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There is a Secret Heart

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of
Philosophy

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Abstract

*late 14c., originally in grammar (in reference to certain nouns that do not name concrete things), from Latin abstractus "drawn away," past participle of abstrahere "to drag away, detach, pull away, divert;" also figuratively, from assimilated form of ab "off, away from" (see [ab-](#)) + trahere "to draw," from PIE root *tragh- "to draw, drag, move."*

“To drag away” I find particularly evocative.

“The candidate must ensure that the abstract refers to all the elements that would make the thesis worth consulting.”

I find this, of course, to be a paralyzing requirement. This thesis is not worth “consulting,” I don’t think. It’s more something you endure. Ideally, it’s something you enjoy. If you, dear reader, are reading this abstract right now, you can likely surmise what you’d be getting yourself into if you decided it was worth your attention. It’s a eulogy to my friend Whitney Mah, an emblem of my mourning, a book report on Jacques Lacan’s third and 17th seminars, some speculations about the ways psychoanalysis can help us reimagine what teaching is and can be, a mutilation of a pretty obscure short story by the pretty obscure writer Donald Barthelme, and a swaying plainscape within which some of the finest sentences of my life have taken root.

Keywords

Freud, Lacan, Psychoanalysis, Psychosis, Pedagogy, Education, Literary Criticism

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement ought first and foremost to go to Allan Pero, for his sensitivity, encouragement, and his unfailing and sincere enthusiasm for my project; and to Sharon Sliwinski and Joel Faflak, who both read early and late drafts of the project and always provided incisive and friendly criticism. This project benefited in countless ways from Noel Glover, with whom I have had countless insightful and important discussions, served on many illuminating conference panels, read many novels, enjoyed many films, made many meals, tapped much mana, and forged a bond that is as close to brotherly as I will ever know. Casey Beal, whose friendship has sustained me in more ways than I can name, also deserves acknowledgement here; as well as his late wife, Whitney Mah, whose breath I hear all around me.

Finally, Melanie Caldwell has been my soil and my sun, and now I am a tall tree.

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Here is the first of several attempts I make in this project to contextualize and frame. As is often the case with introductory or prefatory remarks, this is being written near the end of the project's lifespan. So while it is being read by others with fresh eyes setting out on a long path, it is being written in the spirit of conclusion, of mourning coming to an end. I am moving on.

It is easy enough to describe what I have made: the sprawling document I have always wanted to make, that I did not think I could make, the document I knew I could make specifically at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism. I wanted to write something that I felt was impossible to write, and what follows is my attempt, my *essai*. In its details it's nothing like I imagined it would be, but in its spirit of experimentation, of wandering, of lusting, and of sincerity it satisfies me.

This, however, raises the question as to whether my satisfaction bears any significant relation to the satisfaction of the university, which holds the power of designating this document as acceptable or not. I personally hope the university has a problem coming to a decision about this. Moments of crisis always help to clarify matters at the elemental level; this document is, in my opinion, critical insofar as it attempts to lift the curtains covering the scaffolding, revealing the machinery comprising the behemoth. This I do not do in anything like a grandly demystifying spirit, since anyone worth their salt in the university is already perhaps thoroughly demystified. I do it in a spirit of playfulness, and I hope ultimately in a spirit of reconciliation, a longing that I despise in myself but must admit exists: to be accepted here in the academy. And anyway it is not the scaffolding itself that I believe to be dangerous about the university, it is the possibility that all curtain-raising might one day come to an end.

What do I mean specifically by curtain-raising? I mean exposing the dozens of tiny tics and habits and routines that are perpetuated in the university classroom and in scholarly writing that serve to reinforce power and destroy or degrade desire. One of the supreme mythical scenes of Pedagogy is Socrates "teaching" the slave how to determine the square on the diagonal using questions that do not teach so much as place the slave in a certain position with respect to *episteme*, which itself is only a certain orientation of the symbolic to the real. In this context it is necessary for the slave to be represented by his ignorance, to be nothing other than ignorant, in order for Socrates' demonstration to unfold. But it's questionable that the slave learns anything, and it can't be denied that he remains a slave. This specific arrangement of the one-who-knows to the ignorant is not an accident of the teaching scene; it constitutes that scene. The teacher is always already in a position of power over the student. This document does not wish to point that out or outline any nefarious consequences (there are plenty of manuscripts that already do so), but rather to speculate as to how, or even whether, that power can be abnegated, redistributed, filtered, alchemized, and made available to the student to use in accordance with her desire.

My analog for this procedure is the psychoanalytic scene as it is described by Jacques Lacan. Application of this method, however, is possible only indirectly. Any pedagogy that is too explicit about its tactics or too stringent in its implementation risks repeating the mistakes of the ego-psychologists, whose method places the analyst in a position of knowledge or clarity regarding the “real” world while viewing the experience and discourse of the patient as unhealthy, delusional, or incoherent. I outline Lacan’s critique of ego-psychology in the first part of the document, which is entitled “Perish.”

Why Perish? It isn’t only because during the writing of this document I spent many weeks and months watching a friend die. It is because death is the final punctuation, the closing of the stitch Lacan calls the *point de capiton*, the gesture that causes meaning to crystallize. As punctuation, death is structurally allied with language; though much regarding death is ineffable, death itself is grammatical. I attempt to depict these claims in the margins of Part I, in a way that is perhaps violent to the reader. This violence, which is stylistic, is meant to be abrupt, intrusive, mystifying, passionate, oneiric, wild, etc. As I wrote these marginal intrusions I made an effort to distance my style and my discourse as much as possible from the academic, since it is the purpose of academic discourse precisely to circumscribe and in a way conquer. There is nothing about Whitney Mah’s death that I wish to conquer. I wish it rather to remain unleashed.

The “other half” of Part I is more or less a summary of Lacan’s early work up to his third seminar on psychosis and the introduction of the quilting point, which then concludes with a brief analysis of his 17th seminar. Over the course of this summary I make the perhaps dubious analogy between the discourse of the psychotic and literature. While there are some interesting observations to be made on this front I don’t follow the path very eagerly, since I’m not interested in, or capable of, providing the necessary qualifications one would need to provide to make the claim seem tenable, let alone persuasive. Some literary examples have more in common with psychotic discourse than others, but every literary example has something hallucinogenic about it, something like the palpable force of an alternate reality to it, and insofar as literature constitutes an aged and sophisticated academic discipline it’s worth dwelling on how exactly the literature professor distills insight or knowledge from this object with such peculiar standing in relation to the “real” world. The time I spend with Lacan’s third seminar does yield some interesting speculations about new pedagogical approaches to teaching literature, though none of them have been “tested” yet by me.

What I find to be marvelous about literature is that it animates a battery of associations in the reader, and these associations follow a course that is only partly determined by the literature – it is also determined by the specific topography of the reader’s unconscious. Why one image or scene persists for a reader while another goes unnoticed is what fascinates me as a teacher. Why one poem is enjoyed and another discarded is a question, in the end, of desire. And of course my desire is just as present in the classroom as the students’.

I introduce the second part of the document, entitled “Paracite,” later. If I had but world enough and time I would have included paracitations of Franz Kafka, Ben Marcus, and Anne Carson. Instead there is a rather obscure short story by Donald Barthelme, which I acknowledge was chosen more or less at random. More or less – not entirely, of course. I was perhaps attracted to the absurdity of the story and the school setting. I hope by the end of the document it is clear why that would appeal to me.

* * *

Are things “real” here in the introduction? Is this my chance to wipe off all my makeup, take out a cigarette, lumber home anonymously with my costume in my briefcase, ready to tell you the truth about my day?

Ha ha. What home.

Part I: Perish

In addition to remembering things that one does not know how one remembers, one would also appear to remember things that one has no idea how one knew to begin with.

What happened after I started to write about Achilles was that halfway through the sentence I began to think about a cat, instead.

The cat I began to think about instead was the cat outside of the broken window in the room next to this one, at which the tape frequently scratches when there is a breeze.

Which is to say that I was not actually thinking about a cat either, there being no cat except insofar as the sound of the scratching reminds me of one.

As there were no coins on the floor of Rembrandt's studio, except insofar as the configuration of pigment reminded Rembrandt of them.

As there was, or is, no person at the window in the painting of this house.

As for that matter there is not even a house in the painting of this house, should one wish to carry the matter that far.

Certain matters would appear to get carried certain distances whether one wishes them to or not, unfortunately.

In any case the house that I am dismantling contains almost no furniture at all. In fact it is quite indifferently built.

The only tool I have needed for any of the work is a crowbar, which I took from beneath the same seat in the pickup truck.

Well, there is also the saw, which I came upon in the house itself.

Then again I do not really think of the saw as a tool for dismantling. Rather I think of that as a tool for turning dismantled lumber into firewood.

After it has been dismantled.

Although perhaps this distinction is no more than one of semantics.

At any rate I have no idea why the house should have been constructed so indifferently.

One can only guess that it had been built to be rented, perhaps rather than to be lived in, which is sometimes the case with houses along a beach.

The world is everything that is the case.

I have no idea what I mean by that sentence I have just typed, by the way.

For some reason I seem to have had it in my head all day, however, although without the vaguest notion about where it might have come from.

Such things can happen. One morning not too long ago all I could think about was the word *bricolage*, which I presume is French, even though I do not speak one word of French.

Well, perhaps I did not think about it all, in the usual sense of thinking.

Still, when I went for my walk along the beach, or was picking up shells as I sometimes do, I must have said the word *bricolage* to myself a hundred times.

Eventually I stopped saying it. So today what I have been saying is that the world is everything that is the case, instead.

Oh, well.¹

¹ David Markson. *Wittgenstein's Mistress* (London: Dalkey Archive, 2012), 64 & 78.

What is it about a footnote? This alluring place where it seems secrets are so easily hidden. Isn't it the perfect place to free up one's voice? I've struggled so much to give my assemblage of writing a life of its own that perhaps I can finally comment on it now as though it were some independent beast, stumbling in the distance. This Markson quotation I remember liking so much for its desultory form, its insistence on demonstrating that words and thoughts have a way of producing a kind of unifying coherence despite one's negligence or even disdain of that coherence ("certain matters would appear to get carried certain distances whether one wishes them to or not, unfortunately"). Obviously I've taken more than a little inspiration from Markson's technique. Imagining for a minute that Markson's novel could be taken as a totally "legitimate" academic tract on Wittgenstein's famous *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (a work that has received more than its fair share of more conventional academic commentary), an intervention that might reveal something about the *Tractatus* that is missed by other approaches, despite how apparently unrelated it is to anything relevant to Wittgenstein's work. My work is grounded in this fantasy and committed to exploring it: that there is a mode of writing that belongs in the academy that frustrates, that seduces, and that vanishes in such a way that new dimensions of the work appear, not then to be ambushed and territorialized, but regarded – out of the corner of the eye only, perhaps.

The narrator is captivated by the word *bricolage*, with no explaining it. I think it's already apparent that I am also captivated by it as a technique; a way of producing a completely unanticipated coherence out of whatever thoughts, words, associations, or texts are at hand. I have adopted this mode specifically as one of academic

At about the same time some of my *ribs* were sometimes temporarily smashed, always with the result that what had been destroyed was re-formed after a time. One of the most horrifying miracles was the so-called *compression-of-the-chest-miracle*, which I endured at least several dozen times; it consisted in the whole chest wall being compressed, so that the state of oppression caused by the lack of breath was transmitted to my whole body. The compression-of-the-chest miracle recurred several times in later years; but like the other miracles described here, it belongs mainly to the second half of the year 1894 and perhaps the first half of the year 1895.²

Things take shape of their own accord, ~~language speaking itself.~~

The subject is unconscious of this need for recognition, and this is why it is essential for us to situate this need for recognition in an alterity the quality of which we had not known until Freud. This alterity is rooted in the place of the signifier, whereby being is split from itself.

The human subject is essentially bound in a relationship with his sign-of-being [*signe d'être*], which is the object of all manner of passions and which, as it develops, makes death present. In being tied to the signifier the subject is effectively detached from himself enough to have this relationship to his own being; one that is unique, it would seem, among creatures: it constitutes that last form of what we call in analysis masochism, that is to say that whereby the subject apprehends the pain of existence.

In existing, the subject finds himself from the outset constituted by a division. Why? Because his being must be represented elsewhere, in the sign, and the sign itself is in a third place. It is there that the subject is structured in

literary criticism in order to offer something that cannot be offered by other methods, something wild and playful and horrible.

² Daniel Paul Schreber. *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, trans. Ida Macalpine & Richard A. Hunter (London: WM Dawson & Sons, 1955), 133.

What I like most about Schreber is his sincerity. I like his commitment to observing his neurosis as though it were an intelligent animal, the meaning of whose gestures he seeks to understand. Not unlike my own independent animal – the stumbler from above.

this decomposition – this division – from himself without which it is impossible for us to determine anything at all about the unconscious.³

One begins anywhere.

Hailey always around. A sweet comfort	someone dear.
between something ever effortless:	the irreparable loss of holding
The Losses of all Lost	Because I fear
and me outlasting all	Because I'm slower here.
personal costs of loving her beyond	European Hornbeam panic.
her. Though nothing's beyond her. ⁴	On we ride. Slowly.

³ Jacques Lacan. *Le séminaire, livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient* (Paris: Édition de Seuil, 1998), 255-256. My translation.

So much of Lacan's work is marvelous for its depth, and so much more of it is marvelous for its beauty. My relationship to his writing and thinking is complicated – my reverence for it does not also inspire in me any desire to comment or challenge, even if that is *de rigueur* whenever his writing appears in the context of academic discourse. For him, problems in the clinic stem from the elements of human life that give that life its very structure, the elements by which it can be characterized specifically as human. I want for myself, as a teacher, to share that same scope.

⁴ Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions by Sam and by Hailey* (New York: Pantheon, 2006), 193 &

Is there a place for love in the academy? For my love, for my anguish? “Loving her beyond her...” There are lessons in my life that are like an oar plunged into the clay of the plains or the rocks of the wastes, places where I have taken myself with no guide and no legend only to be stopped by a mysterious figure who roams these places and who reveals to me that I am farther from my home than I have ever been, and that my hands and my cunning and my means are unknown here and useless. And here at the extreme of loss and solitude one plants one's oar and returns, death awaiting. Can these be the lessons we teach?

In Danielewski's poem the fates of the story's two narrators spiral against one another like a helix while a calendar of events lists history's “significant” moments, unfolding endlessly into the future. The chaos of a

What have you already brought here?

“Many times that reading drew our eyes together, but one point alone it was that mastered us: when we read that the longed-for smile was kissed by so great a lover. A Galeotto was the book and he that wrote it; that day we read in it no farther.”

While the one spirit said this the other wept so that for pity I swooned as if in death and dropped like a dead body.⁵

In order to go to the School of Dreams, something must be displaced, starting with the bed. One has to get going. This is what writing is, starting off. It has to do with activity and passivity. This does not mean one will get there. Writing is not arriving; most of the time it's *not-arriving*. One must go on foot, with the body. One has to go away, leave the self. How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure? One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self toward the dark.⁶

love bores its way into a stream of time that passes above it, all around it, love convoluting in a node that becomes infinitely dense, time flowing along a line infinitely long, both at once.

⁵ Dante Alighieri. *The Divine Comedy*, trans. John D. Sinclair (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 79.

Who is Galehaut (Galeotto)? The man's life is marked by an overpowering love for Lancelot, a love that can never be requited entirely since it is marked by Galehaut's self-denial, his renunciation, his sacrifice of his own love for Lancelot so that Lancelot may have his glory and, in this case, Guinevere. That is what a book is: something for you that helps you take the thing you want. And wanting is to allow oneself forever to be battered by the winds and dust. Books are the axe, and beneath the ice, a dark sea.

⁶ Hélène Cixous. *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, trans. Sarah Cornell & Susan Sellers (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 65.

School, dreams, writing. I am trying to take Cixous's description of writing as a model for my own. Writing is not arriving, she says. It is not the same thing as arriving – at some mythical closure of meaning, for example, or some rhetorical monolith – writing is wandering. If it is not wandering, it is defending. How far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure, she asks. Writing into the darkness, without direction, following nothing but the winds of one's desires, discovering them. Yes, one walks through the self – the masques, the alibis – toward the dark, the secret heart.

This is why I am given to guiding my students to the places where logic is disconcerted by the disjunction that breaks through from the imaginary to the symbolic, not in order to indulge in the paradoxes that are thus generated, or in some supposed crisis in thought, but, on the contrary, to redirect their fake shine to the gap they designate – which I always find quite simply edifying – and above all to try to create a method from a sort of calculus whose very inappropriateness would flush out the secret.⁷

We look to the East for a wisdom that we shall not use – and to the sleeper for the secret that we shall not find. So, I say, what of the night, the terrible night? The darkness is the closet in which your lover roosts her heart, and that night-fowl that caws against her spirit and yours, dropping between you and her the awful estrangement of his bowels. The drip of your tears is his implacable pulse. Night people do not bury their dead, but on the neck of you, their beloved and waking, sling the creature, husked of its gestures. And where you go, it goes, the two of you, your living and her dead, that will not die; to daylight, to life, to grief, until both are carrion.⁸

What is one's own night? Is the night a place of terrors, or simply of mysteries? Some secret room we visit only in our moments of great shame? A place without function, a place completely outside the fortress, a place whose heartbeat can only be detected by the dream, transmitted through that bewildering static? Some terrible beauty allures you.

⁷ Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire," from *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 695.

Another model for teaching, an offering worth speculating about. We know that literature is marked by *aporia*, by *différance*, by ambiguity – we are beyond simply noting that. And facts are everywhere. What I am attempting to construct is a teaching that produces a response in the key of a student's desire.

⁸ Djuna Barnes. *Nightwood* (New York: New Directions Books, 1961), 88-89.

Warm with rot, some horrid life defying the implacable decay attending your loss, not only of your lover but of yourself in him – the star finally succumbing to quiescence. One longs to discover a truth amid the gore, a tooth or bone incorruptible. Night people, they stoop to their burden at the call of a distant voice that promises to destroy them. Love. It is suffused through this luxurious darkness, cold and sweet. Stoop, and in the expanse you hear your joy spring to life and vanish, the holy bird, the mirror.

There are impossible stairs at the Loretta Chapel, built by a wandering tinkerer, they say – some angel. I am standing at them as they spiral up and in the empty heart a beam of sun touches up the falling dust, falling like scales in the tideless sea and all around me a voice sings out in the vault. The human voice, full of the ghosts of itself meeting in distant corners even of the transept, quivering to life above the pews, she turns and sings into the apse and like a heaving storm it is all around me clutching at my breath like a demon.

You don't know it, but you conjured this memory of mine and I give it now as a gift I know you can never recognize. It is poised here in the uncertainty between legibility and erasure.

The supreme secret must be told to the Cabinet; first that trees are alive; next there is no crime; next love, universal love, he muttered, gasping, trembling, painfully drawing out these profound truths which needed, so deep were they, so difficult, an immense effort to speak out, but the world was entirely changed by them for ever.⁹

What makes writing effective depends on the purpose of the audience, so to write well you must understand that purpose.¹⁰

⁹ Virginia Woolf. *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925), 102.

Septimus, destroyed by truth.

¹⁰ Paul Headrick. *A Method for Writing Essays about Literature* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2012), 2.

The audience sits out there somewhere, in some great hall of fantasy, expecting something. The Audience. The purpose of the Audience, from this perspective, is to polarize or direct the intentions or desires of the writer. The Audience demands something that can never be made completely explicit. Why do students and professors make such a point of emphasizing the completely irrelevant parts of the writing? The page count, the font size, the style of citation, the placement of the page numbers, the placement of the staple, the number of paragraphs – students and professors attempt to domesticate the uncertainty of the whole exchange with trifles of propriety. These details of hygiene, one remarks with relief, can be made clear. One can even go as far as telling students what to write about, but the uncertainty remains. There is a universe within this uncertainty, and I want to live in it.

There may be a method for writing essays about literature, but all it can produce are observations noted from beyond the cage.

The dominant male culture, in separating man as knower from both woman and from nature as the objects of knowledge, evolved certain intellectual polarities which still have the power to blind our imaginations. Any deviance from a quality valued by that culture can be dismissed as negative: where “rationality” is posited as sanity, legitimate method [and] “real thinking,” any alternative, intuitive, supersensory, or poetic knowledge is labeled “irrational.” If we listen well to the connotations of “irrational” they are highly charged: we hear overtones of “hysteria”, of “madness,” and of randomness, chaotic *absence* of form.¹¹

I am not just trying to understand repetition, I am trying to understand my repetition. These returns to the beginning, to what beginning.

There is a secret heart.

It was the abyss of human illusion that was the real, the tideless deep.¹²

In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them.

¹¹ Adrienne Rich. “The Kingdom of the Fathers” in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (New York: Norton, 1976), 46.

Fear of what cannot be appropriated by a certain discourse or narrative. Fear of witches. Of death.

¹² Henry James. “The Middle Years” in *Collected Stories, Volume II (1892 – 1910)* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 103.

Façades, conjurations, hallucinations, fantasies, personae – is it even possible to assume that anything like a shared world exists between we shifters? The edifice of facts appears at the horizon from every vantage like an enchanted monument, keeping our eyes distracted from the cascading sands beneath our feet.

It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in the early spring, for it was worst then.

I could just remember how my father used to say that the reason for living was to get ready to stay dead a long time.

to stay dead a long time.

was to get ready to stay dead a long time.

And when I would have to look at them day after day, each with his and her secret and selfish thought, and blood strange to each other's blood and strange to mine, and think that this seemed to be the only way I could get ready to stay dead, I would hate my father for having ever planted me.

I would look forward to the times when they faulted, so I could whip them.

When the switch fell I could feel it upon my flesh; when it welted and ridged it was my blood that ran, and I would think with each blow of the switch:

Now you are aware of me!

Now I am something in your secret and selfish life, who have marked your blood with my own for ever and ever.¹³

¹³ William Faulkner. *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Norton, 2010), 98. Text and punctuation modified.

From the chapter attributed to the dead Addie Bundren. A novel so full for me of enduring allure. The dead woman speaks of her anguish, her isolation, his disappointment, her love; the heart of maternal love beating hard within her but no less mystifying for its ardor, like an animal or parasite within her lusting after her son Jewel the scornful, the lover of beasts.

Addie's life is punctuated in advance by this pronouncement of her father's: the reason for living is to get ready to stay dead a long time. Passing her days as a schoolteacher, surrounded by children whose thoughts and desires and blood escape her, to be claimed only by the whip.

A teacher.

...remembering things that one does not know how one remembers. They are echoes with no voice. My destiny as a writer, I know where it began. But I've lost all the words to say it.

Never had them, rather.

I am looking for you, and I know you aren't there. That's that. You're somewhere beneath these filthy clouds, in the gray light, I hear your pulse and see it, as in a fish. Or in the air. You are the ghost and the angel, both of you.

What am I.

Some fragile thing, whose visions are so changeable. In the black eyes of my stranger, my captive, my monster vanishing at my touch, you suddenly are there alive and like that, just, you are both gone but for this pain like a stone, this pendant at my neck. Cold and radiant.

During the years when I found it necessary to revise the circuitry of my mind I discovered that I was no longer interested in whether the woman on the ledge of the window of the sixteenth floor jumped or did not jump, or in why. I was interested only in the picture of her in my mind: her hair incandescent in the floodlights, her toes curled inward on the stone ledge.

In this light all narrative was sentimental. In this light all connections were equally meaningful, and equally senseless.¹⁴

THE STYLE OF SPACE The distinctive way space opposes us, useful because it frames and highlights the material our hands would make. Space being mobile and persons being static, the spatial style is more energetic, animated, even pictorial. True spaces, clusters not falsified by our

¹⁴ Joan Didion. *The White Album*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 44.

Not long after her mastectomy, she told me this was the body she felt she was always meant to have. A perishing one. Some dark beast stole her, or her heart simply stopped beating. You choose.

occupation, are as rare as true words and cannot be acquired through the routine channel of desire, nor may accidents deliver them from use. Words have as little individuality as people – there are moments when any of them will do, provided the parts allow for thrusting enunciation. The proper use of space is to find out the things we have not said, and how our hands might make sure they stay that way.¹⁵

Now, what I want is, Facts.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ben Marcus. *The Age of Wire and String* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive, 1998), 94.

Space has a style. And
 why not? Its own syn tax .
 O
 ne
 see ks t
 for he
 w h a t
 he ~~is not said~~

art.

¹⁶ Charles Dickens. *Hard Times, For These Times* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), 1.

Why was Edmund Husserl so wary of facts, wary enough to warn that “merely fact-minded sciences make merely fact-minded people”? Referring to the second half of the 19th century – precisely when Dickens’ book is published – Husserl claims that “the exclusiveness with which the total world-view of modern man let itself be determined by the positive sciences and blinded by the ‘prosperity’ they produced, meant an indifferent turning-away from the questions which are decisive for a genuine humanity” (Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, trans. David Carr (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 5-6). What are these questions today, and does it even occur to us to ask them in school?

One begins anywhere. At any moment one is surrounded not only by phrases or images in their erratic orbits in and out of time but also constrained by a certain physics of syntax, laws of locution at odds – with what? With desire? With whose? – at odds with that bellowing in one’s chest, an alien gravity leaving one panicked and inert as in a dream.

At odds. My figures of desire, precious as the spirits of the dead, seem blasted by a punishing wind like Dante’s lovers. Invisible, ineluctable. You.

...the platitudes we circulate like coins tallying a meaningless balance.

You must understand that purpose, to write well. Understand it means: invent it.

You don’t tell a story only to yourself. There’s always someone else.

Even when there is no one.¹⁷

It is in the place where the subject has sought to articulate his desire that he will encounter the desire of the Other as such.¹⁸

¹⁷ Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid’s Tale* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985), 44.

And you all have been there for me these thousands of pages.

¹⁸ Lacan, *Séminaire V*, 395.

And this labyrinthine desire reconfigures one’s own in such impossible and unforeseen ways – and one is off; off on the career of language, into the slaughter, as Cixous writes. This writing, my writing, is that. The place where I have sought to articulate my desire encounters all around it the empty chamber of the Other’s desire, dark and resonant. One screams, one scratches at the walls, one begs. What do you want from me, my eternal question. And slowly one comes to learn that no answer will emerge from the stone but for the echoes, and we are Narcissus.

Without actually inscribing his work as a text, the patient does something similar to the work of the writer, who understands from his anxieties and dreams enough to renew his writing and thus to give status to that which haunts his sleep.¹⁹

There is a secret heart.

There is.

* * *

Beyond the Cage

Every project has its presuppositions. Here I am imagining an audience that ranges from veritable experts in Lacan's work to educators who have had as little as no exposure to Lacan. This particular orientation structures the possibilities of the project in advance: an intenser granularity of analysis must be sacrificed for a generalized breadth of summary, a certain amount of belaboured contextualization is necessary, et cetera. Additionally, my familiarity with the established discourse of education as an academic discipline is very slight, which is why throughout the project I can refer to education only in its more abstract features and not at all in quantitative, social scientific, administrative, or policy-based terms, though I do hope that my insights are accessible enough to be incorporated into those discourses. Education has long been a domain that has attracted the attention of psychologists, cognitive scientists, and analysts of behavior, but since psychoanalysis ultimately

¹⁹ François Roustang, *psychoanalysis never lets go*, trans. Ned Lukacher (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 137.

All I have are my dreams, I've often felt. Because in them I have died, and in them I will rediscover the truth of death as it arrives to punctuate it all, to silence it all.

* * *

differs profoundly from these disciplines it is unavoidable that much of what I present here will not harmonize with the work and method of these other disciplines. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, my efforts in this project are directed first toward synopsising Lacan's work insofar as it profoundly restructures the possibilities of teaching; and second, I speculate about the consequences Lacan's work – and psychoanalysis more generally – has for a kind of teaching one might call literary. "Literary" here refers both to the style of teaching (a style Shoshana Felman named "poetic"²⁰) as well as the content of the teaching, i.e. literature. Freud famously claimed that the study of literature was essential training for the analyst,²¹ and I add to this claim that the study of psychoanalysis is essential for the training of teachers in general, but especially teachers of literature. This is not because I believe that studying the teachings of Freud or Lacan improves one's ability to interpret literature but because I believe the function of literature is, as Kafka writes, to be the axe for the frozen sea inside us.²² The teacher of literature presides over the hacking, and she hacks herself, and psychoanalysis provides a vantage from which we may view whatever lies beneath.

Before advancing my introductory remarks it's worth it to reflect on Kafka's claim, especially on what it implies is involved in teaching literature. "We need books that affect us like a disaster," he claims, "like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves." This claim, in my opinion, makes the stakes for teaching clear in all their risks – Kafka advocates for a literature that has some traumatic kernel. This is not to say that he necessarily champions literature that has trauma as its theme – narratives of war or slavery or injustice, for example – but that *is* traumatic, that affects the reader directly, that displaces the reader into an atmosphere of almost paranoid isolation, distanced from the ways and routines of civilization ("banished into forests far from everyone"). "We need books that affect us ... like a suicide," is his belief. Not only terrible in the way that news of a suicide is terrible, but terrible in the way that one's own, personal longing for death is terrible – the terror of acknowledging one's own constant enframing by death.

²⁰ Shoshana Felman, "Psychoanalysis and Education: Teaching Terminable and Interminable". *Yale French Studies* 63 (1982), 21–44.

²¹ "Analytic instruction would include branches of knowledge which are remote from medicine and which the doctor does not come across in his practice: the history of civilization, mythology, the psychology of religion, and the science of literature" (the word Freud uses here is *Literaturwissenschaft*, which we might translate today as "literary theory"). Freud, Sigmund. "The Question of Lay Analysis", *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XX*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), 246.

²² "...we need books that affect us like a disaster, that grieve us deeply, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves, like being banished into forests far from everyone, like a suicide. A book must be the axe for the frozen sea inside us. That is my belief." Franz Kafka. *Letters to Friends, Family, and Editors*, trans. Richard & Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 16.

From a more general perspective we can simply follow Lacan's words on the importance of Freud's work not only for educators but for everyone: "Freud's discovery calls truth into question, and there is no one who is not personally concerned by truth."²³

O love! O love! This refrain. It returns to me from out of the silence like a waking bird. Do you remember that wet October morning in the apple orchards? Us stooping to collect the peridot fruit poised on the cold grass, and in the distance you and I saw one fall by the simple power of its own ripeness; something miraculous about this. Rows and rows of trees hunched and jagged like witches, covered in apples quivering like pendant tears. From among the thousands of apples lying here, how does one choose?

To be clear, I will not be using Lacan's or Freud's work as a method for reading or interpreting literature. I will be using psychoanalysis as a way of understanding what can happen when we read literature together in a context that, in the end, is oriented by a certain Protean fantasy, a fantasy that is irreducible to objectives or methodologies or outcomes because it is structured by a desire that always outstrips us. "It is to a fantasy, spoken or unspoken, that the professor must annually turn at the moment of determining the direction of his journey. He thereby turns from the place where he is expected, the place of the Father, who is always dead, as we know. For only the son has fantasies; only the son is alive."²⁴ In turning from the place of the Father, the professor abjures, by means of a certain style that I will discuss later, her place as the seat of knowledge, power, or mastery. From this new position bereft of the trappings of satiety the professor confronts the anguish and the joy of her desire, her desire utterly outside the context of education, a desire that thrives even if there are no students to teach. Psychoanalysis reconfigures education to be no longer a matter of facts, but a matter of desires; and literature quickens these desires to life.

²³ Jacques Lacan, "The Freudian Thing," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 2006), 337.

²⁴ Roland Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège De France, January 7, 1977", trans. Richard Howard. October 8 (1979), 15.

Before going any further I want to locate a few concepts that are conflated or elided here: teaching, psychoanalysis, writing, reading, research, and literature. I offer this list not in order to establish borders between these terms, but rather to emphasize the porosity of their boundaries. In many instances throughout this work it will become difficult to articulate the difference between teaching and analysis, as well as the difference between the teacher and the analyst. Or again, when, if at all, does the presentation of research become a teaching or a writing? How, as Derrida asked, can we distinguish the difference between writing as *travail* and writing as *oeuvre*?²⁵ What effect does writing about literature in a style that will sometimes become itself literary have on our notions of what teaching, writing, learning, and reading are? By what criteria can we assess the value of syntactical and grammatical experimentation in a context where writing is meant to be didactic or expository? Desire, present like a hawk, whose is it?

A few days before you died, you stopped speaking. Later, we learned that blood was pooling in your skull, itself speckled with cancer, pressuring your brain, causing the aphasia. By that time, Whitney, your body was so ravaged – no breasts, cancer on your bones, your liver, your belly swollen, not even healthy enough to be treated with more chemotherapy. I stood next to you and made jokes and my god you laughed.

These questions are a way of broaching what, for me, is the always-unavoidable and indissoluble problem of writing (especially the writing expected in a document such as this): expository, didactic, transactional writing, let's say. Some words are coins, but some are seeds. In her essay "How Does One Speak to Literature?" Julia Kristeva writes:

behind substantified, opaque linguistic categories and structures, there functions a scene where the subject, defined by the *topos* of its communication with an other, begins by *denying* this communication in order to formulate another device. As negative of the earlier so-called "natural" languages, this new "language" is consequently no longer communicative. I shall call it *transformative*, or even *mortal*, for the "I" as well as for the "other": it leads, in borderline

²⁵ Jacques Derrida. "The University Without Condition" from *Without Alibi*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 209.

experiences, to an antilanguage (Joyce), to a sacrificial language (Bataille), indicating in other respects but simultaneously a disrupted social structure.²⁶

One looks into the kaleidoscope of *Finnegans Wake* and sees these transformative or mortal configurations glistening on every page, convoluting every traditional literary or discursive category with a gleeful abandon – an *antilanguage* because it seems to have isolated itself in its own universe, in communication only with itself, as Shem and Shaun are, for example. Shaun says, at one point, to his halfbrother, “my shemblable! My freer!”²⁷ the allusion to Baudelaire’s famous poem “Au Lecteur” now implicating the reader (the *lecteur*) in this universe that both solicits and is indifferent to her attention (and is especially recalcitrant to attempts at ordering or explaining the text, thus preserving a certain kind of literary freedom). Shem replies, “as you sing it it’s a study. That letter selfpenned to one’s other, that neverperfect everplanned?” The letter selfpenned to one’s other seeks to arrange a moment of arrival or reunion and yet can never quite be articulated, and in any case never posted.

This mortal language, how might it function in the classroom? As a means by which language can become unhooked from the imperative to communicate Husserlian phenomenological idealities – i.e. “facts” – mortal language clears the space for an entirely different mode of communication. Kristeva writes,

although [mortal language] is still understood as signifying, this other scene is only partially linguistic. That is, it only partially depends on the idealities established by linguistic science, since it is only partially communicative. On the contrary, it has access to the formative process of its linguistic idealities by *unfolding* their phenomenal substance. [...] Displacements and facilitations of energy, discharges, and quantitative cathexes that are logically anterior to linguistic entities and to their subject mark the constitution of the movements of the “self,” and are manifested by the formulation of symbolic-linguistic order. Writing would be the recording, through the symbolic order, of this dialectic of displacement, facilitation, discharge, cathexis of drives (the most characteristic of which is the death drive) that operates/constitutes the signifier but also exceeds it; adds itself to the linear order of language by using the most fundamental laws of the signifying

²⁶ Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 102.

²⁷ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1977), 489.

process (displacement, condensation, repetition, inversion); has other supplementary networks at its disposal; and produces a sur-meaning.²⁸

This kind of language is punishing,²⁹ frightening,³⁰ excessive, wondrous. Kristeva, in essence, is describing writing as a language inhabited by the unconscious as it makes itself felt in the displacements and cathexes permanently circulating in human speech. The sur-meaning is elevated to this status by the radiance of desire.

Additional pertinent questions are: how does one write about literature? What is the relationship between teaching and writing? Are teachers writers? What is their relation to Kristeva's mortal language, or to the unconscious? What more can teaching be?

But you could still write. I gave you my notebook to scribble in – answer questions. We asked if you needed anything, how you felt. You struggled to write “ondansetron.” Jagged marks all over the page, you smiling in bewilderment or maybe embarrassment at your body's heavy ineptitude, your brain newly crippled within its decaying house. Nothing in the notebook is really clear except one phrase: “Whitney Mah isn't.” That's what you wrote, laughing silently.

Near the end of his inauguration lecture as the Chair of Literary Semiology at the Collège de France, Barthes writes,

what I hope to be able to renew, each of the years it is given me to teach here, is the manner of presentation of the course or seminar, in short, of “presenting” a discourse without imposing it: that would be the methodological stake, the *quaestio*, the point to be debated. For what can be oppressive in our teaching is not, finally, the knowledge or the culture it conveys, but the

²⁸ Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 102.

²⁹ Kristeva, quoting Barthes: “Writing is rooted in something beyond language [...] it manifests an essence and holds the threat of a secret, it is an anticommunication, it is intimidating.” Roland Barthes. *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 20.

³⁰ “All use of language incurs fright.” Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1993), 227.

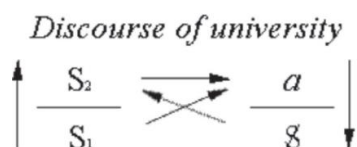
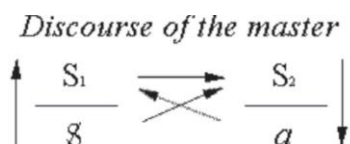
discursive forms through which we propose them. Since, as I have tried to suggest, this teaching has as its object discourse taken in the inevitability of power, method can really bear only on the means of loosening, baffling, or at the very least, of lightening this power. And I am increasingly convinced, both in writing and in teaching, that the fundamental operation of this loosening method is, if one writes, fragmentation, and, if one teaches, digression, or, to put it in a preciously ambiguous word, excursion.³¹

The relationship between teaching and oppression is, currently, one of the central nodes around which education scholarship collects, resonant with the words diversity, inclusion, bullying, tolerance, microaggression, social justice, etc., and in recent years we are not at a loss for examples of the tension between teaching (or, perhaps more accurately, the figure of the university at large) and oppression coming to a head. Barthes, however, does not locate the source of this tension at the level of, say, course content or administrative policies, but instead at the level of style and discourse. In this regard Barthes is reinforcing some of the claims Lacan makes in his 17th seminar, delivered the year after Barthes delivered his inaugural lecture. In this seminar Lacan isolates four discourses, all of which express a certain dimension of the social bond that is implied by the fact of speech between subjects. Lacan does suggest that there are more than four, and other commenters have added one or two, but primarily there are four: the master's discourse, the university discourse, the hysteric's discourse, and the analyst's discourse. Each discourse is itself comprised of four algebraic elements, meaning their value can vary depending on its position in the equation of the discourse. These elements are written and summarized (cursorily; by no means exhaustively) as follows:

- 1) S₁: represents the master signifier, the signifier without which there can be no signification.
- 2) S₂: represents the body of all other signifiers that follow from the existence of the first. This body of signifiers is also referred to as knowledge, generally.
- 3) *a*: represents the lost object, the lack fueling signification, the object and cause of desire, and surplus *jouissance*.
- 4) \$: represents what Lacan calls the "split subject." This subject is the consequence of language, a subject whose access to a perfectly univocal subjectivity is barred by the existence of the unconscious.

³¹ Barthes. "Lecture," 15.

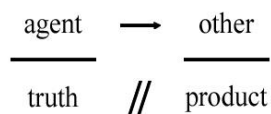
In this brief summary of the seminar I will concentrate on the first two discourses: the master and university. They are written:



The Master's discourse takes its name from the famous master/bondsman dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³² In this text Hegel imagines the historical development of human self-consciousness to begin at the level of struggle between subjects who have each staked their life in a violent effort to appropriate the being of the other so as to reaffirm the univocality of their own. For Hegel this struggle culminates not in the death of one but rather the subjugation of one to the other, this subjugation giving the dialectic its name "master/bondsman". As master, the master compels the bondsman to work, and it is the fruit of the bondsman's work that the master consumes and enjoys. The act of work, however, means the bondsman leaves his or her mark all over the things he or she is making, and this token of engagement with the world serves both to affirm the subjectivity of the bondsman as well as alienate her from the objects with which she identifies. Via Marx this dialectic takes on an historical incarnation, representing the alienation of labour that commences with feudalism and continues unabated today in modern capitalism.

This myth gives us a nice opportunity to develop Lacan's formulae, adding that each sector of the equations stands for a certain operation. This can be written as:

³² G.W.F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 78-83.



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In this instance it is relatively easy to interpret the equation of the master's discourse to mean: the master (S₁) stands in a relation of dominance to the slave (S₂) who in turn produces things (a) for the master's consumption and enjoyment but which mask a fundamental truth, which is the existence of the split subject (i.e. that all subjects are split as a consequence of their relationship with the signifier, including the master, despite the completeness he assumes he has achieved as a result of his dominance over the slave).

In the case of the university discourse we can see that here the motivating agent is S₂, the general body of all knowledge, which seeks endlessly to appropriate everything that lies outside its purview (and is thus desirable), (a). In this case, however, what is ultimately produced is more and more signifiers, all of which fracture the subject further and further. Finally, the masked truth of this discourse is that knowledge is founded in a guarantee that cannot itself be incorporated into S₂, and this is the S₁ of the master signifier. Knowledge does not and will not free the slave. In the context of the University discourse the slave is conflated with the proletarian/student, and to recompense the slave for all that has been taken from him knowledge is given, but "capitalist exploitation effectively frustrates him of his knowledge by rendering it useless."³³ And in a sort of ironic twist, "what, in a type of subversion, gets returned [to the student] is ... master's knowledge. And this is why all he has done is change masters."³⁴ From this vantage one can see more clearly why Barthes so firmly stressed the need for a baffling of language or a reconfiguring of the ritualized methodologies of the university.

We can add any number of nuances to these formulae in order to situate them in different contexts. For example, the discourse of the university will vary slightly depending on several factors specific to that university or the historical epoch within which the university is being considered. In our contemporary setting the university discourse, Slavoj Žižek writes, "has two forms of existence in which its inner tension is externalized: 1) capitalism, its logic of the integrated excess, of the system reproducing itself through constant self-revolutionizing, and 2) the bureaucratic 'totalitarianism' conceptualized in different guises as the rule of

³³ Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 32.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

technology, of instrumental reason, of biopolitics, as the ‘administered world.’”³⁵ The capitalist integration of excess can be seen in the explosion of new degrees, diplomas, and certificates that purport to provide specific training for the job market but actually serve to keep students in school longer while simultaneously narrowing the scope of their learning and, of course, charging them money. As for bureaucratic totalitarianism, we can see its effects clearly enough in the valorization of professional and technical knowledge, which ultimately transforms knowledge and thinking into fungible tokens destined to be exchanged for a salary. The activity of the university is, borrowing another term from Derrida, conditioned, qualified or restricted by its usefulness, and this usefulness is determined primarily from the vantage of capitalism or the master, i.e. the one who desires that things simply work. A critical intervention on this front would amount, again using Derrida’s terms, to permanently allowing professors and students the right to deconstruct to the university. In particular the Humanities must be capable of taking on the task of deconstructing its own history, its own principles, and its own axioms and free the university to oppose the other limiting institutions with which it is so frequently complicit: state powers, economic powers, media powers, ideological powers, religious powers, etc.³⁶

The university discourse has become the hegemonic discourse of 21st century modernity. Knowledge has been completely co-opted by capitalism to such an extent that its value is measured almost exclusively in economic terms. Science has more or less become the guarantor of truth, which in turn has led to the valorization of “studies” whose worth is determined far less by their insight than by the degree to which they are covered in the trappings of scientific discourse. The same is true for the technologization of the contemporary classroom, which succumbs more and more to the fantasy that technological prostheses are indispensable to pedagogy, as if their value were innate. This fetishization of the technological object of course only re-incorporates education into the self-revolutionizing of capitalism perpetually attaining the goal of the consolidation of capital, the alienation of workers, and interminable consumption.

In the face of these circumstances we have Barthes’ prescriptions, centered on the notion of a method that baffles: a fragmentary writing and a digressive teaching. What do they achieve in the contemporary context?

In both *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes* and *A Lover’s Discourse* Barthes submits his writing to the vagaries of the fragmentary as a way of protecting against the unifying impulse of what he calls “the great narrative Other.” In *A Lover’s Discourse*, he writes,

³⁵ Slavoj Žižek, “Jacques Lacan’s Four Discourses,” lacan.com, <http://www.lacan.com/zizfour.htm>, accessed February 20, 2015.

³⁶ Jacques Derrida, “The University Without Condition”, 214.

every amorous episode can be, of course, endowed with a meaning: it is generated, develops, and dies; it follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to a causality or a finality – even, if need be, one which can be moralized [...]: this is the *love story*, subjugated to the great narrative Other, to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must “get over” [...]: the love story (the “episode,” the “adventure”) is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it.³⁷

(As an aside: is teaching complicit with the domesticating tendencies of the love story? Does the very notion of a fact, a unit of pedagogical value, give evidence of this domestication?)

Why was it you who died, when I'm the hateful one, the resigned and contemptuous one? You, who loved the dancers in the street, you, who simply sat with others, you, on the lakebeach with a lapful of strawberries, you, your miracle smile, your sense of all you were leaving behind.

Contrasted with the love story, with the horrible-yet-tidy pain our heart passes bravely like a kidney stone, with the wound we dress in the salve of cooing platitudes in order to return to the daily business of forgetting, there is what Barthes identifies as the soliloquizing discourse that accompanies the lover's story without ever knowing it. It is this discourse, this discourse beyond the reach of officious moralizing, beyond the light of happiness, that interests Barthes. Representing it requires a certain method. He writes,

it is the very principle of this [soliloquizing] discourse (and the text which represents it) that its figures cannot be *classified*: organized, hierarchized, arranged with a view to an end (a settlement): there are no first figures, no last figures. To let it be understood that there was no question here of

³⁷ Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 7.

a love story (or of the history of a love), to discourage the temptation of meaning, it was necessary to choose an *absolutely insignificant* order.³⁸

An absolutely insignificant order not only confounds the great narrative Other but also produces otherwise unimaginable affinities and associations. The insignificant order is an invitation to the reader not to decipher a text but to introduce her desire into it, or to find it there already, perhaps for the first time. Barthes states clearly that this enlivening of desire is the heart of the professor's fantasy, mentioned above:

a fantasy (at any rate, what I call a fantasy): [is] a resurgence of certain desires, certain images that lurk within you, that want to be identified by you, sometimes your whole life, and often only assume concrete form thanks to a particular word. That word, a key signifier, is what leads from the fantasy to its investigation. To mine the fantasy through snatches of knowledge = research. The fantasy is thus mined like an open quarry.³⁹

As an experiment, or as an adventure, I am following Barthes. For the sake of adventure I am a champion of the fragment and the excursus. Here, in a moment of writing that is also a teaching, a moment of writing that is my quarry and yours, there is a heart of desire. It vies with a rage for order emanating from the institution that houses my work and myself; we will let them vie.

What I want is ancient – to sing of love and death.

Through the Bars

³⁸ Ibid. 7-8.

³⁹ Roland Barthes. *How to Live Together*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 6.

What follows will be synoptic, a kind of writing guided by what Lacan calls “an ideal of straightforwardness,”⁴⁰ a presentation of my reading of Lacan in order to provide a vocabulary and a context for those unfamiliar with his work. It is to make of Lacan’s work a love story. But elsewhere, at the periphery, there is a seductive desire haunting the grounds, some tree or voice at the horizon of the work, beyond it, where certainly I see my destiny as a teacher and it is marked with Barthes’ words: “no longer to desire the work but to desire one’s own language.”⁴¹

After you died I moved in to your old apartment. Your things were a chaos of relics – your mittens, your bicycle, your spices – and your lover scattered there as well, completely ruined.

There are dozens of texts in English that introduce Lacan’s work to the unfamiliar or bemused reader, and there are hundreds and hundreds more that apply his insights to topics ranging from film, literature, politics, ethics, mathematics, philosophy, feminism, religious studies, and more. There are only two books in English I know of devoted to a consideration of Lacan’s work specifically *vis-à-vis* education,⁴² though there are several monographs and edited collections on the relationship between education and psychoanalysis more generally.⁴³

⁴⁰ Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Malden: Polity Press, 2014), 21.

⁴¹ Roland Barthes. *Criticism and Truth*, trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 94.

⁴² These are *Jacques Lacan and Education: A Critical Introduction* by Donyell L. Rosboro (Rotterdam: Sense, 2008) and *Psychopedagogy: Freud, Lacan, and the Psychoanalytic Theory of Education* by K. Daniel Cho (New York: Palgrave, 2009)

⁴³ There was an especially optimistic period in the early 20th century where Freud’s teaching seemed to offer so much for the field of education. Several analysts and acolytes sought to apply Freud’s theories in already existing educational settings or in experimental schools, not least among them Freud’s daughter Anna, whose work with children deserves special attention for its sheer breadth. In addition to her theoretical work she established nursery schools for children from impoverished or war-torn families where she applied psychoanalytic insights to child-rearing and early education. A synopsis of her findings can be found in “Four Lectures on Psychoanalysis for Teachers and Parents” in the first volume of *The Writings of Anna Freud: Lectures for Child Analysts and Teachers* (New York: International Universities Press, 1974). Additional texts from this early period include August Aichhorn’s *Wayward Youth*, first published in 1925, which was printed with an oft-cited foreword by Freud himself (New York: Viking, 1963). Finally I will mention Siegfried Bernfeld’s compelling and prescient *Sisyphus, or, The Limits of Education* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). For contemporary examples I will cite all of Deborah Britzman’s books: *Practice Makes Practice* (1991), *Lost Subjects, Contested Objects* (1998), *After-Education* (2003), *Novel Education* (2006), *The Very Thought of Education* (2009), *Freud and Education* (2010), and *A Psychoanalyst in the Classroom* (2015). No theorist has so thoroughly and persistently argued that psychoanalysis helps teachers orient themselves in the most basic problems of learning and knowledge. Her books also serve as excellent expositions of the work of Freud, Anna

As five more of Lacan's works have been edited, translated, and published in the last decade,⁴⁴ however, the research on his relationship to education stands to be extended, sharpened, and rejuvenated.

The problem is how to begin. I am beginning with a fantasy, a fantasy that has accreted to what Barthes above called "a key signifier". That signifier is the centerpiece of Lacan's third seminar on psychosis, and it is psychosis that will ground my initial reflections on education while simultaneously enlivening the topic that will serve as my final reflection: the hysteric's discourse.

* * *

The Ego and the Imaginary

Lacan's analysis of psychosis begins in his third seminar, but there is a fundamental context that must be traced out before approaching his work there. Though it is never easy to determine where to begin with Lacan, most authors have chosen to start with his essay "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,"⁴⁵ which serves as the grounding of Lacan's notion of the Imaginary and of the subject as fundamentally split, fragmented, alienated from itself. The phenomenon under question is what Wolfgang Köhler describes as the *Aha-Erlebnis*, common to humans and animals (Köhler worked with birds and primates), which involves the subject apprehending, suddenly, certain objects or patterns that then crystallize

Freud, Melanie Klein, D.W. Winnicott and many other analysts. In addition to her works there is *Positioning Subjects: Psychoanalysis and Critical Education Studies* by Stephen Appel (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1996); *Learning Desire: Perspectives on Pedagogy, Culture, and the Unsaid*, ed. Sharon Todd (New York: Routledge, 1997); *Psychoanalysis and Pedagogy*, ed. Stephen Appel (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1999); *Pedagogical Desire: Authority, Seduction, Transference, and the Question of Ethics*, ed. Jan Jagodzinski (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2002); and *Disavowed Knowledge: Psychoanalysis, Education, and Teaching* by Peter. M. Taubman (New York: Routledge, 2012).

⁴⁴ These are: *My Teaching*, trans. David Macey (New York: Verso, 2008); *The Triumph of Religion*, trans. Bruce Fink (Malden: Polity, 2013); *On the Names-of-the-Father*, trans. Bruce Fink (Malden: Polity, 2013); *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Malden: Polity, 2014); and *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII: Transference*, trans. Bruce Fink (Malden: Polity, 2015). I will note that the second half of *On the Names-of-the-Father* was previously published in *Television: A Challenge to the Psychoanalytic Establishment*, ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson (New York: Norton, 1990).

⁴⁵ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, 75-81.

into a situation or solution to a problem. This *Aha-Erlebnis* is observed in humans when the subject sees him- or herself in a mirror and, unlike the monkey (who eventually loses interest in the mirror), the human child “playfully experiences the relationship between the movements made in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it duplicates – namely, the child’s own body, and the persons and even things around him.”⁴⁶ That is, the child is fascinated not only by the image, but by how this image bears a relationship to the world around him, to his own body especially, but additionally to any others who may be with the child.⁴⁷ In time, at around 18 months, the child *identifies with* the image – this foreign, specular thing. That is, the child acknowledges that the exterior image is a substitute for or double of him/herself. This manner of identification amounts to a *transformation*, a kind of ascension, which “takes place when the subject assumes an image,”⁴⁸ takes one up, for the first time, as his or her own, but the gap between the “I function” and image is permanent. This crucial moment of identification/transformation, which Lacan insists is specific to humans, presents us with an important split between the I and the ideal-I. The ideal-I is so called in this context only because it will serve as the “rootstock” of secondary identifications – identifications that typically originate in what the child internalizes as its parents’ ideals – not because it represents some fantasy of a perfect self. This split, again, is irreparable: the subject will never be completely reconstituted but will instead maintain a permanently ambiguous relationship between his ego and his image. Lacan concludes, “the function of the mirror stage thus turns out, in my view, to be a particular case of the function of *imagos*, which is to establish a relationship between an organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*,”⁴⁹ and this relationship to reality is marked by a gap.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 75.

⁴⁷ Lacan elaborates on the role played by the other during the mirror stage in his eighth seminar, more than 10 years after his initial exposition of the mirror stage: “a child, who is being held in the arms of an adult, is expressly confronted with his image. The adult, whether he understands what is going on or not, is amused by this. We must give full weight to the movement of the child’s head when the child – even after having been captivated by the first intimations of the game he plays in front of his own image – turns around toward the adult who is holding him, without our being able to say, naturally, what he expects from the adult, whether it is some sort of agreement or attesting. Referring to the Other nevertheless clearly comes to play an essential role here. I am not exaggerating this role by articulating it in this way, as instituting what will become connected to the ideal ego and the ego-ideal, respectively, in the child’s subsequent development.

What can come from this Other, insofar as the child in front of the mirror turns around to look at him? I would say that the only thing that can come from his is the sign “image of a” [i(a)] – a specular image that is both desirable and destructive, that is effectively desired or not desired. This is what comes from the person toward whom the child turns, to the very place with which he identifies at that moment, inasmuch as he sustains his identification with the specular image” (*Sem. VIII*, 353).

⁴⁸ Lacan, *Écrits*, 76

⁴⁹ Ibid. 78.

To strengthen one's understanding of the imaginary it is helpful to apply it to animal ethology. In "The Mirror Stage" Lacan gives the example of the female pigeon who depends on the image of another pigeon for the development of her gonads; also the locust, whose catastrophic sociality can be triggered simply by encountering an image similar to itself. Elsewhere Lacan mentions the male stickleback, which can be induced to perform his mating parade for a female presented to him in a jar, or a replica of a female stickleback, or even a poorly made representation so long as it bears similar coloration to the female. Obviously one could multiply these kinds of examples, but they all serve to demonstrate the influence of the imaginary in animal life in general. I mention them here to demonstrate how the imaginary, so prevalent in animal behavior, is preserved in the human dimension even as the human dimension is further conditioned by the symbolic. For humans, for example, the imaginary speaks to "the question of the meaning of beauty as formative and erogenous,"⁵⁰ or, again, provides a means of understanding the function of narcissism.

You would have wept last night to see us prowling, see us arch-backed, circling. Some tangled and bitter curse taking root between us, your former loves. You would have wept to see us, two frightened wildcats, breathless, smelling blood, ecstatic claws in one another's skin who were once each other's only haven. We scratch about in the corners of the house now, silent and wounded, scars taking root at our throats.

In the early stages of development, however, when the child feels himself to be uncoordinated and obstructed in relation to the image that, on the contrary, seems whole, his or her reality is marked by an "organic inadequacy" that longs for an impossible reparation. The very notion of "development" as understood as a kind of teleology of the organism is in fact, for humans, an endless stitching-together of fragments with the threads of fantasy:

the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation – and, for the subject caught up in the lure of spatial identification, turns out fantasies that proceed from a fragmented image of the body to what I will call an "orthopedic" form of its totality – and to the finally donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental

⁵⁰ Ibid. 77

development with its rigid structure. Thus, the shattering of the *Innenwelt* to *Umwelt* circle gives rise to an inexhaustible squaring of the ego's audits.⁵¹

Important to note here is the universality of the experience undergone by the child. "Normal" development consists precisely in navigating the gap between ego and imago until a more or less permanent line of approach can be adopted, one, however, which is asymptotic to the image, giving the impression of a closer and closer unity but harboring a permanent abyss.

Up to this point I have only been presenting Lacan's views on the infant's relationship to his or her own reflection, and now I will elaborate on how this specular identification is projected onto others, which is primarily, or at least initially, in the form of aggression (recall here the parameters of Hegel's master/bondsman dialect). Lacan refers consistently in his work to Saint Augustine's observation of an "all-consuming, uncontrollable jealousy which the small child feels for his fellow being, usually when the latter is clinging to his mother's breast."⁵² This example is one among many others to which Lacan consistently refers regarding the difficulty young children experience in differentiating themselves from their peers: upon hitting another child, the perpetrator might wince or cry; upon seeing another child fall down, the observer might cry, etc. The case of jealousy is a specific instance of aggression, one where the child not only identifies with another but, in that very identification, sees his or her desire objectified, which is why this imaginary relation is far from being conciliatory. Once the subject sees himself in the other, his desire is projected outside of himself, thereby initiating a drive to reincorporate the object of desire. This murderous impulse (Lacan calls it "the unspecified wish for the destruction of the other as such"⁵³)

tips the whole of human knowledge into being mediated by the other's desire, constitutes its objects in an abstract equivalence due to competition from other people, and turns the *I* into an apparatus to which every instinctual pressure constitutes a danger, even if it corresponds to a natural maturation process.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid. 78

⁵² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1991), 171.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Lacan, *Écrits*, 79.

Of course, this recognition of the I in the other can only ever be a *mis*-recognition, which is reflected in the turbulent “formation” of the I, which is never at rest and must be content to have its social relations be mediated, or softened, by what Lacan calls empty or fictional speech, the means by which the social relation is prevented from becoming blankly violent.

Perhaps it is also worth repeating: the murderous impulse tips the whole of human knowledge into being mediated by the other’s desire. Wanting means wanting a secret, some hidden truth guarded or enjoyed by the other.

Finally, the function of the imaginary within the real constantly unsettles the subject’s relationship with “reality” – the “shared” reality one has with other subjects. This is why Lacan insists that “the subject’s [imaginary] capture by his situation gives us the most general formulation of madness – the kind found within the asylum walls as well as the kind that deafens the world with its sound and fury.”⁵⁵ What this means, among other things, is that the complexities of the mirror stage never vanish in human experience, that they are only deepened – even as they are negotiated – by speech, by sexuality, by dreams, by symptoms.

Not a week after you died I saw your ghost. I was walking with the dog, turning north toward home and you passed me, the dog sniffing in your direction as if out of obligation. The three of us were completely alone on the sidewalk, covered that time of year with yellow maple flowers, walking in the shadows cast by the falling afternoon sun, and you were heading south and you were exactly the way I knew you would be if you had lived to 52 – short hair still, now with strands of gray throughout, same dancer’s gait keeping an effortlessly rapid pace, same bee pendant around your neck, blue-framed glasses, skin like smooth wet clay, alive in another universe sharing only this brief intersection with mine.

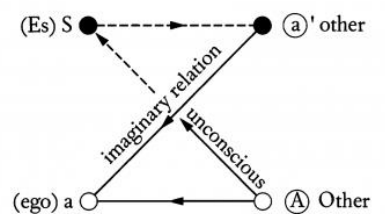
⁵⁵ Ibid. 80.

I have begun with this brief analysis of the mirror stage because it represents a kind of ground zero for human experience; in many ways it is the inaugural moment of human learning since it is the initiation into a structure that is specifically human and permanent. As a founding moment of learning, the mirror stage teaches us that a moment of education is precipitated alongside the appearance of a gap. One might find this tritely obvious: if there is no gap or lack or shadow in our experience then there is nothing that is obscure or hidden and thus no need of any educative intervention to repair or fill in or illuminate. But it is precisely this experience that is in question in this scene: one's involvement with "reality" is always complicated by the fissure that opens up in the mirror stage, and it is the degree to which this fissure is entrenched in human experience that makes the very notion of education understood as an illuminating or filling-in so misleading. The fantasy of reparation or total order is a form of madness at the most elemental level, the font of the genius and chaos of myth. Education, and this is all I really wish to point out, is founded in a mythological belief in wholeness and order but does not recognize its own foundation as mythological, simply because it is so deeply satisfied with the order it produces. Alongside Barthes I am convinced that to protect education from being consumed by its own rage for order one is obligated to stand up for one's fragmentary, wayward position; not in order ultimately to turn this position itself into an instance of order but to curate absences, *aporia*, and ambiguities whose function is to house the desires of the others, the amateurs, the students.

Teachers, Egos.

A large part of what Lacan posits in "The Mirror Stage" is consolidated in the "L-Schema," which first appears in *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis*. In both seminars I and II, as the titles indicate, Lacan focuses on the problematic notion of the ego as it was understood in the early 1950s, especially the notion of the analyst's ego. The analyst, according to the tenets of ego-psychology, acts as a representative of the "good" or "healthy" ego in order to educate or heal the patient's sick or distressed ego. At the forefront of this conception of psychoanalysis is Freud's daughter Anna,⁵⁶ though aspects of it can be seen in Freud's own work, as at the end of his essay "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," where he writes:

L SCHEMA



⁵⁶ Lacan, in Seminar I: "We should note first of all that we hear the ego spoken of as the ally of the analyst, and not only the ally, but the sole source of knowledge. The only thing we know of is the ego, that's the way it is usually put. Anna Freud, Fenichel, nearly all those who have written about analysis since 1920, say it over

it is reasonable to expect of an analyst, as a part of his qualifications, a considerable degree of mental normality and correctness. In addition, he must possess some kind of superiority, so that in certain analytic situations he can act as a model for his patient and in others as a teacher. And finally we must not forget that the analytic situation is based on a love of truth – that is, a recognition of reality – and that it precludes any kind of sham or deceit.⁵⁷

This is precisely the sort of perspective that motivates much of Anna Freud's work, with its emphasis on the teaching and rearing of children at home and in educational institutions. From Anna Freud's perspective, the analyst, equipped with an understanding of the instincts and sensitive to the potential damage caused by their being forbidden and repressed, engages with the patient at the level of the patient's reasonable ego, explaining to the patient, for example, that his or her repression of a certain memory or desire is causing the inhibiting symptoms. By taking up a position of superiority at the level of the ego, the analyst attempts to communicate with the patient at the level of the ego in order to help the patient adjust to the reality that, it is assumed, is accessible to both. This method places all the faith in the health of the analyst's ego, achieved by a training analysis (whose adequacy does not guarantee perfection) and in the relationship of this ego to reality, prompting Lacan to point out that "one really ought to find out if it is the analyst's *ego* which offers the measure of the real."⁵⁸

I will pause here for a moment to ask: is it always already the case that the teacher is presumed to occupy a knowing position with respect to the real? What strategies does the teacher have at her disposal to baffle this position?

I have already noted the degree to which the imaginary determines the subject's apprehension of the real, but also how this apprehension is characterized by its quality of being stitched together by the threads of fantasy. This sartorial dimension of human experience makes the notion of a "healthy" ego – i.e. one whose perspective on the real is "true" or "complete" – problematic, and Lacan will ultimately dismiss the notion as an

and over again – We speak only to the ego, we are in communication with the ego alone, everything is channeled via the ego." (16).

⁵⁷ Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XXIII*, trans. James Strachey London: Hogarth Press, 1964), 248.

⁵⁸ Lacan, *Sem. I*, 18.

illusion.⁵⁹ Anticipating my exegesis a little bit, I will note here that Lacan does not locate the analyst at a or a' , but at A , where, ideally, the ego disappears completely.⁶⁰

The line of the imaginary relation, then, extends exclusively between a and a' and epitomizes the experience of the mirror stage as it shapes inter-human relations throughout life. It is a little misleading to characterize this relation as inter-human, however, since the a' is apprehended by the ego *as an object* and, moreover, includes the world of objects. Lacan, at one point, simply calls a' the place of the ego's objects and a as the subject's form *as reflected* in these objects,⁶¹ which is why the vector moves from a' to a , indicating that the ego is constituted by this reflection, which includes the original reflection in the mirror as well as the consequent constitutive reflections emanating from the world of objects and others as objects.

Freud himself left behind a piece of writing that illuminates the importance of these infantile identifications for education, for the destinies of students as they aspire to become this or that. He writes, reflecting on his and his peers' experiences in their first years of school:

it is hard to decide whether what affected us more and was of greater importance to us was our concern with the sciences that we were taught or with the personalities of our teachers. [...] We courted them or turned our backs on them, we imagined sympathies and antipathies in them which probably had no existence, we studied their characters and on them we formed or misformed our own. They called up our fiercest opposition and forced us to complete submission; we peered into their little weaknesses, and took pride in their excellences, their knowledge, and their justice. At bottom we felt a great affection for them if they gave us any ground for it, though I cannot tell how many of them were aware of this. But it cannot be denied that our position in regard to them was a quite remarkable one and one which may well have had its inconvenience for those concerned. We were from the very first equally inclined to love and to hate them, to criticize and respect them.⁶²

The relationship between Lacan's mirror stage and the experience of education is all but summarized here by Freud:

⁵⁹ Most famously in the example of the talking lectern ("The Freudian Thing," *Écrits*, 353).

⁶⁰ "[The analyst] must not identify with the subject [i.e. enter into the couple a, a'], he must be dead enough not to be caught up in the imaginary relation [$a > a'$]." *Sem. III*, 162.

⁶¹ "On a Question Prior to Any Possible Treatment of Psychosis," *Écrits*, 459.

⁶² Sigmund Freud, "Some Reflections on Schoolboy Psychology" in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XIII*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 242.

for psychoanalysis has taught us that the individual's emotional attitudes to other people, which are of such extreme importance to his later behavior, are already established at an unexpectedly early age. The nature and quality of the human child's relations to his own and the opposite sex have already been laid down in the first six years of his life. He may afterwards develop and transform them in certain directions, but he can no longer get rid of them. The people to whom he is in this way fixed are his parents and his brothers and sisters. All those whom he gets to know later become substitute figures for these first objects of his feelings. (We should perhaps add to his parents any other people, such as nurses, who cared for him in his infancy). These substitute figures can be classified from his point of view according as they are derived from what we call the "imagos" of his father, his mother, his brother and sisters, and so on. His later acquaintances are thus obliged to take over a kind of emotional heritage; they encounter sympathies and antipathies to the production of which they themselves have contributed little. All of his later choices of friendship and love follow upon the basis of the memory-traces left behind by these first prototypes.⁶³

Our earliest encounters with those around us – where need is transformed into demand and ultimately into desire, where love and hate are born, where the defensive measures of the ego are initiated and bolstered, where the uniquely human baptism into the symbolic occurs – are imprinted and preserved in us, persisting like ghosts in all our subsequent encounters with others. And one of the most significant of these others, Freud points out, is the teacher. This is the primary reason why the teacher so frequently gets entangled in a transference relation to the student, whether either party is aware of this or not.

This summary is only meant to highlight the importance of the image in Lacan's description of human development, specifically insofar as it is the stage for the fundamental misrecognition that forever characterizes the subject as split. This misrecognition provides the condition for the identifications with others that so profoundly cast desire as desire of the other. I will continue my elaboration of the terms of the L-Schema in the context of *Seminar III*, where Lacan introduces the problem of the Other as it functions in psychosis, which will entail a description of how it functions generally. Moreover, by following the threads of this particular seminar we are compelled to consider the role of speech in the analytic relation and in inter-human relations generally. Finally, this seminar marks Lacan's earliest efforts to articulate the functions of the signifier, metaphor, and metonymy in human experience, and provides the "elementary cell" of the graph of desire, which Lacan calls *le point de capiton*.

⁶³ Ibid. 243.

Perhaps you know you love someone (loved someone) when in the charm of Saturday morning in Spring your heart empties out as you conjure stories about the passersby that you know you'll never tell. Today, across the road from your house a man, deftly, even hubristically, paints the façade of the beauty supply shop, climbing his ladder as it quivers beneath his steps, morning sun catching the sweat on his neck and brow, extending his roller to preposterous lengths – I look up one moment and he's sitting like a gargoyle scraping old paint, feet hanging off the rooftop, another moment he rolls a coat of beige in gestures of a zealot genuflecting. Finally he stands looking up at the window, as if in search of his ghosts.

Working through the second half of *Seminar III* will bring these terms to the foreground and contextualize my presentation of the *point de capiton*, but I want to note at the outset that proceeding in this manner leaves out several important features of this seminar of which I wouldn't want reader to be unaware. These include the function of the imaginary in relation to the body; the place of the analyst in the analytic relation; the structure of repression; and, given that the topic of the seminar is psychosis, the problematic nature of reality as it contends with the workings of hallucination, delirium, paranoia, and the unconscious – what Lacan highlights as the distinction between reality and certainty.⁶⁴ Each of these different features bears on Lacan's exposition on the signified, signifier, metaphor, and metonymy, and it is important to me that I stress that Lacan's teaching only bears so much extraction before the integrity of his terms starts to erode. That is, if the literature teacher finds Lacan's work on metaphor or the signifier helpful in this or that aspect of her teaching, then it is also crucial to consider the lineage of those terms and all of their analytic implications since it is these very implications that help to justify the rethinking of the teaching position that I am trying to offer here. Psychosis, the ostensible

⁶⁴ “Reality is not at issue [for Schreber, the psychotic]. The subject admits, by means of all the verbally expressed explanatory detours at his disposal, that these [delusional] phenomena are of another order than the real. He is well aware that their reality is uncertain. He even admits their unreality up to a certain point. But, contrary to the normal subject for whom reality is always in the right place, he is certain of something, which is that what is at issue – ranging from hallucination to interpretation – regards him. Reality isn't at issue for him, certainty is”. (Lacan, *Seminar III*, 75).

primary concern of Lacan's third seminar, may seem like a subject far outside the purview of education, yet isn't one of the fundamental myths of education that it teaches others the truth about the real world? What real world?

Who am I, that your dying has so ruined me?

Psychosis

Lacan's third seminar begins with Freud's "Psycho-Analytical Notes on an Autobiographical Account of a Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides),"⁶⁵ published in 1911. Freud's work in turn is based on the autobiography of Dr. Daniel Paul Schreber, Senatspräsident in the Oberlandesgericht in Dresden, who suffered two separate periods of mental illness, the second of which lasted nearly 10 years. In both instances he was treated by a Dr. Flechsig, who becomes a significant character in Schreber's delusional system.

At nearly 400 pages long in the first English edition it is impossible to summarize adequately the complexity of Schreber's illness nor include as many details as one would like. Freud's own presentation of the case emphasizes specifically Schreber's relationship with God and Schreber's belief that the redemption of the human race depends on himself, who must allow his body to be transformed into a woman's. The following is an account from Dr. Weber, director of the Sonnenstein Asylum where Schreber was cared for for the majority of his illness:

it is not to be supposed that [Schreber] *wishes* to be transformed into a woman; it is rather a question of a "must" based upon the Order of Things, which there is no possibility of his evading, much as he would personally prefer to remain in his own honourable and masculine station in life. But neither he nor the rest of mankind can regain the life beyond except by his being transformed into a woman (a process which may occupy many years or even decades) by means of divine miracles. He himself, of this he is convinced, is the only object upon which divine miracles are worked, and he is thus the most remarkable human being who has ever lived upon the earth. Every hour and every minute for years he has experienced these miracles in his body, and he has had them confirmed by the voices that have conversed with him. During the first years of his illness certain of his bodily organs suffered such destructive injuries as would inevitably have led to the death of any other man: he lived for a long time without a stomach, without intestines, almost without lungs, with a torn esophagus, without a bladder, and with shattered ribs, he used

⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XII*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1958).

sometimes to swallow a part of his own larynx with his food, etc. But divine miracles (“rays”) always restored what had been destroyed, and therefore, as long as he remains a man, he is altogether immortal. These alarming phenomena have ceased long ago [Dr. Weber’s report is dated 1899], and his “femaleness” has become prominent instead. This is a matter of a process of development which will probably require decades, if not centuries, for its completion, and it is unlikely that anyone now living will survive to see the end of it. He has a feeling that an enormous number of “female nerves” have already passed over into his body, and out of them a new race of men will proceed, through a process of direct impregnation by God. Not until then, it seems, will he be able to die a natural death, and, along with the rest of mankind, will he regain a state of bliss. In the meantime not only the sun, but trees and birds, which are in the nature of “bemiracled residues of former human souls,” speak to him in human accents, and miraculous things happen everywhere around him.⁶⁶

Lacan takes up several of these details in the course of the seminar, but he emphasizes one aspect of Schreber’s work specifically, which is that the rays speak, and do so in what Schreber describes as a fundamental language. These rays are the only medium for Schreber’s communication with God who otherwise has no way of communicating with living men (God speaks only to the dead).⁶⁷

The whole thing creaks like a ship, stress at the boards so strong they are warm.

Lacan makes it clear at the outset of the seminar that the only method for treating psychotics is via the symbolic – that is, via a method that supposes in advance that the delusions experienced by the psychotic are already captured within a complex network of significations that form a complete signifying network. The delusional on the street might see this or that – say, a red car passing, one that is perceived to be not without

⁶⁶ Ibid. 17.

⁶⁷ “A fundamental misunderstanding obtained, however, which has since run like a red thread through my entire life. It is based upon the fact that, within the Order of the World, God did not really understand the living human being and had no need to understand him, because, according to the Order of the World, He dealt only with corpses.” (Schreber. *Memoirs*, 75).

meaning, but also not with a definite meaning. The analyst, in interpreting the experience of this delusional, can situate him or herself in one of three positions, each yielding completely different conceptions of what delusion is:

- 1) the real: “we can consider the thing from the angle of an aberration of perception. Don’t think we are currently so far removed from this. Not so long ago this was the level at which the question was raised concerning what a madman’s rudimentary experience was. He might just be color blind and see red as green and *vice versa*.”
- 2) the imaginary: “again, we can consider the encounter with the red car along the lines of what happens when the robin redbreast, encountering its mate, displays the breast that gave it its name. It has been demonstrated that its dress corresponds to the guarding of the limit of its territory and that the encounter alone occasions a certain form of behavior towards its adversary. Here the red has an *imaginary* function which, precisely in the order of relations of understanding, can be translated into the fact that for the subject this red will have made him see red and seemed to him to bear within it the expressive and immediate character of hostility or anger.”
- 3) the symbolic: “we can understand the red car within the symbolic order, namely the way one understands the color red in a game of cards, that is, as opposed to black, as being a part of an already organized language.”⁶⁸

The different aspects of Schreber’s illness – his body, God, the rays, the miracles, the birds and trees, etc. – are presented to him as already significant, already with meaning, a meaning that dawns on Schreber slowly during a period he calls “the twilight of the world,” where one (true) world is replaced by another (delusional) world, a world that, for all its hallucinatory phenomena intruding at the margins, nevertheless bears the mark of a unifying consistency, radiating from a single master signifier. This confusion at the level of the symbolic produces psychosis, and in the third seminar one of Lacan’s initial tasks is to provide an illustration of the structure of psychosis, which he does so using the L-Schema.

Did you leave us a message, a hidden letter? I thought as I saw your eyes struggle to place yourself in that hospital – the grand rooms of the ICU – that you were pointing at the secret with your stare, fleeting. As I stood there, cooling your cheeks, wetting your lips, regarding you, where were you? Your life with us a dream and me within it, feeling myself a ghost as you look at me with horror, a shard of your passing life I was, I felt, and we died in opposite directions.

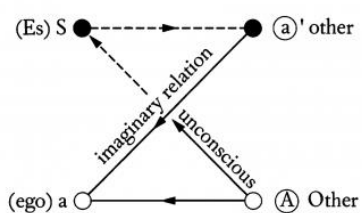
⁶⁸ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 9-10.

In *Seminar II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Analysis*, Lacan writes,

you only know what can happen to a reality once you have definitively reduced it to being inscribed in a language. We only became absolutely certain that the planets do not speak once they'd been shut up, that is to say once Newtonian theory had produced the theory of the unified field [...] which is summed up in the law of gravitation, which consists essentially in the fact that there's a formula which holds all this together, in an ultra-simple language consisting of three letters. At the time, thinkers came up with all kinds of objections – this gravitation is unthinkable, we've never seen the like of this action at a distance, across a void [...]. Newtonian motion makes use of time, but no one worries about the time of physics, because it doesn't in the slightest touch on realities – it's a question of proper language, and the unified field cannot be considered as anything more than a well-made language, than a syntax.

There's no cause to worry from that quarter – everything which enters into the unified field will never speak again, because these are realities which have been totally reduced to language. Here I think you can clearly see the opposition between speech and language.⁶⁹

L SCHEMA



This quotation is how Lacan introduces the L-Schema for the first time in his work, and it reappears in the early stages of *Seminar III* as a way of providing a structural definition of psychosis. I have already explained the terms in the imaginary relation, so I will begin here with *S*, which is the subject, but “not the subject in its totality.”⁷⁰ Nor is the

subject to be confused with the ego. Elsewhere, Lacan will call *S* the site of the subject's “ineffable and stupid existence,”⁷¹ and in *Seminar III* he identifies the *S* with that about which the ego speaks, where the *S* equivocates with the homonymous German *Es*, Freud's term for the id. The subject is not to be thought of as the locus of agency or will (these are trappings of the ego), nor simply as a concretion of animal instincts. Lacan's *S/Es* is not possible to conceive of outside of the context of the symbolic since it is tied to the existence of the

⁶⁹ Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 234.

⁷⁰ Ibid. 243.

⁷¹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 459.

unconscious, itself conditioned by the symbolic.⁷² The subject is always the subject of the unconscious, which is why the vector is directed from A to S . The imaginary relation, as I have already discussed, represents “the plane of the mirror, the symmetrical world of the *egos* and of the homogeneous others,”⁷³ but there is another point to consider in the diagram, which is at the intersection $S < A$ and $a < a'$, which Lacan calls the wall of language, beyond which is A , the true Others. Lacan writes,

when the subject talks to his fellow beings, he uses ordinary language, which holds the imaginary *egos* to be things which are not simply *ex-sisting*, but real. Not knowing what there is in the domain in which the concrete dialogue is held, he is dealing with a certain number of characters a' , a'' , etc. In so far as the subject brings them into relation with his own image, those with whom he speaks are also those with whom he identifies.

That said, we, the analysts, must not overlook our basic assumption – we think there are subjects other than us, [we think] that authentically intersubjective relations exist. We would have no reason to think that if we didn't have the testimony of the characterizing feature of intersubjectivity, that is, that the subject can lie to us. That is the decisive proof. I am not saying that that is the sole foundation of the reality of the other subject, it is its proof. In other words, we in fact address A_1 , A_2 , those we do not know, true Others, true subjects.⁷⁴

This wall is not opaque, however, but more like burnished brass – it offers a reflection, but one seen as if through a glass darkly. “True speech” is so called because it aims at A , but the wall of language blocks, refracts, diffuses this speech and instead of A there is a . “I always aim at true subjects,” Lacan says, “and I have to be content with shadows. The subject (S) is separated from the Others, the true ones, by the wall of language.”⁷⁵ Speech is never without this ambiguity between A and a : insofar as speech exists at all it is directed at the Other, A , and yet we are always confronted with a , the objectified other, the other as image, as fragmented or scattered, the other in whom one recognizes oneself and one's messages which cannot be reconstituted. In a relation of ego-

⁷² “Language is the condition of the unconscious – that's what I say.” Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2007), 41.

⁷³ Lacan, *Sem. II*, 244.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

to-ego, then, there is only ordinary language shuttling about along the plane of the imaginary relation, which is why in *Seminar III* Lacan claims that “the subject speaks *to himself with his ego*,”⁷⁶ thus indicating both the difference between *a* and *a'* as well as their identity in the imaginary relation: *je est un autre*, as Rimbaud wrote. True speech, the ideal of analysis, is possible only if the analyst is trained to be a subject in whom the ego is virtually absent. Lacan writes,

the analysis must aim at the passage of true speech, joining the subject to an other subject, on the other side of the wall of language. That is the final relation of the subject to a genuine Other, to the Other who gives the answer one doesn't expect, which defines the terminal point of analysis [...]. The analysis consists in getting him to become conscious of his relations, not with the ego of the analyst, but with all these Others who are his true interlocutors, whom he hasn't recognized. It is a matter of the subject progressively discovering which Other he is truly addressing, without knowing it, and of him progressively assuming the relations of transference at the place where he is, and where at first he didn't know he was.⁷⁷

The best example of this from Lacan's work is his reading of Plato's *Symposium*, in which Socrates interprets Alcibiades' encomium to Socrates as nothing but a ruse or charade to express the true subject of Alcibiades' words: Agathon.⁷⁸

One might transpose this dynamic into the literature classroom if one admits that at least some part of a literary education can or ought to facilitate precisely this kind of communication with the true Others in the student. Picking up the stories of Edgar Allan Poe we find the famous “The Fall of the House of Usher,” wherein our rational narrator is called upon to aid the delirious Usher, whose languishing sister succumbs to a mysterious disease during his visit to their weird estate. All around Usher, before and after his sister's death, he finds his sense of reality shifting beneath him, and the puzzled narrator can do no more than worry about his friend's sanity. The narrator accompanies Usher in the burial of his sister, whose delayed entombment is a result of Usher's fear/hope that she may still recover from the baffling illness. In addition to serving as the guarantor of the real, the narrator frequently joins Usher in reading scores of fantastic books, and is therefore situated in a

⁷⁶ Lacan. *Sem. III*, 14.

⁷⁷ Lacan. *Sem II*, 246.

⁷⁸ Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Seminar VIII: Transference*, trans. Bruce Fink (Cambridge: Polity, 2015), 159.

similar position as the professor of literature, whose sanity/knowledge in the matter of reality goes unquestioned (especially in relation to the more wild or unstable experience of Usher, the student), and whose chief role is that of reader/interlocutor. Understandably, the death of Usher's sister does nothing to alleviate his pain and confusion, which erupts one dark and stormy night when Usher's raving produces hallucinations so vivid that the narrator is compelled to sedate Usher by – what else? – reading to him.

The antique volume which I had taken up was the "Mad Trist" of Sir Launcelot Canning; but I had called it a favorite of Usher's more in sad jest than in earnest; for, in truth, there is little in its uncouth and unimaginative prolixity which could have had interest for the lofty and spiritual ideality of my friend. It was, however, the only book immediately at hand; and I indulged a vague hope that the excitement which now agitated the hypochondriac, might find relief (for the history of mental disorder is full of similar anomalies) even in the extremeness of the folly which I should read. Could I have judged, indeed, by the wild overstrained air of vivacity with which he hearkened, or apparently hearkened, to the words of the tale, I might well have congratulated myself upon the success of my design.⁷⁹

The reading of the romance, whose literary "quality" is rather low, succeeds in entrancing Usher while simultaneously unlocking the darkest secret of the house. What I am suggesting here is that the narrator, by taking up the voice of the romance, gradually recedes from the scene with Usher; the words of the story act as a screen or disfiguring haze that ultimately produces a space wherein Usher's hidden truths can surface. The narrator reads:

"and Ethelred, who was by nature of a doughty heart, and who was now mighty withal, on account of the powerfulness of the wine which he had drunken, waited no longer to hold parley with the hermit, who, in sooth, was of an obstinate and malicious turn, but, feeling the rain upon his shoulders, and fearing the rising of the tempest, uplifted his mace outright, and, with blows, made quickly room in the plankings of the door for his gauntleted hand; and now pulling therewith sturdily, he so cracked, and ripped, and tore all asunder, that the noise of the dry hollow-sounding wood alarumed and reverberated throughout the forest."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Edgar Allan Poe, "The Fall of the House of Usher," in *The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 242-243.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

And the reading of these words produces an actual echo in reality:

at the termination of this [last] sentence I started and, for a moment, paused; for it appeared to me (although I at once concluded that my excited fancy had deceived me) – it appeared to me that, from some very remote portion of the mansion, there came, indistinctly to my ears, what might have been, in its exact similarity of character, the echo (but a stifled and dull one certainly) of the very cracking and ripping sound which Sir Launcelot had so particularly described.⁸¹

And within the hermitage, once Ethelred destroys the door, we do not find the malicious hermit but rather a dragon sitting upon a hoard of treasure and whose distinguishing features are his tongue and his breath, whose voice is so horrid that Ethelred is forced to “close his ears with his hands against the dreadful noise of it, the like whereof was never before heard.”⁸² And once more the story is mirrored in reality:

here again I paused abruptly, and now with a feeling of wild amazement – for there could be no doubt whatever that, in this instance, I did actually hear (although from what direction it proceeded I found it impossible to say) a low and apparently distant, but harsh, protracted, and most unusual screaming or grating sound – the exact counterpart of what my fancy had already conjured up for the dragon’s unnatural shriek as described by the romancer.⁸³

And of course as Ethelred proceeds to mutilate and destroy the dragon the sounds in the mansion continue to echo exactly the violent sounds of the romance until the climax of the story is likewise made manifest within the mansion itself. Our narrator, observing Usher, writes,

his eyes were bent fixedly before him, and throughout his whole countenance there reigned a stony rigidity. But, as I placed my hand upon his shoulder, there came a strong shudder over his whole person;

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid. 244.

a sickly smile quivered about his lips; and I saw that he spoke in a low, hurried, and gibbering murmur, as if unconscious of my presence.⁸⁴

Precisely as in the analytic scene, Usher has become totally unaware of the presence of his friend in this scene, apparently in complete communion with the events astir within the mansion. Finally, Usher speaks,

“Not hear it? – yes, I hear it, and *have* heard it. Long – long – long – many minutes, many hours, many days, have I heard it – yet dared not – oh, pity me, miserable wretch that I am! – I dared not – I dared not speak! *We have put her living in the tomb!*”⁸⁵

And finally speaking these words to his friend pushes the moment to its crisis in a fatal confrontation with a hideous truth,

as if in the superhuman energy of his utterance there had been found the potency of a spell, the huge antique panels to which the speaker pointed threw slowly back, upon the instant, their ponderous and ebony jaws. It was the work of the rushing gust – but then without those doors there *did* stand the lofty and enshrouded figure of the lady Madeline of Usher.⁸⁶

The romance is a means by which the narrator, wittingly or otherwise, manages, as Lacan says of the analyst, to make himself “dead” enough for Usher’s truth to emerge, embodied in the form of his revenant sister. If we imagine the narrator – the rational, “normal” actor in the story, the one who throughout the tale keeps the fantasies and romances at the level of objects of critical/aesthetic investigation (whereas as Usher takes them to be portals to arcane corners of a sur-reality) – as the teacher, and Usher as the student, we can see that the literary object can mortify the teacher while allowing the students’ truths to stir, provided that the literature at hand has some sort of associative resonance for the students. I am not saying that the literature in any given course ought to have this effect on the students, but I am saying that Poe’s story provides an example of how the pedagogic and analytic scene can be structurally identical, and that no one can be certain in advance that a given piece of

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 245.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

literature will not awaken unconscious elements in the students and the teacher. Often literature does prompt this awakening, which I believe is one of its most important functions, and the purpose of my analysis here is to give some indication of how psychoanalysis enables teachers to acknowledge these perturbations, but also to indicate how literature already functions as a catalyst of free association, thereby already placing the teacher and students on the stage of the unconscious.

Are there ghosts, though? Does a baleful secret emerge from some ancient corner of the students' pasts and erupt with the force of genuine trauma? Obviously it is possible. Lacan comments often on those somewhat paradoxical occasions when an analysis actually *precipitates* psychosis, and it is a common enough occurrence for teachers to witness a student's emotional or psychic turmoil when confronted for the first time with some emblem of knowledge that for whatever reason threatens to overwhelm the balance in the student's world. A character in a novel, for example, can provide a potent object for imaginary identification, which in turn can completely reconfigure one's desires and one's relationship to the world, sometimes with terrible consequences.⁸⁷ The capacity for literature to destroy one's sense of reality is in some ways at the very foundation of the novel as we know it, given that this capacity forms the subject of *Don Quixote*, the first modern novel. The L-schema and its implications help us distinguish, at the structural level, the difference between the psychotic and the "normal" subject, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, for example. Lacan writes:

in the normal subject, speaking to oneself with one's ego can never be made fully explicit. One's relationship to the ego is fundamentally ambiguous, one's assumption of the ego always revocable. In the psychotic subject on the other hand, certain elementary phenomena, and in particular hallucinations, which are their most characteristic form, show us the subject completely identified either with his ego, with which he speaks, or with the ego assumed entirely along instrumental lines. It's he who speaks of him, the subject, the S, in the two equivocal senses of the term, the initial S and the German *Es*. The moment the hallucination appears in the real, that is, accompanied by the sense of reality, which is the elementary phenomenon's basic feature, the subject literally speaks with his ego, and it's as if a third party, his lining, were speaking and commentating on his activity.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ An example that has always stuck with me is that of James Holmes who, while being apprehended by police after opening fire in a Colorado movie theatre, declared "I am the Joker," referring to the famous villain in the DC Comic book series who just wants to watch the world burn.

⁸⁸ Lacan. *Sem. III*, 14.

That is, the paranoia characteristic of psychotics stems from the sense of reality accompanying the voice of the ego as if there were another party there, speaking, accusing, criticizing, threatening, commanding, etc. In the case of Schreber it is the persecutory birds and rays that oppress him, and in the case of the man of La Mancha is the Code of the knight errant or the omnipresent voice of the beautiful Dulcinea directing the knight to perform this or that deed. Of course, as Lacan emphasizes throughout the seminar, hearing voices in one's head is something more or less universal in human beings, but it is the accompanying sense of reality that polarizes the experience of the psychotic.

Why speech?

I can't go much further in this direction without stopping to discuss in some detail the importance of speech as Lacan sees it in his work up to *Seminar III*. In "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," a paper delivered two years prior to *Seminar III*, Lacan writes:

whether it wishes to be an agent of healing, training, or sounding the depths, psychoanalysis has but one medium: the patient's speech. The obviousness of this fact is no excuse for ignoring it. Now all speech calls for a response.

I will show that there is no speech without a response, even if speech meets only with silence, provided it has an auditor, and this is the heart of its function in psychoanalysis.

But if the psychoanalyst is not aware that this is how speech functions, he will experience its call all the more strongly; and if emptiness is the first thing to make itself heard in analysis, he will feel it in himself and he will seek a reality beyond speech to fill the emptiness.

This leads the analyst to analyze the subject's behavior in order to find in it what the subject is not saying. Yet for him to get the subject to admit to the latter, he obviously has to talk about it. He thus speaks now, but his speech has become suspicious because it is merely a response to the failure of his silence, when faced with the perceived echo of his own nothingness.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 206.

The emptiness Lacan describes here is an emptiness characteristic of the speech shuttling from ego to ego in the imaginary relation. Empty speech is a mode of defense for the analysand, avowed or not, regarding whatever thoughts or experiences have landed the analysand in analysis in the first place. At this point the analyst can seek in the subject's story to fill in this or that detail about his or her past, her thoughts about her job or relationship, et cetera. That is, the analyst might choose to prioritize an unspoken reality – a choreography of events in the real that are the foundation of the analysand's neurosis. The analyst, that is, may assume that the speech of the analysand is simply a medium of communication about a scene beyond it, waiting to be discovered by the analyst's perspicacity. Or, confronted with empty speech, the analyst may choose to disregard it entirely and instead point out to the analysand her fidgeting, her way of distractedly touching objects in the room, how she arrived, her posture or composure, details of her comportment – all ways of asking the analysand: “what are you really trying to say?” As Lacan points out, this strategy obviously elicits a response in the analysand, but it simultaneously spoils her speech, which gropes just as blindly as before but now self-consciously, suspiciously.

This sudden awareness of the inadequacy of her speech imputed to her by the analyst's apparent dismissal of it gives rise to a certain frustration in the analysand, which of course can cause an analysis to stall out. But this frustration is only an amplified version of a deeper frustration that is embedded in the analysand's speech; a frustration anchored in the emptiness there, “a frustration that is inherent in the subject's very discourse.”⁹⁰ As the analysand speaks and speaks about herself, perhaps seeking some unifying thread or revelatory secret, what becomes apparent instead is the fragmentary, dissociated, and contradictory character of her egoic trappings. Lacan writes,

doesn't the subject become involved here in an ever greater dispossession of himself as a being, concerning which – by dint of sincere portraits which leave the idea of his being no less incoherent, of rectifications that do not succeed in isolating its essence, of stays and defenses that do not prevent his statue from tottering, of narcissistic embraces that become like a puff of air animating it – he ends up recognizing that this being has never been anything more than his own construction in the imaginary and that this construction undercuts all certainty for him?⁹¹

In an effort to circumscribe and isolate some essence of her being through her speech, the analysand instead encounters the emptiness separating her from her objects, in which she has never had any other choice than to

⁹⁰ Ibid, 207.

⁹¹ Ibid.

find herself reflected. This, again, is illustrated in the $a < a'$ vector in the L-Schema, where the certainty of the self that assumes the imago is permanently incomplete. The analysand becomes frustrated precisely because the attempts at unifying the sense of being cannot succeed, “for in the work he does to reconstruct [his being] *for another* [i.e. the analyst], [the analysand] encounters anew the fundamental alienation that made him construct *it like another*, and that has always destined it to be taken away from him *by another*.”⁹² This last component of the crisis – having one’s being taken by another – reminds us that even at the most perfect extremes of imaginary identification, one will only have one’s being recognized as that of the other. The ego, as a mosaic of imaginary identifications, “is frustration in its very essence”⁹³ because it orients being in a direction that can only ever achieve recognition of the *jouissance* of the other, those objects upon which one’s ego identifications take shape. Thus an analysis based on an improvement of the ego, using the analyst’s ego as a model, can never be successful since it is only another imaginary identification to add to the lineage of the analysand. There is no adequate response to the speech of the analysand at the level of the ego, since it will only ally the analyst with the battery of imaginary identifications that have already proved insufficient for the analysand: “the subject regards as contemptuous any speech that buys into his mistake.”⁹⁴ Above all, the analyst must resist renewing the analysand’s sense of alienation by offering up a trove of identifications, which is precisely why an analysand will never succeed in getting her analyst to declare, yes or no, that she should get married, take a new job, incorporate a new routine, or whatever else in the real the subject hopes harbors the secret to relieving her distress or anxiety. “The analyst’s art must, on the contrary, involve suspending the subject’s certainties until their final mirages have been consumed. And it is in the subject’s discourse that their dissolution must be punctuated.”⁹⁵ That is, neither in the imaginary nor the real, but in the symbolic.

Even when the speech is empty, as it often is, it is nevertheless the only means by which the subject can succeed in having its meaning crystallize, if the analyst knows how to punctuate it. The truth for the analysand is nowhere than in her speech, and it is the analyst who must occupy the place of *A* in order for the subject to receive the message from the unconscious.

I don’t know how

⁹² Ibid. 208.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 209.

There is no shortage of tips available to teachers who are struggling to communicate this or that about literature to students, and likewise there is no shortage of resources available to students whose purpose is to masticate their literature for them. The abundance of these tips and resources are a symptom, I say, of a fear of literature – a fear of what it might make us feel or say, a fear of how it might intimidate or overwhelm us, or a fear of how it might evade the copious synopses that are expected of the professor. That is, there is something about the place literature occupies that threatens to evade us – student or teacher – and leave us confronting a certain emptiness, a hollow whose threshold our personae and our imaginary identifications cannot cross. Literature, for all its *élan* and provocation and vivacity, simultaneously maintains its morbid aspect, its unresponsive or frustrating aspect, all the elements that, for example, Socrates inveighs against to the young Phaedrus.⁹⁶

As I write this some impulse drives me from the desk and I return with a copy of Anne Carson's translations of Sappho's fragments and turning to a page at random I read:

But to go there

]much

talks[

Not easy for us

to equal goddesses in lovely form

]

]

]desire

⁹⁶ Writing, which I am here using synonymously with literature, is for Socrates petrified, always signifying the same thing and dead to any form of interrogation (*Phaedrus*, 275c-e), not unlike the figure of the "dummy" that the analyst mimes.

and []Aphrodite

]nectar poured from

gold

]with hands of Persuasion

]

]

]

]into the Geraistion

]beloveds

]of none

]into desire I shall come.⁹⁷

Imagine again the analytic scene as a model for teaching literature. This poem in many ways resembles the dream – its omissions, its texture, its space. What voice or whose pen can fill the silences and what within this empty poem is there to be expressed? Carson, as translator, fantasizes about the possibility of disappearing entirely within the light of Sappho’s words, made luminous in a new language as if by their own force. The analyst does the same with the words of the analysand, and why not the teacher with the text or the student? Is

⁹⁷ Anne Carson, *If Not, Winter, Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Knopf, 2002), 193.

Sappho's poem as it is preserved here so different from the speech of the psychotic? And for the student encountering this text in the classroom, what it is but a sort of Rorschach test with words, designed to catalyze the students' associations and free them to speak? This particular text has become so mutilated – censored, in a way – that it mimics the uncanny and fitful aspects of the dream, which itself defies the logics of time, grammar, and syntax. We are left with the radiance of the signifiers themselves, isolated but grasping, scanning constantly for other signifiers. Much of Lacan's teaching stems from this relationship between signifiers and the dream elements as articulated by Freud. Lacan writes,

“transposition” – which Freud shows to be the general precondition for the functioning of the dream – is what I designated earlier, with Saussure, as the sliding of the signified under the signifier, which is always happening (unconsciously, let us note) in discourse.

Verdichtung, “condensation,” is the superimposed structure of signifiers in which metaphor finds its field; its name, condensing in itself the word *Dichtung*, [poetry] shows the mechanism's connaturality with poetry, to the extent that it envelops poetry's own properly traditional function.

Verschiebung or “displacement” – this transfer of signification that metonymy displays is closer to the German term; it is presented, right from its first appearance in Freud's work, as the unconscious' best means by which to foil censorship.⁹⁸

Carson's translation here gives us an exaggerated example of how the poem resembles the dream: gaps in the text indicating ways in which the messages are censored, remaining fragments of signifiers generating as if on their own trails of associations that thread themselves through fissures in the blocks, the entire translation representing a secondary elaboration of Sappho's original words, themselves nowhere to be found.

[I see you often in the faces of strangers, people passing by who cannot know you are reviv'd in them. I let them pass. Even when I have nothing more to say I continue to write to you, hoping that something is preserved, that in this universe of writing something emerges from the shores and breathes. Sentences are like offerings, Whitney – the only

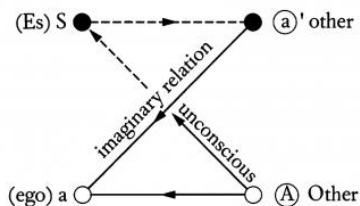
⁹⁸ Lacan, *Écrits*, 425.

things I have to give to you anymore. I drop them like seeds, but am I walking through the wastes?]

But what more can we say about speech in relation to *A*? Returning to *Seminar III*, we encounter one of Lacan's famous aphorisms: "the subject receives his message from the other in an inverted form."⁹⁹ There are two modes in which the validity of this claim is made apparent: first, what Lacan calls *fides*, "speech that gives itself, the *You are my woman* or the *You are my master*, which means – *You are what is still within my speech, and this I can only affirm by speaking in your place. This comes from you to find the certainty of what I pledge. This speech commits you.* The unity of speech insofar as it finds the position of the two subjects is made apparent here."¹⁰⁰ That is, by declaring about the other that it is this or that, the subject receives another message that arrives as if from that other, supplying the correlate. *You are my master* can be heard as *I am your slave*. Subjective positions are therefore founded for *both* subjects via the speech of only one, the other standing in the position, in this case, of object.

Second, this mode can itself be inverted: "the sign by which the subject-to-subject relation is recognized, and which distinguishes it from the subject-to-object relationship, is the *feint*, the reverse of *fides*. You are in the presence of a subject insofar as what he says and does – they're the same thing – can be supposed to have been said and done to deceive you."¹⁰¹ The *feint*, or the element of deception, is always present in the symbolic; it is the possibility of speaking or acting with intent to deceive that the signifier rises to its status beyond the sign. The inverted message, in this second case, comes from the second subject, who sends it in its deceptive form.

L SCHEMA



In terms of the L-Schema, both forms of speech can be understood to occur between *a* and *a'*, where the ego and the other address one another with an eye toward sustaining this or that aspect of their ego, and yet as with all speech there is always an excess that cannot be accounted for in speech. The other is addressed as other, and yet regardless of his or her response there is always a beyond in her speech, a beyond that is made apparent precisely in the address that is supposed to capture it. *A* is the place of

⁹⁹ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 36.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 37.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

this beyond in the L-Schema, the Other as absolute, “that is to say that he is recognized but that he isn’t known.”¹⁰² Later in *Seminar III* Lacan describes this Other as “the one we address ourselves to beyond this counterpart [i.e. *a*’], the one we are forced to admit beyond the relation of mirage, the one who accepts or is refused opposite us, the one who will on occasion deceive us, the one of whom we will never know whether he is deceiving us, the one to whom we always address ourselves.”¹⁰³ The gap between *A* and *a* represents the grounds upon which delusion is possible. Lacan writes:

this distinction between the Other with a big O, that is, the Other in so far as it’s not known, and the other with a small *o*, that is, the other who is me, the source of all knowledge, is fundamental. It’s in this gap, it’s in the angle opened up between these two relations, that the entire dialectic of delusion has to be situated. The question is this – firstly, is the subject talking to you? – secondly, what is he talking about?¹⁰⁴

Lacan considers these questions using the following example – a case of a paranoid woman in whom one can see the place of the *A*, the function of speech, and the notion of reality coalesce in a single phrase, one that has become an emblem of Lacan’s thought: “I’ve just been to the butcher’s.” Before relating the story upon which this phrase serves as a crown, Lacan describes how the patient had contrived to stall the analysis; first by making it a point to be completely open on any topic while at the same time “not allowing the doctor any room for the wrong interpretation, of which she was certain in advance.”¹⁰⁵ Lacan goes on:

all the same she confided to me that one day, as she was leaving her home, she had a run-in in the hallway with an ill-mannered sort of chap, which came as no surprise to her, since this shameful married man was the steady lover of one of her neighbors, someone of loose morals.

On passing her – she could not hide this from me, it still weighed upon her chest – he had said a dirty word to her, a dirty word that she was disinclined to repeat to me because, as she put it, it devalued her. Nevertheless, a certain gentleness that I had put into approaching her meant that after five minutes of chat we were on good terms with one another, and on that subject she confessed to me with a conceding laugh that she was not completely innocent in this matter for

¹⁰² Ibid. 38.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 252.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 40.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 48.

she herself had said something in passing. This something, which she confessed to me more easily than what she had heard, was this – *I've just been to the butcher's*.¹⁰⁶

The details of this case add considerable complexity to the situation: the man is married to a former friend of the woman's. After the marriage the two women's relationship disintegrated, not least because of the man's violent distaste for his wife's friend, who intruded on the newly-wed couple regularly until the point when the husband, perhaps with his wife's blessing, threw her out of the apartment, making it known that she was not welcome. This whole ordeal precipitates the woman's paranoia, and ultimately she ends up in analysis with Lacan. She tells him the story of *I've just been to the butcher's*, and Lacan hazards a little guess about the hidden word: it has some reference to pork.

But here he pauses. Here he emphasizes the importance of not understanding. That is, do not assume too hastily that you understand the speech of the patient, even though something is clearly there to be understood. The patient baits Lacan with a withheld word, an allusion to the pork butcher; the point, though, is not to discover this word but to discover the reason for its allusive form. "If I understand," claims Lacan, "I continue, I don't dwell on it, since I've already understood. This brings out what it is to enter into the patient's game – it is to collaborate in his resistance. The patient's resistance is always your own."¹⁰⁷ So the question is: why did she say *I've just been to the butcher's* instead of calling the man a pig? And what was the degrading word that incited her response? The word is sow. She claims the man called her that. "Sow, what is that?" Lacan asks. "It is effectively her message, but is it not rather her message to herself?"¹⁰⁸ Why can't she grasp this message?

This is the problem of delusion and of hallucination: speech is heard in reality as if it were coming from somewhere or someone other than the subject who hears it. From this elsewhere, the subject cannot understand the message, and certainly cannot understand it as coming from herself. In her speech she is appealing for recognition, for the recognition one obtains by means of the *You are my master*. This recognition depends on the place of the Other, the place from which recognition may come. She appeals to the other, the gentleman in the hallway, for recognition, but he is only a puppet for a voice that is beyond him, "she receives her own speech

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 49.

from him, but not inverted, her own speech is in the other who is herself, the little other, her reflection in the mirror, her counterpart. *Sow!* gives tit for tat, and one no longer knows whether the tit or tat comes first.”¹⁰⁹

In terms of the L-Schema, Lacan summarizes the scene as follows:

the small *a* is the gentleman she encounters in the corridor and there is no big *A*. It's small *a* who says, *I've just been to the butcher's*. And who is *I've just been to the butcher's* said of? Of *S*. Small *a* said *Sow!* to her. The person who is speaking to us, and who spoke *qua* delusional, *a*', undoubtedly receives somewhere her own message in an inverted form from the small other, and what she says affects the beyond which she herself is as subject and which, by definition, simply because she is a human subject, she can only speak of by allusion.¹¹⁰

It is the absence, or the exclusion, of the *A* that characterizes the woman as paranoid or even psychotic. The allusion she is making is to herself, yet it is so perfectly allusive that she cannot recognize herself in the message, she doesn't know she is speaking to herself. Lacan untangles the allusion like this:

What does she say? She says – *I've just been to the butcher's*. Now, who has just been to the butcher's? A quartered pig. She does not know that she is saying this, but she says it nevertheless. That other to whom she is speaking, she says to him about herself – *I, the sow, have just been to the butcher's, I am already disjointed, a fragmented body, membra disiecta, delusional, and my world is fragmenting, like me*. That's what she's saying.¹¹¹

In her speech, always directed toward an other, or toward the Other, the subject is looking for herself as subject. The difficulty for the analyst is in contriving a way for the subject to become aware of this search without ever making it a matter of self-observation for the subject. Lacan summarizes the situation as follows:

it is not about him [i.e. the subject] that you must speak to him, for he can do this well enough himself, and in doing so, it is not even to you that he speaks. While it is to him that you must speak, it is literally about something else – that is, about some-thing other than what is at stake

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 51.

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 52.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

when he speaks of himself – which is the thing that speaks to you. Regardless of what he says, this thing will remain forever inaccessible to him if, being speech addressed to you, it cannot elicit its response in you, and if, having heard its message in this inverted form, you cannot, in re-turning it to him, give him the twofold satisfaction of having recognized it and of making him recognize his truth.¹¹²

That is, the only message that can reach the subject is his or her own, received from the analyst, who must discover it beneath or within the stream of speech that constitutes an analysis.

And when the student speaks? Literature can give the student an opportunity to speak as a student, as someone attempting to commune with knowledge as it circulates in the university – and it can also give the student the opportunity to speak to the Other who is not embodied in the teacher's expectations but rather which serves, as the Other always does for Lacan, as the locus of truth. One can hardly be expected to speak in this way in the classroom, where the overbearing social and academic conventions do everything to prevent this manner of speech. Any enterprising teacher can imagine ways to circumvent these obstacles, but the primary point is that the teacher must (should? Ought to?) know how to receive this speech. Or better, how to position herself such that the students' speech that is directed at their truth is possible at all.

I return briefly to Kafka's comment: we need books that affect us like a disaster, like the death of someone we loved more than ourselves – we need books that affect us like a suicide. Kafka is both averring that books *can* grieve us this deeply, and that we *need* such books. The debate here is not one I want to address in any detail but only mention: literature can sadden, it can provoke, it can seduce, it can set light to many things that people and students already bring with them before reading and can result in panic, violence, injustice, uncivility, or chaos. There are stakes involved when one chooses to teach this and not that, and there is a difference between knowledge and truth. To the extent that university education is frequently the last period of time in a person's life when his or her thoughts and opinions will be deliberately challenged, developed, or transformed, it performs an important social function that of course can have consequences at the individual and political levels. The university discourse has become structurally identical to the master's discourse, and the function of the university has primarily – not entirely – become the production of workers whose destiny is to produce for a master whose sole desire is the maintenance of the status quo. One is either content with this, or

¹¹² Lacan, *Écrits*, 349.

not. Not to be content with it means disrupting, reorienting, or in some other way baffling the university discourse, and my effort here is simply to provide an example of this baffling.

[As all this fades, where does it go? Swirling in the ancient air to settle silently in some corner of my life's past – an old dream houses a fragment of your voice, a summer afternoon from years gone by harbors a shred of your laugh, your birthday passes again and again and each year a gauzy page is laid over all my pictures of you. Obscuring. Obscuring. Death surrounds me like a dark forest, leaves breathing silently – I let it grow. Spread. That's why it is here and why you are here in my words.]

Returning to Schreber's case, we can now see that the emphasis on speech helps clarify the structure of Schreber's delusions, which include several speaking entities (rays, trees, birds). There is the example of the "miracled birds," about which Freud writes,

it is [Schreber's] belief that [the talking birds] are composed of former "fore-courts of Heaven", that is, of human souls which have entered into a state of bliss, and that they have been loaded with ptomaine poison and set on to him. They have been brought to the condition of repeating "meaningless phrases which they have learnt by heart" and which have been "dinned into them". Each time that they have discharged their load of ptomaine poison on to him – that is, each time that they have "reeled off the phrases which have been dinned into them, as it were" – they become to some extent absorbed into his soul, with the words "The deuce of a fellow!" or "Deuce take it!" which are the only words they are still capable of using to express genuine feeling. They cannot understand the meaning of the words they speak, but they are by nature susceptible to similarity of sounds.¹¹³

Moreover, Schreber himself is compelled to proffer strange words or formulations (such as "nerve-contact," "fleeting-improvised-men," "tying-to-heavenly-bodies," "soul murder," etc.) to describe what is

¹¹³ Freud, *SE XII*, 36.

happening to him or being told to him. Lacan writes, “when [Schreber] speaks to us for example of *Nervenanhang*, nerve-contact, he makes it quite clear that this word was spoken to him by the tested souls of the divine rays. These are key words, and he himself notes that he would never have found the formula for them.”¹¹⁴ In one sense, then, the delusion occurs materially at the level of the signifier, at the level of the peculiarity of the words Schreber must use to describe his experience; i.e. his delusion appears as neologism. These terms of course do not refer to any specific thing in the world, but rather to a meaning (as is the case in any language system: meaning always refers to another meaning). And at the level of meaning, Schreber’s delusion is characterized by the fact that “the meaning of his words can’t be exhausted by reference to another meaning [...]. The meaning of these words that pull you up has the property of referring essentially to meaning *as such*. It’s a meaning that essentially refers to nothing but itself, that remains irreducible.”¹¹⁵

This aspect of Schreber’s discourse – the reference to meaning as such – can be located at two poles, points which Lacan calls the refrain and the solution. The former includes the phenomena of the birds, whose repetitions accrue to the point of completely erasing any initial meaning. The latter includes the phenomena of Schreber’s spontaneously completed sentences, whose force seems to come from without and present him with some insight far in excess of the possible meaning of the phrases. But it also includes the phrases most directly related to the development of Schreber’s psychosis, especially the decisive thought: “it really must be rather pleasant to be a woman succumbing to intercourse,” about which Schreber writes, “I would have rejected [this thought] with indignation if fully awake [...] I cannot exclude the possibility that some external influences were at work to implant this idea in me.”¹¹⁶ “These two forms [i.e. the solution and the refrain],” says Lacan, “the fullest and the emptiest, bring meaning to a halt, it’s like lead in the net, in the network, of the subject’s discourse.”¹¹⁷ The career of meaning stops, circles itself.

I will mourn you ever.

¹¹⁴ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 32.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

¹¹⁶ Schreber, *Memoirs*, 63.

¹¹⁷ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 33.

Finally there are the interrupted sentences that visit Schreber, an effect of what he calls *compulsive thinking*, though the sense is really *compulsory thinking* since the questions Schreber must answer are spoken into his nerves such that they “cannot possibly escape the impulse to think.”¹¹⁸ In a footnote he writes,

the souls were in the habit – even before the conditions contrary to the Order of the World had started – of giving their thoughts (when communicating with one another) grammatically incomplete expression; that is to say they omitted certain words which were not essential for the sense. In the course of time this habit degenerated into an abominable abuse of me, because a human being’s nerves of mind (his “foundation” as the expression goes in the basic language) were excited continuously by such interrupted phrases, because they automatically try to find the word that is missing to make up the sense. For instance as one of innumerable examples, I have for years heard hundreds and hundreds of times each day the question: “*Why do you not say it?*”, the word “*aloud*” necessary to complete the sense being omitted, and the rays giving the answer themselves as if it came from me: “Because I am stupid perhaps.”¹¹⁹

Later, Schreber elaborates,

the system of not-finishing-a-sentence became more and more prevalent in the course of years, the more the souls lacked own thoughts. In particular, for years single conjunctions or adverbs have been spoken into my nerves thousands of times; these ought only to introduce clauses, but it is left to my nerves to complete them in a manner satisfactory to a thinking mind [...]; as for instance

1. “Now I shall”,
2. “You were to”,
3. “I shall”,
4. “It will be”,
5. “This of course was”,
6. “Lacking now is”,

etc. In order to give the reader some idea of the original meaning of these incomplete phrases I will add the way they used to be completed, but are now omitted and left to be completed by my nerves. The phrases ought to have been:

1. Now I shall resign myself to being stupid;
2. You were to be represented as denying God, as given to voluptuousness, etc.;
3. I shall have to think about that first;

¹¹⁸ Schreber, *Memoirs*, 174.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* 70.

4. It will be done now, the joint of pork;
5. This of course was too much from the soul's point of view;
6. Lacking now is only the leading idea, that is – we, the rays, have no thoughts.¹²⁰

The sentences as wholes indicate something of Schreber's relation to the signifier, but Lacan is more interested in where the sentences are broken off than what they signify in sum. "In an interrupted sentence," says Lacan, "meaning is present in two ways – as anticipated on the one hand, since it's a question of its suspension, and as repeated on the other, since [Schreber] invariably refers it to an impression of having already heard it."¹²¹ The voices bearing these sentences, which Schreber refers to as rays of God, also exhibit a kind of temporal elongating, a delay in the relay of words as though the distance of transmission is increasing, which Schreber interprets as the withdrawal of God.¹²² The sentences are almost invariably peculiar; Lacan isolates one in particular: "All nonsense cancels itself out."¹²³

All nonsense cancels itself out *as nonsense*. By listening to Schreber's language as it unfolds and develops over time a history of his discourse materializes. Years pass and the sentences develop a signifying consistency, ceasing to be nonsense. The same phenomenon is true in "ordinary" language, especially in the case of adages or that variety of speech known precisely as a "saying." In fact it is this signifying consistency – this accrual of sympathetic utterances – that produces generic distinctions between varieties of discourse: academic, legal, pedagogical, medical, etc.. So much so that inhabiting these different regions of discourse becomes almost solely a question of locutionary style, so profoundly has the language of these discourses been reified and internalized. Schreber's speech, as nonsensical, is precious for exactly that reason, that it is a language whose underlying unifying code is not the real. Lacan returns again and again to Schreber's "nonsense" as a way not only of legitimizing Schreber's speech as significant but also criticizing the notion that common language is "modeled on a simple and direct apprehension of the real."¹²⁴ Lacan insists

language operates within ambiguity, and most of the time you know absolutely nothing about what you are saying. In your most ordinary conversations language has a purely fictional character, you

¹²⁰ Ibid. 172-173.

¹²¹ Ibid. 114.

¹²² "To say 'But naturally' is spoken B.b.b.u.u.t.t.t.n.n.n.a.a.a.t.t.t.u.u.u.r.r.r.a.a.a.l.l.l.y.y.y., or 'Why do you not then shit?' W.w.w.h.h.h.y.y.y. d.d.d.o.o.o.....; and each requires perhaps thirty to sixty seconds to be completed." (Schreber, *Memoirs*, 175-176).

¹²³ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 113.

¹²⁴ Ibid. 118.

give the other the feeling that you are always there, that is to say, that you are capable of producing the correct response, which bears no relation to anything whatsoever that is susceptible of being pursued any further. Nine-tenths of discourses that have effectively taken place are completely fictional in this respect.¹²⁵

Schreber's delusion *is* his language, the force of it, the manner in which it presses upon him as though spoken by another, though it is only a variety of the delusional aspect inherent in all language. The corporeality of Schreber's imagery in describing the congress with his interlocutor evinces their intimacy: God speaks with Schreber through nerves and through rays that penetrate him entirely, an internal discourse that Schreber cannot ignore, which, again, is what characterizes him as psychotic. After all, Lacan notes, the only difference between the normal and psychotic subject is that

the normal subject is essentially someone who is placed in the position of not taking the greater part of his internal discourse seriously. The principle difference between you and the insane is perhaps nothing other than this. And this is why for many, even without their acknowledging it, the insane embody what we would be led to if we began to take things seriously.¹²⁶

This returns us to the question of the ego, the myths surrounding its "healthy" and "unhealthy" aspects. Schreber, whose description of his illness is so lucid, who so clearly recognizes what is happening to him as abnormal and outrageous, has obviously kept the "healthy" portion of his ego intact but this provides him nothing in the way of relief from his delusions. The psychiatric – not psychoanalytic – discourse seeks to leverage a healthy ego against an ill one, whereas "psychoanalysis endorses the psychotic's delusion because it legitimates it in the same sphere as the one in which analytic experience normally operates and because it rediscovers in [the psychotic's] discourse what it usually discovers in the discourse of the unconscious [...]. This discourse, which has emerged in the ego, shows itself...to be irreducible, unmanageable, incurable."¹²⁷ Lacan calls the psychotic a "martyr of the unconscious," since his or her experience bears witness to the unconscious, gives an "open testimony" of this experience. As martyr, the psychotic is in a sense emblematic of a universal discordance, or even a battery of discordances, between what we might call interior delusions and external reality.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 116.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 123.

¹²⁷ Ibid.132.

I remember the night we sat by the windows with the rain falling and read poems. Or was it by the trees in the churchyard? Dusk rising, cold grass blackening, you read, or spoke aloud into the distant air, to the silent sparrows tucked like clouds in the distant hedges, “At night, by the fire,” you said. And within you what breathed itself to life, what demon rattled within your ribs, conjuring, conjuring, “the colors of the bushes and the fallen trees,” the smoldering sun swallowed beneath a sky of blood-stained rags, “repeating themselves, turned in the room,” and the wind rises as to the call of the dawning stars, “like the leaves themselves, turning in the wind”? Within you, a chaos of life singing like a storm, beneath your eyes and your voice, raging until the final inferno purified you, ashen on the waves, on the breezes, on the eternal crust, “Yes,” as the trees traced their dark calligraphy against the pinkblack sky, laughter beyond the corpses fading into the relentless silence of the night in this place, “but the color of the heavy hemlocks came striding,” where you and I met and parted, where nothing remains but a vault of words sinking into the stones, warming them, perhaps, echoing across the walls as if to stitch a web, some place I might catch you again, you spirit, you dream at my throat, “and I remembered the cry of the peacocks.”

The literary artist, in her own way, gives an open testimony to the workings of the unconscious insofar as literature, like the unconscious, unfolds in a universe bounded by a language whose laws are fantastically pliable. Teaching literature can of course operate at the level of discovering, untangling, and interpreting the streams of discourse characterizing a given literary example. The teacher can have a cure for the text, in a manner of speaking. Or one can allow the text to persist uncured, speaking its own language and giving witness to its own universe.

Some poetic forms resemble Schreber’s delusional grammar, which at least suggests that Lacan’s work on psychosis is relevant to reading and teaching poetry. I’m thinking of the sestina and particularly the villanelle, both of which incorporate repeated words or lines at regular intervals which produce a sense of anticipation or call-and-response in the poem, similar to Schreber’s interrupted/completed sentences.

I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead;
 I lift my lids and all is born again.
 (I think I made you up inside my head.)

The stars go waltzing out in blue and red,
 And arbitrary blackness gallops in:
 I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed
 And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.
 (I think I made you up inside my head.)

God topples from the sky, hell's fires fade:
 Exit seraphim and Satan's men:
 I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.

I fancied you'd return the way you said,
 But I grow old and I forget your name.
 (I think I made you up inside my head.)

I should have loved a thunderbird instead;
 At least when spring comes they roar back again.
 I shut my eyes and all the world drops dead.
 (I think I made you up inside my head.)¹²⁸

This poem stutters forward, ultimately revealing that a love has been lost and will not be refound, but the refrains emphasize the priority accorded to the inner-life of the poet (the eyes shut and all the world drops dead), and the delusional core of her love/desire (“I think I made you up inside my head”). The poet depicts a twilight of the world – the stars and heavens recede and all that remains is a conversation with the absent love to whom the poem is addressed but who, like Schreber’s god, is beyond the reach of language. The poem is in some ways an expression of psychosis – or at least of “madness” – but one could also consider it an attempt at a cure for psychosis, for the psychic suffering of the author. Both the poet and Schreber attempt to domesticate their illness by writing, by giving freedom to their language of suffering, but did either author ever find the proper reader? And what, in the end, is on offer for the teacher in this poem? That is, what in this poem is

¹²⁸ Sylvia Plath. “Mad Girl’s Love Song”

teachable? Obviously the formal and technical aspects of the poem are easy targets for a day's "lesson," but there is also an unconscious landscape to be glimpsed here, a language that is evading the forms of everyday communication by substituting a psychotic or unconscious grammar.

Joyce is the apex. Nothing throws the pretensions of teaching literature into so profound doubt as *Finnegans Wake*. What would it even mean to teach it (this novel that is so often avoided and yet almost tailor-made for the university)? One scholar writes of *Finnegans Wake* that "the learning of [the language of *Finnegans Wake*] demands a pedagogy that takes Joyce's own antiauthoritarian approach to teaching to its furthest possible expression. Wake, with its refusal of standardization, cannot be taught in an authoritarian way because no one can be an absolute expert on it, and the depictions of pedagogy within the *Wake* [...] support an anarchic ideal of education."¹²⁹ Almost at random I choose this excerpt: "we can sit us down on the heathery benn, me on you, in quolm unconscioune. To scand the arising. Out of Drumleek. It was there Evora told me I had best. If I ever. When the moon of mourning is set and gone."¹³⁰ In an instance of literature as scintillating as this one has recourse only to the internal coherence of the text, which materializes out of the web of associations that extend from the typographic and phonemic to the mythico-allegorical. To the extent that this excerpt can be taken at its surface-level meaning, it describes ALP's nostalgic wish to take a walk with HCE along the coast as they once used to before they grew old and weary, and before HCE was crippled with desire for his daughter. The entire scene, however, can be transposed into HCE's consciousness, even, and taken as not ALP's waking dream but Earwicker's, or some strange echo of HCE's desire sounding out in ALP's dreams. As the waking HCE fantasizes about his impossible desire for his daughter Issy, the residue of his dreaming relaxes his language of its semantic and logical strictures, revealing an undercurrent of meaning streaming through the expanse of language at its most primitive levels – at its most exuberant and wild levels. The phrase "me and you" slips into "me on you" as HCE's sexual longing emerges into consciousness via the assonance of "and" and "on." "In quolm unconscioune" is overdetermined as well, the forbidden aspect of the incestuous relationship making an appearance in the typographic similarity between "quolm" and "qualm," while the fantasized serenity is nevertheless preserved in the homophony of "quolm" and "calm." "Unconscioune" contains within it the words "unconscious" and "(un)conscience," indicating both the degree to which HCE recognizes his desire as forbidden – repressed from consciousness only to take root in the unconscious – yet still present and able to be expressed only in a climate free of prohibition and thus free of the restrictions of one's conscience. "Ounce"

¹²⁹ Elizabeth Kate Switaj, *James Joyce's Teaching Life and Methods* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 115.

¹³⁰ Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, 623.

suggests how much of this desire HCE can consciously stand. “To scand the arising. Out of Drumleek” contains both the bucolic image of surveying the horizon together (arising and horizon are near homophones) as well as the scand(alous) image of HCE’s tumescence in the presence of his daughter. In the fateful year of 1177 Sir Armoricus Tristram fought and won a battle at Howth, near a bridge called Evora, during the English invasion of Ireland. Regarding this scene Anthony Burgess writes,

Tristram of Lyonesse came to Ireland to convey Iseult, chosen bride, to his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. But Tristram and Iseult fell in love, and a train of subterfuge, guilt, and disloyalty was started. Both HCE’s preoccupations find potent expression here – aged Mark, too old for love, superseded by a younger man; the agonising sweetness of a forbidden relationship. But we can go further. Sir Armory Tristram (Tristram of Armorica, or Brittany) founded the St. Lawrence family of Howth in Dublin and built Howth Castle: a dream-identification of the two Tristrams is inevitable.¹³¹

And of course Joyce plays on the similarity between “Iseult” and “Issy” throughout *Finnegans Wake*, thus finding legendary avatars for the prosaic HCE and his daughter. Imagining the sun rising takes HCE in his dreaming to the reverse image – the setting of the moon of mourning, indicating in a semi-biblical tone¹³² that his congress with Issy is possible only in some otherworldly afterlife, perhaps the one awaiting him after he himself is dead and mourned. Desire circulates between these characters’ lives in a pattern of renewal and repetition, as the letter cast out to sea returns to the delta from which the novel itself begins again.

Obviously one can untangle these overlaid words and meanings and trace the mythical and historical allusions, but this would be in an effort to conjugate the unique literary discourse with a shared discourse of “reality.” Performing this kind of untangling is, I would argue, how the bulk of literature teachers understand their roles as teachers. The value or efficacy of this method is not something I wish to call into question, even if at the extreme it can serve to reduce literature to a kind of game of symbol substitution or, at its worst, an example of the exercise of power Barthes identifies in his Inaugural Lecture. As a supplement – or antidote – to this kind of teaching one can utilize, in the teaching, the very mechanics found in the literary object. The excerpt

¹³¹ Anthony Burgess, “Finnegans Wake: What It’s All About,” <http://www.metaportal.com.br/jjoyce/burgess1.htm>, accessed January 22nd, 2017.

¹³² “The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and your God will be your splendor. The sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself: for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” Isaiah 60:19-20.

above ceases to be, in this case, a token isolated for its value in demonstrating this or that, but rather becomes a question precisely for me, the teacher. Why, that is, has this sentence emerged from the wilds as my animal? Why this text? What is my place in the sea of language such that this or that has brushed against my skin from the depths? And my account of this place is not offered to lay any part of the text to rest but to invigorate it – my account of this place is to give others witness to the dimension of our being that is contained entirely within language and animated by desire, such that the student, the amateur, the one seeking through the image of the other the place of truth, may find his or her own place and sink, or breathe, or thrash. A familiarity with the multitude of ways in which language speaks beyond itself is necessary for the teacher to remain sensitive not only to the wild reach of literature but also to the wanderings of the students' speech, and again it is the discourse of the psychotic that provides the clearest example of how far language can take us in its own directions – literature especially.

We hang on to language, our harpoon inextricable, and draw nearer and nearer the flesh. Lacan's analysis of the structure of Schreber's discourse leads him to more and more elementary facets of language in general: the presence of a listener, the sentence as unit, and the signifier. Lacan is particularly interested in the way in which the meaning of a sentence depends on the presence of a listener, a listener who anticipates the meaning of the sentence, closing it off as a unit of meaning. The language of the psychotic presents itself as so impenetrable or nonsensical in part because of the degree to which the listener anticipates in a direction foreign or orthogonal to the sway of the psychotic's discursive landscape. If the one listening to the psychotic feels closed out of that discourse, or if the psychotic's discourse appears completely autistic, it is because the listener's anticipations fail, further isolating the psychotic and his or her experience of reality.

The language of the psychotic is not a cloak that covers the real, making it accessible to expression; it is a landscape populated by beings – or, rather, signifiers that seem to have the consistency of beings. Lacan attempts to characterize this being in “everyday” or “normal” terms with the following example:

think about this for a moment. You are at the close of a stormy and tiring day, you regard the darkness that is beginning to fall upon your surroundings, and something comes to mind, embodied in the expression, *the peace of the evening*.

What link is there between the expression *the peace of the evening* and what you experience? It's not absurd to ask oneself whether beings who didn't give this peace of the evening a distinct existence, who didn't formulate it verbally, could distinguish it from any of the other registers under which temporal reality may be apprehended.

Whitney, whose breath I hear all around me.

We can now observe that something quite different happens according to whether we, who have called up this peace of the evening ourselves, have formulated this expression before uttering it, or whether it takes us by surprise or interrupts us, calming the movement of agitation that dwelled within us. It's precisely when we are not listening for it, when it's outside our field and suddenly hits us from behind, that it assumes its full value, surprised as we are by this more or less endophasic, more or less inspired, expression that comes to us like a murmur from without, a manifestation of discourse insofar as it barely belongs to us, which comes as an echo of what it is that is all of a sudden significant for us in this presence, an utterance such that we don't know whether it comes from without or within – *the peace of the evening*.¹³³

Lacan characterizes a phrase like this as a being, as something that presents itself to us, as a signifier in the real, in more or less the same sense as the way Schreber's phrases present themselves to him. As he does throughout *Seminar III*, Lacan extends Schreber's experience to more general dimensions and claims that it is not only Schreber's reality that is being re-written by the symbolic, but that "reality [*per se*] is *at the outset* marked by symbolic nihilation."¹³⁴ That is, all the markings of reality that we presume to be the brute objects of that reality, are already marked by the symbolic in the form of being overwritten by it. An aspect of reality as apparent, for example, as the existence of day, is present as such only in relation, and in distinction, to night, the mutually constitutive relationship of these terms defines them, precisely, as symbolic.

How best to begin discussing the signifier, as such? Lacan gives the following example:

I'm at sea, the captain of a small ship. I see things moving about in the night, in a way that gives me cause to think that there may be a sign there. How shall I react? If I'm not yet a human being, I shall react with all sorts of displays, as they say – modeled, motor, and emotional. I satisfy the descriptions of psychologists, I understand something, in fact I do everything I'm telling you that you must know how not to do. If on the other hand I am a human being, I write in my log book – *At such and such a time, at such and such a degree of latitude and longitude, we noticed this and that.*

¹³³ Ibid. 139

¹³⁴ Ibid. 148.

This is what is fundamental. I shelter my responsibility. What distinguishes the signifier is here. I make a note of the sign as such. It's the acknowledgement of receipt that is essential to communication insofar as it is not significant, but signifying.¹³⁵

There is an excess in the signifier that cannot be reduced to a simple response to stimulus, as in the manifold forms of animal communication in mating, predation, mimicry, etc. What marks the signifier is not that one responds to it, but that one marks its arrival. This is an early formulation by Lacan, which will later be supplemented by the more widely disseminated view that the signifier is marked not only by one's acknowledging its reception, but by its capacity to deceive. It is not the fullness of the signifier that marks it as such, not the force it has to conjure meaning from the world, but rather its simple, empty arrival that distinguishes it, its capacity to signify this or that, which is to say to signify nothing. If for Freud human civilization is marked precisely by fundamental sexual prohibitions, Lacan simply opens up this insight to illuminate the fact that this prohibition structures human life entirely and is significant not because of the specific content of the prohibition (which could be anything), but because of its structuring capacity. That is, the fundamental prohibition is itself a signifier in Lacan's sense, which is what prompts Lacan to note that "if the Oedipus complex isn't the introduction of the signifier then I ask to be shown any conception of it whatever. [...] For us [analysts] the superego raises the question of what is the order of entrance, of introduction, of present instance, of the signifier, which is indispensable to the functioning of a human organism that has come to terms not only with a natural environment but with a signifying universe."¹³⁶ At the center of sexuality, which is the center of the Law, there must be the birth of the signifier and its entire ensuing network. This perspective is what allows Lacan to situate neurotic symptoms, which can be acknowledged as such only in their deviance from an order that is structured like a language, at the level of signifiers.

Some days I'll stand alone in the house, waiting for you. I try to conjure you from the woodsmoke, from the falling water, from the patterns in the mortar, from the buds of the impatiens hanging aloft – *touch-me-not*, they're called. Will you console me, I wonder, as I follow you toward death, eyes closed. It was to you first of all that I promised our mark in

¹³⁵ Ibid. 188 & 190.

¹³⁶ Ibid. 189.

the endless pages could not be effaced or mutilated or forgotten, and that was what I told you last before you were swept away from the world while I dreamt of a great darkness. Was it a dream of you?

Whitney, I speak to you like my absent God, my demon. I write to you to be surrounded by your silence, to feel the smallness of my secret heart. I write to you to hear myself in the place where I am not. I write to you hoping to reach the end of the wastes, the end beyond which there is only what? I write to you as to an abyss of desire, an empty sea, I write to you in hope of one thing. I write to you in hope of one thing. Please say it.

Lacan gives a detailed example of a case demonstrating the function of the signifier in the onset of neurotic symptoms and, ultimately, their role in the orienting of sexuality. The case is that of an hysteric. Lacan writes,

[the case] concerns an observation we owe to Joseph Eisler, a psychologist of the Budapest School, made at the end of the First World War, which recounts the story of a chap who was a tram conductor during the Hungarian Revolution.

He is thirty-three years of age, a Hungarian protestant – austerity, stability, peasant tradition. He left his family to move to the city at the end of his adolescence. His working life was marked by changes that were not without meaning – he started out as a baker, then he worked in a chemical laboratory, and finally he became a tram conductor. He used to ring the bell and punch the tickets, but he had also been a driver.

One day, alighting from his tram, he stumbled, fell, and was dragged a short distance. He had some swelling and his left side hurt. He was taken to hospital where they found that there was nothing wrong with him. He was given a few stitches in the scalp to close the wound. Everything was fine. He left after a thorough examination. They took a lot of x-rays, and they were quite certain that there was nothing wrong with him. He had put up a bit of a show.

And then, gradually, he fell victim to crises characterized by an increase in pain in his lower rib, a pain that spread out from this point and drove the subject into a state of increasing discomfort. He would stretch out, lie down on his left side, use a pillow to block it. And things stayed that way, getting worse as time went on. The crises would last several days, returning at regular intervals.

They kept getting worse, reaching the point of actually causing the subject to lose consciousness. Once again he was given a thorough examination. They found absolutely nothing. They suspected traumatic hysteria and sent him to our author, who analyzes him.¹³⁷

Upon entering the analysis, the subject's symptoms find more bewildered or curious expression, which Eisler is at pains to interpret but ultimately settles on an approach that would emphasize the features of an anal character, *en route* to offering the subject an interpretation regarding the subject's homosexualizing tendencies. The interpretation, however, has no effect on the subject's symptoms or behavior. As the analysis progresses Eisler searches for an earlier traumatic scene that the subject's accident has enlivened. Lacan goes on:

in the subject's childhood we find traumas by the bucketful. When he was very small, starting to crawl about the place, his mother had stood on his thumb. Eisler doesn't fail to point out that at this moment something decisive must have occurred, since according to the family tradition he is supposed to have started to suck his thumb after this incident. You see? – castration – regression. One can find others. However, there is one small difficulty, which is that what was decisive in the decompensation of the neurosis wasn't the accident but the radiographic examinations.

The subject's symptoms arise as a result of his encounter with the instruments required for the x-rays. What is important about the subject's encounter with the machine is not simply that it triggers his pain but that it compels the subject to ask a certain question of himself, and it is this question that divides him from the realm of the imaginary (where it is his relation to objects that provokes this or that behavior) to the symbolic: am I or am I not someone capable of procreating? The examination penetrates his interior and from this the question, perhaps seeking for a long time to find its voice, materializes. Lacan writes, "this question is obviously located at the level of the Other, insofar as sexuality is tied to symbolic recognition."¹³⁸ The subject is looking for his place in the symbolic – as either day or night, red or black, man or woman – and appealing to the Other for this. Lacan will henceforth refer to the question "am I a man or a woman?" as the hysteric's question because of its specific relation to the Other. Later, in "On a Question Prior to Any possible Treatment of Psychosis," Lacan adds that A is "the locus from which the question of [the subject's] existence may arise for him."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Ibid. 170.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Lacan, *Écrits*, 459.

As a sort of analog to the hysteric's question is the question of the obsessive, who asks, "am I dead or alive?" The subject's individual existence cannot be explained to him or her via the resources of the symbolic simply because death, like procreation, is "radically inassimilable to the signifier [...]. Why is [the subject] here? Where has he come from? What is he doing here? Why is he going to disappear? The signifier is incapable of providing him with the answer, for the good reason that it places him beyond death. The signifier already considers him dead, by nature it immortalizes him."¹⁴⁰

Procreation and death, then, are the two points around which these varieties of neurosis orbit, passing outside the realm of the Symbolic in their course. Obviously these two themes have an elemental role in the history of literature and art in general, but my interest is not in literary works that address the hysteric or obsessive in the form of content. I am interested in literature's capacity, as Kafka mentioned above, to affect us as an actual death or, as is depicted in some of Heidegger's works on poetry,¹⁴¹ as an actual coming to be, an introduction of something new and complete into the world all at once. The question is what sort of relationship the teacher has to these dimensions of literature and how, if at all, she can open a space for these effects to occur.

As I have already made clear, I believe the teacher's function does involve providing a structure that makes the fundamental symbolic insolubility of birth and death palpable to the student. To the extent that this experience is unsymbolizable, it has a kind of family resemblance to trauma or anarchy, which is one of the reasons *Finnegans Wake* is so polarizing a pedagogical object: it both courts and resists academic capture. If for now we call *Finnegans Wake*, with its overwhelming bounty, an hysteric or procreative work, one might compare it to the obsessive or morbid experience of reading Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which so powerfully explores the essential dimensions of the symbolic that its final moments depict a kind of almost suicidal apotheosis, like Oedipus vanishing into the sky.

Working backward through the language of neurotics leads us finally to a consideration of the signifier as such, the element upon which any possible language is predicated, language here considered as "the most fundamental of interhuman relations."¹⁴² It is important to stress the precise way in which Lacan intends this claim to be understood. Every qualification, opposition, nomination, etc. that comprises the fabric of human existence is grounded not in the "natural world" but in the symbolic. Even the basic elements of nature – say,

¹⁴⁰ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 179-180.

¹⁴¹ Specifically "On the Origin of the Work of Art," available in *The Basic Writings of Martin Heidegger*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1977).

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 197.

day and night, or man and woman – are themselves products of a signifying structure which provides the coordinates for human reality, including sexuality. Since this is generally one of the most contested tenets of Lacan's thinking I will justify it at a basic level. In Lacan's words:

the signifier *man* and the signifier *woman* are something other than a passive attitude and an active attitude, an aggressive attitude and a yielding attitude, something other than forms of behavior. There is undoubtedly a hidden signifier here which, of course, can nowhere be incarnated absolutely, but which is nevertheless the closest thing to being incarnated in the existence of the word *man* and the word *woman*.

If these registers of being are anywhere, in the final analysis it's in words. It isn't obligatory that they be verbalized words. It may be a sign on the wall, it may be, for the so-called primitive, a painting or a stone, but it's elsewhere than in types of conduct or patterns.

This is not new. When we say that the Oedipus complex is essential for the human being to be able to accede to a humanized structure of the real, it can't mean anything else.¹⁴³

Every neurosis is indicative of a disturbance at some level of the symbolic. I have already mentioned the questions by which hysteric and obsessive neuroses take root in questions of procreation and death that are in excess of the resources of the symbolic, and psychosis, for Lacan, “consists of a hole, a lack, at the center of the signifier.”¹⁴⁴ He goes on: “in psychosis it's the signifier that is in question, and as the signifier is never solitary, as it invariably forms something coherent – this is the very meaningfulness of the signifier – the lack of one signifier necessarily brings the subject to the point of calling the set of signifiers into question.”¹⁴⁵ This explains many of Schreber's symptoms – his neologisms, his cross-dressing, his homosexuality, his aposiopesis, and ultimately his conflicted relationship with God. The disturbances at the level of the signifier are for Schreber what produce his psychotic reality, a reality whose substance is not determined along the axis of material – “the reality of a wall we might bump into,” as Lacan puts it – but rather along the axis of meaning, making it a

¹⁴³ Ibid. 198. Later in the seminar Lacan makes the point again in different terms: “if we [analysts] now admit as a fact of common experience that not to have undergone the trial of Oedipus, not to have seen its conflicts and its dead ends open before one, and not to have resolved it, leaves the subject with a certain defect, in a certain state of inability to bring about the correct distance that is called human reality, this is because we hold that reality implies the subject's integration into a particular play of signifiers.” (Lacan, Sem. III, 249).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. 201.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 203.

question of “a meaningful reality, which doesn’t present us simply with footholds and obstacles, but a truth that verifies itself and installs itself by itself as orienting this world and introducing beings, to call them by their name, into it.”¹⁴⁶ Since, as I have already mentioned, it is the Oedipus complex that structures the real, Lacan is able to locate Schreber’s psychosis quite precisely: in the relation to the father. Lacan asks, “by what path does the dimension of truth enter in a living way into life, into the economy of man?” And his answer is “that it’s mediated by the ultimate meaning of the idea of the father.”¹⁴⁷ Not one’s actual father, that is, but the symbol of the father, what elsewhere Lacan calls the name-of-the-father. In *Seminar III*, Lacan’s primary efforts are to clarify the function of the father as symbol, which takes him directly to a consideration of the signifier, embodied in the questions, “what does the signifier essentially signify in its signifying role? What is the original and initiatory function, in human life, of the existence of the symbol qua pure signifier?”¹⁴⁸

Lacan cannot answer this question without a long excursion into some of the fundamental characteristics of human language, beginning with an analysis of metaphor and metonymy. He is led to this excursion by following the thread of Schreber’s interrupted sentences, which are clearly a symptom of his psychosis. Schreber, as his psychosis progresses, is flooded by the speech of the birds and the rays and yet their words are increasingly meaningless, i.e. their speech is indicative of a swelling of the signifier and diminishing of the signified. This prompts Lacan to notice that “even when [Schreber’s] sentences have a meaning, one never encounters anything that resembles a metaphor. But what,” Lacan asks, “is a metaphor?”¹⁴⁹

Metaphor can be understood as a mode of identification between words that completely disregards their lexical equivalence. That is, metaphor identifies a subject with a predicate that is outside the scope of its “accepted” meanings. The identification itself is maintained by the syntax of the sentence, without which the sentence – regardless of the quality of its metaphor – would be meaningless. Lacan’s famous example is the Victor Hugo line, “His sheaf was neither miserly nor spiteful.” The identification here is between Booz and the sheaf, it being out of the question that a sheaf could be neither miserly nor spiteful. In structural terms one could imagine metaphor as operating along a vertical axis, where any number of subjects could have the same predicates. What is important about the structural perspective is that it prioritizes the signifier over the signified, acknowledging that the meaning of a subject’s world is constantly mediated by the signifier, not comprised of signifieds. Lacan describes the stakes as follows:

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 204.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. 215.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 218

in misrecognizing the primordial mediating role of the signifier, in misrecognizing that it's the signifier that in reality is the guiding thread, not only do we throw the original understanding of neurotic phenomena, the interpretation of dreams itself, out of balance, but we make ourselves absolutely incapable of understanding what is happening in the psychoses.¹⁵⁰

Metonymy is a kind of counterpoint to metaphor. If above I distinguished a vertical dimension to metaphor, metonymy would be the horizontal dimension in which “one thing is named by another that is its container, or its part, or that is connected to it.”¹⁵¹ I call this horizontal because in metonymy the substitution is determined by features of the subject that are inherent to it – one’s list of attributes may stretch out indefinitely without ever leaving the domain of the original subject. A typical example of metonymy is the phrase *thirty sails* to describe thirty ships.

Your ashes.

You.

In the early summer mornings, honeybees at your blossoms, dusted in pollen, solace from the growing heat for the brief moments wrapped in your petals. You. Your ashes. Spread now so many years ago at this tree, roots crooking their fingers in the chaos of soil, does your heart beat here again? When the skies open and the rain flows through the veins of the bankside, are you there again? When the cicadas perch aloft in the hollows of your skin, their deaths rushing toward them, are you renewed, your voice, your eyes? In the summer the monarchs grasp you, newly emerged, the moisture dripping from their lashes, a silent heartbeat in the afternoon stillness, they wait, then take their jagged course through the air leaving one leaf quivering. You. And under your crown, in the failing autumn sun, beneath your branches as though to receive the laying on of hands I sit and wait for you to return to me.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 220.

¹⁵¹ Ibid. 221.

The red eyes of a black owl call forth the hunt.

Upon highlighting these two fundamental features of language Lacan returns to the neuroses:

the opposition between metaphor and metonymy is fundamental, since what Freud originally drew attention to in the mechanisms of neurosis, as well as in the mechanisms of the marginal phenomena of normal life or of dreams, is neither the metaphorical dimension nor identification. It's the contrary. In general what Freud calls condensation is what in rhetoric one calls metaphor, what he calls displacement is metonymy. The structuration, the lexical existence of the entire signifying apparatus, is determinant for the phenomena present in neurosis, since the signifier is the instrument by which the missing signified expresses itself. It's for this reason that in focusing attention back onto the signifier we are doing nothing other than returning to the starting point of the Freudian discovery.¹⁵²

Lacan presents the Freudian discovery in terms of the signifier: the interpretation of dreams, the function of memory, the significance of wit and jokes, the analytic technique, human sexuality, slips of the tongue and the forgetting of names or misplacing of objects, all of these have the signifier as their starting point. In one of Freud's more famous biographical anecdotes he demonstrates the central role of the signifier in the seemingly innocuous forgetting of the name "Signorelli." In *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* Freud describes the situation like this:

in 1898 I vainly strove to recall the name of the master who made the imposing frescoes of the "Last Judgment" in the dome of *Orvieto*. Instead of the lost name – *Signorelli* – two other names of artists – *Botticelli* and *Botraffio* – obtruded themselves, names which my judgment immediately and definitely rejected as being incorrect. When the correct name was imparted to me by an outsider I recognized it at once without any hesitation.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. VI*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1960), 4.

Freud's analysis of the slip proceeds along a chain of associations represented by signifiers. Freud discovers that he has forgotten the name while on a train to Herzegovina, and his forgetting of the name occurs immediately after a conversation with a fellow traveler regarding the Turks living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose confidence and deference to their doctors strikes Freud as noteworthy. Freud writes, "When one is compelled to inform [the Turkish patients] that there is no help for the patient, they answer: 'Sir (Herr [in German]), what can I say? I know that if he could be saved you would save him.' In these sentences alone we can find the words and names *Bosnia*, *Herzegovina*, and *Herr*, which may be inserted in an association series between *Signorelli*, *Botticelli*, and *Boltraffio*."¹⁵⁴ In connection with this particular memory of his Turkish patients there is another memory from which Freud immediately withdraws his attention, and this withdrawal proves to be the disturbance that resonates all the way to his forgetting of *Signorelli*. The memory is of his Turkish patients' valuing sexual pleasure above all else in life, such that sexual disturbances or incapacities affect them more profoundly than even the news of terminal illnesses. This disturbing memory, centered on the themes of death and sexuality, propels the chain of associations deeper still, to the recollection of a message Freud had recently received of the suicide of one of his patients, who ended his life on account of an incurable sexual disturbance. Freud received this news in the town of *Trafoi*. He writes, regarding this connection, "I know positively that this sad event, and everything connected with it, did not come to my conscious recollection on that trip in Herzegovina. However, the agreement between *Trafoi* and *Boltraffio* forces me to assume that this reminiscence was at that time brought to activity despite all the intentional deviation of my attention."

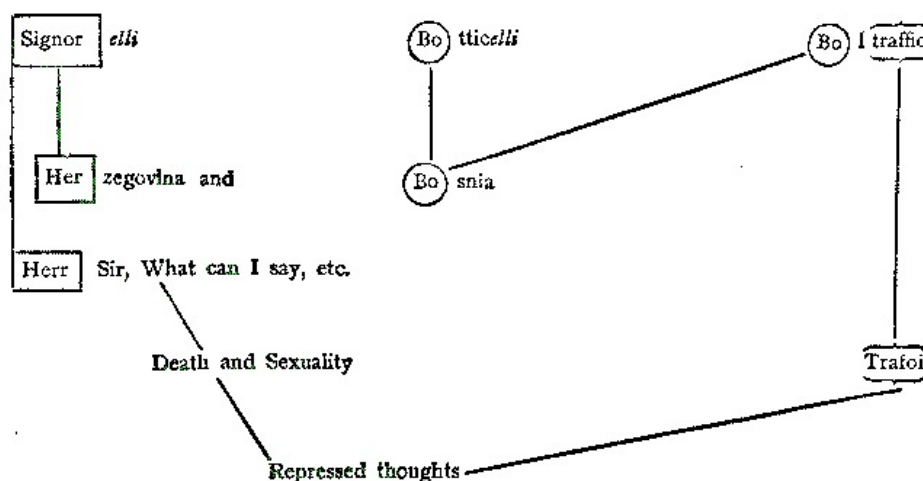
By analyzing the chain of associations – not simply their content but specifically their signifiers – Freud is led to one of the more thoroughgoing conclusions of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: the forgetting of names (and also slips of the tongue, misplacing objects, bungling sentences) is not accidental but motivated by unconscious repression and then carried out along an associative chain of signifiers. In Freud's case, his desire to forget the painful message received at *Trafoi* regarding the painful link between death and sexuality resulted in his being unable to remember the name *Signorelli*; the very forgetting of which is in the end an emblem of the original repressed content. Freud writes,

to be sure, I wished to forget something other than the name of the master of Orvieto; but this other thought brought about an associative connection between itself and this name [*Signorelli*], so that my act of volition missed the aim, and I *forgot the one* [the name *Signorelli*] *against my will*, while I *intentionally* wished to forget the other [the news of the suicide]. The disinclination to recall directed itself against the one content; the inability to remember appeared in another [...]. The

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 4-5.

substitutive names no longer seem so thoroughly justified as they were before this explanation. They remind me (after the form of a compromise) as much of what I wished to forget as of what I wished to remember, and show me that my object to forget something was neither a perfect success nor a failure.

Freud summarizes the linguistic ties in the following diagram:



Here we can see on the left the chain of associations that serve to cover over the painful thoughts regarding the impenetrable human experiences of sexuality and death. On the right we can see the means by which these repressed thoughts nevertheless find expression in the name *Boltraffio*, itself associated with the name of the artist *Boticelli*, and both artists' names appear in their phonemic connection to the name *Bosnia*, a name and location strongly linked, of course, to Herzegovina. Analyzing this diagram in *Seminar III*, Lacan concludes, "that's the mechanism. Its schema, analogous to that of a symptom, suffices to demonstrate the essential importance of the signifier. It's insofar as *Signorelli* and the series of names are equivalent words, translations of one another, metaphrases if you like, that the word is linked to repressed death, refused by Freud."¹⁵⁵ Later Lacan will call the link between these words metonymic, the link between the words being constituted in some cases by proximity (*Bosnia* and *Herzegovina*), in others by phonemic equivalence (*bo* in *Bosnia*, *Boltraffio*, and

¹⁵⁵ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 238-239.

Boticelli as well as the *traf* in *Trafoi* and *Boltraffio*), and yet again by translation (*Signor* and *Herr* being translations of one another). It is important to stress the degree to which these associations manifest themselves at the level of the signifier, not at the level of what they signify. The means by which the repressed thoughts make their appearance follow the specific logic made possible by the fact that the signifier, in itself, signifies nothing, but rather can yield meanings along several different axes at once.

The schema of the diagram, Lacan claims, is analogous to that of a symptom. The symptom is the forgotten word, the inescapable phrase, or the refrain. Something in the body, or in the destructive or baffling repetitions in a person's life, is insisting on being heard but has no voice of its own. Psychoanalysis has since its earliest stages of development been known as the talking cure, and this is because the patient burrows through their symbolic landscape in order ultimately to hear a voice, to receive a message that all the while is struggling to make itself heard in the form of the patient's illness.

I dreamt of you again last night. I always give my dreams as I remember them a coherence they don't have – something so abhorrent or elusive about their form. One wants simply to maintain order, perhaps. I remember watching you dance, the truncated swaying of your shoulders, your mincing steps, your fingers languid like moss in the stream, you standing against the brick, you weeping, you dying. And what I dreamt last night has today become a scattered mosaic of empty signs, of signs in abeyance, to be neglected until when? I return to them now, constellated as I imagine them to be across the floors where I once lay listening to you brush your teeth, these shards everywhere unburnished and silent beneath the dust. They rattle.

The blank, white page. My Bianca. Mother. A ringing silence.

Me.

Or, moving in a different direction, meaning is distilled upwards through signifiers, the unconscious heating the alembic. “If I told him would he like it,” asks Gertrude Stein, without asking. “Would he like it if I told him. Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it.” So much of Stein’s poetry can be taken precisely as an exercise in mapping out the landscape of associations radiating from any given phrase or signifier. Meaning in her poetry is only infrequently found at the level of what is signified by the words she employs but rather in the radical deconstruction of grammar, syntax, and punctuation she practices while modulating her signifiers at the phonetic or lexical level. Stanzas are unified not by any logical coherence but instead by their forming a sort of system of mutually orbiting signifiers. Sentences, in her work, can often be taken as signifying units in themselves, and punctuation is indicated less by traditional typographical markings but rather by the space on the page or the introduction of a new system of signifiers. For example,

If Napoleon if I told him if I told him if Napoleon. Would he like it if I told him if I told him if
 Napoleon. Would he like it if Napoleon if Napoleon if I told him. If I told him if Napoleon if Napoleon
 if I told him. If I told him would he like it would he like it if I told him.

The stanza’s unifying consistency is provided more by the cadence and assonance of the signifiers than by their lexical meanings. The actual historic figure of Napoleon seems so out of place in the poem that, as Freud does in the story above, one is tempted to reject this signifier as “incorrect” as regards to what Stein is “really getting at” in the poem. We take the signifier “Napoleon,” then, as a radically generalized metonymy for something like avatar of history (as Hegel took him, as Tolstoy’s Prince Andrei took him), lion, conqueror – master. Yet even this is perhaps too precise. The stanza does not receive a final punctuation until the next one begins, signaled by a series of line breaks and a fresh set of signifiers:

Now.

Not now.

And now.

Now.

Exactly as as kings.

Feeling full for it.

Exactitude as kings.

So to beseech you as full as for it.

Exactly or as kings.

The first four lines trace out almost perfectly the logic of the dream as Freud describes it in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Overdetermined elements of the dream are expressed in non-mutually-exclusive forms, or these elements are expressed via their opposing signifier as the repressed element takes every opportunity to find expression regardless of logic or consistency. The following line (“Exactly as as kings”) stitches this stanza to the preceding one via the metonymy between Napoleon and king, while at the same time the signifier “kings” is easily transformed into “askings,” which again refers to the preceding stanza – this time metaphorically – where each sentence of the stanza is a question the poet seems to be asking herself. Each of the kings lines are united by the inclusion of this play on words, while also sharing identical amphibrachic metre and, as in the preceding stanza, cycling through different but similar constellations of signifiers. In the interest of space I will not analyze the entire poem, which continues along the trajectory I have outlined here, slowly establishing a unique grammar whose dominant rules are not syntactic or logical but metonymic, phonemic, metrical, and spatial. Instead I address the obvious difference between Freud’s self-analysis regarding Signorelli and Stein’s (or so many other poets’) work as I have described it here.

Repression distorts Freud’s memory, preventing him from remembering the name of the artist whose place in Freud’s life is, in the end, not so grand except insofar as it, by chance, shares enough with the repressed thoughts at the level of the signifier to produce the lapse in his memory. As he stitches together his associations, depicted in the diagram above, he recovers the unpleasant thought and, in turn, reveals to himself the effect his patient’s suicide has had on him and his efforts to evade the pain associated with it. And while Stein’s poem shares much with Freud’s associations insofar as both are a crossing and re-crossing of signifiers, can Stein’s work be said to be the product of repression the way Freud’s word-diagram is?

For more than a few reasons I will not speculate as to what caused Gertrude Stein to write “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso.” What I will claim is that Stein’s insistence on evading the “thing” the poem is “about” at least mirrors Freud’s forgetting. Not lamenting this “forgetting” but rather embracing and celebrating it allows Stein to craft a work that is the product of language’s own feedback, whose rhythm and assonance establishes nodes that function as syntactical markings, that demonstrate that language has a structure independent of meaning, which is why it is almost nonsensical to ask what Stein’s poem “means.” Perhaps the poem makes a promise to the reader, or seems to. Perhaps Stein wants “one to know that language runs off the

rails concerning the magnitude of what she as a woman is capable of revealing concerning *jouissance*.¹⁵⁶ Does the poem instigate? If the poem is a voiding out of meaning within a vault of language, then perhaps it can be taken as a question for us regarding our desire – that is, will we cross the threshold, will we allow ourselves to occupy the empty space with our own speech, our own associations, or our own memories? “Let me recite what history teaches,” Stein concludes. “History teaches.” Our history, hidden somewhere behind the edifice of language’s daily routines, stirring.

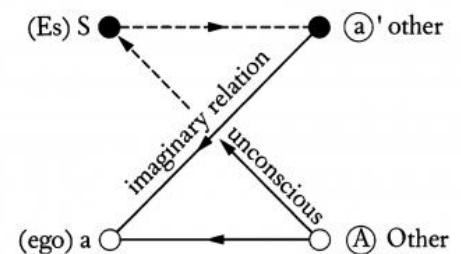
What would you tell me? Would you tell me someone is listening?

Lacan discovers in Freud’s forgetfulness a splitting that accords exactly with his L-schema. Freud forgets Signorelli, but several other names speak in Signorelli’s place. Who speaks these names? Lacan answers,

the other does, he who both is Freud and isn’t Freud, the other who is on the same side as the memory lapse, the other from whom Freud’s ego has withdrawn and who answers in its place. He [this other] doesn’t give the reply, since he is forbidden to speak, but he gives the beginning of the telegram, he answers, *Trafoi* and *Boltraffio*, which he makes the intermediary of the metonymy, the intermediary of the slide between *Herzegovina* and *Bosnia*.¹⁵⁷

Lacan then asks, “who is this other who speaks in the subject, of whom the subject is neither the master nor the counterpart, who is the other who speaks in him?” It is the unconscious, but it is crucial to note that the unconscious cannot be transformed into an ego, and the function of the ego is not to provide a unified or mythological knowledge of the true self. The ego does in fact provide us with a notion of totality, but ultimately the ego is only ever a product of a reflection or a mirage. Again, the ego – *a* in the diagram – constitutes itself

L SCHEMA



¹⁵⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 34.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 239

through an unending series of identifications with the other (*a'*), which is precisely what constitutes the imaginary relation.

Then there is, on the other hand, “the other who speaks from my place, apparently, this other who is within me. This is an other of a totally different nature from the other, my counterpart.”¹⁵⁸ This would be the other whose place is made known by means of unconscious expression, which is a reminder that, “the unconscious is essentially speech, speech of the other, and can only be recognized when the other sends it back to you.”¹⁵⁹ In terms of the L-Schema this statement means that not only is the Other recognized by means of this unconscious speech, but perhaps more importantly the subject, S, who receives the message. The analyst’s ideal position, as was already mentioned, is at A.

Freud’s anecdote of forgetting provides a model for a certain kind of reading, one that proceeds very similarly to “normal” reading but with the added complication that Freud is attempting to read in himself something that is both struggling to be made itself legible as well as dissembling itself regarding his own repressed thoughts. In this instance Freud is his own text, whereas when one teaches Stein’s poetry there is no Stein there to analyze: there are the teacher, the students, and the text. Freud’s associations take him nearer to a truth in himself, whereas the prevailing notion of teaching literature would assume that the teaching is in service of revealing a truth in the poem. Not as an alternative to this form of teaching but as a supplement, I imagine a pedagogy that allows a space for both students and teachers to see in the literature at hand an invitation to explore their associations, to accord these associations the same reverence often accorded to the words of the Poet or Author, to allow the poem to send the message *back*.

Beauty, this violent thing, wrathful, charging earthward with hooked
 prow, talons like shimmering spiders ready to clutch and claim and have
 you ever felt the force of the hawk’s scaled feet gripping you like a
 sprung trap? Have you? Or the stone unforgiving at your skull? The
 voice from nowhere that annihilates you.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 241.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

For Lacan these insights eventually shed light on one of Freud's last contributions to psychoanalytic theory: the compulsion to repeat. It is Lacan's insistence that Freud's discoveries were ultimately grounded in a theory of the signifier that explains the compulsion to repeat as not simply an affliction unique to neurotics but an essential aspect of human existence. For example, in the *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* Freud writes,

we have been struck by the fact that the forgotten and repressed experiences of childhood are reproduced during the work of analysis in dreams and reactions, particularly in those occurring in the transference, although their revival runs counter to the interest of the pleasure principle; and we have explained this by supposing that in these cases a compulsion to repeat is overcoming even the pleasure principle. Outside analysis, too, something similar can be observed. There are people in whose lives the same reactions are perpetually being repeated uncorrected, to their own detriment, or others who seem to be pursued by a relentless fate, though closer investigation teaches us that they are unwittingly bringing this fate on themselves. In such cases we attribute a "daemonic" character to the compulsion to repeat.

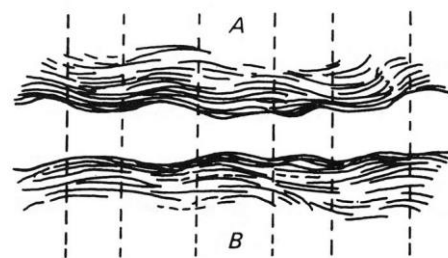
And, further, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud writes,

the impression given is of being pursued by a malignant fate or possessed by some "daemonic" power; but psychoanalysis has always taken the view that their fate is for the most part arranged by themselves and determined by early infantile influences. The compulsion which is here in evidence differs in no way from the compulsion to repeat which we have found in neurotics, even though the people we are now considering have never shown any signs of dealing with a neurotic conflict by producing symptoms. Thus we have come across people all of whose human relationships have the same outcome. [...] If we take into account observations such as these, based upon behaviour in the transference and upon the life-histories of men and women, we shall find courage to assume that there really does exist in the mind a compulsion to repeat which overrides the pleasure principle.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961), 23-24.

Lacan views these examples as evidence “of speech which returns in the subject until it has said its final word, speech that must return, despite the resistance of the ego which is a defense.”¹⁶¹ I have already noted how Lacan views the Oedipus complex from the perspective of symbolic structure; this structure persists until Freud’s final thoughts in *Moses and Monotheism* regarding the murder of the father and the original prohibition, which Lacan recasts in symbolic terms regarding the very notions of truth and justice. Lacan believes the essential Freudian question ultimately relates exclusively to the signifier, and the compulsion to repeat is a function of a speech that insists. Lacan writes, “Freud only ever asked himself one question – how can this system of signifiers [embodied in the Oedipus complex and the murder of the father] without which no incarnation of either truth or justice is possible, how can this literal *logos* take hold of an animal who doesn’t need it and doesn’t care about it – since it doesn’t at all concern his needs?”¹⁶² Or, how is it possible that speech continues to insist even as this insistence contributes directly to unpleasure? Why is that only in humans is there a beyond of the pleasure principle? Freud’s answer stems from his belief in an actual primordial murder of the father, Moses, which in turn instituted an original prohibition maintained throughout human history. In Lacan’s words, “man is in fact possessed by a discourse of the law and he punishes himself with it in the name of this symbolic debt which in his neurosis he keeps paying for more and more. [...] From the Freudian point of view man is the subject captured and tortured by language.”¹⁶³ This captivation and torture is more pronounced in the neuroses, but we are all subject to it.

Again, it is this general captivation by language that compels Lacan to undertake such a detailed analysis of the elements of language, ultimately tracing his way back to the signifier/signified dichotomy made famous by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure’s analysis of the relationship between the signifier and the signified begins with the following diagram. The upper amorphous stream (A) is a representation of thought, so represented because “psychologically our thought – apart from its expression in words – is only a shapeless and indistinct mass. [...] Without the help of signs we would be unable to make a clear-cut, consistent distinction between two ideas. Without language, thought is a vague, uncharted nebula.”¹⁶⁴ The bottom stream (B), equally amorphous, is the body of sounds, of “phonic substance, [which is] neither more



¹⁶¹ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 242.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁶³ *Ibid.* 242-243.

¹⁶⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course on General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin, ed. Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 111-112.

fixed nor more rigid than thought; it is not a mold into which thought must of necessity fit but a plastic substance divided in turn into distinct parts to furnish the signifiers needed by thought.”¹⁶⁵ Language, then, what Saussure nominates as “the linguistic fact”, can be represented by the series of vertical dotted lines, “contiguous subdivisions marked off on both the indefinite plane of jumbled ideas (A) and the equally vague plane of sounds (B).”¹⁶⁶ Lacan interprets Saussure’s diagram as follows: “[the upper level] we shall provisionally call the sentimental mass of the current of discourse, a confused mass in which appear units, islands, an image, an object, a feeling, a cry, an appeal. It’s a continuum, whereas underneath is the signifier as a pure chain of discourse, a succession of words, in which nothing is isolable.”¹⁶⁷ Lacan, however, is not satisfied with Saussure’s diagram: “his solution is inconclusive, since it leaves the locution and the whole sentence problematic.”¹⁶⁸

“No signifier is isolable,”¹⁶⁹ claims Lacan. Signifiers reach; they scan. They associate. They crystalize into a unit only at the completion of the sentence, a fact more apparent in Greek or Latin, for example, where the syntax and arrangement of words is totally unrestricted. The unit, that is, is not signifying outside of a certain binding of the signifier and signified, a binding achieved by what Lacan will call the *point de capiton*. To demonstrate this, Lacan simply begins with a given unit, the word *Yes*. “*Yes*. And, since French, not English is my language, what comes next is – *Yes, I come into his temple to worship the Eternal Lord*.”¹⁷⁰ Obviously, the word *yes* has a sense, but no matter how broad one takes this sense to be, it will not have the sense it does in Lacan’s locution until the entire sentence is bound in place by the *Eternal Lord*. Lacan concludes, “we are, here, in the order of signifiers, and I hope to have made you feel what the continuity of the signifier is. A signifying unit *presupposes* the completion of a certain circle that situates its different elements.”¹⁷¹ And later, “whether it be a sacred text, a novel, a play, a monologue, or any conversation whatsoever, allow me to represent the function of the signifier by a spatializing device, which we have no reason to deprive ourselves of. This point around which all concrete analysis of discourse must operate I shall call a quilting point [*point de capiton*].”¹⁷²

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Lacan, *Sem. III*, 261.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 262.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 263.

¹⁷² Ibid. 267.

The quilting point represents not only a bond between signifier and signified but, like the creases that radiate out from the upholsterer's knot, serves as the nexus about which countless other avenues of meaning take form. Lacan describes the implications of the *point de capiton* as follows:

the schema of the quilting point is essential in human experience. Why does this minimal schema of human experience which Freud gave us in the Oedipus complex retain its irreducible yet enigmatic value for us? And why privilege the Oedipus complex? Why does Freud always want to find it everywhere, with such insistence? Why do we have here a knot that seems so essential to him that he is unable to abandon it in the slightest particular observation – unless it's because the notion of father, closely related to that of the fear of God, gives him the most palpable element in experience of what I've called the quilting point between the signifier and signified?¹⁷³

This is why the Oedipus complex plays such a fundamental role in psychoanalysis: it is the first relation that takes on a signifying structure. Schreber's delusion is a result of the fact that "to all appearances [he] lacks this fundamental signifier called *being a father*."¹⁷⁴ To compensate for this lack he imagines himself as the wife of the ultimate father, God, and further imagines that he must be impregnated by this God in order for the function of *being a father* to materialize.

A goblin comes to me and tells me I enjoy this. One tooth quivering in her black gum as if stabbed there.

Is she right?

¹⁷³ Ibid. 268.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 293.

The implications for Lacan's return to Freud and his emphasis on the elementary function of the signifier can be followed in several directions. I have at least offered some examples of how literature can be heard differently if it is approached as the analyst approaches the psychotic. But there is very little in Lacan's teachings that can be directly applied to education, insofar as Lacan's teachings are structured by a very specific battery of experiences: that of the analyst and analysand interacting with one another in an analysis. Nearly all of what psychoanalysis offers educators must be applied, as it were, atmospherically. The same is true for how one writes about or criticizes Lacan from within the context of the university, for the university exists only because it is structured by a certain relationship to knowledge, and its boundaries are continually reinforced by various rituals and habits that range from the almost comic obeisance to these rituals all the way up to the syntax of one's speech. This is an organizing structure, and for every truth or fact it permits to be revealed there is another that is, as if out of necessity, neglected, obscured, or dismissed. There is a voice that cannot be heard by the university. Lacan says, "language is the condition of the unconscious," and in doing so upsets the priority of what seems so intuitive. Surely language is what Rousseau imagined it to be, some slowly evolved series of increasingly more specific cries that were originally only the effusion of animal drives. This presumption gives a compelling history to the origin of the human animal and permits one to believe that language is our organ to use as we see fit and that the world of the symbolic and the world of the real are identical, overlaid one upon the other. This presumption allows us to believe that it was the human animal who invented language, who has come to master it and will by its means extend its mastery over all possible knowable things. Thus when the university hears Lacan say, "language is the condition of the unconscious," implying as this does that in fact it is language that *precedes* anything that could be considered the monumental effusion of the instincts, that it is language that, in an instant, produced a rift between the symbolic and real that can never be repaired, the university simply translates it otherwise: the unconscious is the condition of language.¹⁷⁵ The following and final chapter attempts to find a place for the unconscious within the university.

Seminar XVII

¹⁷⁵ Lacan discusses this example in more detail in *Seminar XVII: The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007), 41). The scene in general reminds one of Alice's tea party with the Hatter and the March Hare.

“*What you say is always decentered in relation to sense, you shun sense*”, claimed a member of Lacan’s 17th seminar audience. “This is perhaps why my discourse,” replies Lacan, “is an analytic discourse. It’s the structure of analytic discourse to be like that.”¹⁷⁶

One can only go so far along the path of summarizing this seminar in the context of the university; something analogous to a translation must occur. Referring to Anika Lemaire’s university thesis, eventually published as *Jacques Lacan* and representing perhaps the first “study” of Lacan’s work from within the university, Lacan says,

this thesis [...] retains its value [despite being written from within the academy], its value as an example in itself, its value also as an example because of what it promotes to the level of distortion, in some way an obligatory one, of a translation into the university discourse of something that has its own laws.

I have to unravel these laws. They are the ones that claim to give at least the conditions of a properly psychoanalytic discourse.¹⁷⁷

Obviously this document that I am currently writing is not immune to Lacan’s insight here. My interest in amalgamating Lacan’s work and something like a literary pedagogy has this moment of translation to consider. The truths of psychoanalysis, which I claim are essential for renewing our (i.e. those of us in the university) thinking about the possibilities of teaching literature, fly from the spotlight of university discourse, whose own *ethos* is characterized by the assumption that the real is completely accessible to the symbolic. Here Lacan demurs, saying that, “if there is one thing that our entire approach delimits, and that has surely been renewed by analytic experience, it is that the only way in which to evoke the truth is by indicating that it is only accessible through a half-saying, that it cannot be said completely, for the reason that beyond this half there is nothing to say.”¹⁷⁸ This is what justifies, in Lacan’s pedagogy, his efforts to leave in his work room to be misunderstood, his elliptical or elusive style, and his habit of posing questions without ever completely answering them or addressing them directly. It also explains his interest in enigmas, which leave some portion

¹⁷⁶ Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 146.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 51.

of the thing concealed and unsaid. An enigma is not simple a question, however, “the enigma is something that presses us for a response in the name of a mortal danger.”¹⁷⁹

So I will begin this final section with a bit of an enigma, a question Lacan asks at the end of the second session of Seminar 17: “the analyst makes himself the cause of the analysand’s desire. What does this strange notion mean?”¹⁸⁰ And similarly, in the context of this project, does one dare ask whether the teacher makes herself the cause of the students’ desire? What would this mean?

Discourse of the master



It is simplest to situate desire in the discourses by beginning with the master’s discourse. In Lacan’s earliest depictions of this discourse S_1 has a rather precise meaning: it is an “intervening” signifier, intervening in the mass of signifiers already forming a

network, which is represented by S_2 . Within this equation are a few other important terms – “knowledge” and the “subject” [$\$$] – about which Lacan says,

knowledge initially arises at the moment at which S_1 comes to represent something, through its intervention in the field defined [...] as an already structured field of knowledge [i.e. S_2]. And the subject is its supposition, its *hypokeimenon*, insofar as the subject represents the specific trait of being distinguished from the living individual.¹⁸¹

That is, knowledge appears in the subject through the intervention of S_1 within the network of S_2 . This intervention “locates a moment,” akin to the moment of (mis)recognition during the mirror stage: this moment “says that it is at the very instant at which S_1 intervenes in the already constituted field of the other signifiers [...] that, by intervening in another system, this $\$$, which I have called the subject as divided, emerges.”¹⁸² This split, characterized by a gap, is represented as a loss, and this loss “is what the letter to be read as object a designates.” Like the dialectic between the master and bondsman articulated by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of*

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 103.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 38.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. 13.

¹⁸² Ibid. 15.

Spirit, the master's discourse is rooted in an historical moment (one that Marx later will articulate more precisely in politico-economic terms). The master and the slave were two components of some of the earliest forms of civilization (Lacan refers to ancient Greece): the master is the one with the power, the slave is the one with the *savoir-faire*. Lacan describes the development of the master's discourse as a kind of theft: the slave knows how to do this or that, but it is the master who intervenes in the matter of *articulating* this knowledge – that is, transmitting it – “which means [this knowledge] can be transmitted from the slave's pocket to the master's.”¹⁸³ For Lacan, this operation signals the origin of philosophy: “philosophy in its historical function is this extraction, I would almost say this betrayal, of the slave's knowledge, in order to obtain its transmutation into the master's knowledge.”¹⁸⁴ Not because the master has a desire to know, but because the master has a desire that things work (for him) – that he be in a position to enjoy without knowing or working. Working for the master is what the slave does, and just as Hegel noted that insofar as it is the slave, not the master, who first embarks on the path to self-consciousness via the products he or she makes for the master, so here does Lacan note that the master's desire is in a sense managed by the slave, who anticipates that desire. What earlier was stolen at the level of knowledge is in a way regained by the slave in terms of desire, insofar as the slave is able to anticipate the master's desire. But, because of this, the master's desire cannot be said to be his own but rather is the Other's,¹⁸⁵ which is why Lacan claims that knowledge (in this case the slave's knowledge) is the Other's *jouissance*, insofar as the master can only enjoy what the slave produces for the Other. This Other is neither the slave nor the master but rather a field that emerges once S₁ intervenes in S₂, the Other that is the residue of the splitting Lacan already isolated in the mirror stage and which also produces the gap, the loss, *a*, here felt by the slave as a loss of *jouissance* that is accounted for elsewhere as a surplus: “under the Other it is the place where loss is produced, the loss of *jouissance* from which we extract the function of surplus *jouissance*.”¹⁸⁶

The position of each of the elements indicates its function within the discourse. Lacan gives different names to these places throughout the seminar: three different schema in total:

1) <u>master signifier</u>	<u>knowledge</u>
subject	<i>jouissance</i>

¹⁸³ Ibid. 22.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ “Already it is clear that the master's desire is the Other's desire, since it's this desire that the slave anticipates.” (Lacan, *Seminar XVII*, 38).

¹⁸⁶ Ibid. 93.

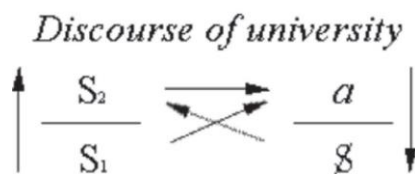
2) desire Other

truth loss

3) agent work

truth production

The varied nomenclature allows the elements of the discourses to take on different inflections. At one point in the seminar Lacan refers to the first position (the upper-left) as the “dominant” position – not in the sense of dominance but rather in the sense the term has in music – and says “one can give different substances to this dominant according to the discourse. Take the dominant in the master’s discourse, whose place is occupied by S_1 . If we called it ‘the law’ we would not fail to open the door to a number of interesting observations.” And later he adds, “at the level of the hysteric’s discourse it is clear that we see this dominant appear in the form of a symptom. It is around the symptom that the hysteric’s discourse is situated and ordered.”¹⁸⁷ Later still he says, “the [upper-left position] will be said to function as the place of orders, of the command.”¹⁸⁸ In the context of the university discourse this command will be heard as the command to know, to know more, to know everything.¹⁸⁹ And finally the dominant position, the place of the command, in the discourse of the analyst is described as follows: “it is the object a , that is to say with what presents itself for the subject as the cause of desire, that the psychoanalyst offers himself as the endpoint for this insane operation, a psychoanalysis, insofar as it sets out on the trace left by the desire to know.”¹⁹⁰



We move now to the university discourse, in order to note immediately the affinity, or perhaps collusion is a better word, between the master’s and university discourses. S_2 , knowledge at large, in the university discourse occupies the place of the command, and beneath it in the place of truth is S_1 , the master signifier. Lacan asks, “why does it come about that one finds

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. 43.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid. 102.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid. 105.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 106.

nothing else at the level of [the university discourse's] truth than the master signifier, insofar as it brings the master's order?"¹⁹¹ The collusion between these discourses becomes apparent when one realizes that it is a continual seesawing between the master's and university discourses that constitutes the progress of the sciences. In the university discourse the command to know is made to *a*, which Lacan identifies as the student. The student works, the product of her labour is, just as are the products produced by the slave, co-opted, acceding to the position of knowledge only after being ratified by the master. Prior to this ratification Lacan calls this knowledge "unnatural" and summarizes the progression as that which "brings an unnatural knowledge out of its primitive localization at the level of the slave into the dominant place, by virtue of having become pure knowledge of the master, ruled by his command."¹⁹² In this way the university discourse, which in this particular moment of his seminar Lacan equates with the discourse of science, is perpetually at the service of the master's discourse, which perhaps above all is a discourse devoted to maintaining dominance over the slave.

I ask: the teaching of literature transpires at the university, does this mean it is (necessarily?) structured by the university discourse?

Erode.

Erode.

Erode.

Entropy.

All our lost things consigned to erratic orbits, revolutions too vast and strained and mutable for us to map, the whole theatre spinning itself slowly to silence, quiescence. You have not appeared in my sky for months except as paraselenae, as your ghost and its shadow, as you and your echo, as two silent and spectral creatures attending me, or hunting me. What lament will transform me, my flashing antlers unfurling, that you might devour me?

The short answer is: yes. The university itself in fact only exists as a consequence of a unique structure of discourse. The essential distinction to note here is that between speech and discourse: the former indicates that actual utterances exchanged by subjects in this or that setting, whereas the latter is a consequence of certain

¹⁹¹ Ibid. 104.

¹⁹² Ibid.

relations that materialize as a result of, or are emblematic of, a unique social structure. Discourse, for Lacan, is always comprised of only four elements, and the style of discourse can be modulated according to how these elements are situated with respect to one another. These elements are distilled from the most basic elements of language; they do not reveal any answers as to the origin of language but are instead the components without which no variety of discourse could really be imagined, and these components are the aforementioned S_1 , S_2 , $\$$, and a . S_2 represents the entire body of signifiers, one that is already from the outset considered to be complete. S_2 represents “a signifying battery that we have no right, ever, to take as dispersed, as not already forming a network of what is called knowledge.”¹⁹³ There is a kind of temporality or sequencing to the arrival of knowledge on the stage, one that requires S_1 and $\$$. I have already commented on Lacan’s examples of *day* and *night*, meant to illustrate how an entire signifying universe arrives all at once at the moment one signifying unit is born. The word *day* takes on significance only by a dichotomistic relation with another signifier, which in turn provides a blueprint for all possible signifying operations, and this is why Lacan insists that this field is already a network. In his own words: “knowledge [i.e. S_2] initially arises at the moment at which S_1 comes to represent something, through its intervention in the field defined, at the point we have come to, as an already structured field of knowledge. And the subject [i.e. $\$$] is its supposition, its *hypokeimenon*, insofar as the subject represent the specific trait of being distinguished from the living individual.”¹⁹⁴ This operation can be summed up by one of Lacan’s more famous aphorisms that the signifier is that which represents a subject to another signifier;¹⁹⁵ at the moment the intervening signifier S_1 appears, $\$$ appears as well. And as I have already outlined at length, the subject, as divided, is already marked by a loss, and this loss is represented in Lacan’s terms as a .

To repeat, for Lacan these elements can be situated in four cardinal ways, each orientation representing a unique discourse, and each element taking on a slightly different connotation depending on the discourse it structures. Being situated in the university, the possibilities of discourse are already qualified by the structure. S_2 occupying the dominant position in the university discourse indicates that what is essential about this discourse, and the institution it makes possible, is knowledge, knowing everything, constructing the world in terms of what is accessible to knowledge, acknowledging objects only because of their capacity to be known.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 13.


¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 29.

Lacan recognizes in this particular discourse (and Žižek mentions this above) a mirroring of capitalist exploitation that itself follows from the master's discourse. The master/capitalist frustrates the slave (the worker, the student, the proletariat) by rendering her knowledge useless, both insofar as she is unable to use it for herself and also by overpowering it with hyper-productive technologized forms of that knowledge that increase the master's surplus at accelerating rates. The university compensates the slave (the worker, the student, the proletariat) to some degree by offering no end to knowledge, but this knowledge is knowledge that has already been calibrated according not exactly to the master's interests but more to the master's understanding of how the world functions. Like the slave in Plato's *Meno*, the grandness of the value of what is given to the boy is not questioned (though knowing the square on the diagonal is clearly useless to the slave), and it also does nothing really to free or enlighten the boy who has only moved from a master to a master's knowledge. This is why Lacan claims that the all the slave has acquired in becoming a student is a new master.¹⁹⁶

It is important to note at this point what role desire plays in the discourses of the master and university. In neither of these instances can it really be said to play any active role at all: Lacan mentions several times that in the case of the master desire is in a way irrelevant; the master does not desire what the slave produces as much as require it in order to perpetuate a specific order. And in any case the slave knows the master's desire far better than the master himself since the slave's products take shape only with respect to this abstract desire. In the case of the university discourse, where knowledge (S₂) plays the dominant role, desire can again be seen as playing more of a structural than dynamic role: the imperative of the university to know, and continue to know, and to know more and more, is a consequence of the fact that as knowledge is acquired it simultaneously expands its domain, opening new regions that must be acquired or colonized. The university houses the fantasy that everything can be known – the fantasy of a totality-knowledge, Lacan calls it.¹⁹⁷ Psychoanalysis intervenes at

Discourse of hysteria



this point, since it was Freud's discovery of the unconscious that introduced a knowledge that, precisely, is not known. And Freud made this discovery by listening to the discourse of the hysteric.

This discourse would exist whether Freud was there to hear it or not, because it is founded not on any specific symptom or neurosis, but is founded in the sexual relation, reflected in the hysteric's question: "am I a man or a woman?" which at heart is a question rooted in the basic signifying structure of language.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid. 32.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 33.

As mentioned above, this question is at its base a question of signifiers. What gives this discourse its substance, though, is that the question is addressed to an other, to one supposed to know and to have an answer. More importantly, as the hysteric asks this question she at the same time solicits the desire of the master, S₁, posing as a kind of sphinx – who of course is always armed with a riddle. While in this way she does manage to obtain some kind of power or advantage over the master (by being the object/cause of his desire), she is also at least in some way eager to be whatever it is he answers.

All speaking subjects are split, which is why some have taken the hysteric's discourse as a model for all discourse.¹⁹⁸ Within this discourse, though, we can also interpret \$ as the symptom, as that which speaks apart from or in addition to the subject, who now is in a sense alien from herself due to her "symptomatic tearing apart."¹⁹⁹ In an appeal for recognition or restoration, a question is addressed to the master (S₁, analyst, priest, teacher, guru, etc.) who is called upon to respond to this demand, producing what has come to be a very long history of diagnoses, accumulated as an enormous body of knowledge (S₂). What the discourse reveals, however, is that all answers to the hysteric's question attempt to restore to her a wholeness that she cannot accept since the truth revealed here is that there is always a loss, a gap, or an excess that can never be accounted for by knowledge. This appropriation by S₂ amputates the hysteric's symptom, which nevertheless persists as *a*, the *plus-de-jour* which characterizes her as hysteric in the first place and is an emblem of her somewhat truculent relationship with language. To repeat a quotation from above, "what hysterics ultimately want one to know is that language goes off the rails concerning the magnitude of what she as a woman is capable of revealing concerning *jouissance*."²⁰⁰ And in the clinical setting it is this very going-off-the-rails that establishes the analytic scene in the form of free association and provides the pathways of the treatment: "how could saying no-matter-what lead anywhere, unless it was determined that there is nothing random in this production of signifiers that, simply because it involves signifiers, does not bear upon this knowledge that is not known, and which is really doing the work?"²⁰¹ Ultimately, then, it is the business of the analyst to somehow procure and prolong this production of signifiers until, ideally, the hysteric comes to see herself as answer to her own question.

¹⁹⁸ "Immersed in language, the subject is hysterical as such." Gérard Wajcman, *Le maître et l'hystérique* (Paris: Navarin, 1982), 29.

¹⁹⁹ Lacan, *Sem. XVII*, 175.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 34.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.* 35.

Prolonging this speech, however, is always challenged by the hysteric who is making her appeal to one that is positioned as the master, as the one either in possession of the knowledge required to resolve the riddle, or one who, when asked, will not be able to resist trying his hand at it. The hysteric appeals specifically to the master in order to maintain what in her is hysterical.²⁰² “The hysteric wants a master. She wants the other to be a master, and to know lots of things, but at the same time she doesn’t want him to know so much that he does not believe she is the supreme price of all his knowledge.”²⁰³ Without her, there is no desire to know on the part of the S_1 – she solicits this desire in an effort to obtain some token of knowledge regarding her illness, only to dismiss it or demonstrate its ineffectiveness.

Discourse of the analyst



This brings us finally to the analyst’s discourse, which demonstrates how the analytic scene functions. Here the analyst is represented by a , which itself represents what has been lost as a result of the discourse of the analysand. The analytic position only exists insofar as one believes this loss to be reparable in some way, and the analyst can remedy it: in Lacan’s words, “an analysis is what one expects from an analyst,”²⁰⁴ but what one expects from an analyst – and this is why S_2 is positioned in the place of truth – is that his knowledge will function in terms of truth. As the discourse illustrates, the analyst addresses himself to the split subject, but does so silently and with an aim to get the subject to produce what, for her, functions as the master signifier S_1 , the unary trait, the signifier around which the rest of the subject’s symbolic universe takes form, and this universe is represented as S_2 . Knowledge functioning in the place of truth is what characterizes the speech of the analyst, which takes the form of an interpretation. Yes, the analyst eventually offers an interpretation, but it is rooted in the speech of the analysand and as such is really only a half-saying, a veiled speech, an enigma, a kind of citation. In Lacan’s words:

interpretation – those who make use of it are aware of this – is often established through an enigma. It is an enigma that is gathered as far as possible from the threads of the psychoanalysand’s discourse, which you, the interpreter, can in no way complete on your own, and cannot consider to be an avowal without lying. It is a citation that is sometimes taken from the very same text, on the other hand, from a given statement – such as the one that can pass for an avowal, provided only that you connect it to the whole context. But you are thereby appealing to whoever is its author.²⁰⁵

²⁰² One recalls Freud’s observation that neurotics love their illness like they love themselves.

²⁰³ Ibid. 129.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. 53.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 37-38.

The analyst has only the speech of the analysand at his disposal when it comes to offering the interpretation – it is not the analyst who is supposed to know, but the rather the analysand, within whom the knowledge as truth resides. “This knowledge of which he who is prepared, in advance, to be the product of the psychoanalysand’s cogitation, that is, the psychoanalyst, makes himself the underwriter, the hostage – insofar as, as this product, he is in the end destined to become a loss, to be eliminated from the process.”²⁰⁶ And this is why the analyst is represented by *a*, the lost object and also the cause of desire.

I asked above whether the teacher can be the cause of the students’ desire. Are we in a position yet to answer this question? One might envision a relationship similar to that between Socrates and Alcibiades: Socrates seeming to house some grand secret of knowledge or pleasure (the *agalma*) that allures Alcibiades almost to the point of madness, but which ultimately is supposed to be edifying even as it is intensely frustrating. Or we can imagine a teaching that imitates Cixous’s description of writing, an endless not-arriving, an interaction with texts that does not circumscribe, delimit, corner, or domesticate them in any way but rather pursues them like a nomad through the deserts or the *Pequod* through the seas, hounding some silent object, an object in which one sees some dimension of oneself, as Ahab’s leg is literally a part of the white whale, but the identification is tenuous, phantasmal, monstrous, unspeakable. One imagines a book that affects one like a suicide, and what is Ahab’s monomaniacal lust for revenge but a form of suicide? We know Ishmael is the literal teacher, and but for him there would be no tale at all, yet it was his own growing distaste of his role as schoolmaster that drove him to decide between suicide and sailorhood, to replace his Cicero for Ahab, his world of knowledge for the white whale. Yes, and my own pursuit of death here, chasing a ghost for years and where does she take me? Into what realm of truth? Where have I not-arrived?

Freud included psychoanalysis in the list of impossible professions, a list that included healing, politics, and education, all of which are so characterized because they cannot fail to produce results adequate to the less wild trades. Allowing myself a bit of room to speculate here, I would say that education is becoming more possible, in the sense that it is recalibrating its understanding of itself and its objectives in order to produce more clearly delimited results. Perhaps this is its own form of the death drive, the drive for the stillness and peace the results from the idea that the bureaucratic structure has successfully covered the field of education with its own symbolic force – that all educational procedures and problems and methods can be understood in terms organized by the bureaucratizing master’s discourse, and that all phenomena that threaten this order are either exiled or colonized.

Let the ghosts in. Follow them. They are wondrous strange. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 38.

I hasten behind you, Whitney. But how you flee. You, star. You, bird. What creature was I, that evening I first stepped into your home, you in one of your dresses smiling, rushing, tending to a pot of yams or kale? You were once alive. You were once alive. And now so many of us bear the scars of your death upon our hearts as sharks do upon their unearthly hides, swimming alone into their distant corners of the black sea, seeking, seeking, seeking.

Part II: Paracite

Why have I done this? Forced these pieces together in this way? I ask in anticipation of questions that may arise in the mind of a reader, though I don't necessarily expect them to.

This preface, unlike others, cannot summarize or distil any of what follows. What follows, by the way, is a sort of concatenation, a collage, an assault of writing – not all of it mine – assembled in what can be characterized neither as a deliberate order nor a haphazard pastiche. I assembled it all under the hypothesis that whatever found its way in would engender – in me, in whomever – associations, associations that will not be foreclosed or buried by the action of any overly apparent or muscular thesis. The thesis is this hypothesis.

The existence of this writing, the materialization of my sustained efforts, implies my regard for these associations, my valuing them. One could deduce, from the fact of this regard, certain literary, philosophical, or ethical stances tied to certain schools or theorists. While there may be a range of possible affinities, for me personally I consider them to be more or less exclusively Freudian and Lacanian, these being the only theorists I consider myself to be acceptably familiar with when it comes to the matter of declaring allegiances.

(At the sub-thematic level I profess a concern for education, specifically the teaching of literature at the university level, though my expertise here is confined to my having been a student of literature in several years of university education and my having taught a few courses. Since education is so complicated and specialized as to constitute its own Faculty on most university campuses, it therefore also has a ritualized and credentialized aspect, which is not completely insignificant since this aspect is a major player in the constitution of knowledge within the discipline as well as a means by which the borders of the discipline are determined and the criteria of its knowledge are established. This is all obvious, and I mention it only to emphasize that my thinking regarding education comes from a perspective that is almost entirely outside of these borders. This admission – I am thinking again of possible readers – will make much of what follows literally useless and senseless if considered from the disciplinary perspective. From the issues that I have in my limited contact with the discipline understood to be significant for it, there is almost nothing in what follows of value, nothing of import.

This remoteness erases all the details comprising education's academic constitution, and from this distance education's disciplinary boundaries disappear into the horizon. From where this work is situated, education is not an academic discipline but rather, as they say, part of the human condition.)

But though this preface will not summarize, it will give me an opportunity to discuss at least one feature of the method, which elsewhere in my writing I have called "paracitation". At that time I wrote:

What would it mean to teach Kafka? Do some works resist teaching more than others, or even resist it absolutely? Some works thrive endlessly, terribly, like Poe's *M. Valdamar*, in the state between sleep and death but putresce instantly at the command to wake, the command to join us here. And if, for love of the object, one resolves to teach otherwise, what can this otherwise be?

The play of language brings us the pair cite and parasite. One famous species of the latter is the *cymothoa exigua*, a marine parasite that enters the host fish through the gills, mates, and afterward the female enters the mouth of the fish, puncturing the host's tongue with a pair of foreclaws and extracting all the blood from the organ until it atrophies and falls off. The isopod then attaches itself to the host where the tongue once was, remaining there as a prosthetic for the rest of the host's life.

If citation puts the tongue of the other in one's mouth, then paracitation is to become the tongue of the other. Surrounded by the body of Kafka, the brain and eyes, the anguish and symptoms and habits and dreams, the style, the fabric of one's discourse is warped by this inhuman and unholy congress. Imagine teaching from this vantage, from a place where one has become lost in the figure of another only to find one's essential vitality therein. Imagine that there is no lesson appended to a text but rather a monstrous identification, the bliss of Aristophanes' unhewn couple who are languid with joy, Kafka's text and words blinking to life again in the dew but laced with hidden roots, mine, sinking. Paraciting, speaking like the demon within, what does it mean for desire? What might I find myself able to say or teach from within the other's mouth? Are you other at all anymore, you, Kafka, what message is this? Who speaks?

Those are my questions. One can follow a psychoanalytic line here – through the desire of the Other, through identification – but how sympathetic are these situations, my relation to the text from the perspective of teaching on one hand, and my relation to the Other from the perspective of an analysis on the other? In the Lacanian quadripartite structure of Subject, other, other', and Other, where is the teacher and where the text? The student? How can desire be made to announce itself, and whose desire?

What follows is an essay, absent all the stylistic trappings that have accrued onto that term over the years and years. It is a sort of offering, perhaps no better than the infantile scybalum, an

acknowledgement that you want something, but who knows what it is. It is an essay; it is not a response, but desires one.

‘...no longer to desire the work but to desire one’s own language.’

June 9, 2016

Like anyone else, the ecosystem of my metaphorical production is unique – the seams of fertility run this way or that; the night sky is obstructed by black trees, or not; seasons are short or long; there are inaccessible places that engender my myths or my dreams; there is a breathtaking coherence, hidden or fractured by, by what?

There are symptoms in my writing that are not stylistic.

On the right is a short story by Donald Barthelme called “Me and Miss Mandible,” published in 1964. Throughout, I have added several journal entries to the original story and elaborated on some of them. Nothing from the original is excised.

They are symptoms, qualifying as such in a clinical sense: as evidence of the, my, unconscious sending a message (to the Other, from the Other?). The coherence of my discourse, of anyone’s discourse, crystallizes around this Other. Symptoms, they’re everywhere in my discourse, in what I’m calling my ecosystem. Like wasps fecundating in the boughs of the groves, like the pearls of grubs populating the undersoil, chewing the roots of a now-dying seedling, symptoms are invisible until you are called upon to look and to feed yourself by your own labor. And then they are everywhere – the whole system seething.

September

13

Miss Mandible wants to make love to me but she hesitates because I am officially a child; I am, according to the records, according to the gradebook on her desk, according to the card index in the principal’s office, eleven years old. There is a misconception here, one that I haven’t quite managed to get cleared up yet. I am in fact thirty-five, I’ve been in the Army, I am six feet one, I have hair in the appropriate places, my voice is a baritone, I know very well what to do with Miss Mandible if she ever makes up her mind.

In the meantime we are studying common fractions.

The word ‘mandible’ is from Greek and refers to chewing. Masticate. None of my peers could possibly know this, but I do as a result of my fascination with Miss Mandible. Etymology is a science of intimacy.

I am anticipating, in our study of common fractions, a time in the future when we will be made to engage uncommon fractions. The square on the diagonal. Irrational numbers. I recall being young, hearing the myths of the algebra teachers – numbers without end, imaginary numbers, $\sqrt{-1}$, matrices, empty sets, paradoxes – and for now it really is nice to have common fractions. In the future I know I won’t have it so easy. I know this because I have already been 16 once, and I will be 16 again in five short years. Apparently.

I could, of course, answer all the questions, or at least most

I write “we,” but that’s just another trick – there is no we – one that Plato noticed thousands of years ago.

Really the question is: what shall I, in your endless silence, impute to you, all the way down to your very heart, your ignorance, your desire? My address to you, all my points and questions, place you somewhere, whether you are there or not.

And I am refusing to be somewhere, too.

“Ideally,” I told him once, “it would be impossible to read.” Or so difficult, so little thread stitching the thing together, that the faintest association, the flash of a strand of spider’s silk, would be precious. Ideally, it would be the ruins of what was never whole. My symptom, are you there? The afflatus of ruin.

~~Value. This word is ringing everywhere in my head — what value does it have, your writing?~~

The strikethrough is only a means of indicating the perseverance of a forsaken step. Something one chooses to hide, and in concealing revealing. I know we can fill our time with empty speech – and how often is teaching caught in its trap? – but is there empty writing? Full writing?

Some tropes must be exorcised. For months I couldn’t stop thinking, “my mother is a fish.” And then it was the phrase, “the very blood of my syntax.” Now it is Whitney, whose breath I hear all around me. At this moment, surfacing from the ruins, a relic:

What are the dead? An effect of grammar, of an arrangement of words, the breathlessness I feel when I say, ‘Whitney is dead’. They are there when words arrange themselves in impossible or unforgivable ways. That is when they arrive, how they persist. The routine of language, the coins we

of them (there are things I don't remember). But I prefer to sit in this too-small seat with the desktop cramping my thighs, bolts dully pressing into my legs all day long, and examine the life around me. There are thirty-two in the class, which is launched every morning with the pledge of allegiance to the flag, which curiously we did not do when I was in the actual Army. My own allegiance, at the moment, is divided between Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, who sits across the aisle from me all day long and is, like Miss Mandible, a fool for love. Of the two I prefer, today, Sue Ann; although between eleven and eleven and a half (she refuses to reveal her exact age) she is clearly a woman, with a woman's disguised aggression and a woman's peculiar contradictions. Strangely neither she nor any of the other children seem to see any incongruity in my presence here.

Incongruity. Incommensurability?

Oh, another pie here; this one missing three of eight slices. The children here are blithely sketching oblong circles, enjoying their proximity to these painless and undemanding proofs. Even the worst diagrams in the room boast the sheen of truth. Whatever the tragedies that surely await me and my love for Mandible/Brownly, I am happy here in fifth grade.

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Happily our geography text, which contains maps of all the principal land-masses of the world, is large enough to conceal my clandestine journal-keeping, accomplished in an ordinary black composition notebook. Every day I must wait until Geography to put down such thoughts as I may have had during the morning about my situation and my fellows. I have tried writing at other times and it does not work.

I am noticing today a certain commitment Miss Mandible has to the phrase 'principle land-mass.' The precise meaning and function of this phrase is eluding me, and our textbook is cautious to avoid too many details in its explanations, which anyway come off more as assertions. It is unanimously agreed that there are seven of these masses, distinguished in our various maps by different colors. The reasons Europe is separated from Asia are suppressed. India is granted a special 'sub-continental' status in this ruse, the conversations or arguments leading to this title entirely absent. My recent re-arrival in the fifth grade, however, has relaxed my expectations regarding the coherence of the

world and my existence. For now I am simply trying my best to fit in.

I am lucky for Geography, anyway, because I am afforded the opportunity to write in my journal. At any other time of the day either the teacher is walking up and down the aisles (during this period, luckily, she sticks close to the map rack in the front of the room) or Bobby Vanderbilt, who sits behind me, is punching me in the kidneys and wanting to know what I am doing. Vanderbilt, I have found out from certain desultory conversations on the playground, is hung up on sports cars, a veteran consumer of *Road & Track*. This explains the continual roaring sounds which seem to emanate from his desk; he is reproducing a record album called *Sounds of Sebring*. As in, he makes the sounds with his own mouth. And I admit he has a talent for it.

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of language, the coins we pass without end tallying a meaningless balance, crumbles like bone when you are standing there next to her as she gasps and chokes and yet already new platitudes take root like spores and you begin to wonder if you will ever have peace with the dead without the fingers of language ensnaring you in bonds that leave you permanently out of reach of the dead you have loved, of the dead you have yet to endure, of your death. When the dead arrive at the faults of language, they are asking you something. They are like a dream.

Why Barthelme? Why this story? The choice, I thought, was essentially arbitrary, but I have since learned that some styles are more resistant than others, at least to my abilities. [*Added June 16, 2016*: This story – this style – does not resist. Or is it me who stops resisting?]

June 10, 2016

There are expository interventions – didactic interventions. Scholars, for example, have written about this story: “sexual contact, like every other form of human contact, is denied and perverted by a society which both titillates its members and then establishes all sorts of restrictive norms for them”; “the point here seems to be that all narratives are interpretations in this sense, are necessarily out of context. To tell a story is therefore to submit oneself to ‘(Who decides?)’ the centerless center”; “only the narrator realizes that the children, as many older members of their society, are mistaking the sign for the thing itself, but ‘that signs are signs, and that some of them are lies’”; “this question, asked of Barthelme’s fiction, needs rephrasing; we must ask ‘how,’ not ‘who.’ In Barthelme’s fictions the ‘answer’ lies in the playful disruption of our accepted forms of discourse and understanding, in the play of irony

reprimanding sense once more back into the 'syntax' which produces it"; "this precocious approach to sex leads to the adoption of these prefabricated patterns of standard behavior"; "in other words, language turns relative. Unfixed, it drifts among a multiplicity of 'meanings.' Any attempt at a stable linguistic 'significance' decomposes into an infinite freeplay that refuses truth"; "Me and Miss Mandible' takes on education and the reliability of signs" (if it wasn't already apparent, most of the scholarship is confined to the 70s and 80s, representing the badly eroded thought of a certain philosopher from El Biar).

The citations above are from the following sources, in order:

Larry McCaffery, "Donald Barthelme and the Metafictional Muse," *SubStance*, Vol. 9, No.2, Issue 27: Current Trends in American Fiction (1980), pp. 75-88.

R. E. Johnson, "Structuralism and the Reading of Contemporary Fiction," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 2, STRUCTURALISM: An Interdisciplinary Study (Summer 1975), pp. 281-306.

Francis Gillen, "Donald Barthelme's City: A Guide," *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (Jan. 1972), pp. 37-44.

John Leland, "Remarks Re-Marked:

Only I, at times (only at times), understand that somehow a mistake has been made, that I am in a place where I don't belong. It may be that Miss Mandible also knows this, at some level, but for reasons not fully understood by me she is going along with the game. When I was first assigned to this room I wanted to protest, the error seemed obvious, the stupidest principal could have seen it; but I have come to believe it was deliberate, that I have been betrayed again.

On occasion I have, understandably, horrific bouts of *déjà vu*. It happens so often that I've been compelled to look into the scientific literature on the subject, which is but meagerly represented at our school library (which seems to specialize in texts on equine anatomy, truncated biographies of professional basketball players, and illustrated recreations of great Moments in American history). I have, at least, collected the following theories (in no particular order, quoted verbatim):

- 1) the experience of *déjà vu* is an extreme reaction of the system that your memory uses to tell you that you are in a familiar situation.
- 2) *déjà vu* is when the brain receives a small sensory input (a sight, a smell, a sound) that is strikingly similar to such a detail experienced in the past, and the entire memory image is brought forward. The brain has taken the past to be the present by virtue of one tiny bit of sensory information.
- 3) *déjà vu* is when *sensory information* is rerouted on its way to *memory storage* and, so, is not immediately perceived. This short delay causes the sensation of experiencing and remembering something at the same time.
- 4) according to speculative physicists, *déjà vu* may relate to particles that can travel backwards in time (tachyons), time loops and multiple universes. This theory presumes that these may give cause for more non-traditional ways of seeing causality and for the possibility of neurological 'time travel'.
- 5) the realm of parapsychology proposes that *déjà vu* is a chance for reincarnates to get a sneak peak into a past life.
- 6) other explanations for *déjà vu* have been given by psychoanalysts, such as the manifestation of wish fulfillment. Here, *déjà vu* is the subconscious repetition of a past experience, but with a more positive ending.

I am collecting more information on an ongoing basis, though my research is complicated by my impulse to keep it more or less hidden from Miss Mandible, and by the fact that the class visits the library for only two hours every

Wednesday afternoon. Taking my cue from Vanderbilt, I fit in by looking at books filled with exploded views of car engines. These are not without their unique fascination: extraordinarily complicated universes of steel, heat, combustion, work, decay, exhaust, noise, and above all entropy are violently dismantled and frozen in a single frame of isometric clarity. Diagrams so clear you can hear them ringing, hear them sustaining their impossible quiescence, ex- or implosion immanent, V-8s threatening either to collapse into perfect unity or erupt at howling velocities, everything having its place either in the machine or in the abyss. Vanderbilt whirrs with his lips in the background while I gaze.

This life-role is as interesting as my former life-role, which was that of a claims adjuster for the Great Northern Insurance Company, a position which compelled me to spend my time amid the debris of our civilization: rumped fenders, roofless sheds, gutted warehouses, smashed arms and legs. After ten years of this one has a tendency to see the world as a vast junkyard, looking at a man and seeing only his (potentially) mangled parts, entering a house only to trace the path of the inevitable fire.

Hence the appeal of the exploded view, where there is at least a sublime order to the array, a bit of relief from the calculus of damage and responsibility. Ten years at GNIC and I couldn't even see the catastrophe anymore, just claims waiting to materialize.

Therefore when I was installed here, although I knew an error had been made, I countenanced it, I was shrewd; I was aware that there might well be some kind of advantage to be gained from what seemed a disaster. The role of The Adjuster teaches one much.

22

Lance Olsen, "Linguistic Pratfalls in Barthelme," *South Atlantic Review*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Nov. 1986), pp. 69-77.

Alan Wilde, "Barthelme Unfair to Kierkegaard: Some Thoughts on Modern and Postmodern Irony," *boundary 2*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Autumn, 1976), pp. 45-70.

Something strangely erotic about this gratuitous citation.

It is apparent by now that I am in Joseph's Thomas's situation. Or some variant of it. I can't be blamed for wanting the love of my teachers or for coveting the secrets they seemed to hide. But as I arrive I find what? There is nothing here.

December 13, 2015

I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a line of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, nor my actions. There is only one thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books. Nobody, so far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which give direction and motivation to our lives. One talks about philosophy. The future. Our solace is in what? Transgression? Resistance? I can remember a time when the joy of writing was like that of seduction, but how does one write when one is beyond desiring the love of another?

Taste the soil sometime. In the spring. One is welcome to pass coins from hand to hand for a lifetime, but what of the thorns and seeds?

Enough has been said of the paradoxical time of the preface. Improvisation is known also as extemporization — leaving the notes behind, the guides and crutches, standing outside a certain time and pacing; a diachronic sequence, the time of logic. I

I am being solicited for the volleyball team. I decline, refusing to take unfair profit from my height.

23

Dream from last night: I am driving a soapbox derby car at frightening speeds through the French countryside. I am wearing a dark leather cap with goggles snug and clear on my face and wool scarf whipping in the wind. At every turn I see Miss Mandible in the distance, steadily vanishing.

Every morning the roll is called: Bestvina, Bokenfohr, Broan, Brownly, Cone, Coyle, Crecelius, Darin, Durbin, Geiger, Guiswite, Heckler, Jacobs, Kleinschmidt, Lay, Logan, Masei, Mitgang, Pfeilsticker. It is like the litany chanted in the dim miserable dawns of Texas by the cadre sergeant of our basic training company.

On those mornings in basic I don't recall ever feeling like I was back in grade school, though now that I am back in grade school I do feel compelled to remember the Army. Perhaps it is something about the feeling of being misplaced, or of having tacitly and unwittingly consigned my life to an overly vague endeavor comprised of activities with inscrutable purposes: constructing dioramas of important Moments in American history, writing out themes for diluted fables.

In the Army, too, I was ever so slightly awry. It took me a fantastically long time to realize what the others grasped almost at once: that much of what we were doing was absolutely pointless, to no purpose. I kept wondering why. Then something happened that proposed a new question. One day we were commanded to whitewash, from the ground to the topmost leaves, all of the trees in our training area. The corporal who relayed the order was nervous and apologetic. Later an off-duty captain sauntered by and watched us, white splashed and totally weary, strung out among the freakish shapes we had created. He walked away swearing. I understood the principle (orders are orders), but I wondered: Who decides?

am trying to write otherwise, is all, follow a path that leads out (ex + ducere: educate) beyond (not higher, not better, not purer) the University (if it is there at all; that is, a unified notion called 'the University'). This writing has no worth or use that can be determined in advance. No thesis, no known place to lay the stress. The wreck of a life.

This is an improvisation on who? on a theme from what?

February 17, 2016

From a slightly different vantage, fantasy is the subject's response to the enigmatic desire of the Other, a way of answering the question about what the Other wants from me. I imagine that by vouchsafing to you these fragments of speech hanging like scales at my eyes you might offer some remedy, some insight. Any response at all. But is this how things stand with the Other right now? This Other that we have come to know as what? The Law, the Symbolic, the locus of speech, the stranger on the bridge whose name we know perfectly well but would not for all the treasure of the world mention it, to cite Dostoevsky. And we are the acolytes? Is it hysterical of me to wonder who this writing is for and what they want? What does the hysteric do? Lacan says of Dora, the matron saint of hysteria, 'there is one thing she prefers to her own desire – she prefers to let her own desires go unsatisfied and have the Other hold the key to her mystery' (VIII, 245).

Oh there was something else in my dream that I am remembering just now: Vanderbilt's voice, shhhhhhhh-ing in the background, modulating his tone as I took corners and hills.

And the trees are filled with white wolves.

29

Sue Ann is a wonder. Yesterday she viciously kicked my ankle for not paying attention when she was attempting to pass me a note during History (a note not, alas, destined for me but for Anna Coyle). It is swollen still. But Miss Mandible was watching me, there was nothing I could do. Oddly enough Sue Ann reminds me of the wife I had in my former role, while Miss Mandible seems to be a child. Something about the way she talks to us, always gentle but not quite friendly. Sometimes she seems to act like someone who is supposed to be a fifth grade teacher. She watches me constantly, trying to keep sexual significance out of her look; I am afraid the other children have noticed. I have already heard, on that ghostly frequency that is the medium of classroom communication, the words 'Teacher's pet!'

When I was in fifth grade for the first time my teacher was called Ms. Mitchnik, who did not seem to me like a child nor was I in any danger of becoming her pet. She once chided me for improperly blowing my nose.

With Mandible, however, there is real danger that she will adopt me as hers. I am six feet one. I am thirty-five, and I am sensitive to the nuances of human gesture. The way she takes my quizzes from me is practically drenched in longing and desire. The way she says my name every morning, slightly different intonations each time, as if she is attempting to caress me with her voice as my name leaves her lips. The way she grants me permission to use the boys' room. She once commented provocatively on my penchant for coffee, which I drink from a thermos every morning on a bench next to the swings. She's never met a fifth grader who liked coffee, she said, practically weeping.

October

2

Is it because I presume you, you sitting here for whatever reasons you have, have this key that I write this, that I stand here speaking as if what? As if you can bless my discourse, naturalize it, diagnose and cure it? Why not? I don't know what you're capable of. But as a teacher, as the subject I become simply be being situated in the position of teacher, within an educational institution, I see something else with a key, a key that I know does not exist between any of the pages of laws that I know nobody has written, but still it is there, and if it is true that I want to be unlocked it is only so the quaking chamber of my heart might erupt like a star and incinerate my liberator, my captor. But, again, there is no key, only silence poised beyond time and the universe of discourse orbiting it, constellating, decaying, the rage of a life swallowed in the darkness, words spent like spume from a comet, an ancient Yes in a cloud of apology.

March 8, 2011

Preface to Dru Farro's one-act play,
'Will You?'

And what philosophically speaking is cruelty?
Letter to J.P.
Paris, 1932

Dru Farro was born to working parents who, when he was quite young, divorced. His letters later in life indicate that he never recovered from his father's absence in his youth, and many of his writings betray his neurotic relationship with authority, masculinity, and sexuality. He openly detested his mother, and in his youth many times ran away from home to live with friends, when he was lucky, but spending many nights sleeping in his truck. In college he studied philosophy, which greatly influenced his poetry, particularly the later collections and the posthumously published *Graves*. Even a cursory glance at his poetry reveals an incessant

On occasion, in the afternoon, we will play a game called 'Bus Stop' in which two or three members from the class will sit up at the front of the room and pretend to be at a bus stop together. I guess that's the only rule of the game. Sue Ann was up in front of the class yesterday – with Coyle and Vanderbilt – pretending to be an old woman who had lost her cane. Vanderbilt appeared to just be playing himself and Coyle was pretending to be deaf. Sue Ann was howling for Bobby to help her find it while the class giggled at his feigned (?) ineptitude. Since you are destined not to find a cane that doesn't exist.

Sometimes I speculate on the exact nature of the conspiracy which brought me here. At times I believe it was instigated by my wife of former days, whose name was . . . I am only pretending to forget. I know her name very well, as well as I know the name of my former motor oil (Quaker State) or my old Army serial number (US 54109268). Her name was Brenda, and the conversation I recall best, the one which makes me suspicious now, took place on the day we parted. 'You have the soul of a whore,' I said on that occasion, stating nothing less than literal, unvarnished fact. 'You,' she replied, 'are a pimp, a poop, and a child. I am leaving you forever and I trust that without me you will perish of your own inadequacies. Which are considerable.'

She is not wrong about my inadequacies, at least that they are considerable. Whether they are potentially fatal I think is doubtful. It is a long shot that Brenda is behind this, but she is harrowingly cunning. She could easily have been an invincible corporate lawyer of international repute or a severe and insatiable choreographer of Stravinsky. She had a tendency to get deeply involved in things. As in, interested in consuming their Life Force. She once told me that as a child she wanted to be a teacher, which I have yet to be able to fathom, since she so hated children and authority. Instead she became a shrink, which I now believe was in an effort to arm herself with terrible knowledge, intimate familiarity with the blueprints of human pain, breathtaking agility in the arena of affective warfare. She called me a pimp, a poop, and a child, and something detonated in my chest. It was a total surprise. It was as if for years she had been covertly stuffing my heart with tinder that could catch only via the meter and assonance of this unique phrase, a phrase silly in itself. A poop, she called me. It all still haunts me and I know she knows this.

I squirm in my seat at the memory of this conversation, and

examination of language, love, and death. He only rarely wrote dramatic works, and 'Will You?' is his most famous play.

June 10, 2016

The more the symptoms multiply, the more the writing reveals a (neurotic) structure. Effacing or disguising the symptoms is a symptom of writing, too. But if it doesn't cripple you it isn't a problem.

A reader could scan my writing like a map; a topography materializes, phrases repeat and accrue into altitudes, or are marooned. There is a climate, and there are borders.

For example, what is this obsession with fracturing everything, dissociating everything, scrambling it all, ruining it? This phobia of

of

of

of

of

the thesis? This revulsion at the thought of seducing you with these little jewels, when I know I don't have them and want you not to care for them.

Was there a break for me? A twilight of my world as a teacher? Or as a student? Adrift in this wash of personae, of images, of objects, by the simple force of my will am I meant to raise some monolith from the depths, something that like a key causes the disarray to crystallize into, into what? The compass spins like a horde of bats in the vault.

Sue Ann watches me with malign compassion. She has noticed the discrepancy between the size of my desk and my own size, but apparently sees it only as a token of my glamour, my dark man-of-the-world-ness.

7

Once I tiptoed up to Miss Mandible's desk (when there was no one else in the room) and examined its surface. Miss Mandible is a clean-desk teacher, I discovered. There was nothing except her gradebook (the one in which I exist as a fifth grader) and a text, which was open at a page headed Making the Processes Meaningful. I read: 'Many pupils enjoy working fractions when they understand what they are doing. They have confidence in their ability to take the right steps and to obtain correct answers. However, to give the subject full social significance, it is necessary that many realistic situations requiring the processes be found. Many interesting and lifelike problems involving the use of fractions should be solved . . .'

At basic they simply reminded us again and again that we were learning to shoot guns in order to kill enemies.

8

I am not irritated by the feeling of having been through all this before. Things are done differently now. The children, moreover, are in some ways different from those who accompanied me on my first voyage through the elementary schools: 'They have confidence in their ability to take the right steps and to obtain correct answers.' This is surely true. When Bobby Vanderbilt, who sits behind me and has the great tactical advantage of being able to maneuver in my disproportionate shadow, wishes to bust a classmate in the mouth he first asks Miss Mandible to lower the blind, saying that the sun hurts his eyes. When she does so, bip! My generation would never have been able to con authority so easily. We would not even have bothered, because we believed in them.

My déjà vu research is not progressing despite my persistent inquiries. I am contemplating postponing it or simply stopping. I am, understandably (due to the nature of my subject), having a hard time telling when I'm learning something new. It all feels new and yet ancient. What is there

to learn about déjà vu when you are me, literally reliving the fifth grade? I am déjà vu.

I have added an interesting etymology to my repertoire, however: cryptomnesia: 'hidden memory'. I encountered this word in an old volume of psychological case studies from the 60s featuring psychologists eerily photogenic – very deliberate haircuts. Sometimes we forget thoughts that we have had, and sometimes we forget that the thinker of a thought was not ourselves. Both compel a man to believe he's brought a beautiful new thought into the world, yet with something at the margins, darkly attendant. Uncanny. Whose thoughts are we thinking?

*Another dream from last night: I don't remember anything**April 5, 2016*

What are the dead? The dead in our lives that persist like what? Like sparrows alighting and vanishing with nothing but the quaking of a voided branch in their wake, or the blossoming of an insatiable storm that secludes you in a blackened room, enshrouds you in a ringing silence. The dead, if you have any, are in the corner. They are right in front of you. You can smell them and hear them. They are perfect and claw at you. When the dead arrive they are smiling at the door but also smiling in the sun and grass but also laughing and like stars when you fix them in your sight it is as if they were never there because they're gone. The dead – are there two or three or four? – the dead are a bed of bright red leaves and black leaves all the same, iridescent with rainfall, rigid with veins, decaying outside of time. They are a like a dream.

December 16, 2015

The first book does not have to be literally the first book a child encountered, but it is the one that the child has carried, knowing it or not, preserving something too precious to let vanish (in any case, nothing vanishes), causing the future to take shape around it. It emphasizes the importance of the question: what happens when we read? What happens when, as teachers, we invite others to encounter something that might return them to a past that has transformed itself into their syntax and habits and dreams? What Freud uncovers with the Wolf is a scene that, reaching out into the future like a ragged claw, provides the scaffolding for the Wolf's world, the watercourse for his time. The primal scene, the heart

except the feeling of dread. I was to be punished for having stolen something. Was it a book?

13

It may be that on my first trip through the schools I was too much under the impression that what the authorities (who decides?) had ordained for me was right and proper, that I confused authority with *life itself*. My path was not particularly of my own choosing. My career stretched out in front of me like a paper chase, and my role was to pick up the clues. When I got out of school, the first time, I felt that this estimate was substantially correct, and eagerly entered the hunt. I found clues abundant: diplomas, membership cards, campaign buttons, a marriage license, insurance forms, discharge papers, tax returns, Certificates of Merit. They seemed to prove, at the very least, that I was in the running. But that was before my tragic mistake on the Mrs. Anton Bichek claim.

Life itself. I'm starting to wonder about this one. As if, were it possible to burrow one's way resolutely enough through the endless shale of documents representing your life's choices and sanctifying them as meaningful, there might be some pure Itself at the bottom, holding it all together, where a true thing might be said or done, something that cannot be written on paper.

I sometimes try to imagine this place reflected in Miss Mandible's eyes. Teach me, I think. Teach me. Tell me why I am here. And not just here in your class (which is mystifying enough, though I am forming hypotheses), but Here. Right fucking Here.

of trauma. When we (I) teach literature I want (whose desire is this? The master's? The university's? The analyst's? The hysteric's?) that scene, whatever it is, to quiver on the horizon, to quicken to life. What is literature without this distant murmur?

June 16, 2016

I have – surrounded as I am by these fragments, by these shards that have endured (why these and no others? is my essential question), these scenes that have accompanied me in my wandering, guiding it even, consigned to desuetude until they suddenly emerge all around me, breathing, gazing, fading, passing through like clouds above an empty ocean – come to understand how one could wonder: Am I dead or alive?

Shot through by the symbolic, its fingers reaching through the notches in my spine, clutching at the back of my throat, me, the frightening excess of someone else's fantasies, withering in the dust.

About the Bichek mistake, I misread a clue. Do not misunderstand me: it was a tragedy only from the point of view of the authorities (who were upset, of course, because they were handed a bill). I conceived that it was my duty to obtain satisfaction for the injured, for this elderly lady (not even one of our policyholders, but a claimant against Big Ben Transfer & Storage, Inc.) from the company. The settlement was \$165,000; the claim, I still believe, was just. But without my encouragement Mrs. Bichek would never have had the self-love to prize her injury so highly. The company paid, but its faith in me, in my efficacy in the role, was broken. Henry Goodykind, the district manager, expressed this thought in a few not altogether unsympathetic words, and told me at the same time that I was to have a new role. The next thing I knew I was here, at Horace Greeley Elementary, under the lubricious eye of Miss Mandible, who has a new haircut.

17

Dream: I am in the basement of my childhood home, but I am not a child. There is a substantial hole in the wooden floors leading into darkness. This hole is perfectly round. Out of it come silver ants the size of Jack Russells. I am terrified, but nobody in the family seems to care. Suddenly it is apparent that I am merely visiting the house as if on a holiday. I just know the ants are protecting something.

Today we are to have a fire drill. I know this because I am a Fire Marshal, not only for our room but for the entire right wing of the second floor. This distinction, which was awarded shortly after my arrival, is interpreted by some as another mark of my somewhat dubious relations with our teacher. My armband, which is red and decorated with white felt letters reading FIRE, sits on the little shelf under my desk, next to the brown paper bag containing the lunch I carefully make for myself each morning. One of the advantages of packing my own lunch (I have no one to pack it for me) is that I am able to fill it with things I enjoy. The peanut butter sandwiches that my mother made in my former existence, many years ago, have been banished in favor of ham and cheese. I have found that my diet has mysteriously adjusted to my new situation (with the aforementioned morning coffee habit excepted); I no longer drink, for instance, and when I smoke, it is in the boys' john, like everybody else. When school is out I hardly smoke at all. It is only in the matter of sex that I feel my own true age; this

May 8, 2015

“My mother is a fish.” Here is a sentence I have loved, one that stands like a ragged cairn at a joint in my life’s passing, a beacon visible not by the light it shines but the shadow it casts, a chasm creeping forward like a plant in step with the blackening dusk. This sentence says, when I read it again or bring it to mind, that here was a place of import, whether as a site of loss, a mark of guidance, a warning, or bare monument of inscrutable human intention. It is a tower among several dozen, perhaps hundreds, that are spent like stars into restless constellations awaiting their mythologies and cartographies. “My mother is a fish,” alluring and enigmatic, is it hysterical? Does it seem to say, “come and try to know me, to divine my purpose, the pathway I mark, my secret meaning, the one stone among my thousands that, when shifted, when properly caressed, transforms me entirely into an abyss of unspeakable joy, a dark ocean of knowledge, apocalypse and apotheosis, a threshold so profound its stillness sets the air to ringing, a promise that will stop your heart”? My mother is a fish.

is apparently something that, once learned, can never be forgotten. I live in fear that Miss Mandible will one day keep me after school, and when we are alone, create a compromising situation. To avoid this I have become a model pupil: another reason for the pronounced dislike I have encountered in certain quarters. But I cannot deny that I am singled by those long glances from the vicinity of the chalkboard; Miss Mandible is in many ways, notably about the bust, a very tasty piece.

With each clandestine erection I feel I am recovering something from the past. I can’t seem to separate the warm pressure in my Dockers from memories of sitting in a school classroom. In those days of dread and intrigue, days of heartbreaking sincerity, days of devotion to the unmitigated purity of our leaders’ judgment, days of beautiful isolation and confusion, days of longing and fear so intense you made yourself literally sick with bewildering symptoms – inflammation of the eye, tics in the face, stuttering, incorrigible cowlicks, hideous acne – days where an erect penis felt like the devil inside, all I had as remedy for the pain of my loins and my ignorance was the dictionary. Words would lead to other words: vagina: canal: sheath: clitoris: bilateral symmetry: mammary: intercourse: coitus: copulate: discharge: orgasm: labia: opening – all equally unsatisfying, sterile, yet impossibly provocative. Diagrams without skin or hair or faces, blanks awaiting imaginary sketching. I used to follow reckless trajectories of forbidden words, developing an admirable quickness and dexterity manipulating the little alphabetical tabs, GHI, RST, DEF. Scanning up and down pages, flopping thick reams from left to right, crackling the bible paper, even licking my fingers as I had seen adults do. Anything to look like I was simply an enthusiastic young boy developing his vocabulary. But I was on a hunt. Between the spacey-looking ‘fucoid’ and the geological ‘fuchsite’ there it was: ‘fuck’. Slang: have sexual intercourse with. Somehow the contours of the letters of this word were themselves erotic. I spent many minutes simply looking at it, feeling myself getting carried along by it, imaging that its letters were a thin bed awaiting myself and some ghostly other, some immaterial aura emanating from the pulsing hum of my libido, some creature beyond representation making its way to the bed, promising

unimaginable pleasure and, more than that, release, some

March 5, 2013

We have in Marcel, and at times in Swann, a kind of simultaneous and contradictory dynamic of desire (which is always, for Marcel, it seems, bound up with hope and love): he strives for a perfect self-effacement so that he might somehow receive more of his beloved *than can be contained in his beloved* (“more absolutely Berma than herself”). The degree to which he successfully erases himself is the precise degree to which he makes himself available to the impressions offered by Beauty. He longs to lose himself that he might gain more than he can imagine. There’s a kind of suicide of longing here, in Marcel, a sacrifice to which one happily acquiesces so that unknown – and unknowable – pleasures might arise. And why not? We’ve all choked on unapproachable pleasures before; we’ve all wished our lover would simply inhabit us, that we might be food for our lover; we’ve all stood transfixed before a storm, an abyss, the salt of the endless ocean, the indifferent sun drying our blood, dying birds, hordes of swifts, the transmissions of Jupiter, colliding galaxies, the violence of bells, the feeling of contentment that comes only in the wake of an irrepressible conviction that *you were nothing*, that love is not that which saves you *and then* prepares you for death. No, love is that which takes everything from you that you have ever hoped from it by giving you *precisely what it has to offer*, which is only what could never have been anticipated. Love is that which takes everything from you so that you might have anything at all. As Céline writes, “that is perhaps what we seek throughout life, that and nothing more, the greatest possible sorrow so as to become fully ourselves before dying.”

dark monster of knowledge, all of this I remember feeling while tracing lovely arabesques through the pages of this huge book containing every possible word, all possible knowledge. Fuck. Look at the etymology:

probably cognate with Dutch *fokken* to mock (15th cent.), to strike (1591), to fool, gull (1623), to beget children (1637), to have sexual intercourse with (1657), to grow, cultivate (1772), Norwegian regional *fukka* to copulate, Swedish regional *fokka* to copulate (compare Swedish regional *focke* penis), further etymology uncertain: perhaps < an Indo-European root meaning 'to strike' also shown by classical Latin *pugnus* fist (see pugnacious adj.). Perhaps compare Old Icelandic *fjúka* to be driven on, tossed by the wind, *feykja* to blow, drive away, Middle High German *fochen* to hiss, to blow. Perhaps compare also Middle High German *ficken* to rub, early modern German *ficken* to rub, itch, scratch, German *ficken* to have sexual intercourse with (1558), German regional *ficken* to rub, to make short fast movements, to hit with rods, although the exact nature of any relationship is unclear.

To mock, to strike, to rub, to blow, to cultivate, to fool. Yes, these meanings have all become only clearer to me, which is why I fear and desire Mandible. Etymology is a science of intimacy, and I am everyday progressing on the path to the truth of my place here: it runs through her.

24

There are isolated challenges to my largeness, to my dimly realized position in the class as Gulliver. Most of my classmates are polite about this matter, as they would be if I had only one eye, or wasted, metal-wrapped legs. I am viewed as a mutation of some sort but essentially a peer. However Harry Broan, whose father has made himself rich manufacturing the Broan Bathroom Vent (with which Harry is frequently reproached; he is always being asked how things are in Ventsville), today inquired if I wanted to fight. An interested group of his followers had gathered to observe this suicidal undertaking. I replied that I didn't feel quite up to it, for which he was obviously grateful. We are now friends forever. He has given me to understand privately that he can get me all the bathroom vents I will ever need, at a ridiculously modest figure.

Love is not the antidote to sorrow; love is sorrow's symptom and presage and it brings us to ourselves only because it ruins us.

June 16, 2016

There is a thread. But who threads it?

After the first few masks fell – student, teacher, scholar – you grew more diffuse. They really are masks; they are parts. Imagine the fear of not having one, or of trying to fashion one. They coordinate discourse, calm anxiety, and structure desire. Is there nothing beneath them?

[*Added August 3, 2016: (Of whom is the portrait of the artist before she is an artist?)*]

All of this is a begging you to speak, but what do I want to hear? Am I enticing or destroying you? Will one touch of approval dissolve the entire edifice? Is it masochistic, the way I beg you to intervene, pronounce the Law? Are these hysterics a way of attuning us both to that desire beyond the walls? It's a parade of working-through, this is.

I have fired automatic and semi-automatic rifles hundreds and hundreds of times, but never thrown a punch at a man or boy.

25

Sue Ann and Miss Mandible are wearing the exact same shoes today. I am positive about this. Red flats with a semi-glossy luster, cut just deeply enough to reveal the cleavages between the toes.

In addition to déjà vu there are the related mnemonic phenomena of presque vu and jamais vu. Presque vu: the feeling that something is imminent, that the word you're waiting for, the one you want, is about to arrive. Jamais vu is far more perilous for me, personally, in its implications: the feeling that our familiars are imposters. When you say or write a word so frequently it loses its substance, its reality. When your world is populated with doubles and fakes. I am proceeding slowly and carefully in these new areas, especially since I know from experience that most psychological science is quackery.

'Many interesting and lifelike problems involving the use of fractions should be solved . . .' The theorists fail to realize that everything that is either interesting or lifelike in the classroom proceeds from what they would probably call interpersonal relations: Sue Ann Brownly kicking me in the ankle. How lifelike, how womanlike, is her tender solicitude after the deed! Her pride in my newly acquired limp is transparent; everyone knows that she has set her mark upon me, that it is a victory in her unequal struggle with Miss Mandible for my great, overgrown heart. Even Miss Mandible knows, and counters in perhaps the only way she can, with sarcasm. 'Are you wounded, Thomas?'

Conflagrations smolder behind her eyelids, yearning for the Fire Marshal clouds her eyes. I mumble that I have bumped my leg.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.

30

I return again and again to the problem of my future.

31

April 9, 2016

What are the dead? I ask here because they are never far enough away to ignore. What more quickly than a thought of the dead brings to light the heart of desire? Death envaults the universe of human possibility like the speed of light, providing a horizon beyond which there is no possibility of representation. And at the heart of this human possibility there is desire. And each of us is here in the university because there is something we want to know, something we seek out by occupying a specific position in relation to knowledge. Do the dead object? Do we imagine that their secrets will fulfill or sustain us? Do the dead materialize at the borderlands as seducers or pedagogues? We sift through a forest of voices looking for an answer whose question escapes us; voices and words with a hold on truth. They are like a dream.

Halloween. My peers are all in disguise. I myself am dressed as an insurance claims adjuster, an idea that came to me from I know not where: I shocked myself somewhat that I am apparently sufficiently perverse actually to wear this costume. Brownly is stunning, if a little predictable, in her witch's garb while Mandible plays it conservatively with a cat's-ears headband accompanying her usual attire. Vanderbilt is Dale Earnhardt in tie-dyed coveralls, aviators, and convincing moustache. We are told that the holiday is a celebration of the dead. Or for the dead? Mandible is unclear on this point. The costumes and indulgences, I have gleaned, are meant to arm revelers against the knowledge of death, the abyss all around them.

I am fascinated by Mandible's rhetorical tactics bearing on the subject of death. She has managed to plan an afternoon of Halloween-related lessons that refer either to innocuous and ancient rituals of barbarians or platitudes involving apple-bobbing. Not that I am enthusiastic about the subject myself, but my recent experiences have me wondering about how this will end. Or End. But of course this is a problem we are left to deal with on our own time.

This afternoon we are scheduled to parade through the school in our disguises, I guess to show them off. Sue Ann will lead the way, surely, with Miss Mandible drawing up the rear, and we are expected, as I understand it, to go into all the classrooms and trek solemnly around the perimeter, letting the second-graders or whoever get a nice long look and then leave for the next room. We have already been visited by the sixth grade, which featured no fewer than four witches. There was also a boy dressed just like me who, he exclaimed, was meant to be 'a nerd'. We had the same Dockers, same short-sleeve blue button-up shirt tucked in, same spectacles. Imagine a classroom of 11 year-olds dressed in disguise, seated obediently behind their desks, gawking at a procession of cheeky 12 year-olds with their ironic costumes and secret knowledge, reserves of maturity unfathomable to us, invincibly indifferent to everything. Costumes with real blood, probably.

I am not looking forward to my turn.

November

A brief investigation concerning transgression and*August 14, 2010*

██████████ a boy ██████████ was captivated
by mirrors ██████████ abducted by them.

After ██████████ a ██████████
██████████ time
██████████ the ██████████

story ██████████ is difficult to tell

██████████

Sometimes ██████████
the story end ██████████

██████████

██████████, a ██████████
dear gift, one ██████████

feared ██████████

to death, ██████████

a comet flashing ██████████

One thought ██████████

is ██████████ always ██████████

struggling to locate ██████████

myself ██████████

. The ██████████

horror ██████████

to be ██████████

a horror ██████████

from the ██████████

mirror,
faceless ██████████

face, ██████████ body

animated ██████████

by ██████████
words, ██████████

animated by the wake ██████████

of ██████████
death.

discipline:

Inside Horace Greeley Elementary many edifying activities occur. Discipline is learned. And coloring is learned. Also, an affinity for flags. Very little is tolerated within the walls of Horace Greeley Elementary, but least of all a tendency toward deviation. Should a child, for example, while enjoying the liberties of recess, break some unwritten rule presumed to belong under the category of ‘common knowledge’ (since there are very few rules explicitly announced in the classrooms on even a perfunctory basis) such as:

- 1) throwing a rock either directly at or implicitly at: another child or employee of Horace Greeley Elementary, a valuable structure (such as the school building or flag pole), an animal (wild or domestic), a vehicle, the sky, a soccer – or any other – ball that has become entangled in the branches of a tree, the ground, water, other rocks, adults who are not employed by Horace Greeley Elementary, or any clothing not being worn by the owner at the present moment such as: a coat hanging from a tree, a backpack hanging from a tree, shoes hanging by their laces from a tree, et cetera,
- 2) spitting (either in private or public),
- 3) cursing (including the words ‘butthole’, ‘buttface’, ‘butthead’, ‘buttbrain’, ‘buttmouth’, ‘butlover’, ‘buttbutter’, or ‘buttercrackhead’ (among, of course, many other words referring to the male or female genitalia or anal region as well as words referring to unsavory bodily functions such as flatulence or micturition, in addition to the traditional canon of swear words: fuck, shit, ass, damn, bitch, bastard, hell, and any phrase that speaks the name of any holy creature in vain)). Moreover, words that imply curse words are also forbidden such as: shiitakehead, shiatsuface, motherducker, flipping, fudging, mother fudging, mother effing, arsehole, basshole, Regina, and dastard, among many others. Finally, saying regular words in a harsh and/or suggestive tone is likewise not tolerated,
- 4) performing overly gymnastic or athletic techniques that require the jumping out of swings, jumping off of large structures, climbing trees, climbing cars, climbing other humans, climbing animals (wild or domestic), or running very fast down hills,
- 5) screaming,
- 6) touching with too much force another human being (child or adult), and
- 7) selling goods to other children such as: sports cards at prices other than those suggested in accredited sports

beckets; various foodstuffs; pornographic magazines; illegal, legal, or prescription drugs; or homework assignments,

then he or she will be subject to the following corrective measures:

1) standing at ‘a box’ for the duration of recess (for minor infractions). ‘A box’ is a colored square located on the easternmost promenade of Horace Greeley that features any number 1 through 8 in whose confines the student stands and must remain, facing the brick walls of the school, until the recess bell rings.

2) should all boxes be full (a not uncommon occurrence), then minor offenses are punished by the accused being forced to remain at the side of one of three ‘recess ladies’, all of whom are famous for their strict dispositions and severe, jagged physiognomies. The accused is not spoken to and must follow, at an uncomfortably close distance, the strange ladies’ vigilant perambulations.

3) being sent to the principal’s office (for either a single major infraction or a history of minor infractions). This requires interacting with the principal’s secretary, describing in general terms the reasons for one’s appearance in the office (though the details of the case will not be heard here), and waiting until the principal is available. Once in the office of the principle the accused must describe, again, his or her offense (though again the details will not be considered) at which point, absolutely frozen in fear, the principal delivers an overgeneral moralistic homily based on one or a few of the following themes: thou shalt not abuse property, thou shalt not take one’s privileges for granted (the privilege, for example, of attending school), thou shalt not listen to one’s friends (also known as the rule of ‘monkey see, monkey do’, where the student is, it goes without saying, the monkey), thou shalt not swear, thou shalt not be exceptional (to any and all rules), thou shalt not do anything but what the others are doing, thou shalt not do anything at all.

4) being suspended from school for 1-3 days (for major infractions, such as spitting). The school suspension can take the form either of an ‘in-school’ variety, in which the accused does not attend his or her usual class but instead sits in another, usually lower grade, class for the period of 1-3 days, or the ‘out-of-school’ variety, in which the student simply remains at home for the duration of 1-3 days and

June 24, 2016

Time passes. It’s like I’m waiting for something.

Kafka’s journals: “Wrote badly today.”

I know you’re listening – reading. But what are you looking for?

Anyway, I’ve given up on the original ideas. I’ve developed an allergy to the word “education”; I’ve completely lost my handle on it – turned back by the mountains of paper on the subject. [*Added the next day*: The mountains of associations, the battery of images in pursuit; so different from one another, so profoundly different.

In any case, there is only one question now, which is the question of my desire, emptied out by pretensions to altruism or honorability: whose approbation are you after, what image are you struggling to embody? The secret heart.]

Can’t help but feel a bit like Hamlet.

But who to kill? [*Added June 27, 2016*: Which ghost to obey?]

February 7, 2012

We're not here simply to understand art, but we're here to understand more. Strangely, though, it seems that, not unlike certain physical experiments, by participating too actively in the scrutiny of reality – that is, by inventing the jar – we do not preserve the specimen for scientific analysis (be it aesthetic, ethical, or cognitive), instead we cut ourselves off from it. The jar not only does not give of bird or bush, but it is also like nothing else in Tennessee, and, how absurd this is, why, in all of Tennessee, do we insist on the jar?

June 25, 2011

I wreck the real thing.

July 21, 2010

And she,
I wonder,
has died before,
amid the things collected on the
floor –
some magazines, a can for trash,
the stash of wash,
the fan,
a few books.
Oh and a box of tissues –
just things that are never
forgotten.

must make up the missed work at a later date. During an in-school suspension the accused sits in a too-small desk (that is, a desk cleared by the Board of Estimates to be sufficient for the average second grade student) that faces a wall and listens to lessons that he or she has already heard, presumably feeling great shame for being a giant among children and being subjected to the humiliating experience of, temporarily at least, being forced to act like and think like less developed human students. (N.B. despite the apparent similarities, my current situation is nothing like an in-school suspension, though 'suspension' is a rather provocative word in this context). During an out-of-school suspension much consternation is caused to the parent or parents who must leave the child at home unattended. Much television is watched by the suspended student.

5) in the event that a student is accused of many major infractions (such as spitting one day, then employing a neon yellow plastic water pistol for the purpose of spraying evaporative graffiti on the school's majestic walls another day), he or she may have all recess activity indefinitely suspended. Instead, that is, of going outside with her or his peers to expend energy she or he will sit in the school's empty gymnasium with a book. In this way many books can be read by delinquent students.

delinquent: offender against the law. XVII (earlier *dehynquant*, Caxton, from F.). –**L.** *delinquent-*, *ens*, pp. of *delinquere* be at fault, offend, f. *de* DE- 3 + *linquere* leave (cf. LOAN); see –ENT. Also, *de* ('completely') + *linquere*, thus 'exile'.

4

The underground circulating library has brought me a copy of *Movie-TV Secrets*, the multicolor cover blazoned with the headline 'Debbie's Date Insults Liz!' It is a gift from Frankie Randolph, a rather plain girl who until today has had not one word for me, passed on via Bobby Vanderbilt. I nod and smile over my shoulder in acknowledgment; Frankie hides her head under her desk. I have seen these magazines being passed around among the girls (sometimes one of the boys will condescend to inspect a particularly lurid cover). Miss Mandible confiscates them whenever she finds one, exercising her disciplinary tones. I leaf through *Movie-TV*

June 27, 2016

Enduring image of the open ocean at late twilight, placid, horrifying. In the black sea below me the leviathan drifts, silent among the constellations of scintillating animals, following its dark course to where? In the midnight silence it vouchsafes something to me, a fragment surfacing like a corpse: a memory, a relic, a trace.

There are readers I am trying to destroy.

Why?

Is it revenge? Or am I provoking them so they will destroy me? Am I daring them to pronounce the Law?

You can't.

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June 27, 2016

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Secrets and get an eyeful. 'The exclusive picture on these

pages isn't what it seems. We know how it looks and we know what the gossipers will do. So in the interests of a nice guy, we're publishing the facts first. Here's what really happened!' The picture shows a rising young movie idol in bed, pajama-ed and bleary-eyed, while an equally blowzy young woman looks startled beside him. I am happy to know that the picture is not really what it seems; it seems to be nothing less than divorce evidence.

What do these hipless eleven-year-olds think when they come across, in the same magazine, the full-page ad for Maurice de Paree, which features 'Hip Helpers' or what appear to be padded rumps? ('A real undercover agent that adds appeal to those hips and derriere, both!') If they cannot decipher the language the illustrations leave nothing to the imagination. 'Drive him frantic . . .' the copy continues. Perhaps this explains Bobby Vanderbilt's preoccupation with Lancias and Maseratis; it is a defense against being driven frantic.

I cannot imagine what Frankie Randolph intends with all this.

Sue Ann has observed Frankie Randolph's overture, and catching my eye, she pulls from her satchel no less than seventeen of these magazines, thrusting them at me as if to prove that anything any of her rivals has to offer, she can top. I shuffle through them quickly, noting the broad editorial perspective:

'Debbie's Kids Are Crying'
 'Eddie Asks Debbie: Will You . . . ?'
 'The Nightmares Liz Has About Eddie!'
 'The Things Debbie Can Tell About Eddie'
 'The Private Life of Eddie and Liz'
 'Debbie Gets Her Man Back?'
 'A New Life for Liz'
 'Love Is a Tricky Affair'
 'Eddie's Taylor-Made Love Nest'
 'How Liz Made a Man of Eddie'
 'Are They Planning to Live Together?'
 'Isn't It Time to Stop Kicking Debbie Around?'
 'Debbie's Dilemma'
 'Eddie Becomes a Father Again'
 'Is Debbie Planning to Re-wed?'
 'Can Liz Fulfill Herself?'
 'Why Debbie Is Sick of Hollywood'

Who are these people, Debbie, Eddie, Liz, and how did

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June 27, 2016
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June 27, 2016
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as pearls.

they get themselves in such a terrible predicament? Sue Ann knows, I am sure; it is obvious that she has been studying their history as a guide to what she may expect when she is suddenly freed from this drab, flat classroom.

Again I am reminded of Brenda, so perspicacious with regard to the secret histories of others. I wonder if Brenda, as a young girl, coveted this contraband as passionately as Sue Ann seems to. Of course, we're all entitled to satisfy our curiosity.

curiosity: late 14c., 'careful attention to detail,' also 'desire to know or learn' (originally usually in a bad sense), from Old French curiosete 'curiosity, avidity, choosiness' (Modern French curiosité), from Latin curiositatem (nominative curiositas) 'desire of knowledge, inquisitiveness,' from curiosus (see curious). Neutral or good sense is from early 17c. Meaning 'an object of interest' is from 1640s.

curious: mid-14c., 'eager to know' (often in a bad sense), from Old French curios 'solicitous, anxious, inquisitive; odd, strange' (Modern French curieux) and directly from Latin curiosus 'careful, diligent; inquiring eagerly, meddling,' akin to cura 'care' (see cure (n.)). The objective sense of 'exciting curiosity' is 1715 in English. In booksellers' catalogues, the word means 'erotic, pornographic.' Curiouser and curiouser is from 'Alice in Wonderland' (1865).

cure: late 14c., from Old French curer, from Latin curare 'take care of'

I know that Sue Ann will not stop until she learns whatever

Pulling this string of words out
and out from my chest and my
throat, where does it end?

February 8, 2016

“The very blood of my syntax” is
the phrase – a new one, finally –
bedded like a seed or a bat in the
caves, breathing, glowing. It is
precious. It has risen like a spirit
from the ashen earth to arrest me,
to breathe its breath at my neck
warm and brief and be an echo
from a monstrous voice that is
like a splintered demon from an
ancient dream, yes, a dream
retreating like a hawk or leviathan
serene and indifferent and
familiar, a distant point of contact,
a dragging anchor and silt shroud
billowing, something saying ‘here’
where I am not, an accident of
worlds, a symptom.

June 27, 2016

Spirits, ashes, dreams, the
leviathan.

They recur.

July 4, 2016

No longer to desire the work but
to desire one’s own language.

And what, ever, was the work
except a pale double, a surrogate
of enjoyment, a seducer? Hidden
at the heart of it all was no secret
beyond me but rather the place of
my absence, the site inviting me to
arrive, always disappearing into
the distance.

What pact enjoins me to one
discourse among any?

Early this morning I woke from a
dream: I am standing behind the
red shed of my childhood home,
at the woodpile, searching for the
matches there.

it is she wants to know, and these gossip magazines – with their precisely calibrated intrigues, scrupulous balances between seen and unseen, temporalities driven by an engine of unending drama, teasing horrifically elevated to the status of deliberate psychological derangement – are Step One.

I am angry and I shove the magazines back at her with not even a whisper of thanks.

5

Dream: I am standing at the boys' urinal trough in my old elementary school. I am completely naked. I am alone, but I know there are others watching, and I feel they are the girls from my earliest fantasies. I have to pee real bad. When I do there is a rush of guilty feelings, a vivid sense that I am doing something forbidden, a terrifying joy.

I wake up soaked in piss, which has not happened to me since I was nine.

The fifth grade at Horace Greeley Elementary is a furnace of love, love, love. Today it is raining, but inside the air is heavy and tense with passion. Sue Ann is absent; I suspect that yesterday's exchange has driven her to her bed. Guilt hangs about me. She is not responsible, I know, for what she reads, for the models proposed to her by a venal publishing industry; I should not have been so harsh. Perhaps it is only the flu.

Nowhere have I encountered an atmosphere as charged with aborted sexuality as this. Miss Mandible is helpless; nothing goes right today. Amos Darin has been found drawing a dirty picture in the cloakroom. Sad and inaccurate, it was offered not as a sign of something else but as an act of love in itself. It has excited even those who have not seen it, even those who saw but understood only that it was dirty. The room buzzes with imperfectly comprehended titillation. Amos stands by the door, waiting to be taken to the principal's office. He wavers between fear and enjoyment of his temporary celebrity. From time to time Miss Mandible looks at me reproachfully, as if blaming me for the uproar. But I did not create this atmosphere, I am caught in it like all the others.

8

I am standing in the empty lot
 behind the red shed in the
 backyard. It's winter, and wet
 snow has collected on the wood
 piled high against the shed.
 There's a large wooden box
 overturned, and two saw horses
 on top, homemade.

As if I were a crow I am seeing
 myself from above, standing at the
 empty lot behind the shed of my
 childhood house. Snow covers the
 woodpile – I am exactly in the
 center of the empty lot, without a
 coat, staring at the wood. At the
 foot of the pile is a strip of canvas
 with leather handles sewn at the
 ends, for carrying wood. I see
 myself from the narrow spruce to
 the left, from the apex of the
 shed, from the telephone wires
 hanging high above, from
 nowhere. The decaying cedar
 fencing splinters behind me in the
 cold, nails rusting. Wind blows
 through my cotton shirt.

When you choose to burn it, pack
 the dusty grass stalks drying in the
 ash pail deep into the woodpile.
 Rip the bark from the logs and
 wrap it in dried brown grass and
 newspaper. Fill every crack. The
 silence of these empty houses
 protects you. The grass splinters
 into dust that now rises on the
 wind around you like a shroud,
 like a djinn. Though you are
 weeping, there is no sound but the
 cracking grass, the cracking paper.
 A silent snow falls as you force
 the grass wrist deep into the pile,
 blood collecting scraps of bark on
 your fingers and knuckles. Breath
 rising like smoke, heaving like a
 wide-eyed animal fleeing. And you
 roar into the pile, hoping your
 heart stops.

The crows are collected above
 you; standing with your back
 against the rotting cedar planks,

Everything is promised my classmates and I, most of all the future. We accept the outrageous assurances without blinking.

I myself get caught up in the rhetoric of it all. I feel the strength of Mandible's lesson plans – they are scientifically calibrated to inject me with the precise minimal knowledge of all possible careers and life plans. We learn of the beauty of other lands, but nothing of immigration. We learn of the heroics of politics, but nothing of hatred. We learn of the accomplishments of science, but nothing of grant proposals or the trials of organic chemistry. We learn of the dignity of poetry, but nothing of anguish. Today we engaged a taxonomy of dog breeds, which was cute and enlightening. Strictly as a matter of preparing for all possible contingencies and for the sake of fitting in, I am currently considering a career as an ecologist or microbiologist, both of which professions I have been warmly invited to pursue. I am expected to give a report of the life and work of ecologists as a large Research Project scheduled for March.

9

I have finally found the nerve to petition for a larger desk. At recess I can hardly walk; my legs do not wish to uncoil themselves, leading two obnoxious 6th graders I do not know to call me 'Frankenasshole'. Miss Mandible says she will take it up with the custodian, and couldn't contain a brief guffaw when I told her about the offending term. Uncertain, the meaning of this. Additionally, she seizes this opportunity to tell me she is worried about the excellence of my themes. Have I, she asks, been receiving help? For an instant I am on the brink of telling her my story. Something, however, warns me not to attempt it. Here I am safe, I have a place; I do not wish to entrust myself once more to the whimsy of authority. I resolve to make my themes less excellent in the future. If my committed mediocrity is what it takes to keep me safe, then I am committed.

11

A ruined marriage, a ruined adjusting career, a grim interlude in the Army when I was almost not a person. This

is the sum of my existence to date, a dismal total. Small

you listen for the sound of a glass
bell in the air, wretched and clear,
so quiet, from below the
overturned plywood box, where
the matches lie. Shoulders
steaming, cotton shirt sweat-
soaked, hands shining with blood,
you regard the woodpile, your
mirror, your voice about to speak.

Will they light?

March 12, 2021

Why did you choose to vanish, all
these years, forsaking your home
and your family, the warm rush of
mountain wind through the
swaying pines, the waves of
plainsgrass swaying, the spring
hail, the cicadas singing, the silent
sun? Have you stolen off with
something, to pick it clean in a
secret corner of the world? These
years of wandering have brought
you closer to what? To the same
secret heart, hidden in the
shadows of the spruce boughs as
you lay in the warm grass, hidden
beneath the stairs, listening in on
your anguish and shame, hidden
in the shape of distant passers-by
as you paced out your midnight
walks, hidden behind the locked
doors, cowering at the shrieking
and gasping, witness of your
blackest hour, your wretched joy,
your boundless hate, the light you
carry through a night that never
ends except at the heart.

The days are getting long now.
One waits for nothing, anymore,
not even death.

This rotting earth, please take me.

wonder that re-education seemed my only hope. It is clear even to me that I need reworking in some fundamental way. How efficient is the society that provides thus for the salvage of its clinkers!

Plucked from my unexamined life among other pleasant, desperate, money-making young Americans, thrown backward in space and time, I am beginning to understand how I went wrong, how we all go wrong. (Although this was far from the intention of those who sent me here; they require only that I get right.) There is something strangely satisfying knowing that I am here because I was an insufficient human. I am anxious to see how I shall be saved.

14

The distinction between children and adults, while probably useful for some purposes, is at bottom a specious one, I feel. There are only individual egos, crazy for love.

It is easy to see this when my efforts to ignore the advances of Miss Mandible are too perfect. She is clearly hurt by my indifference to her gifts of knowledge and care. She has a fair share of groveling students, desperate to demonstrate their obedience, their obsequy. These students literally bring her apples on occasion. But I am waiting for an apple from Mandible.

15

The custodian has informed Miss Mandible that our desks are all the correct size for fifth-graders, as specified by the Board of Estimates and furnished the schools by the Nu-Art Educational Supply Corporation of Englewood, California. He has pointed out that if the desk size is correct, then the pupil size must be incorrect. Miss Mandible, who has already arrived at this conclusion, refuses to press the matter further. I think I know why. An appeal to the administration might result in my removal from the class, in a transfer to some sort of setup for 'exceptional children'. This would be a disaster of the first magnitude. To sit in a room with child geniuses (or, more likely, children who are 'retarded') would shrivel me in a week. Let my experience here be that of the common run, I say; let me be, please God, typical. I hope I forget my entire past so that I may more easily be an actual fifth grader. I would consent to whatever is necessary, I feel.

17

‘The predominant psychodynamic perspective is that *déjà vu* reflects the mind’s effort to quickly block the emotional distress aroused by the present experience by shifting into a distorted state of consciousness and forcing an artificial “familiar” interpretation of the present new experience.’

September 8, 2034

Nightmare from last night, the sky opening up into an archaic darkness, streaked with purple and red spreading like ink in water. The same nightmare after all these years, my constant dream.

We are standing in the yard, and all the dogs are there with us and alive again. The cedars are full of cardinals and it is evening in late summer. The wildflowers are stringy and dropping woolly heads of seeds and the bees are swirling at the mouth of the hive and we are gathered together to watch it all.

You and me.

The moon is so close, dark sun setting all awry, to the north, shadows we've never seen before. The limit of terror; we're choking on it, weeping. Of course the whole thing is too beautiful to endure, me standing there with you and the dogs, animals all around us.

The attendant dead, so near.

Clutching your hand, what do I see breathing beyond the planets?

'...if the current experience is reminiscent of a previous situation in which one acted immorally, the *déjà vu* reflects the ego's effort to divert the attention of the superego away from this implication.'

'Jackson suggests that we have two varieties of consciousness: *normal*, that processes information from the outside world, and *parasitic*, that monitors the thoughts and reflections of the inner, mental world.'

'On rare occasions, the parahippocampal system, operating independently of the hippocampal/prefrontal system, will mistakenly assess an unfamiliar experience as familiar.'

'Personal descriptions of *déjà vu* often include a feeling of being able to predict what will happen next.'

'A second parapsychological interpretation is that an individual is tapping into someone else's experience of the present situation in the past or future time, or even through oneself from an out-of-body experience, with the "normal" self receiving impressions from this disembodied state in either the present moment or some other point in time.'

'...the feeling of *déjà vu* corresponds to the memory of an unconscious fantasy.'

Well.

20

We read signs as promises. Miss Mandible understands by my great height, by my resonant vowels, that I will one day carry her off to bed. Sue Ann interprets these same signs to mean that I am unique among her male acquaintances, therefore most desirable, therefore her special property as is every thing that is Most Desirable. If neither of these propositions work out then life has broken faith with them.

I myself, in my former existence, read the company motto ("Here to Help in Time of Need") as a description of the duty of the adjuster, drastically mislocating the company's deepest concerns. I believed that because I had obtained a wife who was made up of wife-signs (beauty, charm, softness, perfume, cookery) I had found love. Brenda,

July 6, 2016

Repeating.

These fragments I have shored
against my ruins, as they say.

“You have the same gait,” I’m
told. The picture is of some
ancestor, unknown to me,
stepping heavily through an
aberrant Tennessee snow, cedar
rail fences buried in drifts, making
his way along an empty path to
the church, solitary as a grave in
the wastes. Cursing to himself?
Squinting at the radiant abyss
around him? Can he see his own
dead antecedents peering through
the limbs of the pines? I am
swallowed by a future
unimaginable to them, he thinks,
approaching the churchyard. The
vagaries of lives pullulating across
these empty lands overwhelm the
mind. Where are you going, my
avatar? Do you know I am here,
in the distant wake of your
footsteps? Even as the melting
snows leave no trace I am
nevertheless locked here in
abeyance, quickened to life by a
battery of desires circling, circling,
leaving behind a legacy of decay
evanescent, until it is my turn.

Repeating.

reading the same signs that have now misled Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, felt she had been promised that she would never be bored again. All of us, Miss Mandible, Sue Ann, myself, Brenda, Mr. Goodykind, still believe that the American flag betokens a kind of general righteousness.

But I say, looking about me in this incubator of future citizens, that signs are signs, and that some of them are lies. This is the great discovery of my time here.

23

It may be that my experience as a child will save me after all. If only I can remain quietly in this classroom, making my notes while Napoleon plods through Russia in the droning voice of Harry Broan, reading aloud from our History text. All of the mysteries that perplexed me as an adult have their origins here, and one by one I am numbering them, exposing their roots. This is the essence of etymology. Miss Mandible will refuse to permit me to remain ungrown. Her hands rest on my shoulders too warmly, and for too long.

I am rushing toward something. I can feel it.

December

7

Many setbacks. I have avoided writing. I am not feeling well here. Last week I saw Brownly passing Debbie-and-Eddies to Vanderbilt. I was inordinately upset about this and nearly called both of them several impermissible names. I fantasized breathlessly about destroying Vanderbilt in a demonstration of peerless vigor and masculinity before denying Brownly’s inevitable wishes to side with me, after all. The soul of a whore. The soul of a whore.

My consternation did not go undetected by Miss Mandible, who quietly asked me during reading break if I needed to see the nurse. I nearly wept, and I think she noticed this. But she cannot possibly understand what is happening to me.

August 4, 2015

My mother is a fish because they are both dead. Vardaman and I are walking together, surrounded by ghosts, the summer sun burning away the limpid sheen of the scales and eyes, the noisome disembowelment desiccating in the weeds, silence for miles accompanies the rhythm of our footsteps through the crackling stalks of scorched grass. The drumming of a grasshopper's erratic flight, perhaps. "Do you remember the time," I ask him, though he carries on as if I had said nothing, as if I were another among the spirits, "watching the old man, railroad tie driven into his belt, catch his fish and rip from them his hook and grip them about the fins, ribbons of muscles tense along his forearms, all to be destroyed by the single obliterating stroke of the tie to the skull and I, later, five- or six-years old, no tie upon my person and panicked, the fry seizing at my feet on the rivershore, held aloft the nearest stone like Abraham with no blade and no angel to deliver me from my charge, to crush through skull and brain and the site of all life and need in this animal that made no cry and left no monument behind but what? Its eye." And mine and me, seeing myself in it.

This scene is not the heart, it is the lock. It is the gate beyond which lies my silent double, you.

It is the pledges that this place makes to me, pledges that cannot be redeemed, that confuse me later and make me feel I am not getting anywhere. Everything is presented as the result of some knowable process; if I wish to arrive at four I get there by way of two and two. If I wish to burn Moscow the route I must travel has already been marked out by another visitor. If, like Bobby Vanderbilt, I yearn for the wheel of the Lancia 2.4-liter coupe, I have only to go through the appropriate process, that is, get the money. And if it is money itself that I desire, I have only to make it: keep my nose clean, develop a general affability, have a decent handle of numbers and grammar, get a job working for a company. All of these goals are equally beautiful in the sight of the Board of Estimates; the proof is all around us, in the nonsense ugliness of this steel and glass building, in the straightline matter-of-factness with which Miss Mandible handles some of our less reputable wars. Who points out that arrangements sometimes slip, that errors are made, that signs are misread? "They have confidence in their ability to take the right steps and to obtain correct answers." I take the right steps, obtain correct answers, and my wife leaves me for another man.

The first time through I really left with the impression that the world was just full of nice people with jobs: a dentist, a teacher, a secretary. The frequency with which mention is made to these professions is astounding. It is heresy to say to us 11 year-olds that we will probably be nothing but gropers, though this is the truth. We will graduate to the sixth grade with a party that will feature young girls in make-up posing in photos taken by insufferable parents. I want them to tell me that this is a ruse. I want them to take me to the abyss. I am waiting for the truth to arrive to me again, from somewhere else this time. I'm not leaving until I get it.

8

My enlightenment is proceeding wonderfully.

9

Disaster once again. Tomorrow I am to be sent to a doctor, for observation. Sue Ann Brownly caught Miss Mandible and me in the cloakroom, during recess, and immediately threw a fit. For a moment I thought she was actually going to choke. She ran out of the room weeping, straight for the principal's office, certain now which of us was Debbie,

which Eddie, which Liz. I am sorry to be the cause of her disillusionment, but I know that she will recover. Miss Mandible is ruined but fulfilled. Fulfilled because ruined? Although she will be charged with contributing to the corrupting of a youth, she seems at peace; her promise has been kept. She knows now that everything she has been told about life, about America, is true.

I have tried to convince the school authorities that I am a minor only in a very special sense, that I am in fact mostly to blame – but it does no good. They are as dense as ever. My contemporaries are astounded that I present myself as anything other than an innocent victim. Like the Old Guard marching through the Russian drifts, the class marches to the conclusion that truth is punishment.

Bobby Vanderbilt has given me his copy of *Sounds of Sebring*, in farewell.

September 8, 2034

I see myself, silent, at last.

“Dru Farro and *paracitation*: a critical analysis”

Anyone encountering Dru Farro’s essay “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” is likely to want an answer key; a guide explaining the details of its structure, tracing down the sometimes oblique references, and noting the various – often minute – oddities in the text. The essay’s two columns are, on the reader’s right, the complete verbatim text of Donald Barthelme’s short story “Me and Miss Mandible,” though, as Farro points out, Barthelme’s text is modified by Farro’s own additions, none of which are signaled in any way except, perhaps, by stylistic nuances distinguishing Barthelme’s prose from Farro’s. On the reader’s left is another series of journal entries that range from 1935 to September 8, 2034 (the month and day, one might point out, of Farro’s mother’s birthday) and are not arranged chronologically. They are marked by a typographic irregularity and feature several excerpts from Farro’s other work, mostly that between the years 2014 and 2016. Perhaps most noticeable is their apparent heterogeneity with anything related to Barthelme’s/Farro’s text. Though some entries are commentary-like, these are confined to the early pages of the essay and then completely disappear.

Luckily for the reader, Farro provides a preface to the essay that provides a preliminary orientation to the piece. We begin with Farro’s epigraph, which is from Roland Barthes’ *Criticism and Truth*: “...no longer to desire the work but to desire one’s own language.” The original quotation appears in the context of Barthes’ attempt to differentiate reading and criticism. Barthes writes,

[o]nly reading loves the work, entertains with it a relationship of desire. To read is to desire the work, to want to be the work, to refuse to echo the work using any discourse other than that of the work [...]. To go from reading to criticism is to change desires, it is no longer to desire the work but to desire one’s own language. But by that very process it is to send the work back to the desire to write from that which it arose. And so discourse circulates around the book: *reading, writing*: all literature goes from one desire to another.

“Me and Me and Miss Mandible” seems to stand somewhere between reading and criticism as Barthes defines it here. On one hand Farro clearly responds to the work in a discourse that exceeds that of Barthelme’s text, but on the other hand never completely severs that relationship with the text; indeed the entire text is repeated. What Farro’s text is ultimately an example of is the circulation of desire as Barthes describes it above. Desire, as it is called forth by Barthelme’s text, appears in the form of Farro’s interjections, which then recede back into the progression of the reading of the story. As Farro’s desire circulates, the story accrues more and more of his language and this accrual, in the end, extends even beyond the Barthelme story to include the marginal journal entries on the left which, in turn, one might imagine, could themselves collect or attract more and

more of Farro's (or anyone else's) words. This model of reading/criticism as a potentially endless *accumulation* stands as a contrast or balance to alternative models wherein criticism is seen as a means of *distillation* and reading is seen as a sort of sensitivity to salient or relevant aspects of the whole. If, from a conventional perspective, criticism is thought to be an operation of incision, Farro sees it as an occasion for elaboration or expansion, which of course is what follows in the text of "Me and Me and Miss Mandible."

The preface begins, as is typical, by indicating the purpose or hypothesis of the piece. Farro writes,

[t]his preface, unlike others, cannot summarize or distil any of what follows. What follows, by the way, is a sort of concatenation, a collage, an assault of writing – not all of it mine – assembled in what can be characterized neither as a deliberate order nor a haphazard pastiche. I assembled it all under the hypothesis that whatever found its way in [to the work] would engender – in me, in whomever – associations, associations that will not be foreclosed or buried by the action of any overly apparent or muscular thesis. The thesis is this hypothesis.

The allusions, really, begin here. The thesis/hypothesis distinction cannot help but bring to mind the emblematic Hegelian equation: thesis, antithesis, synthesis, which is meant to summarize the career of Spirit in its monumental progression to self-realization as depicted in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The most famous passage in Hegel's work is no doubt the dialectic of the master and bondsman in which the two consciousnesses stake their lives in what has been called the struggle for prestige, resulting in the subjugation of the now-enslaved bondsman to the master. Paradoxically, however, it is the bondsman who is first capable of recognizing himself in the work he produces for the master, positioning him to accede to a higher state of consciousness than the master, who languishes in the endless consumption of the bondsman's labour. The bondsman's experience, then, is not unlike the scenario described by Barthes above, at least insofar as the bondsman's desire materializes, as desire, by means of the works he fashions from the world around him.

Following the associations further, as Farro clearly intends us to do, the Hegelian theme recalls Jacques Derrida's *Glas*, which is the obvious stylistic ancestor to Farro's work. *Glas* is comprised of two columns, one of which is an interminable *exposé* on Hegel's name, his *corpus*, and his legacy (the other column is on the work of French writer Jean Genet). The ghost of Hegel extends farther even than this, as we also recall Farro's one-act plays *The This* and *The Thesis*²⁰⁷, both of which depend on Hegel's *Phenomenology* for their dramatic unfolding and both of which bear the mark of Farro's characteristic obsession with the notion of the thesis as well as his penchant for making himself a character in his own work. In *The This*, for example, René Magritte and his

²⁰⁷ Both of which appear in the unpublished manuscripts of Farro's thesis, which, prior to the final title of *A Thousand Unknown Things*, was provisionally entitled *New Possible Prefaces*, indicative of Farro's fixation on prefaces.

kitchenware have a surreal conversation considering the relationship between the thesis and Hegelian sense-certainty in an effort to determine the point at which one can say that the thesis exists (the play facetiously employs Magritte's infamous *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* as the fulcrum for this existential eristic). *The Thesis*, on the other hand, is far more akin to "Me and Me and Miss Mandible" in its jaggedness, in the characters' heterogeneity, and in the intrusion of personal memory into the realm of philosophic reflection.²⁰⁸ Even the very phrase, "this preface, unlike others, cannot summarize or distil any of what follows," would be a welcome sentiment in Hegel's famous preface to the *Phenomenology* which, among other things, calls the summarizing aspect of the preface into question.

If we can follow Hegel's influence this far only in the opening paragraphs to Farro's work, we can follow Derrida's at least as far. Not only is there the aforementioned stylistic influence of *Glas*, but also the typographic and temporal disarray of Farro's work clearly borrows from Derrida's *The Post Card*, the first half of which is the text of a series of dated post cards sent to an unidentified "you" and occasioned by a certain picture, chanced upon by Derrida, of Socrates in the act of writing. As with Hegel, Derrida looms over Farro's dramatic works – along with the figure of Antonin Artaud – especially in the long introduction to Farro's one-act *Will You* which, moreover, is quoted in "Me and Me and Miss Mandible" (also, in "Me and Me and

²⁰⁸ An example excerpt:

DRU: I am always re-born out of my thousands and thousands and endless deaths.

THOMAS: This grave, however, stands for the Unhappy Consciousness as a monument of the vanished individuality of the Unchangeable. The Unhappy Consciousness, in encountering this symbol of the vanished individuality of the Unchangeable, comes to know that this individuality, because it has vanished, is not the true individuality.

DRU: And, though I want nothing more than for the wind to stop blowing through the pinetops and for the sound to stop, it is no different than wishing, if I wanted this, for the wind to blow.

THOMAS: As a result, the Unhappy Consciousness lays aside its efforts to seek the Unchangeable as an *actual* existence. "Only then," Hegel says, "is [the Unhappy Consciousness] capable of finding individuality in its genuine or universal form" (218).

DRU: Yes. The first memory is the memory that says, "There is nothing I can do in this place." The first memory is the memory that says, "I have just given up". You will bear scores of marks in your palms forever. They are an inscription...

The remainder of the play continues this analysis of Hegel's Unhappy Consciousness alongside the more and more diffuse and suicidal yearnings of Dru.

Miss Mandible” Farro evasively alludes to Derrida’s work, calling Derrida “a certain philosopher from El-Biar”). Of course, at the most general level, Farro’s almost neurotic relationship with the text – with the typography of the text, the topology of its features (especially the site of the thesis, the end of the preface, the beginning of the beginning, the end of the thesis, the terrain of its syntax, etc.) – betrays an indebtedness to Derrida’s early works and his experimental works.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, Farro does not list Hegel or Derrida among his “allegiances,” but rather Freud and Lacan. Farro writes, just after the paragraph I cited above,

[t]he existence of this writing, the materialization of my sustained efforts, implies my regard for these associations, my valuing them. One could deduce, from the fact of this regard, certain literary, philosophical, or ethical stances tied to certain schools or theorists. While there may be a range of possible affinities, for me personally I consider them to be more or less exclusively Freudian and Lacanian, these being the only theorists I consider myself to be acceptably familiar with when it comes to the matter of declaring allegiances.

The paragraph is a perplexing one, not simply for the influences listed (though Farro’s emphasis on personal memory and the idea of trauma invites psychoanalytic speculation). Farro assumes that the reader’s impulse, when confronting an essay as unconventional and even mystifying as “Me and Me and Miss Mandible”, will be to separate out thematic, literary, or philosophical motifs and extrapolate, from these fragments, underlying theses that exist in the text whether Farro wants them to be there or not. But is this the reader’s impulse? We have here an example of Farro’s tendency to assume the worst from his readers; that they will refuse to enjoy his work but only seek to carve it up and ready it for sale, as it were. Ironically, Farro’s very efforts to avoid being carved up in this way in fact *compel* his readers to do so since his work refuses to be digested as it is. This is why other critics have referred to Farro’s work as “classically hysterical”²⁰⁹ since it longs for the reader to have the key to his truth while interminably dangling the lock just out of reach.

In any case, either directly or indirectly the reader’s critical appraisal of the piece is directed, by Farro, to psychoanalysis: specifically Freud and Lacan. This explains Farro’s “regard for [the reader’s] associations,” if we take “associations” precisely in the analytic sense of “free association,” which Freud established as the “fundamental technical rule of analysis”. In the *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* he writes,

[w]e instruct the patient to put himself into a state of quiet, unreflecting self-observation, and to report to us whatever internal perceptions he is able to make – feelings, thoughts, memories – in the order

²⁰⁹ See for example Regina Dowd-Specter’s “Dora Goes Again Unread: Contemporary Misunderstandings and Repetitions” or Philippa Gregg’s “There is No Secret Heart: Fear of Women in the Work of Dru Farro.”

in which they occur to him. At the same time we warn him expressly against giving way to any motive which would lead him to make a selection among these associations or to exclude any of them, whether on the ground that it is too *disagreeable* or too *indiscreet* to say, or that it is too *unimportant* or *irrelevant*, or that it is *nonsensical* and need not be said. We urge him always to follow only the surface of his consciousness and to leave aside any criticism of what he finds, whatever shape that criticism may take; and we assure him that the success of the treatment, and above all its duration, depends on the conscientiousness with which he obeys this fundamental technical rule of analysis.²¹⁰

It seems as though Farro is espousing the psychoanalytic practice of free association as a model for reading “Me and Me and Miss Mandible,” and possibly as a model for reading in general. It was certainly the model he adopted for writing it, as is clear from the sporadic arrangements of excerpts from the past, the often unbelievably tenuous connections between the two columns, and the informal style of some of the entries. Indeed, “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” reads almost like a transcript of psychosis, where the reader is compelled to search everywhere for a unifying consistency to a language that appears completely dissociated from the reality of the Barthelme story, or even from the reality of anything we would recognize as a “document.” The very title “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” reminds one of the distinct personalities often associated with psychosis, where different characters are nevertheless also contained within “me”. It is a wonder that Farro recommends the model of free association for his readers, when in truth they ought to be the analysts!

The preface continues here with a quite long parenthetical reference, in which Farro claims, “[a]t the subthematic level I profess a concern for education, specifically the teaching of literature at the university.” Farro acknowledges that his psychoanalytically informed method of writing/reading cannot very well be taken as a simple pragmatic model of teaching in general, or teaching literature specifically. Though he emphasizes his unfamiliarity with the academic discipline of education, he presumes, correctly, that “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” will not be useful for students or researchers in education departments who are looking for critical reflections on contemporary forms of pedagogical praxis. This further complicates the status of the document – one can hardly consider it a contribution to scholarly literature on the topic of education; one can hardly consider it scholarly at all. What is it then?

Before concluding his preface Farro introduces a neologism of his own invention: paracitation. The word is a play on “parasite” and “citation” and is meant in some way to encapsulate what he is trying to do in “Me and Me and Miss Mandible.” The term is originally from Farro’s essay “Paracitation,” delivered in Tokyo in

²¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVI*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1963), 287.

2015. This essay is likewise a piece on the teaching of literature, and it is likewise evasive and impractical. Farro begins by describing – again, almost like a psychotic – a phrase that he cannot get out his mind: “the very blood of my syntax.” He writes that this phrase is “bedded like a seed or bat in the eaves,” that is has “risen like a spirit from the ashen earth to arrest” him and that it is “like a splintered demon from an ancient dream [...] a dream retreating like a hawk or leviathan.” Syntax, Farro claims, is a “structure of reality” and, as such, it can shift the landscape of the real according to the use to which it is put. In the academy, he writes, “it is put in the service of method, adopted as a dialect of profundity, [it is] a key rendering knowledge transmissible [...], [it is] a rhetoric of unobjectionable transparency.” Citing Roland Barthes, Farro argues that the method to which the very syntax of the academy (if there is such a thing) is put is always goal-oriented and straight-pathed. Barthes writes, “paradoxically, what the straight path actually marks out are the places the subject doesn’t want to go: it fetishizes the goal as a place and, as a result [...] it enters the service of a generality, a ‘morality.’ The subject, for instance, renounces what he doesn’t know of himself, his irreducibility, his force (to say nothing of his unconscious).”²¹¹ The academic method, according to Barthes and Farro, does not simply discourage exploration of the unconscious, it excludes it at the outset by means of the boundaries established by its very methodological coherence. Indeed, this coherence extends all the way to syntax.

There are, of course, several problematic features of the above claims, the grossest of which is, ironically, their generality – the very sin of which Barthes accuses the academy. The “straight path” is no doubt the ideal of certain curricular structures, but this claim cannot really be verified without an extended analysis of actual curricula employed in actual universities. No evidence, not even anecdotal, is offered by either Barthes or Farro of the perfidious effect of this method, nor is there even any mention of whether the straight path method is practiced equally from department to department (the assumption is that we are concerned exclusively with Humanities departments).

Additionally, some readers might contend that the subject’s (read: student’s) “unconscious” ought not to be a matter for university – or any other – education. These readers, who first of all might not even admit that the unconscious exists, might point out that Farro is allowing the unconscious the status and influence assigned to it by the likes of Freud and Lacan who, of course, developed their theories without the help of contemporary sciences like neurobiology or neuropsychology. Moreover, they might argue, it can hardly be denied that, in the last five years or so, university campuses across North America have become more accommodating to students suffering from anxiety, depression, mild forms of autism, addiction, anorexia/bulimia, bi-polar disorder, etc., all of which should be directed to the attention of the university

²¹¹ Roland Barthes, *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of some Everyday Spaces*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3.

mental health care offices, surely not the literature professor. It is one thing to discuss the act of reading from a psychoanalytical perspective, but quite another to extend this perspective to the classroom itself.

Farro has responded to these claims elsewhere in his work, especially in his essay “Robber: Come,” which is an *exposé* of the work of Deborah Britzman, delivered at Fudon University in 2013. His claim, following Britzman, is that learning itself is an affective experience and, as such, all of the dynamics that are in play in an analysis – love, hate, aggression, jealousy, paranoia, ambivalence, identification, etc. – are present in the classroom, in the relationship between teacher, student, and knowledge. Farro writes,

it only takes a moment of reflection on our own childhood experiences of education to recall the emotional element of learning. We desire our teachers’ love, our peers’ love, we are anxious in the face of testing, we are feverishly ambitious [...] we dream of being at school – the dream of being naked in front of one’s classmates is one of the most famous – we learn to play at school, resolve conflict at school, work together at school [...]. Learning is at its best when it is done for its own sake – for the sheer pleasure of it – and this is the most highly affected pedagogical experience we can have of it. An erotics of learning.

There is little to object to in Farro’s description of typical schoolroom experiences; the resistance begins when the looming and unpredictable element of education – the element that is always in excess of the material being taught – is attributed to the unconscious. Denying the presence and function of the unconscious in the development of humans and its persistence in every interhuman interaction – not least among them education – is, however, to leave oneself recourse only to the theses of behavioral scientists, sociologists, education administrators, etc. To the extent that these theses are structured by a specific scientific discourse they operate under the presumption that the real corresponds precisely to the symbolic and that the unincorporated data are simply acceptable deviations or anomalies that may be rejected in order to preserve the method that produces the best results. Farro responds, on the contrary:

education proceeds along an axis that is not instrumental, progressive, or teleological. Education, like psychoanalysis, is structured around a fundamental difference and absence that is grafted into its very identity. Where psychoanalysis and education seem most often to diverge from one another, a divergence I am warning against, is the last to final step – the penultimate step. Where education sees the penultimate step as being that which stands at the precipice of a kind of Hegelian unity and absolute – materialized in the form of, say, a standardized test or graduation exam – psychoanalysis sees the penultimate step as one where the analysand is prepared to accept and navigate the difference about which her identity is constituted. This is a radically uncertain scenario, and so long as education persists in ignoring, or fearing, the radical uncertainty that it seeks perpetually to calm or control, then it is failing students as humans even as it is succeeding in making them more productive, more tolerant, or more efficient.

The result of Farro's commitment to this picture of education is a teaching that can only be characterized as risky and speculative. Returning to "Paracitation," Farro asks "[w]hat would it mean to teach Kafka? Do some works resist teaching more than others, or even resist it absolutely? [...] And if, for love of the [literary] object, one resolves to teach otherwise, what can this otherwise be?" He then offers paracitation as an example of teaching otherwise, a pedagogical strategy that, instead of centering on citation as the means of distilling a piece of literature to digestible portions, focuses on speaking from within the object, as though the teacher were lost within the body of the text, exactly as he does in "Me and Me and Miss Mandible." From this perspective, for example, "Kafka's text and words [come] blinking to life again [...] but laced with hidden roots." These "roots" are the lifeline of the teacher's desire, coming alive from within the text, like a parasite. He "cites," Kafka's short story "A Country Doctor" thus (Farro's additions are unitalicized):

O be joyful, all you patients,

The doctor's laid in bed beside you!

Never shall I reach home at this rate; trees pass like listless ruin to the ocean floor, I see the stars above burn out one by one; my flourishing practice is done for and I have healed no one; my successor is robbing me; in my house the groom is raging; Rose is his victim; he hunts her like a shark smiling; all about me a plague of saprotrophic faces swirl like spores, eyeing me indolently, indifferently, saying nothing; the boy is dead, my only chance gone; I do not want to think about it anymore. Naked, exposed to the frost of this most unhappy of ages, with an earthly vehicle, unearthly horses, Gods in the canopy gauzy and still and incapable even of disdain, I wander astray. My fur coat is hanging from the back of the gig, falling to pieces, but I cannot reach it, and none of my limber pack of patients lifts a finger. How could I ever have loved you, you jackals, you precious insects. Betrayed! Betrayed! I sought you with the blessing of all my people and you have stolen away to the labyrinth while the birds swarm with songs of my death. Betrayed! A false alarm on the night bell once answered – it cannot be made good, not ever.

The value of this excerpt as a pedagogical device is complicated by its value as an artistic object in its own right, a sort of post-modern amalgam between Duchamp's "L.H.O.O.Q.," the Chapman Brothers' "Insult to Injury," and Sherrie Levine's "After Walker Evans" or Borges' story "Pierre Menard, author of the *Quixote*". At the very least, Farro's intervention here calls the status of "the text" into question; not the text in general, however, but the text as already under the consideration of academic scrutiny; Farro's question seems to be: how is the text *immediately* transformed the moment it is taken as a literary object subjected to scholarly analysis? Simply upon its arrival in the classroom the document is presumed to be susceptible to distillation and fragmentation, a premium is put on symbolic interpretation, with an eye toward presenting the story in the form of units of meaning available for exchange, which may then be employed as a guarantor of knowledge acquisition. Here, and in "Me and Me and Miss Mandible," this formula is inverted: the story is

not summarized but, instead, it is protracted; symbols are multiplied by the analysis and the “meaning” of the text materializes in the infinitely expansive network of symbols, metaphors, and especially associations, any of which reconfigure the story while simultaneously extending its career along the tracks of interpretation. The mode of intervention is anti-didactic insofar as Farro’s additions are not nearly as deliberate as they are freely associative, revealing as much to him (him the reader more than him the teacher) about his unconscious landscape as they do about the major themes or imagery of the story. As a model for reading, Farro’s work reorients the value of the literary text insofar as it is no longer (only) an object available for intellectual consumption and is instead an object making a demand of the reader, a demand literally to respond to the text at the complicated intersection of the reader’s desire, her associations, and the general thematic coherence of the story. One writes one’s desire into a text that, by the force of its internal coherence, reconfigures this desire for the reader, not wholly unlike Lacan’s famous schema in which the reader/patient receives his or her message from the text/Other in an inverted form. Here, however, the message is inverted not in its meaning but in its intent: what was originally a demand for meaning made by the reader to the text becomes a demand for meaning made by the text to the reader.

One ought to note that a pedagogy like this is possible, perhaps, only in the contemporary historical moment, a moment when analysis in the form of information is more widely available than could ever have been imagined 20 years ago. A student simply does not have to attend a class on Kafka in order to obtain cogent and relatively detailed facts about him or his work and, therefore, insofar as the academy values this form of fragmentized or distilled form of information it is participating in its own obsolescence. Today, one can perform a simple internet search for analysis of “A Country Doctor” and obtain, in under a second, dozens of analyses of the text ranging from peer-reviewed journal articles to blog posts to professors’ lecture notes, most of which are sufficient enough in their thematic, stylistic, or symbolic reviews of the text to make subsequent analyses in this mode more or less redundant. That is, the compiled scholarship is essentially enough to consider the scholarly perspective complete, or at the very least more than sufficient to satisfy the needs of the typical undergraduate student whose primary objective as a student is redeployment of information. Farro’s work does not necessarily criticize or condemn this state of things as much as acknowledge it and provide a novel means of engaging with texts that, even the more obscure among them, are everyday accruing easily available scholarly analyses which in turn are challenging the university professor to provide an education that is in excess of the facts already at the fingertips of any student. As Farro writes in his essay “The Postmortem Condition,” an analysis of Lyotard’s seminal work,

[i]f knowledge comes to be equated with access to information, then educators will be less and less crucial in the dissemination of knowledge and more useful as guides toward databases of information. The material of learning, however, is theoretically already available in these computerized archives. Curiosity is muted in favor of acquisition. Imagination is replaced by performance. Lyotard writes,

“the transmission of knowledge is no longer designed to train an elite capable of guiding the nation toward emancipation, but to supply the system with players capable of acceptably fulfilling their roles at the pragmatic posts required by its institutions.” Should this be the case, and I think that it is, the role of the professor or educator obviously gets thrown radically into question. If there is no longer a pretense to transmitting knowledge that the student would otherwise have no access to, then the question becomes: what kind of knowledge, if any, *are* we transmitting?

Farro’s answer seems to be: knowledge of one’s self, the self considered from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

“Me and Me and Miss Mandible” is both the product of Farro’s wild self-analysis (an impossible endeavor) and an object meant, as the preface indicates, to provoke, to foment, associations; associations whose significance exceed the boundaries of information, even of knowledge, and aspire to the domain of truth – the student’s truth.

The conclusion to Farro’s preface: “[w]hat follows is an essay, absent all the stylistic trappings that have accrued onto that term over the years and years. It is a sort of offering, perhaps no better than the infantile scybalum, an acknowledgement that you want something, but who knows what it is. It is an essay; it is not a response, but desires one.” One such possible response is that of the present author: an answer key. *Isn’t that what you want?*

* * *

One can hardly approach “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” without a copy of “Me and Miss Mandible” at hand, in order to discover all the moments of Farro’s interventions. Farro expands Barthelme’s text by almost double; some additions are only a few words, while others are several paragraphs. Especially notable among the added passages are the themes of dreams, *déjà vu*, and etymology.

In the left-hand column emerge the more explicitly psychoanalytic themes, not only in the content of the entries but in their form: the past is completely disjointed, ultimately giving way to a paranoid future; Farro’s memories play the central role and the excerpted character of the entries reminds the reader of the fragmented nature of memory; and the somewhat confessional tone of the entries suggests the tone of an analysand

struggling between soliciting a response from the analyst and maintaining the freedom of her thoughts and associations. Farro's debt to Barthes is apparent here, especially in the latter's work *A Lover's Discourse* and *Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes*, both of which experiment with arbitrary arrangements of fragmented text.

This answer key will be structured similarly to "Me and Me and Miss Mandible," in order to make things as simple as possible for the reader. When the left column is under consideration the text will be aligned to the left and a heading will be included indicating the date of the entry being analyzed, and similarly for the right column. It is worth iterating that the intent of this key is to supply details regarding the structure of Farro's essay, notable biographical information, and elaboration of essential references and themes, which alone can take the reader quite far afield from the apparent subject matter of the story. Borrowing an image from the essay, this key might be considered to be an exploded view of "Me and Me and Miss Mandible," its individual components isolated as clearly as possible.

September 13

[Miss Mandible ... makes up her mind.]

This scandalous first paragraph is Barthelme's. The salient features are the potential sexual relationship between teacher and young student (echoes of the Oedipus complex are present here), and the disjunction of realities bordering on the psychotic. Our narrator, who in the original is called Joseph but which Farro changes to Thomas (his own alter-ego), is both thirty-five and eleven years old, having reappeared in the fifth (originally sixth) grade with the brutal immediacy of a psychotic break.

Farro has demonstrated his familiarity with the clinical and theoretical aspects of psychosis in his piece, "Your Actual Ghost," a summary of Lacan's early work up to his third seminar on psychosis, interlaced with impressionistic observations related to the death of the dancer Whitney Mah and a lengthy series of excerpts from various works of literature and psychoanalysis. "Your Actual Ghost" begins with a long passage from David Markson's *Wittgenstein's Mistress* in which the novel's protagonist and only

character reflects on the peculiarity of certain logical conclusions (“Certain matters would appear to get carried certain distances whether one wishes them to or not, unfortunately”), as well as commenting on the fact that she cannot get the word *bricolage* out of her head even though she does “not speak one word of French.” These two themes – the internal motion of discourse and *bricolage* – could easily be seen as hallmarks of Farro’s own techniques, as well as showcase his reverence for the unexpected and associative (Markson’s narrator writes: “[t]he world is everything that is the case. I have no idea what I mean by that sentence I have just typed, by the way.” This, of course, echoes Farro’s own “the very blood of my syntax,” mentioned above). Like Thomas, Wittgenstein’s mistress lives in a second world, the world that remains after some mysterious and cataclysmic trauma, a world that is not completely unfamiliar, but also one that is relentlessly alien. It is within the literary aura of alternate or bizarre worlds – worlds that cohere almost exclusively thanks to their discourse – that Farro elects to discuss Lacan’s work on psychosis. This positioning, clearly, reorients our relationship as readers to Farro’s theoretical analysis, preventing us from ever fully inhabiting the world of scholarship even while the material at hand is deeply theoretical. Moreover, the intrusion of Farro’s reflections on the aftermath of Mah’s death into the text on Lacan work as examples of the sorts of hallucinations Lacan discusses at length in *Seminar III*, hallucinations that help track the underlying trauma and which, as they appear in Farro’s text, point to something to which he refers again and again in his texts: the secret heart.

Lacan’s method for treating psychosis could be taken as a model for reading Barthelme’s (and Farro’s) text. Farro writes,

[b]y listening to Schreber’s language as it unfolds and develops over time a history of his discourse materializes. Years pass and the sentences develop a signifying consistency, ceasing to be nonsense. The same is true in ‘ordinary’ language [...]. In fact it is this signifying consistency – this accrual of sympathetic utterances – that produces generic distinctions between varieties of discourse: academic, legal, pedagogical, medical, etc. So much so that inhabiting these different regions of discourse becomes almost solely a question of locutionary

style, so profoundly has the language of these discourses been reified and internalized. Schreber's speech, as nonsensical, is precious for exactly that reason, that it is a language whose underlying unifying code is not the real. Lacan returns again and again to Schreber's 'nonsense' as a way not only of legitimizing Schreber's speech as significant but also criticizing the notion that common language is 'modeled on a simple and direct apprehension of the real.'

By valorizing Schreber's discourse, and even imitating it to a certain extent, Farro also repositions the role of the real in his own discourse, undercutting declarations of truth and reality to such an extent that the reader is compelled to discover the signifying coherence of Farro's/Barthelme's text on its own terms, or supplement the discursive framework with his or her own associative embellishments. In this scenario the reader, reading Farro's text, is simultaneously exhorted indirectly to write his or her associations into the text, just as Farro writes his impressions of mourning into his analysis of psychosis.

June 9, 2016

Since this entry speaks at one level removed from Farro/Barthelme's text, it is easy to assume that this voice is the "real" Farro, commenting on the text the way this text is commenting on "Me and Me and Miss Mandible." The prevailing metaphor in this entry – indeed, it is a metaphor of Farro's capacity for metaphor – is that of the ecosystem, wherein an astonishing array of flora and fauna can be said, despite their variance, to be linked. Farro stresses the degree to which his metaphorical production is unique to him, being, as it is, a product of his own career through the world and the legacy left by what one might call the trauma of being – the battery of experiences that resist everything but metaphorical signification. Despite the multifarious instances of the metaphorical production of any one individual, this plenitude can nevertheless be said to be organized by the unconscious.

For Farro, the unconscious is present already in his writing, manifest in the form of symptoms that he writes “are not stylistic.” He goes on: “they are symptoms, qualifying as such in a clinical sense: as evidence of the, my, unconscious sending a message (to the Other, from the Other?).” Taken in this sense, as a sort of subterranean or invisible message ciphered into the material of the natural world, the symptoms of writing are akin to the parasitic (“wasps fecundating in the boughs”) or buried (“grubs populating the undersoil”) aspects of the ecosystem, present like a stain on the everyday structures of nature – the common oak covered in the tumors of the gall wasp, for example.

As already discussed above, in imitation of this parasitism Farro has intervened in Barthelme’s work, leaving the mark of an entirely separate discourse couched in the structural coherence of another discourse. In other words, to the extent that Barthelme’s story can be considered to be an object bounded by whatever more or less loosely determined set of literary conventions, Farro’s staining of this object presents a kind of crisis of boundaries. Where scholarly analysis purports to preserve the object in its wholeness, Farro’s analysis perverts that object explicitly by marking it with his desire.

Of course, every scholarly intervention is a product, in some respect, of desire as well, and yet this desire is often disavowed or even repressed by a discourse that aspires to objective generality. Farro explores this theme in his paper “Clouds,” delivered in Saskatoon in 2013. The paper is occasioned by an interview with Cecilia Giménez, the 84 year-old Spanish woman who, in Farro’s words, was crucified for her attempt to restore a fresco of Jesus at her local church in the town of Borja. For Farro, the gleeful scorn of the critics and the carnival of stone-throwing that followed Giménez’s intervention is indicative of a reverence for the true that disavows the individual’s desire regarding the object. Taking shelter behind the aura of the artistic relic, Giménez’s critics accused her of distorting the fresco beyond repair, erasing an important artifact from the history of religious art. Consulting Giménez herself, who was so pained by the fresco’s decay that she took it upon herself – because nobody else was going to – to restore it,

we learn that she volunteered at the church in her spare time, time that was itself was sparse given that she is the caretaker of her 54-year-old son who suffers from a degenerative disease (her other son died of the same disease not long before the restoration). Describing Giménez's situation, Farro writes,

I don't know what it's like to have children, nor to have a child die from a slow, constant, irrepressible degeneration. We can imagine, though, probably, the lengths we would go to save someone we love from the onset and progression of a terminal disease. We would pray for miracles, in whatever form our prayers take, probably. We might even remember the stories John tells of Jesus as he heals the sick, as he gives back to us what we thought was forever lost. But you cannot stop a degenerative disease from killing your sons. You might even feel guilty about this. Certainly you will feel powerless, and you will likely be in great need of comforting and support. You may feel insufficient to the task, and perhaps like you have failed your beloved. But you go on loving, and trying, and caring. Lazarus, resurrected or not, would still be beloved of Jesus, and the quality of care is not measured by the degree to which the sick are healed by it. Love is not vitiated by the decay in whose midst it circulates. Bravely. Love circulates bravely in the midst of decay, even though it knows, Cecilia, that it cannot restore the sons that engendered it.

But care and devotion and love might be able to restore other beloved things.

Taking the restoration as a sublimation of her grief (Cecelia says, "all my life I've painted as a way to relax, to help me forget my misfortune"), Farro sees

the restoration not as a heinous ruining of the piece but, on the contrary, as an example of art operating at its most profound levels, as bringing the other's desire to bear on itself. Farro sees Giménez's example as one to be followed by scholars who, instead of casting stones, might seek instead to register their desire somewhere in their work, to avow it as desire.

Farro, however, also acknowledges the complexity of this registering insofar as desire, as Lacan alleges, is the desire of the other. Transposed from the psychoanalytic context, Farro considers this question from within the relationship between the reader and writer. He writes, “[r]eally the question is: what shall I, in your endless silence, impute to you, all the way down to your very heart, your ignorance, your desire? My address to you, all my points and questions, place you somewhere, whether you are there or not.” Impossible as it is to know the desire of the reader – the expectations, the demands, the interests – the writer is compelled to assume, or to place the reader in a certain desiring position, which leads to the formal or generalized language of, for example, scholarship. But does every cue taken by the writer come from what is presumed about the reader? What if these presumptions are completely suspended, or what if the writer writes as if his or her sole reader were the writer him/herself? How near, returning to a psychoanalytic context, would this form of writing come to the speech of the analysand, who speaks without reservation to a presence who is only barely there, listening with a third ear?

“And I am refusing to be somewhere, too,” Farro continues. This line, in a psychoanalytic context, can be taken at least two ways. The first would place Farro, the one acknowledging his refusal to be anywhere, in the position described by Lacan as that of dummy, as the one who is “dead enough not to be caught up in the imaginary relation,”²¹² ideally the place of the analyst. With the emphasis on provoking and encouraging the free associating of the reader, it is easy to imagine Farro as the figure providing the context for the reader to encounter her associations but who is otherwise absent from the text; absent insofar as he has organized the text in such a way as to refrain from saying anything overtly thetic or assertive about

²¹² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III: The Psychoses*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 1993), 162.

literature, psychoanalysis, etc. In this manner Farro would be imitating Lacan's own pedagogical techniques as he expresses again and again in the seminars, summarized by his claim that all of his teaching aspires to be not quite understood.²¹³

Alternatively, as mentioned above, one can liken Farro's refusal to be somewhere to the hysteric's analogous refusal, who occupies an enduringly evasive position insofar as her desires are perpetually unsatisfied in order, as Lacan says, "to have the Other hold the key to her mystery."²¹⁴ There is, after all, something fundamentally hysterical about the position of the writer since it is only at the indulgence and judgment of the reader that the writer manages to exist at all. There is the example of David Markson's novel *Vanishing Point*, in which the narrator, known only as Author, expresses a desire to remove himself entirely from the text he's writing, which we are told is itself only a randomly selected list of curiosities and facts from the history of literature, art, and philosophy collected by Author on notecards that have, over the years and years, come to fill two shoeboxes. Only the tiniest threads of a "story" exist in Markson's novel (akin to the precious strands of spider's silk Farro mentions), which amount to the reader coming to understand that Author has grown old and tired and his death is quite near.

Farro's description of his hopes for his own work could double as a description of Markson's novels: "the ruins of what was never whole," wherein an author searches for himself in the form of his symptom, embodied by all the memories and notes that he surrounds himself with – these memories and notes and no others. Like Farro, Markson will often remark on why a memory or anecdote persists when so much else is forgotten. *Vanishing Point* is struck through with the inescapable (if miniscule) traumatic memory of a figure washing her face in the basin of a

²¹³ "I would say that it is with deliberate, if not entirely deliberate, intention that I pursue this discourse in such a way as to offer you the opportunity to not quite understand. This margin enables you yourselves to say that you think you follow me, that is, that you remain in a problematic position, which always leaves the door open to a progressive rectification." Lacan, *Sem. III*, 164.

²¹⁴ Jacques Lacan, *Seminar VIII: Transference*, trans. Bruce Fink (London: Polity, 2015), 245.

toilet. Several instances of these inescapable, inassimilable, unrepresentable memories exist in Farro's work – the mutilated fish, above all.

The fish, for Farro, is embodied in a phrase from William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*: “my mother is a fish,” Vardaman's famous one-sentence chapter. Farro goes on also to mention the phrase “the very blood of my syntax,” to which I referred above, and the new phrase, “Whitney, whose breath I hear all around me.” Like Markson, Farro assembles these fragments in order to discover what they produce by the sheer power of their being assembled (Markson's methodological mantra in *Vanishing Point* is: “nonlinear, discontinuous, collage-like, an assemblage”). Where Markson's fragments tend, throughout his novels, to be striking or peculiar scenes from the history of art, Farro's tend to be cast-off excerpts from unfinished or unpublished works, which is indeed the case here for the “relic” “surfacing from the ruins:”

[w]hat are the dead? An effect of grammar, of an arrangement of words, the breathlessness I feel when I say, ‘Whitney is dead.’ They are there when words arrange themselves in impossible or unforgivable ways. That is when they arrive, how they persist. The routine of language, the coins we pass without end tallying a meaningless balance, crumbles like bone when you are standing there next to her as she gasps and chokes and yet already new platitudes take root like spores and you begin to wonder if you will ever have peace with the dead without the fingers of language ensnaring you in bonds that leave you permanently out of reach of the dead you have loved, of the dead you have yet to endure, of your death. When the dead arrive at the faults of language, they are asking you something. They are like a dream.

This excerpt is from an unfinished one-act tentatively entitled “Anamorphosis,” in which three to five actors were to be speaking different lines simultaneously except for spontaneous moments of unison – “like the

chords in a Debussy,” Farro wrote in his journal for the piece. The fascination with unpredictable moments of crystallization persists here – Farro, in the journal, writes: “out of a chaos of speech, actors varying their volumes, moments of unison feel like lightning strikes, and these are the traumas, whose clarity is so forceful, so entirely different from the stream of speech that is everywhere in the theatre, that it is so disorienting and terrible.”

September 13

[Etymology is a science of intimacy ... I am happy here in fifth grade.]

The remainder of September 13 contains much original material of Farro’s, specifically the apothegm on etymology (likely borrowed from Joyce’s portmanteau “intimologies”²¹⁵) and the ruminations about fractions, which are given a distinctly Platonic and Badiouian slant (the emphasis on the square on the diagonal recalls Plato’s *Meno* – perhaps the most crucial philosophical text for educators – while the brief mention of matrices and empty sets brings Plato’s disciple Alain Badiou to mind). In his essay, “A Commentary on a Brief Interview of Roland Barthes in Which He Claims That Literature is the Only Thing That Should Be Taught,” Farro offered a Lacanian reading of the *Meno* in which, quoting Lacan, he writes, “*Meno* isn’t the analysand, he’s the analyst – the bulk of analysts.”²¹⁶ This barb simply signifies Lacan’s distaste for any analyst who demands too categorically for methodologies that could, for example, be summarized in a kind of manual of psychoanalytic technique. *Meno* asks Socrates, with somewhat intimidating persistence, a question while being completely incapable of recognizing its underlying presumptions which, in the end, make it impossible for Socrates to give a meaningful answer. Lacan

²¹⁵ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Viking Press, 1939), 101.

²¹⁶ The quotation is from Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book II: The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Routledge, 1988), 14.

summarizes the issue as follows: “[t]he aim and paradox of the *Meno* is to show us that the *epistémê*, knowledge bounded by formal coherence, does not cover the whole of the field of human experience.”²¹⁷ The character of Thomas is keenly aware of this given that a great deal of his reflections deal precisely with the disjunction between the highly organized world of formal education and the chaotic, irrational and unjust reality of human life. More than these elements, though, there is the element of the unconscious, which could be considered the antithesis of education *par excellence* given its defiance of chronology, logical operations, etc. The unconscious, from a certain perspective, exists in fact only as a consequence of education taken in the most primitive sense: as the domestication or eradication of the uncivil instincts. These instincts, however, cannot be completely eradicated, ending up instead precisely in the locus of the unconscious.

September 15

The “principle land-mass” paragraph is Farro’s addition. Function uncertain.

June 10, 2016

At the end of June 9, 2016 Farro asks himself why he has chosen, from any number of stories or artifacts, this particular story of Barthelme’s. He notes that “some styles are more resistant than others, at least to my abilities,” meaning, presumably, that Barthelme’s casual, humorous, and surreal storytelling lends itself easily to Farro’s experimental impulses. Farro does not specify what the texts are resistant *to*, but one might assume he means resistant to paracitation. Barthelme’s story, with its episodic structure and surreal setting, lends itself to distortion far more simply than, for example, the tightly woven plot of a typical mystery novel or the inimitably styled work of a Flaubert or a Twain. But Farro also wonders, in an addition to this entry – made on June 16 – whether the resistance is not from the text but from himself. This question (“is it me who stops resisting?”), invites us

²¹⁷ Ibid. 16

to consider the extent to which our interaction with a text is complicated by our resistance to elements from the text, elements we might as readers have no idea we are resisting or why. What this means in the context of education or the academy is that reading practices are shaped by a current of desire running beneath the pretensions to close reading or objectivity.

In June 10, 2016 we get a list of quotations from the scholarship on “Me and Miss Mandible” which serves as a foil for Farro’s own work with the story and as an example of the tropes of scholarship. While the individual excerpts vary in their tone and content, they each exemplify the mode of intervention Farro is committed to suspending. That is, each excerpt reconfigures or distils the ambiguous or uncertain aspects of Barthelme’s story into a thesis, a move that is especially gross in the examples explicitly referring to the ambiguity or indeterminateness of literary narratives. Taken together they represent an aspect of what might be called “literary knowledge” and when taken individually they might be seen as, to steal of favourite phrase of Farro’s, coins circulating in the economy of this knowledge. To possess these coins is to possess a specific, supreme insight. Together with the “strangely erotic” citation information (i.e. proof of publication) these scholarly insights possess an unassailable validity within the literary economy. The eroticism is perhaps a reference here to Aristophanes’ famous speech in the *Symposium* in which love is described as an intense longing for the two halves of a formerly whole being to be reunited, reproducing their former symmetry and reciprocity. What is a citation, after all, but a moment of contact between two pieces of writing? The citation serves as an emblem of the bond that can never be too complete. Or, differently, the citation can be a mark of dominance, a sign that another text has been consumed and is now entirely represented by the token that remains which itself serves to signify to others that some confrontation has occurred and spoils rewarded. The citations, as they proliferate, are like a harem of servants whose submission is guaranteed by the license the writer may always take on the text she quotes.

“Me and Miss Mandible,” which is so strangely centered on the rules of the game of education, becomes even more monstrous when education attempts to reincorporate it within its own discourse. The scholarship that rightly emphasizes the subversive dimension of Barthelme’s themes and

techniques is itself an extension of the fantasies (and perversions) that are so obvious to Thomas. That is, by commenting on the “play of irony” in Barthelme’s text one does not so much unlock that playfulness as freeze it in its place as an item in scholarly discourse. Or, instead of claiming to discover an “infinite freeplay” of language, which as a statement in itself is mostly didactic, one could produce an example of this freeplay, as Farro has done.

“It is apparent by now that I am in Joseph’s Thomas’s situation. Or some variant of it.” The aspect of Thomas’s experience Farro sympathizes with is no doubt the feeling of confusion or emptiness at discovering that when one finally accedes to the position of teacher, expecting to enjoy all the truth, order, or knowledge one had long assumed teachers enjoy, there are only more mystifying rules to play by that seem to have no author.

September 19

The entire section on *déjà vu* is Farro’s addition, and Barthelme never mentions the phenomenon in the original. The listed theories are selected from several different psychology texts published since 2000.

The diverse theories listed here indicate clearly how unresolved the experience of *déjà vu* is for contemporary science. Farro utilizes the uncertainty here to emphasize the mystery of memory and the surreal, alienating aspects of one’s experience of reality (much like Thomas’s recording of his dreams, discussed later on). They also convey a little about the awkwardness with which scientific discourse and methodology deal with phenomena that do not readily submit to their approach or orientation. The first example hardly even qualifies as a description of *déjà vu*, given that it implies that *déjà vu* is triggered by being in a *familiar* situation, when anyone who has ever experienced *déjà vu* would claim that it is the feeling of having done this *exact* thing already. Or again, the third example, intentionally or not, demonstrates how deeply science can be influenced by metaphor given the imagery here of roadways, storage houses, and itemized units of sensation. The fourth example gives a possible explanation for Thomas appearing to re-experience the fifth-grade: he is literally re-living it by having returned his consciousness back through time to when he was eleven, letting

it play out in a separate timeline, a separate universe. A citation for the psychoanalytic explanation (example 6) is not given, but the source cannot have been Freud or Lacan (or even one of their disciples); and while psychoanalysis obviously places a great deal of stress on repetition of past experiences, the phenomenon of *déjà vu* is rarely mentioned in connection with trauma or wish-fulfillment, as is implied here.

By inserting the theme of *déjà vu*, Farro provides a response to the question of what exactly is happening to Thomas while at the same time complicating the picture further. We might take this technique as a cornerstone of Farro's literary critical or pedagogical methodology, where every incisive gesture is accompanied by a forking of multiple pathways whose directions are determined by one's associative impulses.

Of course this methodology is itself challenged by the very next paragraph in which Thomas expresses his sense of peace or relief when regarding the exploded views or car engines. In this passage it is not the chaotic multiplicity that is depicted but a supreme clarity, or rather a supreme suspension. Farro's extravagant prose in this paragraph is a clear deviation from his miming of Barthelme's writing, suggesting that this particular description of the exploded view was precious for Farro. The exploded view is neither a total mess nor a perfectly functioning machine but rather the precise moment between the two; thus Farro's conflicted language in the passage, which modulates between stressing the violent as well as the quiescent aspects of the view.

The exploded view is a theme sympathetic to Thomas's reflection on his former profession of claims adjuster for the Great Northern Insurance Company. Barthelme's original text continues here, extending the theme of chaotic disarray. The reader might see an analogy between the function of the claims adjuster – who distils a monetary value out of ruin or disarray – and the literature teacher or scholar as Farro sometimes implies that person to be, one who sifts out certain values from the text, refashioning them for circulation in the economy of scholarship. “Ten years at GNIC and I couldn't even see the catastrophe anymore, just claims waiting to materialize,” might be a fitting description of how the literature scholar's relationship to literature changes as she gets farther along in her academic

career: everything one reads must be adjusted into a claim (synonym for thesis).

December 13, 2015

This entry is the preface to Farro's essay "Petals. Flowers." the first portion of which is a quotation from Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer*:

I have made a silent compact with myself not to change a line of what I write. I am not interested in perfecting my thoughts, nor my actions. There is only thing which interests me vitally now, and that is the recording of all that which is omitted in books. Nobody, so far as I can see, is making use of those elements in the air which give direction and motivation to our lives.²¹⁸

All the themes of Farro's writing return in this essay: the coins, the seeds, the preface, the (lack of a) thesis, the desire of the other, education, experimentation in writing, etc. The essay has a somewhat colorful publication history, being at first rejected by the journal *Chiasma: A Site for Thought*, which Farro co-founded. In his journals Farro describes the rejection as "a sign that I need to leave." The piece was later published in the e-journal *Critical Studies in Culture, Society, Texts, Media, Gender, and Civilization*.

Like nearly all the rest of his work, "Petals. Flowers." cannot be easily summarized, and ranges from biography, poetry, psychoanalysis, and education with the typical structural experimentation in formatting and the use of footnotes, as well as an early example of paracitation (this essay precedes Farro's coining the word). A part of what the essay examines is the role of books and teachers in what one might call one's psychic destiny. Citing Freud's brief essay, "Some Reflections on Schoolboy Psychology,"

²¹⁸ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 11 [Footnote from original text].

Farro depicts the influence of the teacher on the young student as ambivalent and ambiguous; the teacher is both admired and reviled and often taken as a substitute for a parent. Moreover, again citing Freud, the teacher is frequently a significant figure in the onset of neurosis, as is clear in the cases of the Wolf Man and Rat Man. The classroom is the site, for many, of the domestication of the impulses and the experiences of prohibition, punishment, and pleasure, all of which profoundly contribute to the psychic development of the child, including the decision, later in life, to become a teacher. If, as Lacan notes, to be an analyst one must perhaps be at least a little neurotic,²¹⁹ Farro asks in turn:

What must someone be to be a good teacher, a good researcher?
The world of education, insofar as it is a world of research,
learning, and acquisition of knowledge, is its own kind of culture
for breeding (and preserving) neuroses. Freud makes this clear in
the analysis of the Rat Man's case:²²⁰

[For obsessives], thought processes themselves become sexualized as sexual desire, which would normally refer to the content of the patient's thoughts, is applied to the act of thinking itself, and the satisfaction felt in arriving at a certain intellectual outcome is experienced as sexual satisfaction. This relationship between the drive to knowledge and the intellectual process makes it particularly well suited, in various forms of obsessive-compulsive neurosis where it has a part to play, to waylaying the energy that struggles in vain to force its way through to action and luring it in the direction of thought, which offers the possibility of a different kind of pleasurable satisfaction.²²¹

²¹⁹ Jacques Lacan, *Des Noms-du-Père* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005), 15.

²²⁰ At this point a reader writes to me: 'The tone shift into this whole section is so bracing. I'm trying to decide whether I like this as an exercise in whiplash, or whether I am hung-up and distracted.' What is a decision like this worth to a reader? [This footnote is from the original text].

²²¹ Freud, *SE Vol. X*, 245 [This footnote is from the original text].

Is this what our practice and thinking as researchers amounts to, the thrill of a ciphered satisfaction? Yes? How would our thinking on the matter of teaching change?

Farro does not directly answer these questions but, as is typical of his style, leaves them for the reader to take in whatever direction she chooses. Ultimately these questions aim at the bedrock of one's identity as a teacher, compelling the reader to consider the circumstances – psychic or practical – that have led to her decision to become a teacher, to take up this unique position with respect to knowledge and with respect to others. By unsettling these issues Farro displaces the teaching position from a simple matter-of-fact perspective and exposes its faces that are otherwise hidden or too close to see, thereby making the teaching position available to a novel critical perspective. Citing Lacan, Farro takes a claim about the analyst and applies it to the teacher: “[i]f you are not coming here to put into question everything you do, I don't see why you're here. Why would those who do not sense meaning of this task remain tied to us, rather than joining up with some bureaucracy or other?”²²² Farro continues this line of thought with one of the more explicitly prescriptive passages in his work:

[i]t is no longer a question that the university is a bureaucracy. The question has become whether it is possible to isolate and maintain spaces where thought is unconditioned. This does not exclusively mean the freedom to be critical, but additionally the freedom to be creative and experimental. The value of the experimental in this setting cannot be determined in advance, but only in the effect it has on students, readers, and the experimenters themselves. A space to feel the heart of their desire.

And obviously Farro's work is a testament to his commitment to insisting on a creative and experimental space in the classroom and in the university. In the final paragraphs of this entry Farro repeats the uncertain status of his

²²² Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, trans. John Forrester (London: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 7.

experimentation, as far as something like projected outcomes go: “[t]his writing has no worth or use that can be determined in advance. No thesis, no known place to lay the stress. The wreck of a life.”

“The wreck of a life,” a rather unexpected fragment in this entry, seems to refer to the disarray of experiences, memories, and desires that comprise the substance of our lives and the font of our writing. While writing might be thought to be precisely the ordering of these elements into something powerful and coherent, Farro’s “writing otherwise” is more of a portrait of the chaotic trajectories our associations take us on as we write, a portrait whose educational worth is of the more abstract “know thyself” than of the easily circulating “objective” or “impartial” writing typically employed in scholarship. Indeed after reading enough of Farro’s work it is easy to deduce that he would not believe in the possibility of a writing in which the writer takes no or even little part.

September 23

The recorded dream is Farro’s addition to an entry that, in the original, is just the roll call and the anecdote of the whitewashed trees. The dream is rather elegantly woven into Barthelme’s text, and the entire entry is a near perfect example of the pathways of associations as they move from a mystifying dream to the recollection of a past trauma (the whitewashed trees represent a crisis in authority for Thomas), to the incorporating of Vanderbilt’s imitations (likely heard the day before), finally to the whitewashed trees which help Thomas remember a forgotten aspect of his dream: the trees full of white wolves.

Nobody unfamiliar with Freud’s work would see the white wolves as a reference, while those with even only a small exposure to Freud’s work would know of the dream of the wolves and its eponymous dreamer, the Wolf Man. Farro uses the Wolf Man case study as an example of the sometimes profound and traumatizing role books have in one’s psychic

development, a role he exhorts educators to acknowledge. Indeed the Wolf Man is so called because of a fear of wolves that originates with illustrations in a book, and extends to a fear of a certain teacher whose name was Wolf; this fear then extends to the Wolf Man's relationship with other teachers.

Setting the scene in this way might help one to reflect on the rather peculiar name of Barthelme's teacher: Mandible. As Farro has already pointed out, the name refers to chewing and this, combined with Thomas's sexual attraction to Mandible, cannot fail to connote for the reader the image of the praying mantis, whose dangerous allure culminates in the most famous of post-coital indulgences. The threat of being gobbled up is, of course, likewise at the heart of the Wolf Man's fear of his own teacher, Herr Wolf.

February 17, 2016

Another excerpt here from "Paracitation," where the affinities between teaching and psychoanalysis are alluded to in what can only be described as bombastic prose. Citing Lacan, Farro writes, "there is one thing [the hysteric] prefers to her own desire – she prefers to let her own desires go unsatisfied and have the Other hold the key to her mystery," and the rest of the excerpt circles around this metaphor of the key to the hysteric's mystery and the teacher's position. The entry is an insistent inquiry into the state of desire at two different moments in the academy: the first moment is as a speaker at an academic conference, a position, after all, that scholars are required to occupy at regular intervals. Directly addressing the audience, Farro writes, "I imagine that by vouchsafing to you these fragments of speech hanging like scales at my eyes you might offer some remedy, some insight. Any response at all." Of course the metaphor of the scales at the eyes is meant to emphasize precisely their falling, which would characterize Farro's position as, say, the blind one looking to be healed, to be guided, to be taken in by those for whom the world is clear and radiant. It is a position not unlike the student seeking the master, or the neurotic seeking the analyst.

In this moment Farro imagines, rightly or wrongly, that the conference is at least potentially a place of diagnosis, or even of judgment, not simply an arena for the circulating of research. Though he perhaps cannot be faulted for at least presuming that there will be a response to his speech, and this response would, again perhaps, be enough to mark the desire of the respondent.

Farro is quick to acknowledge, however, that the conference, this staple of academic life, is hardly the therapeutic or enlightening endeavor he portrays it as. The fantasy he is desperately trying to locate, *a la* Barthes, is certainly a response to the enigmatic desire of the Other, but the people sitting in the audience are not this Other, which Farro instead identifies as, “[t]he Law, the Symbolic, the locus of speech, the stranger on the bridge whose name we know perfectly well but would not for all the treasure of the world mention it.” What does *this* Other want, Farro asks. If one does not write for a specific other – a letter or postcard, a direct address – then one writes for the Audience, for the Reader. In short, for no one. It is due to his sense of this emptiness that Farro characterizes his writing as hysterical, a sort of rueful hysteria that pretends to harbor a secret in order to force the other to solve it and in so doing appear. Only to be insufficient, of course, allowing the hysteric to preserve the place of emptiness that sustains her position.

The second academic position Farro considers in this passage is that of the teacher, a slightly different position than that of scholar presenting to a room of peers. A certain orientation with respect to knowledge, a certain variety of discourse, a certain configuration of human bodies, a certain institutional ethos are all elements that determine someone as a teacher, and once one is so determined a vitality is engendered that carries discourse along, guides the question of desire in certain ways. The force of these determining aspects of teaching cannot easily be attenuated and have the rigidity of structural laws: the teacher, the master, cannot abdicate the power she has. Even an explicit claim to ignorance about a question cannot unseat her in this role. These are laws that nobody has written, and the key that Farro searches for is precisely that which is so obdurately sought by the

hysteric: the key held by the one who knows. The one who really knows what she wants, unlocking an incinerating bliss. This one, however, of course, is not there and there is no key, “only silence poised beyond time and the universe of discourse orbiting it,” a first word attended by an endless reckoning, which is the destiny of language.

This entry, at least obliquely, does give some indication as to the motivation behind a piece like “Me and Me and Miss Mandible,” which seeks to avoid taking up any position that could be too quickly assimilated by a given structure or discourse. The piece is neither academic nor strictly artistic, neither Barthelme’s nor Farro’s, neither autobiographical nor fictional, neither true nor false, neither serious nor a joke. Or, again, it is also all of these things. This uncertainty disorients the reader entirely within her usual framework of understanding or interpreting, and disorients Farro as well, compelling both to do as Lacan exhorts analysts to do with the psychotic: listen to the discourse in order to find the buttons that quilt it and the subject’s discourse and reality together.

September 29

This entry is primarily Farro’s invention – only the first paragraph is Barthelme’s and Farro inserts the insinuation that Miss Mandible, like Thomas, is playing a part: “[s]ometimes she seems to act like someone who is supposed to be a fifth grade teacher.” This small addition elevates the surreality of the story as well as welcomes the speculation that role-playing and life-repeating is not an experience confined to the unique case of Thomas but others as well, perhaps everyone.

Little is added to the whole story by the remainder of the new material in this entry, except that this section is particularly funny.

October 2

Another entry that is primarily Farro's. Like the previous entry, this one raises the surreal element of the story to another power by depicting the children playing a game that depends on their capacity to assume a life-role. "Bus Stop" is apparently an actual game Farro played while he attended public school. In the journals of his youth, which were kept as a requirement for an English course, he writes, "I hate bus stop and I can't believe everyone thinks this game is so fun. If I ever have to go up [and participate] I'm not playing along. Big football game today against McCormick...".

The extended reflection on the character of Brenda is also Farro's. In Brenda we see another tacit comparison between psychoanalysis and education insofar as she apparently aspired to be a teacher before becoming a "shrink."

March 8, 2011

Here we have another excerpt from the unpublished *A Thousand Unknown Things*; the only instance we know of in which Farro writes of himself in the third person (indeed, in the excerpt here he writes of himself after his own death). The preface to "Will You?" contains only this small amount of "autobiographical" information before moving on to a rather extensive consideration of Antonin Artaud and Jacques Derrida, specifically Derrida's essay on Artaud that appears in *Writing and Difference*. Several associations link up in this work: the fascination with masks and playing roles, the element of psychosis or hallucination, the expulsion of the author/god and denying the sanctity of the text are all aspects of Farro's writing that appear in this preface. Derrida's reading of Artaud's theatre of cruelty might even be taken as a benchmark Farro has set for his own writing. Farro writes, quoting Derrida,

[t]he stage [of the theatre of cruelty] will not be representation “if representation means the surface of a spectacle displayed for spectators. It will not even offer the presentation of a present, if present signifies that which is maintained *in front* of me. Cruel representation must permeate me.” All the distance of the hierarchy established by the authority of the text collapses here, which produces a communication that is unmediated and undistorted by this distance. We can see better now how the theatre of cruelty is a theatre of affirmation, a mode though which the primordial yes of existence is articulated immediately, exhaustively, unmistakably. The unrepresentable source of life upon which representation is predicated is here represented, justifying Derrida’s claim that ‘non-representation is, thus, original representation.’

Whereas Artaud’s techniques of representation were on the level of an assault – lights, screams, grunts, percussion, bodily excretions, etc. – Farro’s are more labyrinthine and evocative, designed to permeate the reader by catalyzing their associations, igniting them like a spark in the tinder, to use an image from “Me and Me and Miss Mandible.”

October 7

This entry is entirely Barthelme’s but for the last paragraph. In Farro’s youth journals a brief mention of his knowledge of the military: “some guy called yesterday asking if I’d like to join the Marines. Said no. Asked if he’s ever seen *Full Metal Jacket*.”

June 10, 2016

Generally, the June 2016 entries have a consistent thematic content, given that the entire text of “Me and Me and Miss Mandible” seems to have been composed in June-July of that year. The topographic or cartographic vocabulary reappears here, as well as the speculative symptomology of Farro’s writing. He writes, stuttering as if looking for the correct word, or uncertain that the cause of his fear exists, “what is this obsession with fracturing everything, dissociation everything, scrambling it all, ruining it? This phobia of

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the thesis?” In addition, then, to the hysteric and psychotic aspects of his writing there are obsessive and even phobic aspects as well, related to the notion of the thesis, which he describes as a “little jewel,” that he does not have and does not want the reader to value, to seek out.

Just as the last June 10 entry, this one concludes with a reflection on the teaching position. Using the language of psychosis (“break,” “twilight of the world”) Farro wonders what precipitated the symptoms in his writing to multiply, crippling him. Commenting on the ambiguity of the scholarly identity (teacher, writer, reader, student, authority, parent-figure, analyst, etc.) Farro writes, “[a] drift in this wash of personae, of images, of objects, by the simple force of my will am I meant to raise some monolith from the depths, something that like a key [the key image returns] causes the disarray to crystallize into, into [more stuttering] what?” Farro leaves the question unanswered, and the reader wonders what could fill the space here. Raising the monolith from the depths connotes the analytic procedure of revisiting the past in order to find the source of neuroses, clarifying the patient’s experiences, revealing the otherwise inaccessible truth. Farro, however, is not a patient in analysis but a writer in solitude, and instead of the clarity of the exploded view there is the chaotic whirling of bats. There is essentially,

one supposes, an identity crisis, a failure to identify with any given role or figure which leads to an inability to orient himself in the symbolic flow regulating civilized life. The key, in this instance, would be a palpable desire that says, “I want to be x,” or “I want to be like x.” But, as already mentioned, the hysterical desire forecloses this option, leaving Farro in abeyance, waiting for a cue from the Other (a job title, an institution, an interpellation). Like Thomas, who spent the first portion of his life following a paper trail of “diplomas, membership cards, campaign buttons, a marriage license, insurance forms, discharge papers, tax returns, Certificates of Merit,” before being returned to the fifth grade, Farro can do no more than wait to see where it all leads.

And is it leading somewhere.

October 8

Again, all of the material on *déjà vu* and the dream recordings are Farro’s. This particular passage recalls Plato’s theory of recollection (“I am [...] having a hard telling when I’m learning something new. It all feels new and yet ancient”) as performed in the *Meno*.

The inclusion of a notion such as cryptomnesia is another turn of the screw regarding Thomas’s situation. While the force of the story does not at all depend on Thomas’s predicament having a logical or psychological explanation behind it, including a cryptomnesiac dimension at least provides grounds for the speculation that Thomas’s re-experience of the fifth grade is actually a memory of the fifth grade that was forgotten or repressed. Along these lines the repressed aspect would be his sexual desire for Miss Mandible and Sue Ann Brownly, which manifestly is now fully apparent.

The dream recorded in this entry is an almost clandestine allusion to a small section in “A Commentary on a Brief Interview of Roland Barthes in

Which He Claims 'That Literature is the Only Thing That Should Be Taught' in which Farro analyzes the famous Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick essay, "A Poem is Being Written." This essay is in part Kosofsky Sedgwick's self-analysis performed through an elaboration of her personal history of writing – of poems specifically. She claims her poetic impulse originated when, as a young girl, she received a flattering poem from her grandfather, who had used a rhyming dictionary to write the piece. In an effort to reproduce the feeling the poem inspired in her, she steals the dictionary and writes her first lyric. While the reference to the book theft is brief, it grounds a more sustained analysis of the poet's relationship to her own writing, which of course is a question dear to Farro's heart. Kosofsky Sedgwick's tack, as is clear from the title of her piece, is to examine her poetry almost as a symptom of her sexuality – the blunt and violent elements of her poetry correspond to the masochistic fantasies explored by Freud in his paper, "A Child is Being Beaten."

Kosofsky Sedgwick's paper provides Farro with the occasion to extend his usual lucubration on writing. His analysis begins with the following scenario:

imagine your writing is not you-become-other but rather a child of yours, a "problem" for you, a living entity in need of care, discipline, teaching. Imagine a poem that began like a dream you cannot remember ever having, a poem that recurs for years, spreading. One might spend nine years, as Kosofsky Sedgwick does, giving voice to a poem that is trying to give voice to this dream, the dream of herself waiting to occur, the dream that returns her to the scene of writing, a scene of a complex trauma:

the lyric poem, known to the child as such by its beat and by a principle of severe economy [...] – the lyric poem was both the spanked body, my own body or another one like it for me to watch or punish, and at the same time the very spanking, the rhythmic hand whether hard or subtle of authority itself (115).

What is meter but a heart pumping blood, the mindless, incessant caresses, or the measured force of spanking? And, when one

stands over one's writing, hand risen, whose body lies prone
beneath?

Farro leaves the question, as usual, unanswered, but the reader is at least guided toward acknowledging that writing, in Farro's and Kosofsky Sedgwick's case at least, can be the body that accepts the violence, anger, or hatred of the writer, directed at herself or others. It is this volatile aspect of writing that Farro finds so intriguing when considered from the perspective of education. After all, school is the primary site of writing for the bulk of a person's life, and, as Freud and Farro both note, the school and school teacher often constitute the *mise-en-scène* of the beating fantasy (where the teacher replaces the father and the beaten child and the onlookers are almost invariably schoolmates).

Thomas's situation can here be taken in a new light as well; not as a forgotten or hidden memory but as a fantasy. Freud concludes in "A Child is Being Beaten," that this fantasy is ultimately a production of the prohibition of the father as sexual object. The child is taught to renounce her desire of the father which, if it persists, results in a guilt that is punished in the form of the beating. In Thomas's case the sexes of the players are reversed, but the desire of the teacher/mother is obviously still intact, as are the vague feelings of paranoia or impending doom that signal to Thomas that he is meant to be punished for this desire.

The last relevant aspect of Farro's analysis of Kosofsky Sedgwick's work is the function of pleasure in the fantasy of being beaten. Freud's claim is that the pleasure of the fantasy is a result of a regression of the libido from the original object (the now-prohibited father) to a different object, whether anal, oral, or genital. Freud observed from his patients that at the climax of the beating fantasy "there is almost invariably masturbatory [i.e. genital] satisfaction," while a regression to an anal object would explain the significance of spanking. The correlation Farro attempts, via Kosofsky Sedgwick, to establish between writing and the fantasy of being beaten can now be extended to include masturbatory pleasure. Quoting Derrida, Farro entwines the act of writing with that of masturbation: "the supplement [of "auto-affection in general"] has not only the power of *procuring* an absent

presence [as does, e.g., writing] through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy of the sign, it *holds it at a distance and masters it* [like a taming, a beating].”²²³ Several critics have accused Farro of alienating his readers to such an extent that his writing could only be described as masturbatory, which it clearly is. Of course, as already noted, the mental activity of the obsessive is also characterized by Freud as being more or less masturbatory, and critics and scholars alike make their living by their mental activity.

April 5, 2016

Another excerpt from the aforementioned “Anamorphosis,” where it is clear that the actors’ voices were meant to align on the question, “what are the dead?” and again on the answer, “they are like a dream.” While the first excerpt focused primarily on the linguistic or grammatical presence of the dead (“[w]hat are the dead? An effect of grammar, of an arrangement of words, the breathlessness I feel when I say, ‘Whitney is dead.’”), this second excerpt, whose images connote scenes of isolation in the natural world, scenes where one might most easily believe one has seen a ghost or spirit, describes the way in which the dead intrude into our perception only to vanish instantly (one cannot help but consider the similarities with psychosis). Thus the dead make their presence felt both in the mourner’s speech and in the mourner’s field of perception, scintillating in the margins. The entry of April 9, 2016, which is discussed below, completes what is apparently a kind of trilogy or cycle on the theme of the dead and the dream.

October 13

²²³ The bracketed comments are Farro’s and appear in the original text of “A Commentary on a Brief Interview.”

Only the first and last paragraphs of this entry are Barthelme's. It is a crucial entry in the original story; appearing almost exactly halfway through the story, it gives the reader some kind of indication as to why or how Thomas/Joseph ended up in his predicament. The entry suggests that the trauma of discovering his employer would prefer him to act more like a heartless cog in a profit-generating machine than a sensitive or generous human being precipitates a crisis in Thomas/Joseph that causes him literally to regress to the formative parts of one's life – parts when one's unique value and irreplaceable individual worth are constantly emphasized – in order to have the vacuity and dishonesty of these claims demonstrated to his now emotionally and mentally advanced self. Seen in this way the story then becomes a sort of surreal or ridiculous depiction of the emasculating, disillusioning, or heartbreaking onset of typical working-class male mid-life malaise.

Farro complicates this picture somewhat by reflecting explicitly on the meaning of the phrase "life itself," having Thomas wonder if anything of a life remains if one burrows to the bottom of the document or symbols that taken together present the picture of oneself that circulates in the world and in one's personal life. Farro puts a decidedly Lacanian spin on these reflections by having Thomas fantasize about this place of truth as being reflected in the eyes of Miss Mandible, the one whose desire he covets and the one for whom he wishes to be the object of desire (to repeat yet again a hackneyed Lacanian maxim, "desire is the desire of the Other"). The fact, however, that his desire for Miss Mandible is essentially an existential matter, a question of his being "not just in [Mandible's] class [...] but Here. Right fucking Here," as Farro puts it, elevates Thomas's relationship to Mandible beyond one of sexual desire. Or, rather, sexual desire reveals its unique link to Being, and this experience transpires in the classroom via the figures of the teacher and student. This new configuration, though, is also nearly identical to that of the analyst and analysand (Farro discusses the similarity between these two positions at length in "Your Actual Ghost").

Farro also adds the detail that Miss Mandible has a new haircut.

December 16, 2015

Another passage from “Petals. Flowers,” this one more focused on the role of the book than the role of the teacher in the psychic development of the child (the passage also recalls Farro’s analysis of Kosofsky Sedgwick’s theft of her grandfather’s dictionary). Perhaps the most pertinent element of this passage is Farro’s blunt, even scandalous, claim that “[w]hen we (I) teach literature I want [...] that [primal] scene, whatever it is, to quiver on the horizon, to quicken to life. What is literature without this distant murmur?” And how, indeed, does the study of literature defend itself against charges of its increasing irrelevance except by claiming that literature “humanizes” students, provides knowledge of “the human condition”? While Farro might agree with these claims, his work suggests more specifically that literature provides knowledge not of *the* human condition but of *your* human condition, of the coordinates of your, the student’s/reader’s, matrix of desire, the relationships between love, hate, and ignorance that are pillars in its structure, the function of language as it mediates your involvement or disengagement with others, language understood as what David Foster Wallace calls the “tiny keyhole”²²⁴ at the pole of the universe inside you, a universe we typically know less about than we do about the actual literal universe. This knowledge is hidden beyond what in the student/reader escapes symbolization, and literature, taught in a way that frees the associations of the reader/student, can bring this knowledge to light, briefly but unmistakably. So Farro seems to believe, given the rather high place he assigns to the experience of trauma or the primal scene in his notion of teaching literature.

²²⁴ David Foster Wallace, “Good Old Neon,” from *Oblivion* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2004), 178.

October 17

The entry begins with a rather silly dream, the only meaningful element, by my estimation, is that the giant ants recall those described by Herodotus as dwelling in the Indian deserts and protecting large sums of gold that could only be recovered by riding female camels whose desire to return to their newborn young gave them sufficient speed to outrun the murderous ants (who are smaller than dogs but larger than foxes).²²⁵ One might concede that this has a vaguely psychoanalytic bent, given the important role of the mother camel. This dream of course does not appear in the original text. Only the second paragraph of this entry is Barthelme's, and Farro takes advantage of Thomas's Mandible fantasy to add his own reflections on the relationship between words and sexual pleasure (one cannot help but recall Dora, who likewise, Freud alleges, derived her "guilty" knowledge of sexuality from an encyclopedia).²²⁶ In Barthelme's original paragraph, however, there is the intriguing detail that Thomas/Joseph makes his own lunches now, which invites all manner of speculation regarding his home life (e.g. does he have a mortgage, phone bill, home insurance? Who pays for these things, if not him? Who will attend the parent-teacher conferences when the time comes? Does everyone in the world treat Thomas/Joseph like an 11-year-old or just the people at Horace Greeley? Do grocery store clerks raise an eyebrow when he comes through the checkout? Etc. The complete irrelevance of these questions to the development of the story makes Barthelme's brief allusion all the more delightful).

This lengthy and impassioned entry signals the acceleration of the theme of sexuality as it progresses, for lack of a better phrase, through the rising action of the story up to its, ahem, climax. In Barthelme's original text, lacking the long parenthesis on authority and the digressions regarding *déjà*

²²⁵ Herodotus, *Histories*, trans. Isaac Taylor (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1929), 238-240.

²²⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. VII*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953), 102.

vii, this acceleration is even more marked. The relationship between school and sexuality is made apparent enough in this digression, as well as the importance of books in exploring these early phases of sexuality.

While a preoccupation with etymologies is a consistent habit of Farro's work, this excavation of the word "fuck" recalls in particular his essay, "Clitophon," on the Platonic dialogue of the same name. This essay, in addition to the attention it gives to etymology and translation, is another example of Farro's oblique approach to discussing education. After commenting at length on the highly contested legitimacy of the *Clitophon* as Plato's original work, Farro writes,

[t]hese preliminary orientations also reveal perspectives on the relationship between truth and knowledge, and on education. Presuming that the *Clitophon* is not a widely taught text, even in Classics or Philosophy departments, we might imagine this is due to the fact that many educators believe that this "riddle" [of a text] *cannot* be taught – there are simply too many problems, too many questions, too little about it that can be said "definitively," "authoritatively," or "without doubt." After all, an entire archaeological history has to be proffered before one can even properly call it (and not without contention) a dialogue of Plato's. Neglecting to allow a non-work such as this, however, exposes beliefs or presumptions that are otherwise difficult to see: a "proper" subject for education is one that is already determined in its historical, hermeneutic, or generic contours, an object that meets certain requirements of conceptual integrity or transmissibility.

These "beliefs," Farro goes on to show, do not appear exclusively in the decision to teach this dialogue and not that one, for example, but in the very strategy of reading adopted for handling or presenting a text. Farro writes, "[t]he dialogue is so uncanny that the bulk of scholarship on it is concerned almost exclusively with determining its validity as Plato's actual work," and

that the majority of scholars make no effort to contend with the content of the piece until the value of it is, in essence, legitimated by affixing Plato's name to it.

Finally, even the content suffers from a certain distortion, as all translations do, in the form of the translators' presumptions regarding what a Platonic dialogue looks or ought to look like. It is here that Thomas's vocabularic reverie finds deeper expression in Farro's other work. Accusing translators of a sort of moral conservatism regarding subject matter "fit" for philosophical analysis, Farro demonstrates that in at least four different translations of the dialogue there is a willful resistance to acknowledge the sexual connotations of Plato's Greek, connotations that are of course entirely legitimate to consider given the absolutely central role sexuality played in ancient pedagogy as portrayed in the unquestionably Platonic dialogues *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*. The full text of this demonstration is included here as an endnote.²²⁷

June 16, 2016

For Lacan the question, "am I dead or alive," is a question specific to the obsessive, while the hysteric asks, on the other hand, "am I a man or a woman?" Farro interprets the obsessive's question essentially in terms of the phrases and memories that seem to determine the course of his life far more than they are the products of that life. When one's life, desires, fantasies, et cetera seems to be nothing more than the accumulation of stray words and images that seem to come from without, that seem to persist beyond all rational explanation, one gets the sense, as Farro puts it, that these words are in fact the motivating force behind his life, fortifying and animating his spine and throat, proximate and alien both. Is a life in fact merely the life of

²²⁷ SEE PAGE WHATEVERWHATEVER

these fragments, orbiting and eclipsing one another in an economy determined by laws strict enough for one to see one's destiny stretching out into the future, a zodiac of repetitions?

May 8, 2015

This entry is a quotation of the first paragraph of Farro's essay, "Desert/Destroy, Variation, Fourth Draft," which borrows its title from that of Whitney Mah's last dance performance before her death. This is the first appearance in Farro's work of the mutilated fish, mentioned above as an example of a "thorn" that both blocks writing and unleashes it. In this instance Farro uses the image of a cairn to illustrate the standing the phrase has in his memory and in the pathways of his associations. Like a cairn on an obscure trail, the phrase represents a kind of landmark moment in Farro's personal history that persists, and in this essay he attempts to uncover what the phenomenon of this persistence means for the study and teaching of literature. "My mother is a fish" is the first of four cairns, the others being "do I dare disturb the universe," from "The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock"; "the desire to die is the desire to know; it is not the desire to disappear, and it is not suicide; it is the desire to enjoy," and "the only book that is worth writing is the one we don't have the courage or strength to write," both of which are from Hélène Cixous's *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*. The essay also features a long aside on Dostoevsky's *The Double* and a sort of literary re-telling of Freud's famous case of the father who dreams of his burning child.

This entry provides some depiction, whether it is a common one or not, of the experience of the literature student whose reading can amount to the accrual of these cairns, which appear and persist for reasons that, Farro would claim, can only be ascertained from the perspective of psychoanalysis. Asking if the phrase is hysterical in particular highlights the psychoanalytic aspects of this entry, which also situates the text as the (hysterical) analysand and the reader as the analyst. Of course, the analogy only goes so far as it is

the analyst's job precisely *not* to be caught up in the hysteric's attempts to have her secret desire discovered or satisfied by the knowledge she presumes the analyst to have (and, of course, does not have). The structure, though, is nevertheless an important way for the reader to glimpse some dimension of her own desire, that dimension which causes this or that phrase to radiate and take its place in the catalog of enduring images or phrases that have a similar value to those that recur in the dreams of the reader.

As an example, while the phrase "my mother is a fish," taken from William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, obviously indicates the young Vardaman's attempt to comprehend the death of his mother by associating her with the fish he has recently caught and killed, Farro instead pursues a series of associations that provide an answer to why, of all the beautiful and mysterious sentences in Faulkner's novel, this one persists for him. This leads to the memory of himself killing a fish with a stone such that its eye became dislodged from its skull. One need not go far from this point to locate an ancient hatred or aggression directed toward the mother, which is a rather banal stopping point in the analytic *dérive*, but Farro pursues the image further, reaching an insight that is far in excess of the dimensions of Faulkner's novel; that is, the image of the fish, allied in some way with the mother, is ultimately a reflection of himself, of his own eyes. All of this is made more explicit in the entry of August 4, 2015, discussed below.

March 5, 2013

An obscure and digressive entry here, taken from Farro's lengthy (near monograph-length) journal entries on Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, which he read in 2012-2013. The entry, though, is not entirely irrelevant as Marcel's experience at the theater forms an easy parallel with Farro's description of his own career through school. The young Marcel, suffering from an obscure longing to be a writer or artist of some sort while also, at this moment in the novel, experiencing his first love in Swann's young daughter Gilberte, is finally allowed to visit the theater and see the famous

actress Berma, whose beauty and skill he has dreamed of since his days in Combray reading the famous French dramas. As the entry makes clear, Marcel devotes himself entirely to experiencing the pleasure and beauty he believes is promised him by these highest forms of art. Proust writes, “I considered theatre, audience, play, *and my own body* only as an acoustic medium *of no importance* save in the degree to which it was favourable to the inflexions of [Berma’s] voice,”²²⁸ (Farro calls this “a suicide of longing”). As the actress finally arrives on stage, however, Marcel feels that “all my pleasures had ceased; in vain did I strain towards Berma’s eyes, ears, mind, so as not to let one morsel escape me of the reasons she would give me of admiring her, I did not succeed in gleaning a single one.”²²⁹ That is, Marcel suffers one of his first (of many) disappointments, discovering that all he had hoped he would discover – in art, in writing, in society, in sex – is less than his fantasies permitted him to expect. The scene recalls Farro’s sentiments above, regarding education: “I can’t be blamed for wanting the love of my teachers or for coveting the secrets they seemed to hide. But as I arrive I find what? There is nothing here.”

The remainder of the entry, which seems to be more about Marcel’s relationships with Gilberte and Albertine than art, seeks to recover something from this loss. The prose here is characteristically hyperbolic and almost delirious (the transmissions of Jupiter?, the violence of bells?); the only sentiment that escapes this effusion is the claim that “love is that which takes everything from you so that you might have anything at all.” Perhaps it is deliberate that Farro places this entry next to the “fuck” entry on the right – at this point in Thomas’s narrative he seems to realize that his desire for Mandible is destined for ruin, even as it promises to reveal some essential truth (“I am everyday progressing on the path to the truth of my place here: it runs through her.”)

²²⁸ Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Vol. I: Swann’s Way & Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage, 1982), 484.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

October 25

The identity between Mandible's and Sue Ann's shoes serves as a pivot point between the two of them. Like the fold bisecting an image into its symmetrical parts, the shoes are the nexus between Thomas's objects of desire, one corresponding to his adult interior self, the other to his apparent adolescent persona. This small detail about the shoes is Farro's addition.

Needless to say the following paragraph is also Farro's, and it expands on the subtheme of *déjà vu. Presque vu* – or *nearly seen* – describes the tip-of-the-tongue feeling one has when trying to remember some name or phrase or word. This familiar dilemma is of considerable interest for the sciences of psychological and cognitive processes, but the most famous instance of it from analytic literature is of course Freud's inability to remember the name *Signorelli*, which provides him no small amount of material with which to form psychoanalytic speculations. In "Your Actual Ghost" Farro summarizes this seminal Freudian moment, emphasizing Freud's insight that the forgetting stems from a repression of thoughts relatedly specifically to death and sexuality. In this way death and sexuality can be seen to be structuring aspects of speech and memory, at the very least because what phrases and memory are available to us consciously are a residue or an agglomeration of associations that have surreptitiously maintained a link to the original repressed thought, one so frequently rooted in the ideas of death or sexuality. As Freud puts it in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, the fragments of language that do remain accessible to him, albeit within the distortion characteristic of *presque vu*, "remind me as much of what I wished to forget as of what I wished to remember."²³⁰

Jamais vu – or *never seen*, specifically the *feeling* of having never seen a particular person or place despite the certainty or *knowledge* that one knows the person/place – has a rather important analytic exemplar in Freud's

²³⁰ Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume 6*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1961), 5.

analysis of the short story *The Sandman*, in which he develops his theory of the uncanny. Sight and its connection with the eyes innervate the uncanny effects of this story, which begins with a young boy's horror at having his eyes plucked out by the eponymous antagonist (affiliated with the castration complex). As the story develops, however, the feeling of the uncanny is more closely allied with the trope of the double: the puppet Olympia is portrayed as both living and inanimate in the story, and the character of Coppelius (the original figure of the sandman) is doubled as the optician Coppola. Obviously the double plays a central role in "Me and Me and Miss Mandible" as well, on several levels. Not only is Thomas a double of Joseph, but this main character is a sort of double of himself, at different (yet the same) periods in his life. We add as well the uncanny authorial doubling that is occurring between Farro and Barthelme – a doubling which would mystify any reader who did not have the original text of the story immediately at hand. We see this bizarre doubling made explicit in a later entry when Thomas encounters his *doppelgänger* at a school Halloween party. Freud in his essay does not miss the opportunity to note the double's relationship not only to castration but to death of the ego,²³¹ a death that Thomas seeks to avoid throughout the story as he insists that his "true" self is 35 despite being treated otherwise in every dimension of his life. Freud mentions explicitly that an unavoidable return to places one is trying to escape is another reliable source of the uncanny, and this of course is Thomas's essential plight.

The following paragraph is Barthelme's, however the sentence, "[t]he theorists fail to realize that everything that is either interesting or lifelike in the classroom proceeds from what they would probably call interpersonal relations," could serve as a generalized but acceptable summary of nearly all the literature on the relationship between psychoanalysis and education. "Lifelike," however, in this scene, connotes something like "animal life," given the brutal display of dominance and marking involved, as well as the vying for a place in the Thomas's "great, overgrown heart," which is the

²³¹ Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1964), 247.

human substitute or overdetermined symbol of the animalistic legacy of reproduction. That is, the “lifelike” instincts of competition, survival and reproduction are filtered through the prism of civilized life and recast as flirtatious violence (Sue Ann’s kick is like a libidinal outburst) and competition in the symbolic domain (Mandible’s sarcasm must serve as a substitute for what might otherwise amount to interspecies murder). Of course the whole scenario is a bit skewed when considered from this bioevolutionary perspective by the glaring anomaly of two females fighting for the right to one male, which is almost unheard of in the animal kingdom and likely an effect of Thomas’s fantasies distorting his interpretation of the scene. The repetition, at the end of the entry, of the word “fuck,” indicates an overflow of libido which justifies the claim that Thomas is likely experiences illusions of grandeur regarding his desirability.

The repetition, appearing here in the same entry as the introduction of *jamaïs vu* (which as Farro points out is also used to describe the uncanny feeling one has when a word is repeated so often that it becomes meaningless as a word), gives the reader a sense of its uncanny aspect, of the material presence of the word on the page, “fuck,” whose material contours on the page, as Thomas points out above, have an erotic flair. A feeling of disorientation sets in as the word hovers between its wordness and its thingness and, for a moment, the structures that provide language with its mystical powers quiver.

June 16, 2016

A return here to the “contemporary” entries (i.e. those that Farro seemed to be writing at the same time as collating the excerpts from previous works), the reader again confronts the image of the thread, the symbol of association. These entries tend, at least far more so than any of the others, to reflect on the style and structure of “Me and Me and Miss Mandible.” “There is a thread. But who threads it?” This quotation brings a certain dilemma to light regarding the different positions of the writer and reader as

they each follow the sway of their associations as they are conjured by the text; that is, if it is a certain associative line that Farro is trying to follow by excavating his texts in search of some bedrock of trauma or mystery, what status does the reader's own associative excavation have? It is as though the text projects above it two distinct labyrinths superimposed on one another, one followed by the reader, the other by the writer. Farro's question seems to be one for himself: is it you, the reader, that will discover the line unifying these fragments; or is it You, my Other, the one whose desire I desire, that I address?

This question grows more apparent in the following paragraph, in which Farro address an ambiguous you that might be the other as reader or Other as locus of desire. Farro seems to be describing his watershed crisis: after the "masks fell," – that is, after the structures that orient one's discourse and persona became too apparent, too incredible, even – the desire that coordinated one's actions, one's affectations, and one's discourse likewise became incredible, uncertain, or simply invisible. When the reader for whom one presumes one writes appears in its true function, which is as a sort of idol representing – and serving as representative for – the god beyond, what happens when this idol is taken as an object and not a portal? Each persona has its idol: the student has the figure of the teacher, who is the portal to knowledge; the teacher has the figure of the student, who is the portal to a confirmation of one's mastery; the scholar has the figure of the peer or reader, who is the portal to validation. When these portals close, however, then, like Kafka's famous waif at the gates, there seems to be no breaching them without the secret knowledge that one need only walk through them, which nevertheless is impossible. Indeed, the final paragraph of the entry is rather like a retelling or reimagining of Kafka's "Before the Law," in which Farro, like Kafka's helpless man, desires only for the Law to appear, this Law that provides order in the chaos of the land, in order to say one must do this or do that. The "you" of this paragraph, as in that above, vacillates between the individual reader, whoever that might be, and the Reader, the Reader for whom one writes when there is no designated recipient, the Reader from whom one takes all one's cues as a writer. A literal reader, an individual, can actually intervene, can actually speak on behalf of a law to

which they are privy (in the form of acceptance, approval, criticism, rejection, directives, etc.), but a Reader can never intervene and speak on behalf of the Law, since this Law has no representative and is only apparent in its effects and consequences. “These hysterics” of which Farro speaks seem to be directed at the reader, the one whose gaze Farro seems to want to direct to the structures that so disorient and distress him, “the desire beyond the walls.”

The last two sentences of this dense and somewhat mystifying paragraph change directions significantly, turning the entire crisis of the Other Reader into an aspect of what Farro considers to be his own working-through, transpiring through the activity of his writing. All the writing is, of course, for someone or directed at someone, but, somewhat like an actual psychoanalysis, silence is the response, as if there is no one else in the room or on the page.

Then what am I.

October 30

Original entry from Barthelme.

April 9, 2016

The last of the “What are the dead?” cycle, this one focused primarily on desire – the desire for knowledge. One recalls immediately Farro’s citation of Cixous’s *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*: “the desire to die is the desire to know; it is not the desire to disappear, and it is not suicide; it is the desire to enjoy.” In this entry Farro asks, “What more quickly than a thought of

the dead brings to light the heart of desire? [...] And each of us is here in the university because there is something we want to know, something we seek out by occupying a specific position in relation to knowledge. Do the dead object? Do we imagine that their secrets will fulfill or sustain us?" There seems to be some conflation here of the dead with the text – neither of which can respond when addressed. Can the dead/text object to becoming an object of scholarly scrutiny? If so it is clear that Farro aims to place his own text beyond the powers of academic insight, at the distant borders where education and seduction cannot be so easily distinguished.

October 31

This entire scene is Farro's, and it is perhaps more than fortuitous that it appears on the same page as the April 9 entry on the dead. Here, in the elementary school costume parade, the relationship of death to education is completely ignored. Farro points out how death is avoided as a subject of actual conversation, which in a room full of fifth graders is obviously understandable. It is at this moment in the narrative that Farro begins to gesture toward a fatal culmination of the story, as if the only proper conclusion to Thomas's predicament is death, perhaps by suicide. The surreal procession of children is an image well worth reflecting on – from an analogical perspective we might take the image as a fitting reflection of our everyday exhibition of *personae*, roles we occupy in specific interpersonal engagements, all of them presumably covering up an essential or true self. Thomas's inexplicable decision to dress as his former self despite how "perverse" a choice it is demonstrates his dependence on his past life role; that is, given the opportunity to embody anything on Halloween he can't come up with anything other than what he has been before. The observation that, as well, many students have chosen typical costumes (witches, cats), is another example of the paralysis or confusion one can be thrown into when faced with the task of embodying a different persona, even if only for a silly holiday. Moreover, Thomas uncannily confronts his

identical self – a boy dressed exactly as he is. Instead of a moment of congress with the boy, or even another episode of *déjà vu*, Thomas can only feel a hostile difference between his imagos – instead of confronting a child who seemed, like Thomas, destined to inhabit the position of insurance claims adjuster, Thomas confronts the ironic and dismissive image of a young boy who more or less characterizes Thomas's former life as a joke. Thomas, in turn, seems intimidated by the power of the sixth graders, leading him to his preposterous conclusions that their costumes are accentuated with real blood.

November 3

Another entry that is entirely Farro's addition. From his journal entries it is pretty clear that his observations here are autobiographical. Apart from its humour, the entry does little more for the piece than add one more voice to the chorus of critics who have claimed that the school grows closer and closer to the prison and the church. From a narrative standpoint, it is impossible to believe that, given the relative length of all of Thomas's other entries in the story, he was able to write all of this during the class's daily geography lesson, nor that he would want to unless he had a proverbial axe to grind. An editor ought to have intervened.

August 14, 2010

Excising the black space, the following entry reads:

[A] boy was captivated by mirrors, abducted by them. After a time the story is difficult to tell. Sometimes the story ends, a dear gift, one feared to death, a comet flashing. One thought is always

struggling to locate myself. The horror to be a horror from the mirror, faceless face, body animated by words, animated by the wake of death.

The entry is censored in Farro's journals, meaning there is no way to recover the full text of this excerpt. While it is obviously an allusion to the function of unconscious censorship, it is also an example of the way in which meaning persists in the face of erasure. Formally the entry is comparable to Jonathan Safran Foer's *Tree of Codes*, a novella-length censoring of Bruno Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles*. Safran Foer is a persistent influence in Farro's work, due primarily to Safran Foer's typographical experimentation and fascination with the ways messages can be simultaneously expressed and mutilated.²³²

On its own the entry is jagged and borderline nonsensical, almost like a bad translation or a message written by a machine. While in the text itself we see the usual themes reappear – death, mirrors, words – we are perhaps more interested in Farro's decision to censor this exactly and nothing else. One can presume that approximately 60% of the text is taken out, which leaves more than enough room for the original text to be vastly different from the remaining excerpt. I personally have examined the archived journals in Cheyenne, Wyoming's Cheney Branch archives of Farro's work and found the imprints of the original to be irrecoverable, truly consigning them to oblivion.

The date of this entry, coincidentally, makes it the earliest of Farro's entries. Perhaps there is an element of shame in his earlier work.

²³² One thinks specifically of Oskar's grandparents' messages to one another in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. His grandfather, who does not speak except by using his hands upon which are tattooed the words "yes" and "no", delivers a message on a touchtone phone that Safran Foer transcribes as an enormous string of numbers. Oskar's grandmother, on the other hand, writes so frantically that she ceases to use punctuation and eventually ceases to leave any space between her words and finally simply writes letters on top of letters, creating a black a mass of illegible text, not unlike the Commandant in Kafka's *In the Penal Colony*.

June 24, 2016

Another episodic and cryptic entry. The central theme is still Farro's obsession with the reader ("I know you're listening – reading"), though the bulk of the entry depicts his struggle to conjugate his discourse and desire with the discourse and desires of education as an academic discipline. Farro seems to leave behind the conventional research approach of sifting through the "mountains of paper on the subject [of education]" in order to find some line of coherence, leaving him with no other option than to interrogate the subject from the perspective of his desire, which of course eludes and mystifies him. As always, the question of desire is accompanied by the figure of the Other ("whose approbation are you after, what image are you struggling to embody?"); the question here seems to be: what compels a person to want to teach? By prioritizing this question and by examining it from the perspective of psychoanalysis, Farro recasts the problems of education in terms of the history and desire of the teacher. The image of Hamlet – whose inability to act is notorious – exemplifies the forking paths of education as transmission of knowledge on one hand and education as attunement to one's unconscious on the other. If there are any ghosts haunting Farro's work, it would be one that compels him to speak on behalf of knowledge, and another that compels him to speak on behalf of truth. Indeed.

November 3

This entire entry is Farro's addition, and, apart from its rather banal critique of the silliness of elementary school disciplinary measures, it seems to be mostly a lark.

February 7, 2012

Excerpt from an essay delivered in Boston in 2012 on the Russian philosopher and theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. The first paragraph anticipates many of Farro's subsequent literary concerns, especially the notion that the work of art reveals its true value precisely in what it refuses to give us, forcing the reader or viewer to draw from her own associative or unconscious resources. Farro's concluding question, paired with the bizarre and dream-like image of the jar in Tennessee, reminds one of the central, opaque, and alluring navel of the dream about which the entire dreamwork coalesces but which itself, restive and unfathomable, perpetually escapes analysis. It seems, when one attempts to unify Farro's thoughts on the matter, that it is the presence of this navel and the bare fact that learners are also dreamers that causes him to understand the teaching of literature in such an idiosyncratic sense. The value of, say, a poem such as Stevens' "Anecdote of the Jar" does not at all lie in the meaning of the jar, but rather in the non-meaning of the jar. But, to go further, this non-meaning is not itself to be taken as the meaning – i.e. that the jar represents the unrepresentable or is some icon of *différance* – but is rather an invitation for the reader to enter into her associative stream and, precisely there, begin to survey and analyze the landscape, interrogating it for no purpose other than to draw nearer, perhaps ever nearer, to her desire.

Is anyone listening.

June 25, 2011

Another early entry, this one from a poem in the notebooks. Purpose uncertain.

July 21, 2010

Excerpt from a different poem than the last entry. These two entries taken together signal a kind of turning point in “Me and Me and Miss Mandible,” where the entries become more dream-like, more ambiguous, perhaps more poetic. This increasing disintegration of anything like a theme or central argument of the essay – which was already quite abstract – mirrors the manner in which Farro seems to understand teaching literature. That is, what begins as at least an apparent effort to explicate or address a text by means of something like argumentation or close reading (after all, the earliest entries make explicit reference to “Me and Miss Mandible” as well as discuss the function or even “argument” of the accompanying entries) devolves into fragmented and mystifying shards of dream images and metaphors, all of them increasingly personal, increasingly preoccupied with the specter of Farro’s, and everyone’s, inevitable death and the desires, fantasies, and words orbiting it.

November 4

Apart from only a few added touches (“...exercising her disciplinary tones” and “I cannot imagine what Frankie Randolph intends with all this”) the primary intervention here is the recollection of Brenda, the etymologies, and the rumination on Sue Ann’s tabloid-driven sexual education. The conflation of education, curiosity, sexuality, the notion of a cure drives home the sentiment that the impulse to know can always be viewed from a libidinal perspective.

June 27, 2016

An image from what Farro elsewhere refers to as his “ecosystem of metaphorical production,” which in turn leads to the confession: “[t]here are readers I am trying to destroy.” Despite its ambiguity, this passage comprises one of the more succinct explanations of Farro’s motivations behind his experimentation. By foregoing basically every convention of academic writing Farro is ultimately asking the reader, or Reader, to speak on behalf of a Law whose grounds are uncertain, or even mythological. That is, in an academic setting where critical and original thinking are so highly prized, Farro attempts to write from his own origin and with an eye toward providing a critique in the ancient sense: a crisis and a verdict. For Farro, the stakes of learning, teaching, reading, or writing are not circumscribed exclusively by the subject at hand, but by the absolute limits of death and desire. If, after all, the spirit of critique can never rest, then one might say that Farro attempts to sympathize with and mimic that restlessness, urging the reader never to forget the desire that motivates her interest in this or that, an evanescent desire always to be rediscovered.

1935 & June 27, 2016

I will take these entries together, since they are clearly meant to be seen as a whole. The 1935 entries are excerpts from e.e. cummings’ poem “as if as” from his collection *No Thanks* (famously dedicated to all the publishers who declined to print his work – it is not hard to imagine Farro sympathizing and identifying with cummings’ difficulties), and the other entries are Farro’s paracitation of cummings’ poem. cummings’ poetry, like Farro’s scholarship, derives a great amount of its import from its willingness to extend the conventions of its practice to extremes in search of new effects of meaning. cummings’ work, like Farro’s resists traditional methods of reading and analysis, so it is not surprising that Farro sees cummings as a sort of ally. Farro adds his specific concerns to cummings’ poem, which itself powerfully depicts the magical interaction between a mundane fact (“i am alive”) and the image of fog among the rushes. Farro embellishes this scene with the

rather incongruous imagery of a pair of weary hands and an idol (one whose centrality to the whole recalls the jar in Tennessee) upon which is written the Greek apothegm: γνοθι σεαυτον, “gnothi seauton” generally translated as, “know thyself” and which Farro renders phonetically as “know thee say aughten”. The punning here complicates the message considerably as it can be taken to mean both that in order to know oneself one must say nothing and in order to know the other one must say nothing. Farro’s second addition imagines the ghosts of cummings’ original poem to be not tendrils of fog but “windrisen cinders cast dreamfully far,” producing a rhyme with cummings’ phrase “rush fields dreamfully are.” The fog/ghost/smoke that on its own makes worlds becomes, in Farro’s added final stanza, the ambivalent image of dew-soaked ash crowned with sun, bright as pearls.

This entry is, I believe, a sort of follow-up to the preceding entry (June 27, 2016): cummings’ poem serves as an example precisely of the kind of language that defies the Law, or at least provokes a response. Farro’s response is, of course, not didactic or expository but paracitic – it extends and diversifies the range of meaning for cummings’ original poem while also providing, by way of allusion almost, a commentary on the original poem. To the expansive imagery of cummings’ original poem (the reeling fog pouring over the rush fields, themselves appearing among the fog as if in a dream) Farro adds the somewhat religious images of the hands and the idol bearing an inscription that implicates the individual (know thyself), as well as the collective (the emaciated horde), whereas cummings’ poem makes little gesture toward the human (he only mentions ghosts – the image of the fog). In Farro’s additions this horde is taken up by the ancient hands (with every joint in the cracking fingers cracking) and scattered like ashes into some impossible distance (dreamfully far). cummings’ final stanza leaves the reader with an image almost of autochthonous life rising from the fog/ghost/smoke, whose heartbeat one can almost see emerge in the very typography of the final line (mmamakmakemakesWwOwoRworLworld), the stuttering to life and the systole/diastole of the alternating capital letters. In cummings’ poem this is a world of life that is orthogonal to human life, that carries on above or beyond the human world. Farro’s additions

complicate this image, making it seem as though the new world is not in addition to the one at hand but rather is a consequence of the human world coming to an end; the cinders of the horde cast dreamfully far leave beyond the conflicted image of the glistening ash in the sun.

Can this image speak for itself?

At the end of the entry Farro writes, “[p]ulling this string of words out and out from my chest and my throat, where does it end?” Again we see a sort of longing for silence, a longing to be rid of the unending circulation of discourse, or perhaps a longing to finally have spoken the final word – a longing for death, perhaps.

November 5

Apart from the dream, this entry is Barthelme’s original.

February 8, 2016

Excerpt from “Paracitation.” Farro’s writing process, in the later part of his career, became increasingly dominated by single phrases – in his journals he refers to them as “thorns”; “little ineradicable and immovable thorns in my brain and heart that don’t block my writing exactly but demand a toll, and there’s no crossing until it’s paid.” Farro’s willingness to value precisely these “precious” phrases is what, according to him, distinguishes his research from more conventional academic work. In part, his insistence that his “symptom” is an essential part of his work as a scholar serves to

transmute his writing from out of the realm of the ideally easily circulated academic discourse and into the realm of hysterical discourse, discourse in need of an interpretation that is not simply semantic but symbolic. In this particular excerpt we can see yet again the familiar features of what Barthes would call Farro's "image repertoire": the spirits, the dream, the birds, the leviathan. The presupposition seems to be that, not unlike in the analyst's training, the teacher of literature must herself be aware of the extent to which her history, her body, her fantasies, etc. influence the manner in which she reads, writes, teaches, and learns literature. Paracitation itself is an exercise in following these associative threads, allowing a story or poem to blossom anew under the influence of one's unconscious, not only renewing the landscape of the piece but also touching on the store of unique metaphorical production that, for the teacher and student of literature, are an education in and of themselves; an education that, for Farro, need not replace the conventional methods of reading and teaching literature but work in tandem with these methods, seeking the fantasy underlying every myth of education.

Is Farro's prose "good"? Is it "clear"? One hardly knows what to make of prose that is so far from the style of the academy, and this is at least in part the reason Farro employs it. His work is no more indecipherable than, say, Lacan's *Écrits*, which Lacan himself claimed were virtually unreadable. The difficulty of the prose – if indeed it is difficult – is itself a pedagogical gesture, one that not only encourages the reader to dwell with the words but, perhaps more importantly, encourage Farro as a writer to continue to unleash what in the literary text causes us to be mysteries to ourselves.

Follow him. Try it.

June 27, 2016

In this brief entry Farro simply highlights what, for him, are the images that repeat. Why these? Is this question any less valuable or any less interesting than seeking the meaning of a white whale?

July 4, 2016

Yet another repetition here, this time of the epigraph to “Me and Me and Miss Mandible.” Farro, in essence, is asking in the subsequent paragraph, “what compels a reader to value this work and not that one, to be a scholar of this and not that?” Farro presumes that in seeking the secret of the text one is ultimately seeking the secret of oneself, never discovered. Is it banal to inquire as to the value or origin of the conventions that characterize one discourse as scholarly, another as literary? The teacher of literature, inundated with the creative forces of so many writers, may write in that same literary current. This entry is an example of Farro doing so.

There is something in the quality of literary writing that makes summary pointless, or even a bit violent. Obviously, one can say of these vignettes that they are about a young boy who builds a bonfire and wonders if the matches will light. Yet the vignettes are also, from another perspective, not vignettes at all but arguments, arguments from a scholar who is attempting to demonstrate the value of dreams in examining texts. From still another perspective they might be seen as exercises for students to evaluate the consequences for a piece of writing when an author varies the tone, the images, the style, the person. Each of these perspectives suggests a different mode of analysis, and as these modes multiply one begins to see the beating heart of a literary education – not simply acknowledging that many interpretations exist and are valid, but in acknowledging the value of saying yes to some and not others, of committing oneself to a reading that, in the end, is a choice that lies beyond the presumed desire of the teacher (i.e. a reading the teacher “wants”) and is a reading the reader wants, an aspect of her desire.

This entry also marks yet another turning point in “Me and Me and Miss Mandible.” The remaining entries are more obscure, unreal. While the paracitation of “Me and Miss Mandible” plods on rather unremarkably on the right, the entries on the left become more sweeping, more personal, more suicidal.

The fires speak of the horror.

March 12, 2021

The first of three impossible entries, whose date has not yet arrived. Farro is undoubtedly referring to his exodus from his birthplace of Wyoming, perhaps seeing in it some similarity to his hero Joyce’s exile. Referring to himself in the second person has the somewhat uncanny effect of positioning Farro as both reader and writer, while at the same time giving the reader a feeling of being interrogated, perhaps. The image of the secret heart appears yet again, this time as a kind of ghost or totem accompanying Farro throughout his life’s seminal moments. The tone of the entry bears some resemblance to that of the early versions of Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, the poet asking, “—Was it for this that one, the fairest of all Rivers, lov’d to blend his murmurs with my Nurse’s song, and from his alder shades and rocky falls, and from his fords and shallows, sent a voice that flow’d along my dreams?” To the extent that a reader may interpret Wordsworth’s question here as one of disgust at the inadequacy of his poetry to measure up to the experiences that inspired it, one can interpret Farro’s resignation here as a consequence of his permanent distance from the secret heart, its impenetrable opacity that persists despite Farro’s efforts to seize it in his writing.

The image of the light being carried through endless night recalls the final image of Cormac McCarthy's *No Country for Old Men*, a novel Farro wrote about extensively in his journals. In the novel Sheriff Bell has a dream:

it was like we was both back in older times and I was on horseback goin through the mountains of a night. Goin through this pass in the mountains. It was cold and there was snow on the ground and he rode past me and kept on goin. Never said nothin. He just rode on past and he has this blanket wrapped around him and he had his head down and when he rode past I seen he was carryin fire in a horn the way people used to do and I could see the horn from the light inside of it. About the color of the moon. And in the dream I knew that he was goin on ahead and that he was fixin to make a fire somewhere out there in all that dark and all that cold and I knew that whenever I got there he would be there. And then I woke up.

In his journals Farro writes, "Something about the whole scene reminds me of Aeneas meeting his dead father in Hades, who so strangely dismisses his son through the gate of ivory, not of horn. As if the secret the dead know is that our waking life is a false dream, not a true one. But a dream in any case."

The suicidal aspect to Farro's writing is made explicit here in the final words of the entry.

He once told me he wanted to destroy himself with sentences.

September 8, 2034

Farro had been in the habit of recording his dreams for many years and this particular apocalyptic scenario does indeed recur in his dream journals. It is very rare for any of the entries in these journals not to mention a feeling of fear or anxiety associated with the dream's events. Very rarely Farro appends brief reflections on the dreams after recording them. The unnamed

“you” he describes variously as “M, but not M,” “M, but with several faces,” “W,” “W, alive again,” and twice as “reader.” This particular dream offers a rather marked contrast with Thomas’s dreams, which are generally more absurd and light-hearted than this dream of end times, and the foreboding quality of this dream aligns with the text at the right of the page on *déjà vu*. The reader begins to sense that several things are coming to an end.

Such a profound solitude, death.

Q: Clutching your hand, what do I see breathing beyond the planets?

A: Love, the mirror, you exalted.

Reader.

July 6, 2016

A gate only for me, now closed.

August 4, 2015

The father is a cloaked horseman, the father is the keeper of the false gate, the mother is a mutilated fish, a mirror.

Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable.

September 8, 2034

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- Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: Norton, 2007)
- Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I: Freud's Papers on Technique*, trans. John Forrester (New York: Norton, 1991)
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- Jacques Lacan. *Le séminaire, livre V: Les formations de l'inconscient* (Paris: Édition de Seuil, 1998)
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- Jacques Lacan. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book X: Anxiety*, trans. A. R. Price (Malden: Polity Press, 2014)
- James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1977)
- Jan Jagodzinski, ed. *Pedagogical Desire: Authority, Seduction, Transference, and the Question of Ethics*, (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 2002)
- Joan Didion. *The White Album*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979)
- Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Art*, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980)
- K. Daniel Cho. *Psychopedagogy: Freud, Lacan, and the Psychoanalytic Theory of Education* (New York: Palgrave, 2009)
- Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Vol. I: Swann's Way & Within a Budding Grove*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff & Terence Kilmartin (New York: Vintage, 1982)
- Margaret Atwood. *The Handmaid's Tale* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1985)
- Mark Z. Danielewski's *Only Revolutions by Sam and by Hailey* (New York: Pantheon, 2006)
- Martin Heidegger. "On the Origin of the Work of Art," *The Basic Writings of Martin Heidegger*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: HarperCollins, 1977)
- Paul Headrick. *A Method for Writing Essays about Literature* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2012)
- Peter Taubman. *Disavowed Knowledge: Psychoanalysis, Education, and Teaching* (New York: Routledge, 2012)
- Roland Barthes, "Lecture in Inauguration of the Chair of Literary Semiology, Collège De France, January 7, 1977", trans. Richard Howard. October 8 (1979)
- Roland Barthes. *A Lover's Discourse*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978)
- Roland Barthes. *Criticism and Truth*, trans. Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: Athlone Press, 1987)
- Roland Barthes. *How to Live Together*, trans. Kate Briggs (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013)
- Roland Barthes. *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967)
- Sharon Todd, ed.. *Learning Desire: Perspectives on Pedagogy, Culture, and the Unsaid* (New York: Routledge, 1997)
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- Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961)
- Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. VI*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1960)
- Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Vol. XVI*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1963)
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Stephen Appel, *Positioning Subjects: Psychoanalysis and Critical Education Studies* (Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1996)

Sylvia Plath. "Mad Girl's Love Song"

Virginia Woolf. *Mrs. Dalloway* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1925)

William Faulkner. *As I Lay Dying* (New York: Norton, 2010)

Curriculum Vitae

DRU FARRO

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EDUCATION

University of Western Ontario, London, ON Canada	2011 –
Present	
Ph.D. in Theory and Criticism (ABD) <u>Anticipated graduation Sept. 2017</u>	
University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY	
MA in English Education and Literary Studies	2009 – 2011
St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM	
BA in Liberal Arts (double major in Philosophy and History of Mathematics/Science, double minor in Classics and Comparative Literature)	2003 – 2007

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

<u>University of Western Ontario</u>	
- Teaching Assistant – FR/WSFR2112: Sex and Seduction in the French novel	2014
- Teaching Assistant – ENGL1027: Storytelling	2013
- Teaching Assistant – FILM2058: Superheroes	2012
- Teaching Assistant – VAH1052 G: Art and Popular Culture	2011
<u>University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY</u>	
- Instructor – ENGL 2020-01 and 02: Introduction to Literature	2011
Developed every aspect of the course, conducted individual student conferences on a bi-semester basis, administered all grades	
- Graduate Instructor – HP 1020, HP 1161	2010-2011
Developed syllabus and overall course structure, conducted individual student conferences, administered all grades, participated in departmental grading boards.	
- Graduate Instructor – HP 1161 (Co-taught with Diane Panozzo)	2010
Lead class discussions, collaborated with Ms. Panozzo to develop and modify the syllabus, met with students individually, read and commented on all papers.	
- Graduate Instructor – ENGL 1010, Composition	2009
Taught all courses, met with students individually, read and commented on paper drafts, administered grades	
<u>University of Memphis, Memphis, TN</u>	
- Tutor	2008
Worked closely with non-traditional university students on written work and edited papers.	

Shelby County School District **2008**

-Substitute Teacher

Carried out daily lesson plans, monitored reading periods.

St. John's College, Santa Fe, NM

-Writing Assistant **2005-2007**

Edited students' papers, worked individually with students' on their revisions, lead weekly discussion groups on pertinent writing topics for interested students and colleagues.

-Library Assistant **2003-2005**

Shelved books, checked out items for borrowers, solved computer/printer-related problems, handled money in the payment of late fees and during the annual book sale, assisted in the planning for the overhaul and redistribution our collections, and helped borrowers with whatever they needed.

RELATED EXPERIENCE

University of Western Ontario

-Deputy Chief Editor, *Chiasma: A Site for Thought* **2013 – 2015**

-Founder and head administrator of 'song, and sin', a blog for the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism **2012 – 2015**

-Co-Organizer of 'Revolution and Recovery', a graduate conference at the Centre for the Study of Theory and Criticism **2012**

-Ph.D Representative on the Research Committee **2011-2013**

University of Wyoming

-Co-Organizer of first graduate student-run conference at UW's English Department: 'Celebration and Criticism in the Academy' **2011**

-Co-Editor, *Insert Title Here*, the University of Wyoming's Composition 1010 reader **2009**

St. John's College Prison Tutoring Program

Tutor **2004 – 2005**

Worked with inmates with reading comprehension, writing short responses to reading material, and basic spoken language skills

PUBLICATIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

The Scattered Pelican, Vol. I, #1, 'Trans- & Trance' **2015**

Paper title: 'Desert/Destroy, Variation, Fourth Draft'

Chiasma: A Site for Thought, Vol. I, #2, 'What Now, Professor?' **2015**

Paper title: 'Annotation, Navigation, Electronic Editions' (translated from French) Note: this paper was published under the pseudonym John Casey Oliver Beal

CONFERNCES

University of Toronto (Department of English): Movements and Migrancies **2016**

Paper title: 'Bleed Out Your Days in the River of Time'

University of Western Ontario (Department of Education): 7th Annual Graduate Research in Education Symposium	2016
Paper title: 'Psychoanalysis and Education's First Breath'	
University of Toronto (Department of Cinema Studies): Sight/Site/Cite	2016
Paper title: 'Parasites'	
Cultural Studies Association Annual Conference, Riverside, California: 'Another University is Possible'	2015
Paper title: 'The Aggression of Dialogue, The Resistance to Learning'	
University of Western Ontario (Department of Modern Languages and Literature): 'Trans- and Trance'	2015
Paper title: 'Someone Must Have Traduced Josef K'	
Derrida Today Annual Conference, New York City	2014
Paper title: 'Education Interminable: Derrida and Psychoanalysis'	
Technology in Education Symposium, University of Western Ontario	2014
Paper title: 'The Eclipse of Technology'	
The American Comparative Literature Association Annual Meeting, New York	2014
Paper title: 'A Pedagogy of Ignorance and Analysis'	
Dalhousie University (Department of English): 'Dissent'	2013
Paper title: 'Answer, please: Desire and Dissent in the Classroom'	
University of Toronto (Department of English): 'Repetition, with a Difference?'	2013
Paper title: 'Clouds: Quotation as Crucifixion and the Thrown Stones of Criticism'	
University of Western Ontario (Department of Education): 4th Annual Faculty Research Symposium	2013
Paper title: 'Robber: Come. An Introduction to Desire in the Classroom'	
University of Western Ontario (Department of Comparative Literature): 'Good Laugh, Bad Laugh'	2013
Paper title: 'A Sparrow with a Machine Gun: Lacan, the Letter, Enjoyment'	
York University (Gender, Feminist, and Women's Studies): 'Dynamic Resistances'	2012
Paper title: 'The Predator and the Prey: Blindness and Theory'	
University of Saskatchewan (Department of French): 'Fascination des Images'	2012
Paper title: 'A Death of Life: Baudrillard, Merleau-Ponty and Photographic Absence'	
University of Wyoming (Department of English): 'Celebration and Criticism in the Academy'	2011
Paper title: 'A Thousand Unknown Things: Logic Made Impossible'	
Brandeis University (Department of Philosophy): 'Philosophy and Language'	2010

Paper title: 'War, Responsibility, Language: the Impossibility of Ethics'

AWARDS

Graduate Student Teaching Award (Nominated), *University of Western Ontario* **2012**
 Promoting Intellectual Engagement in the First Year Award, *University of Wyoming* **2011**

LANGUAGES

French (intermediate to advanced)

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Member of the Western Network for Digital Education & Research **2014-2019**
 Reading group organizer: 20th century women's fiction **2013-2014**
 Reading group organizer: Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time* **2012-2013**
 Reading group organizer: the novels of Cormac McCarthy **2012-2013**
 Reading group organizer: Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* **2011**
 Reading group organizer: David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* **2011**
 Reading group organizer: Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* **2011**