priestliness), her marital discontent intensifies. Contemplating Daniel’s redeeming power and the “unknown standard by which he judged her,” Gwendolen looks “at herself in a mirror—not in admiration, but in a sad kind of companionship.”^{34, 35} Once again, the fantasy has been fractured, leaving the image only as a figure of amity, not aesthetic desire. Gwendolen’s marriage transforms into a prison; Gwendolen’s fantasy of female mastery inverts into a reality of male mastery. Marriage robs Gwendolen of her subjectivity, which is intrinsically contingent on the fantasy of female mastery. If the female subject is constructed as a fetishistic product, and is constructed in a moment of transgendered spectatorship, then the marital disruption of spectatorship disrupts the subject. This linear process generates an artificial subject, insofar as the male spectator substitutes for the transgendered spectator. The masculine subject position dominates the female, objectifying the female and reducing her subjectivity to a recursive aesthetic.

IV. Toward New Subjectivity

The novel terminates Gwendolen’s marriage with a swift ferocity, signaling a new stage of subject formation that coincides with Daniel’s discovery of his Jewish identity. Grandcourt falls off his yacht, and Gwendolen fails to throw him a rope in time. Explaining to Daniel her murderous premeditations, Gwendolen describes how she “fought against them—I was terrified at them—I saw his dead face [...] I was like two creatures.”³⁶ Gwendolen’s description illustrates a bifurcation between the self-spectatorship of the marriage fantasy and the panel of the wainscot that she comes in

contact with earlier in the novel. When the panel first appears, Gwendolen gazes on its picture of a dead face and a fleeing figure in Gothic horror; however, this passage defines the panel as a representation of Gwendolen's future: a figure fleeing from the dead face. Therein, the panel functions as a site of self-spectatorship, too, one that generates a fantasy of female murder extrapolated from the fantasy of female mastery.

Rebecca Stern argues that "Gothic, and specifically female, horror [...] articulates the fear of losing one's image of self-as subject by seeing all too clearly the objectifying socio-psychological structure in which one is caught."³⁷ Gwendolen's earlier sensation of horror represents that very anxiety. The female wants to maintain the "labyrinth of reflection" in order to structure subjectivity within the marriage institution.³⁸ Once the illusion of spectatorship breaks, the systems of objectification become visible. Gwendolen's marriage dismantles the transgendered spectator, displaying the true force of male power over the female wife. *Daniel Deronda*, however, construes Gwendolen's reaction to Stern's Gothic anxiety as a potentiality of liberating transformation.

The fantasy of female murder offers a final pathway toward subjectivity. This bidirectional mode proves the most complex (of the three modeled in *Daniel Deronda*), since it involves two competing processes: the female actualizes the transgendered spectator and inflicts violence on the male subject, and then the female experiences guilt. In the former process, the female subject transcends the fetishistic properties of the aesthetic subject, destroying the institution of oppression that subtends the fantasy of female mastery. In the latter process, however, the female subject becomes all the more entrapped in the vertical distribution of marital power. Guilt derives from the breaking of cosmic law (Thou shalt not kill), the violation of statutory law, and the assault on the marital institution. Violations of law perturb paternalistic judicial structures and warrant correction—guilt thus legitimates status quo operations of power.

Foucault asserts, "It would be wrong to say that the soul is an illusion, or an ideological effect. On the contrary, it exists, it has a reality, it is produced permanently around, on, within the body by the functioning of a power that is exercised on those punished."³⁹ Hence Foucault's epigram, "The soul is the prison of the body."⁴⁰ Gwendolen's guilt represents an ongoing production of the subject in a "epistemologico-judicial formation" —to know thyself is to know thyself as a criminal creature in violation

of the disciplining light that reduces the married female to a “galley-slave.”⁴¹ Gwendolen’s assertion of the guilty self—“I am here and I am guilty”—could be construed as the reification of the panel image (the fantasy of female murder made real) or as Gwendolen’s turning to Daniel for love and comfort. When Daniel tells Gwendolen about his forthcoming marriage, she rehearses the Leubronn opening one last time, looking “at him with a sort of intention in her eyes [...] he said what her mind had been labouring with—“You have been very good to me. I have deserved nothing. I will try—try to live.”⁴² Perhaps this cry for life represents a fourth mode of subject formation, a fissure between “subject as product of guilt” and “subject as product of forgiveness.” For Gwendolen this means that to live is to be forgiven, and to be forgiven is to receive absolution for crimes against institutions. Nevertheless, Gwendolen’s desire to live transcends those institutions, in that she intends to live no longer bound by their structures. Daniel’s marriage to Mirah provides an alternative possibility for Gwendolen to seek a subject formed outside the marital prison. To live is to discover a soul that is not a prison, but a space of infinite freedom from self- and externally disciplining spectatorship.

In *Daniel Deronda*, the marriage plot is a testing ground for female subject formation. But if *Daniel Deronda* situates and contextualizes marriage within this generic framework, a central and implicit question remains unanswered: is the marriage plot a viable site for the evolution of female subjectivity? *Daniel Deronda*’s conclusion seems, inadvertently, to suggest the contrary—that the marriage plot, as a generic device, cannot contain a female subject. In its conventional iterations—to which *Daniel Deronda* most definitely conforms—the marriage plot delimits and ultimately constitutes the female subject as a function of marriage itself. The female subject comes into being as a consequence of first, being marriageable, and second, getting married. Narrative tension and resolution adhere to this dialectic of marriageability and marriage. Cliché trials and tribulations of female subjectivity follow the narrative structure of the marriage plot itself. Therefore, the marriage plot forecloses the possibility of an autonomous female subject, insofar as autonomous subjecthood is ever a possibility. Perhaps the marriage plot is a merely making-visible the institutional apparatuses through which subjectivity occurs.

Can the novel, and more specifically, *Daniel Deronda*, imagine the female subject as entirely independent of marriage? Insofar as the marriage plot presupposes that the female character exists only within the marriage plot, the answer is no. The marriage

plot, to a greater extent than marriage itself, bounds female subjectivity to its generic expectations, because the marriage plot's internal logic cannot imagine a world absent from marriage. While *Daniel Deronda* models one form of female subject formation as the violent negation of marriage, it does not tender entirely marriage-less modes of subjectivity. Even to respond, "I would prefer not," presupposes the "to marry." In effect, the marriage plot affords a bleak vision of female subjectivity within the novelistic form.

NOTES

1. Eliot, George. *Daniel Deronda*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.
2. *Ibid.*, 1.
3. *Ibid.*, 5.
4. *Ibid.*, 5-6.
5. *Ibid.*, 6-7.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. For a history and critique of film theoretic models of female spectatorship, see Diane Waldman's essay "Film Theory and the Gendered Spectator: The Female or the Feminist Reader?"
8. Doane, Mary Ann. "Film and the Masquerade: Theorising the Female Spectator." *Screen*.23:3-4 (1982): 80
9. Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." *Media and Cultural Studies: Key Works*. ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 344.
10. Eliot, 11.
11. *Ibid.*, 11.
12. *Ibid.*, 10.
13. Stern, Rebecca F. "Gothic Light: Vision and Visibility in the Victorian Novel." *South Central Review*. 11:4 (Winter, 1994): 26.
14. Eliot, 12.
15. *Ibid.*, 13.
16. *Ibid.*, 20.
17. *Ibid.*, 21.
18. *Ibid.*, 22.

19. Ibid., 196.
20. Ibid., 251.
21. Ibid., 255.
22. Marcus, Sharon. *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 102.
23. Ibid., 102.
24. Ibid., 104.
25. Eliot, 368.
26. Ibid., 378.
27. Ibid., 472.
28. Ibid., 472.
29. Ibid., 472.
30. Ibid., 16.
31. Ibid., 468.
32. Ibid., 472.
33. Ibid., 474.
34. Ibid., 368.
35. Ibid., 369.
36. Ibid., 592.
37. Stern, 29.
38. Eliot, 514.
39. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 29.
40. Ibid., 30.
41. Ibid., 23.
42. Eliot, 691.

