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The Representation of Narrative:
What Happens in *Othello*

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The usual structure of Shakespeare's plays is that after an expository first act, the three central acts — the main body of the play — are given over to dramatic representation of the main body of the narrative action that constitutes the story and the plot, before crisis and resolution are achieved in act 5; thus the central portions of *King Lear* deal with the progressive degeneration of both the Lear and the Gloucester families, those of *Hamlet* with the Prince's progress from uncertainty to commitment and with the changing fortunes of the Polonius household, and those of *Macbeth* with the period of Macbeth's unchallenged rule. When it comes to *Othello*, however, Shakespeare is forced to adopt a rather different method, for the simple reason that the events which provide the nominal mainspring to drive the plot of *Othello* never in fact take place. Desdemona's adultery with Cassio, on which all Othello's actions depend, is quite literally a non-event; even if it were not, it could never, as Iago so pithily reminds Othello, be represented on the stage. In its place Shakespeare must put something else to act as the central business of the play; instead of the representation of an act, he offers us the representation of Iago's story of that act — which thus stands, in fact, as the representation of a representation. In so doing, he draws attention to the fact and effect of performance in itself, as well as to its status as mode of representation, as Iago stages fictive playlets and deploys as his props two other ways of mediating the contents of the mind to the outside world: things written, and things dreamed. As this play of non-events, slippages

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and substitutions unfolds, writing, performance and dreamwork will be insistently played off against each other until we may well be unsure of what happens in *Othello*.

That this play which is so preeminently about stories should have at its heart a story is apt. It could perhaps be said that all of Shakespeare's plays necessarily display a strong interest in modes of narration, but what seems to me to distinguish *Othello* from the other works of Shakespeare's early and middle period is precisely the radical falsity of the rooted belief that most strongly informs the hero's actions. Lear perceives his mistake very early on, and Hamlet obsessively tests the truth of what he is told, but *Othello* gives us a central character whose view of events is so divorced both from our own and from "reality" that he has lent his name to a delusional psychiatric condition, the Othello syndrome (see Enoch and Trethowan). Even here, we may be struck by the fact that, unlike Lear or, apparently, Hamlet, Othello is certainly never obviously certifiable, leading us to note how delicately the borderlines of a distorted perception are plotted. This emphasis on the idiosyncratic viewpoint and its disjunction from external facts is further underlined by the drunkenness of Cassio, with its accompanying mood-altering tendencies, and his equally abrupt return to a more normal perspective. To some extent, similar effects may be found in other Shakespeare plays with which *Othello* has strong links: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with its magic juices, and two other plays of jealousy, *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* (jealousy being a condition peculiarly apt for the dramatization of belief in the false). In all of these, though, the presence of a supernatural element and of a comedic teleology allows for the realist mode to be overridden by the very different conventions of romance. It is uniquely in *Othello* that modes of representation and narration are systematically explored exclusively within the confines of the "realist" mode (*pace* Rymer!) and of a theatricality that is never (as it is with inset plays and masques) explicitly extradiegetic.

In the case of *Othello*, the play's concern with narration has been often noticed (see for instance Gardner; Bayley; Sinfield; Bates; Wayne; and Purkiss). Mark Thornton Burnett remarks that "in *Othello*, stories abound and conflict with each other, and the play delineates the attempts of characters to construct narratives for themselves which will permit them to understand personal preoccupations, to replace fear with certainty and self-assurance" (62). Thomas Moisan comments that "*Othello* engages us intertextually in the kinds of narratives, and narrativity, from which it derives its fable" (50), while Stephen Greenblatt sees the play's characteristic process as "submission to narrative self-fashioning" (234). Patricia Parker also takes this insistence on narrativity as the springboard for her telling examination of the function of "dilation" and "delation" in the play ("Shakespeare and Rhetoric" 54-74; see also Callaghan 61). I propose to argue, however, that it is not merely the fact of narration but the modes of narration, and their implications for dramatic representation, on which the play centers. In particular, *Othello* demonstrates a consistent concern with speaking, writing, performing, and narrating.

Not only does *Othello* insistently emphasize the telling of stories, it also shows, in Iago's case, the means by which they are concocted, and such means,

grippingly, seem to include tricks of mind and speech hovering just below the level of full consciousness. The play itself registers a conspicuous interest in the logic and status of the dream as a mode of representation. Unlike *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which it may seem to resemble in the extent of this concern, *Othello* has no play-within-the-play; it does, however, offer repeated instances of a kind of ventriloquization, by means of which one character co-opts the voice of another either innocently or as a technique of willful misrepresentation. Finally, *Othello* also lacks, unlike Shakespeare's other tragedies, a scene in which the text of a letter is read aloud and glossed; nevertheless, it contains a number of packed and allusive images that center precisely on the decoding and on the communicative status of written, as opposed to oral, texts. Through examination of Shakespeare's representation of all these representational modes, I hope to reflect on the aesthetic experience afforded by a theatrical performance of *Othello*. The play may encode a sophisticated understanding of the problematics of the meaning of meaning, but it can still speak a raw language of pain.

Othello opens with the words "Tush, never tell me" (1.1.1); its closing lines are Lodovico's promise: "Myself will straight abroad, and to the state / This heavy act with heavy heart relate" (5.2.371-2). Here the business of narration is directly foregrounded, and the impulse to recount offers the only form of comfort that seems available to the surviving characters in the face of the tragedy that they have witnessed. It is not only in the face of disaster, however, that characters are moved to tell tales; it is, on most occasions, more or less their first impulse. In our first encounter with Iago, he and Roderigo are quite literally telling tales, as they attempt to convince Brabantio that his daughter has eloped with Othello. When Othello himself enters, the story that he tells of himself to the Senate casts him as the consummate teller of exotic romance narratives, as he speaks to Desdemona of "The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.144-5). Burnett comments of this that "Othello's story caters to assumptions about his status as a black man even as it seems to resist them: it closely resembles contemporary accounts of travels to newly discovered countries" (65).[1] There is, however, a curious reluctance on Othello's part to dwell on the processes of his own storytelling, for he actually seeks to render his own narration transparent and to obliterate all traces of its mediating effect on the facts of his life. His offer to the Senate is as follows:

> And till she come, as faithful as to heaven
> I do confess the vices of my blood,
> So justly to your grave ears I'll present
> How I did thrive in this fair lady's love,
> And she in mine. (1.3.122-6)

Othello promises to be both "faithful" and "just" in his recounting, proffering a realist narrative in which the action of retelling is in effect a recreating; moreover, the verb he chooses, "present," is suggestive more of an acting out than of a telling, with an echo of what Moisan has called "the uneasy antiphony the

play negotiates between its narrativity and its theatricality" (68). Othello will in effect replay the scene for them, except that in the absence of Desdemona — on which this whole interlude depends — he will also take her part.

Having thus secured the attention of his audience, he begins:

> Her father lov'd me, oft invited me,
> Still questioned me the story of my life,
> From year to year; the battles, sieges, fortunes,
> That I have pass'd:
> I ran it through, even from my boyish days,
> To the very moment that he bade me tell it. (1.3.128-33)

Here the mimetic properties claimed by Othello for his narrative enactment become even more pronounced. Both Moisan and Parker ("Fantasies") have pointed to the intimate relationship between difference and *différance* in narrative, between dilation and delation; this is precisely what Othello seeks to ignore as he presents his own narrative as transparent and authoritative, not as the product of rhetoric or art. His whole life is summoned up, its immediacy accentuated by its striking culmination in the "now" of Brabantio's command; and its truth is implicitly asserted by the starkness with which the potential fictionality of "story" is canceled out by the bald claim to factuality of "my life." The narrative process itself is not only elided but is, quite literally, figured as a gap, a moment of non-existence: Othello's life to date stops at the moment when Brabantio bids him recount it, not at the moment when he had actually recounted it. It is odd that storytelling, in many ways the key activity of Othello's life, is thus apparently not counted by him as a part of that life at all — although to recount the story of the whole of it must, presumably, have occupied quite some time. In this play in which the relationship of events to time is so thoroughly problematized, this is perhaps the most remarkable piece of temporal legerdemain of all. There is a slippage here that is further emphasized by the fact that Othello's invitation to Desdemona to "witness it" (1.3.169) coincides, literally, with her entrance: she is asked to attest to the truth of an account she has not heard, and this seems to arise not so much from any bad faith on Othello's part as from his blindness to the processes of narrative that differentiate his verbal reconstruction from the event itself, at which Desdemona has indeed been present and to which she could, therefore, witness.

What of the story itself? Is it really true, or, more importantly, since nothing in a play is, in one sense, true, would its various audiences have considered it to be so? It seems to me to be important in two major aspects: what it does say, and what it does not. It reveals strikingly little of either of those two primary demarcators of people (arguably in most circumstances, but overwhelmingly in Shakespeare's Venice), class or race background; it offers no clues about motivation. Instead, its primary function is to depict the exoticism and dangers of his travels, and Othello attributes its spectacular success in winning over Desdemona's affections to its fulfillment of this aim. This is certainly stirring stuff: a mere summary of it moves the Duke to comment, "I think this tale would win my daughter too" (1.3.171). Is it plausible, though? The Arden edi-

tor comments of the Anthropophagi and the "men whose heads / Do grow beneath their shoulders" (1.3.144-5) that "such travellers' tales were current, and it seems as idle as the deserts to try to determine whether Shakespeare was primarily indebted to Mandeville or Raleigh or Holland's Pliny." Parker, however, remarks that "Othello's 'dilated' traveler's tale recalls Africanus, Mandeville, Pliny, and the rest" ("Fantasies" 98), all of whose veracity was much in doubt, and Jyotsna Singh describes Othello's "stories of slavery and adventure" as featuring him as "a 'character' in an imaginary landscape which viewers, then and now, recognize as a semi-fictional creation of colonialist travel narratives" (288).

Part of the attraction of "travellers' tales" is surely their overt improbability, and an age with a growing interest in anatomy and medicine might well be skeptical of men with heads beneath their shoulders. In this case, the lack of immediacy of this narration of a narrative is further figured by Othello's tautological replacement of the word "cannibal" with "anthropophagi." Cannibal, which seems in anagrammatized form to have provided the origin of Caliban's name, perhaps functions as an isolated relic of the native speech of which we hear so little in *Othello*; its replacement by the classical term "anthropophagi" thus symbolizes not only Othello's learning but also the firmness with which he is inserted into pre-existing discourses of travel that must radically inform and structure his ostensibly experiential account. Even as Othello thinks he tells his story, it in fact tells him, but he is as blind to its constitutive structures as he is to the narrative constraints that make the telling of the story as much a part of the chronological history of his life as the experience of it is. Othello, in short, thinks narration is a transparent mode, as he demonstrates again when he claims simply that "My parts, my title, and my perfect soul, / Shall manifest me rightly" (1.2.31-2) and that "My services, which I have done the signiory, / Shall out-tongue his complaints" (1.2.18-19). What Shakespeare's representation of narration shows the audience, however, is that narration is always already a representation that in fact remakes itself with each re-presentation.

Such consciousness of fictionality never features in Othello's account, but it is perhaps appropriate that Desdemona's immediate response to his story is to tell another, of a far more palpable mendacity than his own:

> she thank'd me,
> And bade me, if I had a friend that lov'd her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story,
> And that would woo her. (1.3.163-6)

Desdemona here seems clearly aware that the concoction of a fiction can be a useful mechanism for the direct manipulation of reality: upon this hint, Othello spake. It may well seem ominous that Othello here can register the disguised truth of Desdemona's story, recognizing it as a "hint" and as referring to himself and to her rather than to the putative "friend," but that he can show no awareness of his own imbrication in similar tactical ploys: implicitly, he already assumes mendacity in her and truth in himself. Ironically, though, Desdemona's fiction lies only to tell a deeper truth, which she cannot express in any other way.

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What Desdemona knows, and Othello does not, is that narration is not a separate compartment from experience, a cut-and-dried rerun of it, but in complex and mutually formative interplay with it. The story that Othello has told of his life has resulted in a change to the story that, in the future, he will tell of it (as we see in act 5 when his anecdote of the killing of the Turk takes on new symbolic meaning when applied to his present circumstances); once again, the stress is on the materiality and the consequentiality not only of the narration but of the lived (or, on the Shakespearean stage, represented) moment of its representation. For Othello, though, essence and representation are consistently figured as fused. His attitude, and its difference from that prevalent in Venice, is perhaps best encapsulated in two paired moments in act 1, scene 3. When the First Senator is told that the Turks are heading for Rhodes, he dismisses the news with "'tis a pageant, / To keep us in false gaze" (1.3.18-19); when Othello's followers draw in his defense, he rebukes them as follows: "Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it, / Without a prompter" (1.2.83-4). The supersubtle Venetian senator plays with the discourse of theatricality, which he casts as inherently deceptive, but Othello draws no distinction between his own internalized behavior and the externalized fictionality of the stage, and registers no consciousness of the kind of perceptional fallacy that is so obvious to the Senator. It is in the same vein that he will later command Iago, "if thou dost love me, / Show me thy thought" (3.3.119-20).

Othello's absolute faith in the reliability of his own story as a transparent mediator of his experiences clearly prepares him all too well for his role as the dupe of Iago. From the outset of the play, Iago exhibits a sustained concern with modes of narration, persuasion, and figuring, both to oneself and to others. Suggestively, he registers an early awareness of a mechanism for self-narration of which he will later make very telling use, the dream: he assures Roderigo, "If ever I did dream of such a matter, / Abhor me" (1.1.5-6). He also mounts a miniature play-within-the-play in his use of inset dialogue to characterize (and presumably, in performance, to "impersonate") Othello:

> But he, as loving his own pride and purposes,
> Evades them, with a bombast circumstance,
> Horribly stuff'd with epithets of war:
> And in conclusion,
> Nonsuits my mediators: for "Certes," says he,
> "I have already chosen my officer." (1.1.12-17)

Strikingly, Iago also refers to his own preferred method of communicating information: he feels that Othello should have promoted him on the grounds of sure personal knowledge, referring to himself as "I, of whom his eyes had seen the proof" (1.1.28). For all his later brilliance as a manipulative stage manager of the various representational strategies through which he will deceive Othello, and for all the sophistication in hermeneutics that leads him to explain to Othello the impossibility of ocular proof, it is precisely on such proof that his own claim is based. As the word "proof" re-echoes throughout the later part of the play (we hear it at 3.3.194-5, 200, 436, 448, and, as "prove," at 5.1.66), we may recall this *ur*-investigation of its problematics.

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Iago's inability to prove even by proof is radically symptomatic of the problem he experiences in the early part of this scene. Although what he is telling Brabantio is true, he cannot initially get him to believe it — an ironic contrast with the ease with which he will later persuade Othello of a lie. The breakthrough, suggestively, involves a recurrence of the dream motif, as Brabantio moves from incredulity to declaring, "This accident is not unlike my dream, / Belief of it oppresses me already" (1.1.142-3). This prefigures Iago's later fabrication of a dream sequence involving Cassio, and it also exemplifies his most successful strategy of inducing his victim to internalize the persuasion. Interestingly, a later comment of Iago's is similarly prophetic: "I must show out a flag, and sign of love, / Which is indeed but sign" (1.1.156-7). This not only plays grimly on his own role as Othello's flag-bearer; it equally affords an ironic prolepsis of his later co-optation of the handkerchief as literal "flag, and sign of love." Throughout the early stages of the play, Shakespeare lays great stress on the provisionality of Iago's plan, and on the processes of its formation — "A double knavery . . . how, how? . . . let me see" (1.3.392). To see the later developments of the scheme foreshadowed here may well be to glimpse Shakespeare's representation of something akin to dreamwork taking place in Iago's mental processes, and certainly this is echoed in the way Iago himself figures the progress of his strategy: "If consequence do but approve my dream, / My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream" (2.3.58-9). To some extent, the unfolding action of Othello does indeed reflect Iago's dream — or Iago's nightmare — come true.

In itself, and as it forms the main business of both Iago's plot and Shakespeare's, Iago's story is as circumstantial as Othello's own, and it is no more inherently improbable: indeed Coppélia Kahn argues that Iago himself effectively comes to believe it (143). Like Othello "presenting" his story to the senate, Iago too cements his narrative structure with carefully staged playlets: Cassio handing the stolen handkerchief to Bianca, Cassio drunk and fighting, Iago offering us his little vignette of Cassio's dream. In this last instance, Iago functions as a double of Othello's own performative style: just as Othello acts out Desdemona's part in her absence from the senate meeting, so Iago plays Cassio's role for him. In both cases the role of the subsidiary actor is ventriloquized: fictionally, we are offered their voices, but factually they are silent. Although it has no formal play-within-the-play, Othello's exploration of theatricality repeatedly offers such moments of characters playing each other, from Iago's quotation of Othello's promotion of Cassio to the Duke's highly suggestive words to Brabantio, "Let me speak like yourself" (1.3.199); Iago will produce another such moment of role-slippage when he labels women "Players in your housewifery; and housewives in your beds" (2.1.112), and Othello makes perhaps the most poignant use of the motif when he firsts casts Emilia as a bawd (4.2.28-30) and then, ironically, pretends to misrecognize Desdemona as not being the whore that, in fact, she is not (90-2). It is this technique that will later allow Iago to attempt the incrimination of Bianca by a similar ventriloquization, this time involving the language of the body: "Stay you, good gentlewoman; look you pale, mistress? / Do you perceive the gestures of her eye?" (5.1.104-5). Finally, the ultimate act of ventriloquization will also be the

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most poignant: Emilia, on her deathbed, will imitate Desdemona as she
resolves, "I will play the swan, / And die in music: [Singing] *Willow, willow,
willow*" (5.2.248-9). Emilia, unlike her husband, does not mean to deceive
here; but both she and we are well aware of the precise status of this moment
as re-presentation, since it is precisely from that quality that it takes its affec-
tive force.

Iago's relation to Cassio, though, is more sustained than any of these other
examples of impersonation. In all of Iago's stage-managed episodes, Cassio is
allotted a part, and Cassio's promotion is the reason for Iago's initial discon-
tent: Iago sees Cassio in the role he had coveted for himself. Iago and Cassio
are doubled in other ways. Famously, they twice offer closely juxtaposed and
completely antithetical views of Desdemona: Cassio blazons her to the Cypri-
ots (2.1.65), whereas Iago is "nothing, if not critical" (119), and their respons-
es to the withdrawal of Desdemona and Othello for their wedding night are
similarly counterpointed, Cassio seeing purity and Iago lust (2.3.15-25).
Equally, though Cassio's lament for lost reputation is soon echoed by Iago's dis-
quisition on good name (3.3.159-65), contrasts of dramatic context and rhetor-
ical style make for a very different effect. Just as the substance of their speech
is different, so is there a marked difference in the way they are received as
tellers of stories. Whereas Iago's messages are, initially at least, habitually dis-
regarded, Cassio's are avidly received, and he is repeatedly turned to as an infor-
mant of authority. When we first encounter him, Othello immediately asks
him, "What is the news?" (1.2.36) and follows it up two lines later with,
"What's the matter, think you?" (38). Arriving in Cyprus, Desdemona greets
him with "I thank you, valiant Cassio; / What tidings can you tell me of my
lord?" (2.1.87-8).

Most notable in this respect is the description of Cassio's own arrival on the
island, which immediately follows the Third Gentleman's assurance that the
Turkish fleet is destroyed:

> *Mon.* How, is this true?
> *Third Gent.*   The ship is here put in,
> A Veronesa; Michael Cassio,
> Lieutenant to the warlike Moor Othello,
> Is come ashore: the Moor himself at sea,
> And in full commission here for Cyprus.
> *Mon.* I am glad on't, 'tis a worthy governor.
> *Third Gent.* But this same Cassio, though he speak of comfort,
> Touching the Turkish loss, yet he looks sadly,
> And prays the Moor be safe, for they were parted,
> With foul and violent tempest. (2.1.25-34)

The Arden edition prints "How, is this true?"; but it would be just as apposite
to read "How is this true?" because that is what the passage is substantially con-
cerned with. The precise mechanism of the transmission of this information is
never uncovered (it cannot be "the ship" that speaks the message), but it is
amply suggested by the introduction of Cassio's name followed by the idea of

"speaking." For once in the play, the process of recounting is rendered gen-
uinely unproblematic: Cassio sees, tells, and is believed, and nothing occurs
later in the play to undermine the substance of his report. There are other
echoes of this sane world: Desdemona wants the Clown to "[b]e edified by
report" (3.4.12), and Emilia's imagined story about the putative storyteller who
has slandered Desdemona is, ironically, true. Equally, Bianca, despite the fact
that she is told so little, manages usually to get a pretty accurate idea of what is
going on through conjecture. Perhaps to some extent these moments of sim-
plified decoding provide the same kinds of respite from tension as is supplied
in other tragedies by comic relief, of which there is so noticeably little in *Oth-
ello*. Perhaps they afford us instead a sort of epistemological relief, though one
that only makes more poignant our understanding of the machinations of Iago.

Iago's own approach to the transmission — or in his case to the distorting
— of information is clearly characterized. He is himself a remarkably insensi-
tive reader of situations, believing Emilia to be likely to commit adultery with
both Othello and Cassio, believing Cassio to be in love with Desdemona,
believing it possible that she might return the affection. Emilia's word for his
wishes is, interestingly, "fantasy" (3.3.303). His recapitulations, in particular,
are crude, albeit inflected for the benefit of Roderigo: "with what violence she
first lov'd the Moor, but for bragging, and telling her fantastical lies" (2.1.221-
2); "Lechery, by this hand: an index and prologue to the history of lust and foul
thoughts" (254-5). Iago's initial problem, seen from his own perspective, is no
small one: a man whose announcements are rarely heeded must try to weave a
convincing story whose success will depend entirely on people acting in certain
ways that are, in fact, against their own interest. His first attempt at producing
such a narrative is particularly fraught, since he must retell the story of the fight
between Montano and Cassio, in the presence of both, in a way that while not
seeming directly to incriminate Cassio will actually have precisely that effect;
and he must, moreover, avoid being caught out in any of the lies he has told. In
this last consideration, he sails particularly close to the wind. He tells Othello
that he heard "Cassio high in oaths, which till to-night / I ne'er might see
before" (2.3.226-7), and he thus comes dangerously close to contradicting his
earlier assertion to Montano that Cassio's drunkenness is habitual. In fact,
though, to focus exclusively on swearing allows him to deflect attention com-
pletely from the problematic issue of the frequency of Cassio's drinking, and his
re-presentation of the affair has precisely the effects that he desires. Later, he
will use a similar strategy when he deliberately makes his interlude with Cassio
a dumbshow, an archaic mode of representation in theatrical terms but the only
one that will do duty here. It is particularly ironic that this is overtly framed in
terms that hint at its fictionality: Iago opens the episode with, "For I will make
him tell the tale anew" (4.1.84), and Othello comments aside, "Iago beckons
me, now he begins the story" (130); but Othello's uncritical attitude towards his
own storytelling prevents him from perceiving the re-presented nature of even
so crude and unrealistic (in metatheatrical terms) a device as the dumbshow.

The crucial role in Iago's story is of course that of Desdemona, but since she
continually refuses to play it for him, Iago has to resort to an overt declaration
of the unstageability of certain parts of his narrative:

It were a tedious difficulty, I think,
To bring 'em to that prospect, damn 'em then,
If ever mortal eyes did see them bolster
More than their own; what then, how then?
What shall I say? where's satisfaction?
It is impossible you should see this . . . (3.3.403-8)

This is an aesthetic strange to Othello, who is unused to the notion that any experience, however arcane, whether of slavery or of anthropophagi, cannot be summoned up for the imagination of the auditor. Iago, as his inability to convince Brabantio in the first scene showed, is a poorer narrator and stager than Othello, despite — or perhaps because of — his far more sophisticated approach to the problematics of representation. But his approach works because he is able to effect a gradual shift in Othello's horizons of narrative expectation. Initially, Othello adheres to his own ideas of the entire transparency of representational systems: he adjures Iago to "give the worst of thought / The worst of word" (136-7); he complains:

Thou dost conspire against thy friend, Iago,
If thou but thinkest him wrong'd, and makest his ear
A stranger to thy thoughts. (146-8)

Once again, Othello shows no consciousness whatsoever of the mechanics of representation: for him, the thought of one friend has immediate passage to the ear of another.

Iago soon sets to work on these ideas, however. It is remarkable how much of his attack on Othello consists not in the providing of evidence but in instructing his victim in new ways of interpreting evidence. When Othello demands, "give me the ocular proof" (3.3.366), Iago explains patiently, "It is impossible you should see this" (408). He amazes Othello by telling him of the alleged representational code of Venice: "their best conscience / Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown" (207-8). Othello, whose very identity is so extensively predicated on narration, responds in appalled fascination: "Dost thou say so?" (209) — a reply that ironically encodes the very problematics of representation that it discounts, since the fact that Iago says so does not make it true. Iago continues in this vein, repeatedly stressing an aesthetics of concealment:

            Alas, alas!
It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known . . . (4.1.272-4)

And Othello is convinced. The man who earlier in the play is presented to us as the consummate narrator, and who has earlier demanded with such vehemence an accurate account of the origins of the brawl, begins to veer towards silence:

I should make very forges of my cheeks,
That would to cinders burn up modesty,
Did I but speak thy deeds. (4.2.76-8)

This is the effect of Iago's doctrine of the dangers of re-presentation, and it is potent indeed: Othello, the worker with words, will not use them now, and it is actually his refusal to make any more specific accusation than this that so radically disempowers Desdemona, since she can make no detailed rebuttal.

In more ways than one, then, Iago's machinations lead directly to the tragedy, for he not only feeds Othello false information but radically conditions his mechanisms for responding to it. Left alone, Othello mutters, "This honest creature doubtless / Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds" (3.3.246-7). Most terribly of all, this new belief in the power of the hidden does not completely override his earlier faith in the transparency of narration, but rather fuses with it. When Iago, mock-deprecatingly, asks, "Will you think so?", he replies at once, "Think so, Iago?" (4.1.1), suggesting that though the Moor has lost faith in signifying systems, he remains paradoxically and dangerously adamant about his own ability to decode them: even if everything Desdemona says to him is a lie, he can know the truth about her. He is, we recognize, caught up in the epistemological impasse of the Cretan paradox.

As for Desdemona herself, she remains blissfully unaware even of what story she has been cast in. This is revealed by her dogged persistence in pleading for Cassio and in refusing to believe that her husband could be jealous of her. In this respect, she may well seem to play into Iago's hands; certainly, in the stories that they have told of her, critics have frequently constructed her as naive, even irritating, in this part of the play. Equally, however, Desdemona's actions can be seen as arising from a total lack of awareness of the role scripted for her by both Othello and Iago. What she discovers is that even when she is physically present on the stage and apparently controlling her own behavior, she is still subject to ventriloquization through the interpretative strategies applied to her by others. When she does finally learn this, her response is an apt one in this play structured by narratives, for she too tells a story: displacing her own anxieties into the safely distanced world of fiction, in a classic narrative strategy, she tells the tale-within-the-tale of Barbary, her mother's maid, who at a time of grief herself fell back on the recounting of stories as she sang the "song of willow" that, though "an old thing," "express'd her fortune" (4.4.28-9). This bedchamber scene that shows us Desdemona and Emilia alone together is ostensibly colored by an atmosphere of intimacy, but actually it is largely structured by absences and silences, as Desdemona, instead of revealing to us her own innermost thoughts, tells us a story of a woman who told a story. As such, it can be taken to stand for all the stories in *Othello* that have a hollowness at their heart, as is so strikingly figured by the imaginary nature of the adultery that forms the very kernel of the play.

The most striking gap in any story in the play is perhaps that in Iago's. Famously, critics have been consistently unconvinced that the motivation that Iago himself describes is sufficient to actuate the levels of malice that he demonstrates. What is his hidden agenda, the secret self that he never reveals to us, what is his "dream" and his "fantasy"? To plug this gap, critics have offered stories of their own, reading Iago as anything from disgruntled soldier to repressed homosexual. On one level, it is arguable that this is because his part is in fact underwritten. But I would like to suggest that it may be precisely the secret of Shakespeare's success, of his universally acknowledged "greatness," that he habitually underwrites roles, and indeed whole plays, in ways that

provide immense stimulation to audience involvement and imagination. Iago is perhaps merely the most striking example of the phenomenon. Equally, his opacity may serve as an important corrective to Othello's own aesthetic of the transparency of narrative by reminding us of the inherent difficulties involved in all decoding. In an ultimate irony Iago, whose stories and whose ventriloquized playlets we know we must disbelieve, thus nevertheless becomes the most reliable voice to guide us in the proper interpretation of our own experiences of stage representation.

The difficulties of decoding are most strikingly figured at the very end of the play in a tale by that most innocent of tellers, Othello himself. Othello, fittingly, chooses to die as he has lived, recounting a story:

> Set you down this,
> And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
> Beat a Venetian, and traduc'd the state,
> I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
> And smote him thus. [*Stabs himself.*] (5.2.352-7)

This is a story that obviously means a lot to Othello: he dies uttering it, giving it the talismanic force habitually attached to last words, and he is anxious that those hearing it should, in their turns, recount it. It is, however, unclear how exactly this relation relates to him. Initially, Othello is the hero of his own tales: has he now become the villain? Both the "I" and the "him" of the story (suggestively echoing Desdemona's earlier and more sophisticated comment that "I do beguile / The thing I am by seeming otherwise" [2.1.122-3]), he is himself both Turk and not-Turk, subject and object of his own narration. Perhaps, however, even to think in such terms is in itself to commit one of the most common (though at the same time one of the least, if at all, avoidable) of all interpretative errors: to read the self into the text. On a thematic and psychological level, of course, it obviously is a *roman à clef*; I am not saying that I cannot see the extraordinary symbolic force of having Othello at this crucial moment presented to us as that most demonized of others, the Turk. Mention of Turks may also, however, remind us of their abrupt disappearance from the narrative (if not the thematic) structure of the play at the opening of act 2, when all the narrative competence we possess encouraged us to expect them to form a major part of the story. It thus underlines the problematics and containing structures of the narrative mode itself.

This reminder that we ourselves have, during the course of the play, experienced problems with the decoding of narrative may serve to concentrate our minds on the interpretative processes of Othello himself, and in particular to make us aware of the delicately drawn relation between Othello as narrator and Othello as hearer. The logic of his account to the senate implies a stress on the presentness of representation, rather than on the element of re-presenting, which would allow for the introduction of difference. When he himself is told a story by Iago, though, he focuses instinctively on precisely those elements of the narrative that allow for the maximum flexibility of reader response and, ostensibly at least, for greatest interpretative leeway. Repeatedly, he imposes

his own guilt-based reading over the possibilities of innocence that Iago pretends to hold out to him. Iago's narrative, then, is for Othello both an accurate representation — a transparent account of events — and, simultaneously, a representation, a version of events offered by an inaccurate narrator whose poor readings must be erased in favor of those supplied by Othello himself. Though uncritical as narrator and spectator, Othello does, in many ways, pride himself on his performance as close reader.

The "reading" element of the interchanges between Iago and Othello is interestingly imaged at several points. One such passage is perhaps the most famous in the play, and as such may well be taken rather for granted: but when Iago declares that "trifles light as air / Are to the jealous, confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ" (3.3.327-9), we should, I think, be particularly attentive to the implied comparison between the suggestions he has been making to Othello and a written text. This is made especially pointed if we take "proofs" as meaning not only "evidence" but "page proofs," a usage first recorded by the OED in 1563 and with recorded occurrences also in 1600, 1612 and 1613. In a rather similar vein, Othello refers to Iago's mutterings as "close denotements" (3.3.127), and the idea of "note" there is precisely what Iago repeatedly invites Othello to do. This is a play that, uniquely among Shakespeare's "great" tragedies, has no written text-within-the-text. No letter is read out on stage and glossed, as they are by Claudius, Gloucester and Lady Macbeth, and Iago suggestively refers to Othello's "unbookish jealousy" (4.1.101). However, Iago holds out the alleged relationship between Desdemona and Cassio as a text that he himself has lightly annotated but that obviously requires much more extensive marginalia, and these Othello is only too happy to supply, as the two join each other in a happy game of glossing and outglossing in which Desdemona is the "most goodly book" "to write 'whore' on" (4.2.73-4). The proofs are, after all, only at proof stage; they still need to be corrected, and Othello can emend them to what he pleases.

It is at the close of the play that the emphasis on its textuality is most marked, as Lodovico laments, "O bloody period!" (5.2.358) with its connotation of the literal, printed full stop. Interestingly, Gratiano's response to this is that "All that's spoke is marr'd." As much as anywhere in the play, it is in this final scene that the dynamics and problematics of narration, representation and ocular proof find incisive exploration. When Othello, in a potentially highly bizarre moment, looks towards Iago's feet and finds them uncloven, he seems finally to have accepted the possibility that a story may be merely a "fable" (5.2.287); but only a few lines later his aesthetics of inalienably accurate representation is back in place as he implores, "I pray you in your letters, / When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of them as they are" (341-3). This in itself has a double-edged force: on the one hand, it returns to the misleading and mutually contradictory letters reporting the Turkish campaign against the Venetians, but on the other it chimes with the letters found on Roderigo's body (309-19), which have proved potent instruments to reveal the truth. "Proof" has, at last, come forth, and it is in the written text that it has surfaced.

The logic of Othello's own proof-readings is clear enough. As readers are so often tempted to do, he construes the story as centered on himself — as Des-

demona implicitly does with the tale of Barbary, and as Barbary in turn did with the "old song" which, both to her and to Desdemona, "express'd her fortune" — so that, for him, even an exchange between Cassio and Bianca becomes a story about himself and Desdemona. This is, of course, to say little more than that everyone reads from his or her own highly particularized subject position and that readers are frequently likely to make an immense emotional investment in works that have, objectively viewed, nothing whatsoever to do with their own lives, as can easily be illustrated by the common reaction to films of books that "he doesn't look anything like Heathcliff/Rhett Butler/Mr. Darcy." In one way, this is precisely the key to the secret of Iago's success with Othello, since it is by his omissions that he gets Othello interested enough in his narrative of Desdemona's supposed infidelity to make the Moor wish to fill in the gaps by his own imaginative engagement with them. Writing ourselves into films, books, and plays, we constitute a fantasy out of a narrative in ways very closely analogous to Iago's Hamlet-like "interpreter" role for the script elements with which the actions of Desdemona and Cassio supply him.

Othello, though, may operate rather differently. Michael D. Bristol, commenting on the story of the spectator who shot dead the actor playing Othello to stop a black man from killing a white woman, notes that "[g]iven the painful nature of the story, the history of both the interpretation and the performance of *Othello* have been characterized by a search for anesthetic explanations that allow the show to go on" (79). If Bristol is right, does the demand for the anesthetic actually foreclose our response to the *aesthetic* pleasures of the text? Rowland Wymer, discussing Webster and Ford, has recently commented that "[m]odern academic criticism, in its concern with meaning and contextualization, has often given an inadequate account of the experience provided by works of art," and he goes on to quote Susan Sontag's insistence that "[in] place of a hermeneutics we need an erotics of art" (Wymer 104). Perhaps our own highly tuned interpretative abilities, consistently trained to the making of meanings, tend to blind us to the possibility that at the heart of *Othello* lies an exposure both of the indeterminacy and opacity at the heart of all narratives and of the problematics of our own responses to them,[2] as the play insistently underlines in its repeated emphasis on both the hermeneutics and the erotics of enactment, reenactment, narration and representation. It is only in the re-presentation of *Othello* — in the temporally conditioned, imaginatively engaged process of responding to the actors' own engagement with it in the theater — that we re-experience the quality of the play's exploration of the dynamics of narration staged. Throughout the play, we are made powerfully aware of that urgent imperative that underlies the triple-layered use of the Willow Song, expression: "an old thing 'twas, but it express'd her fortune." Characters in *Othello* tend on the whole to be bad at explaining — both Cassio and Desdemona fail spectacularly at it — but they are good at expressing. Every time that the play is performed, they are given a rich and full opportunity to do so, which, as the play's own use of reading metaphors reminds us, touches us in ways distinct from the experience of reading.

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Notes

1. See Cheadle for the interesting suggestion that "the reference to the anthropophagi could . . . even figure as Othello's most apposite rebuke of the man who has proved credulous in being prepared to believe in fabulous creatures no less than love charms" (492).

2. In the case of *Othello*, the norms of critical response have in fact been distorted by what Rochelle Smith terms "the tendency of *Othello* criticism to mirror the perspectives of the play's main characters." She cites various examples of this tendency (311).

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Electing a Department:
Differences, Fictions, and a Narrative

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"If I were to make a critical comment on the English department, I would say that it is not enough like the media representation of it."
—Stanley Fish on the Duke English department

1.

"No word of this meeting is to be spoken outside this room." So spake my chair both at the beginning and the end of the biggest department meeting in recent years. All but one of twenty-one permanent, tenure-track members were present. Our occasion was to choose candidates for two new positions. The search committee had labored long and hard. Everybody was abuzz with anticipation. The meeting had even drawn me, for only the second time that year. What is electing an English department? In a very real sense, it is a narrative, including the story of why a senior member would disdain its formal deliberations, why hiring usually proves so contentious, and why a chair would be moved to mark all business as strictly private.

One thing especially needs to be stressed about this narrative: it is never told in specific terms. "In the department," begins Nicolai Gogol's great story, "The Overcoat" — but then the narrator wavers: "but perhaps it is just as well not to say which department. There is nothing more touchy and ill-tempered than departments, regiments, government offices, and indeed any kind of official body" (5). Any academic department is no different. The only

departments that receive public representation are those, such as Duke's, whose members or whose institutions already enjoy enough renown that they have specificity to waste. Even in these cases there are limits; we never expect to learn what Fredric Jameson really thinks of Frank Lentricchia's divorce. My narrative will be designed at once to challenge and to explore these limits. The following account would be different if I had made the same discreet choice as Gogol's narrator, who "in order to avoid all sorts of unpleasant misunderstandings," concludes that "we shall refer to the department in question as *a certain department.*"

How much difference? To some, no doubt, not much. Nobody in my department commands a national reputation. No one outside my department could recognize anybody referred to here, or would care to. Indeed, to some we will all variously appear familiar enough in some stereotypical sense, and to read a specific tale of our deliberations will appear the stuff of banality rather than transgression. To others, however, the following pages will represent a breach of discretion. The actual department business of real departments is properly conducted in private, and a public narrative of even one hiring decision is neither responsible nor ethical. How much difference will such a narrative make? Perhaps it depends upon what sort of inquiry it is designed to serve.

It might be more accurate to characterize the following pages as an exploration into the nature of academic departments with a narrative embedded in it. The argument is that a department as a social entity has been continually repressed in educational discourse; indeed, this is why we lack narratives. Two things especially result from this repression. First, the necessary fiction of a department can be stabilized as a structure, recreated ultimately in the interests of the research university model that initiated the modern conception of a department. Secondly, the social foundation of this structure fails to be granted any discursive existence, because all authority derives from the elite model, founded on scholarship. It may be the case that all departments suffer from this repression; hence the reason — to take a recent example — why in his most recent study James Sosnoski must sort through so many varied definitions of the term "discipline," as if it had strictly to do with either intellectual work or bureaucratic rule (see *Modern Skeletons* 28-42). Departments such as my own, however, suffer most, because they abide in institutions that cannot support research, and therefore are unable to reconcile their professional identity with their social one. Only this latter identity gives my department its life, even if the former provides its occasion.

But how to express its business as a narrative? Immediately there is the question of whose story it is — and the prospect that there are as many versions of any one department as there are members of it. Everybody has heard of departments whose members are at such complete odds with one another that they cannot even agree when to have a meeting. I heard of another this past year, some of whose members communicate with each other only by e-mail. "We're not that bad," assured my man (at the same institution but in another department). "We all talk to each other in our department." Nonetheless, one can be fairly certain that if each of the people in this virtual department was to try to relate the story of so much as a single year, all would be astonished at the

previously unspoken differences among them. So individual differences must be acknowledged and some risk taken if one wants to open up the conditions by which the basic organizational units of an academic discipline are comprehended: departmental truth is not only muffled and inward but deeply personal. In order to give one's own department as the story of one vote, and to give one vote as the story of the department, much is going to be told that will sound like sheer fiction.

Exactly what sorts of social organizations are departments? Why do so many fall by the wayside along the high road of disciplinarity? Electing a department does not involve a direct, explicit consideration of such questions by its members, even if the questions are lodged at the center of virtually any departmental deliberation. Indeed, it is probably the essence of the election process that such a consideration cannot take place, and in this respect, it seems to me, a narrative of electing a department accords with our deepest sense of all narratives arising from academic life. They are simultaneously heard in two registers: banal and exceptional, impeccably deferred and irredeemably blunt.

2.

It seemed a foregone conclusion. The local favorite for one of the positions was the lover and companion of one of the two most powerful people in the department. In addition, the woman had been teaching composition in the department off and on for a number of years and enjoyed easy social contact with a majority of its members. Finally, everyone seemed agreed that she was a good teacher and that she had conducted her formal job interview with her usual poise. Therefore, it almost appeared vindictive to point out that, among other imperfections, she had not had one graduate course in the area for which the position had been advertised, had never taught a course in it, and had written her dissertation in an entirely different area. I pointed these things out at the meeting anyway.

A few others also wondered about what claims for specialization we were being offered. More spoke in the woman's favor — all discretely ignoring her lack of credentials and emphasizing instead her interview performance. There was really only one other candidate, very well qualified, even if in the context of the meeting she finally had to matter less for herself than as a locus for principled opposition to the local favorite. At last we voted. A tie, with two abstentions. Another vote. Another tie, with no abstentions. We were out of time and one vote short of the absolute majority that department rules stipulated. A special vote was quickly announced two days hence, ballots to be cast in a box on the department secretary's desk.

What story of the department had transpired to this point? In one respect, it is a narrative having to do with the enormous recent increase in temporary, part-time faculty. Whatever principles of sociality obtain, it is difficult to ignore adjuncts at the departmental coffeepot. No matter that it happens all the time anyway; one of the cruelest academic stories I know is of an adjunct who thought she was on friendly terms with a permanent member until he abruptly said to her one day, "I really don't want to talk to you anymore because

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adjuncts are always leaving." Tenured people, in my experience, are often capa-
ble of talking more frankly to the untenured (in large departments, this includes
grad students) than to their own permanent colleagues, and they often fight
ferociously for less secure friends if a spot on the tenure track opens up. In this
particular election, the spot had been created, by the simple procedure of
adding the local favorite to the three already selected by the search committee.

In terms of my emphasis, her addition more sharply reformulated the con-
flict between two quite separate visions: the department as a professional orga-
nization and as a social one. Indeed, given the way in which a department such
as my own is inscribed in the institutional hierarchy of American higher edu-
cation, this conflict is inescapable. Supporters of the local favorite might not
agree, of course. Undoubtedly supporters of any local favorite never agree —
rightly or wrongly — that the person is finally being considered solely for social
reasons, and of course this may not always be the case, even if in departments
such as mine it is almost guaranteed to be so. More interesting, though, is the
fact that social reasons must remain unenunciated, even among a group of peo-
ple for whom they are decisive.

Of course, in one sense this is as it should be. Few departments labor with-
out the illusion that new members are chosen on the basis of criteria safely
removed from the conviction that certain people are "just not one of us," as I
recall a colleague blurting out years ago during another meeting. In another
sense, however, the repression of the social exacts a terrible cost, because even a
candidate not worth the name must be publicly accountable as a good teacher,
a sound scholar, or a knowledgeable theorist. There is no other official vocab-
ulary. Thus, the moment of the social imperative always marks any depart-
ment's division from itself. It shouldn't ever happen from a strict professional
vantage that a department would be caught in the throes of its affection for a
local candidate. My guess is that it happens all the time — everywhere.

Clarion's difference from Harvard or Duke lies in the fact that departments
at these distinguished institutions do not have to face this division, over and
over again. There, local favorites are exceptions — if not (one trusts) excep-
tional. Hence, for example, Harvard's famous dean, Henry Rosovsky, is quite
clear: Harvard staffs its departments according to who is the best in the world
in any field.[1] It is left to most other universities to manage their own versions
of this lofty standard. The official conception of the department handed down
to them by the dynamic, ambitious research model ignores how few can approx-
imate it and disdains any other idea, especially a social one. To Rosovsky, the
social represents a suspect, if not degraded, realm of "petty jealousy." Or, to take
another, more recent example, the social has to be almost ignored — if not
entirely unlamented — in David Damrosch's account of the sovereign figure of
the individual scholar, who works alone and belongs to a department only in the
most nominal fashion.

Clarion's local favorites, on the other hand, are not exceptional, because the
department is not in place to define itself exclusively as a disciplinary entity.
Local favorites are instead a constitutive feature of our departmental composi-
tion. The pain is that, each time we elect someone into the department, the
decisive role of social pressures cannot be admitted — although, each time, it

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must somehow be assessed. Even though the results have not always been unhappy for the English department — at least we don't openly scream at the chairman, as a senior man did at my first department meeting many years ago — the process never transpires without bitterness, resentment, and renewed factionalism. To put the ultimate consequence still more crudely, the department finally *is* this division between the professional and the social.

Granted, few will dispute our authority to teach topic sentences, the Pearl poet, and slave narratives — although many members were alarmed a couple of years ago when, at one of those meetings convened so that the administration could "engage in dialogue," the new dean instructed the department to have a proposed position in medieval literature reborn as one in cultural studies so that we would have a better chance to consider minority candidates. Nevertheless, as a department we are not ultimately a group of professionals who "profess" such subjects as much as a group of individuals who have to relate to each other, day by day, in terms of them.

Why write of all this so specifically? I was enjoined not to. Let me begin to answer this question by reformulating it: why be enjoined not to? And then to pose a further question: whose interests are being served by everybody so being enjoined? Those of the department considered as a family? But a chair is not a father, nor do the rest of the members of a department bond or dispute among themselves as siblings. Nowadays their individual backgrounds are likely to be too varied, while the old paternalistic model of a chair's authority has become exhausted. My department was more familial when I joined it over twenty-five years ago and immediately fell under the venerable tyranny of an old chair whom just about everyone feared, hated, and loved to tell incredible stories about. I felt enlisted into a Freudian Band of Brothers (there were only two women), before the patricidal deed had been done. It never was, though. Our father's end came rather lamely and sadly. He just crept away like the old bachelor he was, and we children were left without any clear image of how to reproduce his power.

The peculiar authority of any chair cannot be put better than it is by Richard Ohmann: "the chairman's power comes from the multiversity in which departments find themselves, and it is necessary because decisions have to pass back and forth between a managerial and a professional setting" (218). There is a sense in which a chair is structurally compromised. Because a chair is at once representative of the "remotest arm" of the administration (as Ohmann goes on to explain) and of the inner recesses of the department, it is often not clear in whose name s/he acts. Whether or not enjoining us on this particular occasion not to speak outside was intended by the chair simply to encourage discussion, discussion was in fact discouragingly brief and restrained. Energies at variance with fictions of professionalism were free to continue and to issue their own challenge in terms of the upcoming vote. Everybody knew what seethed beneath the rules. In whose name, finally, were we being asked to forget?

Worst of all, it seemed to me that we were being asked this day to make over our own departmental interests, such as they could be made manifest, in the image of the institution. Of course in many ways the interests of the part

and the whole are identical; one could even claim that a department *has* no interests apart from the larger ones of its institution.[2] What I want to claim myself is that the category of the social marks the limits of mutual interest. The administration can only be concerned about the members of a department getting along with each other insofar as the department's administrative functioning is threatened. The members themselves, on the other hand, not only know far more intimately how this functioning is dependent upon getting along; they know how sometimes sheer getting along is more important — bureaucratic license or disciplinary integrity be damned. This vote was one such time. Once again, the English department had to decide on its own reason for being.

I have failed to emphasize how excited I had grown at the prospect. "All bets are off," somebody said. Others knew for how many years all bets had already been settled because all important decisions were based on the same two factions. Could these factions have at last dissipated, as rumored? Only in the last couple of years had a significant number of new people come into the department. "It's a different department now," people had taken to exclaiming, always with a certain wonderment. Everybody sensed that no vote so much as this one over hiring a local favorite would reveal how new the department really had become. Before the meeting, I even thought of my old retired colleague, and how he used to relish the infrequent times when business as usual was going to fail. "God, how I love chaos, Terry. It's all we can hope for."

Perhaps those ready to vote for the local favorite were in thrall of similar energies. Ohmann begins his chapter on English departments by citing George Bernard Shaw's aphorism about all professions as conspiracies against the laity, and then compares English departments to "the conspirators' cell groups" (209). He means the conspiracy to be directed at the public. What about a conspiracy directed at the department's own disciplinary self-image, as dictated by the public? Maybe from the outside it does not make sense why a department would settle for mediocrity, familiarity, and other unworthy professional goals, each heedless of the official imperative for unremitting innovation in all things. (The number of untold departmental narratives about forced compliance to affirmative action guidelines must be legion.) From the inside, however, where these sorts of things can be casually misrepresented, where inertia sometimes feels sweet, and where few care to hear about new knives, much less cutting edges, it can be deeply satisfying to bond once more against the vast, threatening outside, and to hell with administrative directives about multiculturalism, disciplinary ones about the latest theory from Duke, or political ones about outcomes' assessments.

Exactly what *unites* a group? At root, certain prescribed ways of negotiating with the outside so that the group can perpetuate its identity. The peculiar groups that are academic departments have their respective identities so consummately rationalized, though, that a species of fatigued formality quite typically transpires with respect to the outside. Donald Barthelme has a lovely story, "The New Member," about this operation. Members of a unnamed committee begin their meeting by taking note of a man looking in from outside a window. Immediately the meeting comes to be about the group's fascination with this man, or perhaps rather its inability to direct its attention to the "press-

ing items" of the agenda. The only item actually addressed is "the Worth girl."
One man moves she be hit by a car. Another woman moves that the Worth girl
fall in love with the man outside. Eventually all agree to invite him in, where-
upon he states, no, he has no grievance, he just wants to "'be with somebody'"
(184). The committee understands. A motion is soon forthcoming to make the
man a member. The motion passes easily. The man sits down and begins to
announce, among other things, that everyone has to wear overalls, no one can
wear nose rings, and gatherings of one or more persons are prohibited.

What Barthelme presents is an exquisitely incoherent dance of social ener-
gy, collapsed into formalism. The old members need a new member not so
much to change the rules as to reinvigorate themselves in relation to each other.
(This, in turn, is the point of having rules.) I suppose the need arises in any
group grown idle about its energies. Was this the case in my own department
at the time of the vote for its own new member? Perhaps there are times in the
history of a group when only a new member can reveal how old everybody is.
My truest objection to the local favorite was that she was not new. Indeed, so
well integrated into the department was she, and not only because of her rela-
tionship to one of its most powerful members, that you could hardly see around
her. Consequently, a vote against her appeared to me as a vote for the Outside
itself. What story could a department tell itself if it was willing to renounce its
need for an outside?

Of course there are always plenty of official narratives to be constructed
each year for versions of outsides. In large part, even the day-to-day business
of a department consists in its mutual commitment to the necessity for such
narratives. Everybody has to write teaching observations on everybody else
according to the bargaining agreement, committees have to report at meetings
to the department as a whole, the chair has to draw up curriculum and peda-
gogical stories for the administration to hear — to mention these only. (The
previous year much of our own departmental time had been invested in a grand
narrative called the NCATE report, required each ten years for certification on
the national level. I chanced to ask the chair what the letters stood for, and she
had to ask somebody else.) But all these narratives are really registers of a deep-
er, if wider, interiority whereby a department simultaneously recreates an insti-
tution and is recreated by it. Hiring raises the possibility of another story.

But what story? Normally, in most departments, I suppose, the plot lines
hardly get established as something very different. Any recruitment remains
embedded in the institution. It is still conducted along disciplinary lines. Yet
a new member might not fit — or might fit in unusually provocative ways. A
group has every right to be excited at the prospect. I could not help but sit amid
mine the afternoon of the vote and wonder precisely how I belonged myself. I
had once been friends of a sort with the local favorite, for example. What sense
did this make now, much less the reasons why we were no longer friends? I
knew of a position in another department where a friend of mine was the local
but not, evidently, the favorite. How different was this man's situation? How
different is any department from another? Does every departmental narrative
have to refract into its most individual, personal plot lines? Was my own lack
of sympathy to the social currents energizing our favorite merely because, in the

end, I didn't feel part of them — whether as a colleague or as a scholar, it made no real difference?

One can be a member of a larger department, not to say a more prestigious one, and far more easily remain apart, I think, from the pressure of such questions. Hence, for example, in his recent memoir, Frank Lentricchia can write as follows: "I teach English at a distinguished university, in which like all English departments I have known or heard about, we have virtually nothing in common, not even literature" (11). Lentricchia can be forgiven for being unable to broaden his social, if not discursive, base. The circumstances in which most academics labor, however, are far more unforgiving. An old friend likes to recall the first jobs of her and her husband at a small liberal arts school. Early in the year, they attended a concert. A couple from his department sat next to them. At intermission, the man confessed to being bored and suggested they all retire to his house for a drink. My friend and her husband looked at each other. Alas, they demurred. The story of how he lost his job over this incident is too intricate (and unbelievable) to tell. "We should have known better," my friend concludes. True. Embedded within the professionalized departmental narrative we should all know better. The basic point of this latter narrative, however, is that what we would know should remain uncontaminated by the debased social realm of the anecdotal, which is irrelevant to the discipline.

For a time in a foreign country I taught with a man who came from a junior college in the South. "We like each other," he used to say of his department; "we do lots of things together." Periodically I asked him to repeat how collectively happy everybody was, so incredible did it seem to me. Could it only happen in a junior college, consigned to a lowly position in academic ranking? (Or else it could only happen long ago, and then probably only through the efforts of an exuberant chair. See Spilka for the sort of richly anecdotal account that *College English* would not very likely publish today.) One admits how much sociality matters (because research does not) only very grudgingly. More recently at a conference I met a woman from another junior college. I asked her how many courses she taught. She said five: "It's all right, we have fun together. We don't have the pressures you do because we don't have any 'airs.'"

One could hazard an axiom: the more institutionally low, the more departmentally happy. And yet people will not necessarily like each other because they have only themselves or lack some official basis on which to compete; for one thing, there will always have to be elections to hire new members. The following formulation seems better: the more illusions (warranted or not) about scholarship, the less acknowledgment of the significance of sociality. Therefore, most departments regularly purchase the first at the expense of the second — as no one will have to remind the dour Lentricchia (or even the misunderstood Fish, his former chair). Alas, though, groups of people need occasions in order to be revealed to themselves as groups, if not to experience themselves in this way. My department (as opposed to its factions) has always been poor in such occasions. I stopped going to the few sporadic ones, including the Christmas party some years ago when a drunken colleague arrived late and proceeded to vomit on her hostess' rug. Everyone agreed afterwards that the event was at least a lot more fun than anything that happens at a department meeting.

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After such incoherence, what story? Can the real one about any department be told as merely how someone in the group relates to the others? Or is the deeper narrative instead the recurrent hope, manifest in a number of different ways, and only fitfully collective, that one day a new member will come along to make good all the unused, stale, or disvalued social possibilities? Granted, such concerns about a department could not be more different than, say, those of James Phelan, when he laments the Duke phenomenon of securing preeminence by hiring away top people and speaks of the necessity for a "better model" (196). It involves "people with diverse interests and expertise who share more fundamental beliefs about education, critical discourse, and inquiry." The telling thing to me is that Phelan is apparently under no pressure to realize how utterly his wish is rebuked by the disturbing moment where he meets a colleague and they just "have a good talk," much to Phelan's amazement that such a thing so rarely happens (48).

Such things probably happen more often in my department, because we are not subject to the research demands of Phelan's (which is the first thing he and his colleague begin to talk about). "How is your research going?" is not, after all, a question designed to elicit profound human contact. Indeed, it could easily be argued that the purpose of an academic department is to inhibit such contact, as meetings transpire over each year's budget, each semester's course schedule, and the constitution of standing and ad hoc committees. These are almost exclusively the terms in which Joel Colton discusses "The Role of the Department in the Groves of Academe" in *The Academic Handbook*. It is not his concern if someone refuses to post office hours, if nobody wants to chair the evaluation committee, or if there simply are no curricular dreams to be dreamed this year.[3] Colton begins by noting the common wisdom once expressed by a popular faculty member, speaking to students and extolling the virtues of an academic career. He is asked if there are any disadvantages. "Yes," the professor replies, "the colleagues in one's own department" (261). In such a context, how not to long for Phelan's notion of a department?

There are two basic reasons why not. First, Phelan's vision is simply false. People in an academic department are defined in terms of their commitment to their discipline, not to each other. Hence they are academics in the first place (and only committed to each other in some other way after the fact). Hence also, Phelan himself rarely gets together with any of his colleagues in order to share fundamental beliefs. The Ohio State English department may have fewer parties than the Clarion English department. He mentions only a few people, who have his same intellectual interests. What Phelan does he does alone. There really *is* no stable structural analogy for how his real activity participates in the larger life of his department, especially insofar as the activity consists not only of solitary worrying — about teaching, giving papers, and publishing a book — but of aspiring to join another department (eventually his own chair has to be told), albeit as the occupant of an endowed chair.

Second, Phelan's vision lacks political nuance. We do not need better models of departments. We need better fictions. The reason we do not get them is

because of institutional hierarchy. An institution such as Ohio State simply transmits the organizing logic of elite institutions, founded on a research imperative whereby each member of a department is comprehended not as a social being but as a scholar who works alone. (Again, Damrosch is eloquent on this point.) Phelan sentimentalizes community not only because he lacks it but because he lacks any mandate to have any. Of course nobody else has any either. Yet what this means in practice is that large, doctoral universities effectively set the terms. Compare to Phelan a Penn State professor in a recent letter to the *Chronicle of Higher Education* about how my university is different from his: "There is a kind of unity of mission on that campus. The faculty is not composed of independent scholarly entrepreneurs. It is more united than the diverse faculty at our cumbersome multiversity" (Phillips B3). Penn State, in other words, gets to say what Clarion is, and not vice versa. Consigned to an "organic" realm, Clarion speaks only to itself and for itself. No wonder it opts for local favorites.

Let me enlarge on this last point by citing a remark from a recent article of Graff's. He has been emphasizing how disabled academics are from explaining what they do to anybody else because they teach in isolation from each other. One problem that follows from this is that even students are excluded from a larger conversation and prevented from understanding the intellectual allegiances or identities of their various professors. "'You call yourself a Marxist-feminist, but you sound like just a bourgeois liberal to me.' This contesting of identifications takes place frequently at our academic conferences but rarely in our classrooms" ("Academic Writing" 16). More to my context, such contesting rarely takes place in our halls, or our coffee lounges, or our department meetings. Undoubtedly it should. But it does not — and instead conferences seem to multiply, especially at the regional or even local level. Could this be because departments have become more constricted? What is a haplessly socialized member of one to do, for all manner of other invigoration, but go to a conference? Graff's line appears scarcely conceivable anywhere else. Therefore, the most searching and consoling stories available to the profession at the present time may no longer be the product of departments, but of conferences.

Meanwhile, we fail to get better fictions about departments because the focus for an academic discipline continues to be lodged at the departmental level. Once more this paradigm serves the interests of research institutions that in fact secure their preeminence by a disciplinary organization based on linkages among departments rather than on membership in any one. (Berkeley hires from Yale and vice versa. Phelan, from Chicago, is understandably sour that he came in second at Berkeley. He still makes all his important professional moves at conferences, and from there emerge all his candid conversations.) One way this organization consolidates itself is precisely through conferences; they are expensive to attend, feature papers expressive of the latest fashions, and encourage in all sorts of ways the maintenance of institutional boundaries based on status. (To be from a place no one has heard of seldom elicits conversation at the cash bar.) However, more conferences — many now organized by universities that enjoy little status — do not necessarily open up the possibilities for who gets to deliver papers at the MLA or the English Institute. These confer-

ences do, however, offer increased opportunities for sociality, and especially for recuperating lost, idle, or stagnant sociality back home.

Perhaps the social actuality of a department may finally not be intelligible except in terms either larger or smaller than those of the disciplinary or administrative unit. Most may never experience themselves in larger terms. Most may not want to. (At any conference one is guaranteed to hear about these.) What difference does it make to such a department to be mindful of another whose whole identity is founded upon easy access to a wider professional world? English departments at the majority of universities throughout the United States function, after all, as small, intricate entities only nominally related to this world. Members in these departments may read about it. Their universities lack the resources to enable them to contribute to it; instead, only highly localized versions of the values of the great world are possible. At one point in Molly Hite's novel, *Class Porn*, the heroine hears a tenured member exclaim about another man on their committee that he's a "great guy," and then she thinks as follows: "It's one of the conventions of our committee that when you mention the name of somebody on it you're supposed to be overcome with emotion. The emotions differ hierarchically, of course. When my name is mentioned, for instance, presumably everybody laughs" (145). She's just a lowly lecturer without her dissertation finished. People who lack a Ph.D. lack even the recognition of another university.

Hite's amusing novel is not an example of what I mean by a better fiction about departmental life. For one thing, Eleanor Nyland renounces this life by the novel's end. Renunciation happens recurrently in academic novels — and, if not, at least academic life has been sorely tested, usually by erotic horizons heretofore unimagined. Stories that trace the precise contours of a department's own narrow bounds in order to embrace them by the end are, on the other hand, far more rare, harsh, and precious. I think of them as fictions of friendship. Friendship really doesn't have anything to do with departments at all, and may more often function in them as yet another threat to their social coherence; even friends, as in my own late instance, have to vote.[4] Nonetheless, to friends, the sheer *conspiracy* of professional life is eased. Friendship is probably the best, most humanizing possibility available to most of us in departments, because it promises the story neither of structure nor hierarchy, although inescapably implicated in each.

Let me conclude with one of the finest academic fictions I know: Bernard Malamud's "Rembrandt's Hat." Arkin, an art historian, is a dozen years younger than Rubin, a sculptor, at the New York art school where both teach. The men are friendly, but not friends. They become enemies after the day when Arkin admiringly compares one of Rubin's many odd hats to one from a middle-aged self-portrait of Rembrandt. After that Rubin ceases to wear the hat and appears to Arkin to be avoiding him. Months pass. One day Arkin happens into Rubin's studio. There's really only one piece that he likes. Another day, while showing some slides, he sees that the hat Rubin wore months earlier more resembled that of a cook at a diner than it did Rembrandt's. Later he returns to the sculptor's studio, congratulates him on the fine piece, and apologizes for mixing up the hats so long ago. Rubin accepts the apology. But the

two men become no more than cordial to each other. Once Arkin spots Rubin regarding himself in the bathroom mirror in a white cap that now really does appear to resemble Rembrandt's hat.

What seems to me especially beautiful about this story is how the air of a very peculiar human contact — close, fragile, intolerably slight and painfully interiorized — lifts off its plot. Where else but in an academic department could Rubin have taken the exact kind of offense he does, and who else but an academic such as Arkin could have expressed it with such apparent casualness? There are departments in which people teach together for decades and yet fail to achieve as much clarification of their mutual feelings for each other as Malamud's narrative provides his two characters. How necessary is it to us for others to tell us who we are? Or are we content to think we know already? In the end, the distinctive thing about the stories possible in any department may be that they must remain partial, blunted, baffled, or just silenced. Beyond the estimable professional reasons, I am not sure why this should be so — unless there are embodied in academic attire such depths of self-regard that no disciplinary formation, no administrative directive, and no social group can be devised to organize, address, or confront them.

<p style="text-align:center">4.</p>

About the department vote: when the third round was counted, two days later, the local favorite was defeated, 11-9. One member continued to abstain. There was speculation. Few really know why he did. Another member switched his or her vote. More speculation. No one could be absolutely certain who. The new member returned her signed contract in time to permit the fact to be announced at the last meeting of the semester. No expression of opinion was heard.

Notes

1. Gerald Graff awards Daniel Coit Gilman, the first president of Johns Hopkins University, the honor of having created the modern research university on the model of German graduate schools, which included specialized departments. "The word 'department' had been in use in colleges throughout the nineteenth century," notes Graff, "but only now did it take on connotations of disciplinary specialization and administrative autonomy" (*Professing* 58). For the best recent consideration of the costs of the specialized model, see Sosnosky, *Modern Skeletons*, although his alternative attempt to redistribute the same elements of method and subject matter as those he contests seems to me to set aside the important distinction of his earlier study between token and elite professionals.

Arguably the most unspoken question in the profession today is what sort of a specialized department is possible anymore for a group consisting largely of either "token" professors, unrewarded with research time, or "defielded" or "Taylorized" ones, overcome with general education courses and bureaucratized

timetables. Such departments may now be better comprehended in terms of the larger critique of downsizing practices and corporate values to which the entire spectrum of American labor is subject; see Aronowitz and DiFazio.

2. This is an extremely complicated question. James Phelan just deals with it by taking the high road; of the members of an ideal department, he writes as follows: "They make a commitment to each other, and to their institution because they know that without it the ideals won't be realized" (196). Back on the low road, can we assume that the commitment of many department members to each other is, very much on the contrary, based on the felt fact that the institution will never realize their ideals?

Or that, in a very real sense, the institution cannot, if only because it has no reputation? Ohmann's discreet citation from the minutes of a "major midwestern English department" could not be more in contrast; the whole point of the meeting is that the department has suffered a loss of ranking in a national report. But what about the majority of departments whose institutions enjoy no prestige in national terms? The less claim to larger social or cultural recognition an institution has, I believe, the more inward — in my terms, incoherent — a department will inescapably be.

3. It is, however, the chair's concern. Colton's interest in the human lineaments of this figure is in striking contrast to the rest of his exposition. At one point, for example, he effuses over the "ideal chair": "mediator, negotiator, and arbitrator; budget, personnel, and recruiting officer; advisor on community housing and schooling, and on career opportunities for spouses; chief justice; pastor; parliamentarian; social director; lecture bureau director; team coach; Dutch uncle (or aunt); statistician; housekeeper; general office manager; and personal counselor and mentor" (274). As is common in many accounts of academic departments, the multiplicity and heterogeneity that could be accorded the department as a whole, as well as many other members of it, is used up in a highly interactive, process-oriented idea of the chair, as if this figure could restore in himself or herself the effaced social dimension.

4. And friendship is likely to be more sorely tested when the vote is over tenure rather than a new hire. I must trust that it is clear why my account has to do with the latter rather than the former: nothing is normally at stake over tenure at an institution such as Clarion. Instead, hiring someone is equivalent to giving the person tenure, because we relate to each other not as scholars but as teachers who share common problems and close quarters. Therefore, social controls govern the tenure process long before a tenure vote occurs, so anyone who could have been denied tenure simply has not lasted to the point of a tenure decision; this is why no one in my department has ever been denied tenure.

It is also why the one person who for the first time was recently refused by the department was nonetheless confirmed by the administration — as a department we simply lacked experience in the tenure process as something other than a form of ritual acceptance. The recent episode illustrates, I think, how tenure decisions, unlike ones involving hiring, are less timeless, even at institutions such as Clarion; as Jeffrey Williams puts it (invoking Pierre Bourdieu), "the habituating mechanism of tenure ensures the reproduction of extant

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socio-institutional arrangements and hierarchies by its continual adjustment and revision" (137).

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Chorography in the Classroom:
Mapping a Post(e) Identity

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Allen Meek received his Ph.D from the University of Florida in 1995. His dissertation, "Mourning and the Televisual," is an inquiry into the poetics and politics of mourning in electronic culture, with particular reference to the writings of Walter Benjamin. He is currently a resident of New Zealand, where he is Lecturer in Media Studies at Massey University and is preparing his first book, "Chorographies," on place, media, and cultural identity.

Now the environment of America is media. Not the land itself, but the image of the land. The focus is not the people so much as it is on the interplay between people and screens.
—Michael Ventura

The project of this essay is to outline an approach to cultural and media studies responsive to changing experiences of place and identity in an electronic culture. My undertaking of this project, which should be understood primarily as the search for a writing practice, was prompted by the tasks facing me as a teacher in a multicultural environment and by an experience I shared with many of my students of geographical and social separation mediated by electronic technologies. I will call this shared cultural condition "post(e) identity," intending to evoke both Jurgen Habermas' notion of a "postconventional identity" responding to a crisis of national identity, and Gregory Ulmer's post(e) (*poste*: the French word for TV set) pedagogy designed to transmit the various posts of modernism, structuralism, and colonialism. The other term I have borrowed from Ulmer is "chorography," which names an application of the theories of Jacques Derrida to composition in hypermedia. My discussion of chorography is situated between a consideration of television's and cinema's role in constructing and maintaining a sense of national identity and the project of an experimental interface with new communication technologies in the classroom.

The reflections that I will offer here on pedagogy are the result of several years of teaching undergrad-

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uate courses at the University of Florida to an often intensely multicultural mix
of students: southern blacks and whites; exiles from Cuba, Panama, and Nicara-
gua; Jamaicans and Haitians; first-generation Chinese, Indian, Korean, Mexi-
can, and Filipino Americans; and others from many different countries and
regions of the US. As a stranger myself in this environment, my time in Flori-
da involved a gradual coming-to-consciousness of the dynamics of cultural dif-
ference in the North American context, shaped both by my own experience of
displacement (I am a New Zealander) and by the emergence of postcolonialist
and multiculturalist discourses in the academy.

An historical function of cinema, TV, and now video and personal comput-
ers has been to supply the culturally and geographically displaced urban and
suburban masses with a simulation of a missing homeland or community. But
anyone who has experienced the transition from a relatively monocultural soci-
ety into a multicultural or cosmopolitan one will also have noticed the central
role that the imagery of electronic media plays in providing spaces of escapist
fantasy that can be shared with others of diverse ethnic backgrounds. These
fantasies have sometimes to do with a shared emotional experience of bereave-
ment and loss, at other times with a shared hope of self- and social transfor-
mation. The screen promises both the return home and the escape from the
limitations and problems of home.

The classroom, as a social space where cultural difference must be negoti-
ated and a common discourse established, offers opportunities not only to dis-
cuss and critically examine media culture but also to invent new interfaces with
it and, in an electronic classroom, on it. In the classroom, if only briefly, we can
attempt to create and define together a public sphere and thereby a different
mode of social participation than usually presented in mainstream media cul-
ture.

In a range of courses based primarily in the study of American literature,
film, and popular culture, I attempted to explore with students the question of
America's cultural diversity and the increasing embeddedness of its social rela-
tions in electronic media. Some of the standard themes of American literature
and film — the gothic as a mode of representation, the frontier as a space of
self-transformation, the emerging mass cultural forms of the twentieth century
— served as the starting point for class discussions about how difference and
identity have become such controversial issues on a global level today. For
instance, in an introductory class on American literature we read Nathaniel
West's *The Day of the Locust* alongside Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's
essay "The Culture Industry" and compared these early critiques of American
media culture with two postmodern constructions of history, Spalding Gray's
Swimming to Cambodia and Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*. Moving between these
journeys in hyperreality (West and Gray) and exilic voices (Adorno and Cha)
helped to show how electronic media promise an adventure of becoming (as a
profoundly American mythology) but also pose dilemmas of mourning and dis-
placement. Hollywood and TV have served as America's means of remaking
history as spectacle or virtual reality, but the mise-en-scène in which this quest
takes shape is also inhabited by other histories (it is a haunted space) and nav-
igated with an accompanying sense of fragmentation and loss.

As students face their individual screens in the fully computerized class-room, the question of community and difference can be focused in a more direct way around the social role of technological media. More directly, because now the electronic word and image have become the means of reading and writing, but also more indirectly, because this interface has for the most part replaced oral face-to-face communication. All of the cultural hype and commercial promotion that surround the internet and the ideologies of the "information super-highway" support a certain excitement and enthusiasm that students generally exhibit as users of the new technologies (along with a certain technophobia which in my experience is fairly easily dispelled). But the promise offered by hypermedia needs to be tested, in my view, by posing to the class the problems, and indeed often the social catastrophes, that have accompanied the global expansion of technological modernity. This does not amount to posing a "pes-simistic" against an "optimistic" account of the new technologies, as both dystopian and utopian visions become part of a negotiated and experimental engagement that leaves the business of critical evaluation until the closing dis-cussions of the course. The central pedagogical strategy is that ethnic diversity in the classroom be called forth as a kind of collective testimony to the unre-solved tensions between technological dream and lived history.

Chorography

Chorography names a process of mapping post(e) identity as it takes shape in the non-sites of electronic spatiality, the mediascapes in which our experience of *communitas* is simulated. The Greek word *chora* means land or place. In *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*, Ulmer associates the word at various moments with the concepts of nation, motherland, and America (74), proposing that those concepts might be reformulated in the terms in which *chora* is described by Derrida: as pure surface without depth, infinitely containing without imposing limits, open and foreign to itself at the same time (*Heuretics* 65). Unlike our conventional idea of the nation as a territory bestowing or denying the rights of citizenship, *chora* is a transitional space that does not impose bor-ders or demand proof of identity but provides a passage through which identi-ty can be renegotiated. Because of this, *chora* offers a means by which we might rethink our relation to foreignness in an historical situation in which earlier forms of community have been displaced and in which a common language (and market) of electronic images is proliferating on the global scene. Chorog-raphy offers a rhetorical mode for a postconventional identity in a televisual culture.

Ulmer has suggested elsewhere that he is inventing a peculiarly American application of deconstruction (*Teletheory* 202-3). Loosely adapting Ulmer's theory of the "mystory" (a collage/montage essay in which the writer juxtapos-es different fragments of individual, community, and national histories), I have asked students to construct travelogues and, in hypermedia, homepages that assemble these fragments in ways that emphasize the transitory and nomadic as well as the regional and multicultural dimensions of life in North America. (I will discuss some examples of students' work in later sections.)

Chora closely resembles *choros*, the Greek word for a band of dancers and singers. The emphasis chorography places on the collective determinants of our identities — locality, community, nation — unsettles the priority accorded to the individual consciousness by the European Enlightenment and takes as its point of departure the Freudian, Marxian, and structuralist subversions of the subject as well as the postcolonial critique of Western ethnocentrism and imperialism. The political and historical contexts in which chorography poses a new conceptualization of a self-in-process can be better understood by comparing some of the different forms of social identity presented by contemporary cinema and TV. With reference to my experiences in the classroom, I will discuss some examples of ambitious attempts by German filmmakers to confront the disturbing legacies of their national past, as well as the invention and maintenance through TV of a community of exiled Iranians in California. Finally, I will offer an example of an experimental text, Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*, that can serve as a model for doing chorography in the classroom.

Electronic Mourning

The politics of ethnic nationalism confront us with the catastrophic threat that can accompany nostalgia for a native land and people. At the same time that we may choose to engage in or support localized struggles against cultural domination in all of its forms, we must also face the problem that local and ethnic identities increasingly find themselves displaced or fractured not only geographically but in ways mediated by new information technologies and markets. Such a situation invites the production of new cultural forms: hybrid texts that can incorporate and remix ethnic and community traditions with mass cultural styles and images. The politics of the future will have much to do with how we negotiate what Dean MacCannell has called these "empty meeting grounds," or "the realm of possibility for the future of human relationships emerging in and between the diasporas" (7).

I attempted to address these issues in a course I taught recently on the history of film. Studying a series of encounters between American and European star actors, directors, and cinematic styles, we inquired into the role of film in defining national identity and collective memory. From *Casablanca* to *Blue Velvet*, Hollywood has incorporated and reconstructed European history and style in terms of American mythologies while, conversely, European directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Jean-Luc Godard, and Wim Wenders have staged their own ambivalent attraction to Hollywood. One of the texts we read for that course, Eric Santner's *Stranded Objects*, examines how cinema and TV have been used to explore the problematic of national identity in postwar Germany. Although the guilt experienced by the different generations of Germans alive during and born after the Third Reich presents an extreme case, it in some respects offers a model for how national identity in general needs to be reinvented. Such a reinvention, Santner argues, would "work through" (in a psychoanalytic sense) rather than repress collective feelings of guilt and shame about the past. In response to the problem that "coming to terms with the

past," as Adorno perceived, often means refusing to confront the mistakes and catastrophes for which one is ethically responsible, Habermas has noted the emergence of a "postconventional identity" (Santner 50) in which a sense of national coherence or historical continuity has become increasingly fragmented. This recent cultural condition includes the decentering of the nation as an economic and political entity, new patterns of migration and structures of ethnicity, and the development of global information networks and electronic media that locate us in simulated communities and spaces. All of these determinants of cultural identity demand that we learn to mediate foreignness in new ways.

Postwar Germany confronts on one side the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust and on the other the impact of American "mass culture." As a consequence of this situation, Santner argues, when German artists attempt to stage their national identity in order to perform a kind of healing of the disasters in their collective past — his examples are Edgar Reitz's TV epic, *Heimat* (Homeland), and Hans Jurgen Syberberg's monumental film, *Hitler, a Film from Germany* — they reveal strong tendencies toward reinscribing the insular, xenophobic, and racist world views that supported fascism. In *Heimat*, which nostalgically recreates a small rural community of the war years, Santner perceives the figure of the migrant or foreigner (associated with both the Jews and America) presented as scapegoat for the unresolved ambivalence within the ethnic group. Much of Santner's discussion of *Heimat* (which is now available on video with English subtitles) transfers usefully onto a reading of Wenders' *American Friend*, featuring antihero Dennis Hopper as a "Cowboy in Hamburg." The displacement of German guilt (the main character is a Swiss who murders a French Jew) onto the American presence in postwar Germany becomes readable as a collective repetition compulsion. Drawing on D. W. Winnicott's theory of transitional objects, Santner argues that mourning requires social empathy, allowing a self to develop the capability of identifying not only with his or her immediate group but also with the figure of the victim or outsider — rather than reconstituting, as *American Friend* does, the national self as the real victim.

While making his diagnosis, Santner does not himself propose what the role of televisual media might *become* in this process. He does, however, provide a prehistory of the place electronic media hold with regard to the notion of *chora*:

> The exotic landscapes of the East and the American West (whether colonized in fact or merely visited in the imagination), the psychic terrain as explored and mythologized by Freud, the flickering projections of light on white screens, and the fictions and myths that one creates out of the fragmented materials of one's own life, all become ciphers for a singular, primal yearning. (120-1)

A sense that communal wholeness has been shattered in the age of technological modernity gives rise to a general homesickness that looks for narcissistic satisfaction in the substitute aura of celebrities and charismatic leaders. In my

History of Film class, the figure of Marilyn Monroe served as a counterexample to Germany, suggesting how electronic mourning operates in an American context. Just as Julia Kristeva has explained the *chora* in terms of pre-Oedipal, preverbal semiotic functions (*Revolution* 25-30), S. Paige Baty understands Monroe as an icon who has emerged out of a mass-mediated *matrix* — a kind of collective, archetypal womb (59). Like the presymbolic world of the infant not yet individuated and separated from the mother's body, the electronic screen serves as a *chora* where semiotic fragments of media culture take on a virtual unity or flow. The example of Marilyn reminds us of the primary ideological function of this space, as the image of the celebrity condenses various historical narratives. The iconography of media culture serves as a simulation of a lost wholeness postulated, retroactively, as prior to the narcissistic wounds by which cultural identity is formed. According to such an account of popular culture, Marilyn functions as an all-American girl of the 1950s who through her association with the Kennedys somehow carries the blame for their assassinations and all of the wounds that would subsequently scar America's self-image in the 1960s and 1970s. This scapegoating of the woman as *femme fatale* supports the conservative reactions of the 1980s against the liberal "excesses" of the previous two decades, reactions that led to the reassertion of "family values." In a society such as the United States, global in its ethnic diversity and yet mediated by an (often numbingly) homogeneous media culture, a figure like Marilyn — or for that matter, Madonna — can serve as a guide to collective memory and thereby also to its repressed histories.

What must be given up, or mourned, writes Santner, is "the notion that alterity is something that requires a solution" (151). In place of the paranoid narcissism of regressive nationalism, a post(e) identity would learn to discover the repressed past in reaction to which media cultures have established their symbolic currency and thereby to excavate alternative identifications. What we need are practices of writing and research that can interface with the new media and help us to remake our identities in ways that more adequately acknowledge cultural difference. So one way to understand the *chora* is in its relation to the voices of foreigners, or as Kristeva has put it, to the stranger "who lives within us" (*Strangers* 1). The *chora* is a model for an intersubjective space in which the primary alterity of the self-image is re-encountered. In the classroom such a re-encounter means learning to acknowledge the exclusionary mythologies of national identity. Chorography can thereby be a means by which we can recover a solidarity with the foreigners who reside within us.

Exile on Television

Alongside examples from media culture that reveal the construction of national identity, I believe the teacher has an ethical responsibility to present students with alternative narratives and modes of representation. A case study that provides another counterpoint to the German example is Hamid Naficy's analysis of TV produced by Iranian exiles in Los Angeles. In contrast to the way in which a nation such as Germany seeks to rediscover a lost sense of unity, Iran-

ian collective identity is reasserted through a common experience of political exile and reassembled using the imagery of contemporary popular media. As Naficy explains, exile cultures are always a hybrid of influences from the home and host societies:

> On the one hand, Iranian exiles have created via their media and culture a symbolic and fetishized private hermetically sealed electronic *communitas* infused with home, past, memory, loss, nostalgia, longing for return, and the communal self; on the other hand, they have tried to get on with the process of living by incorporating themselves into the dominant culture of consumer capitalism by means of developing a new sense of the self and what can be called an "exilic economy." This economy is fueled principally by various advertising driven media, which cross fertilize each other and hegemonize the consumer lifestyle as ideal. (xvi)

While New German filmmakers like Reitz and Wenders carry the legacy of Adorno's critique of the American culture industry and use it to justify a certain cultural insularity, the adaptation on the part of Iranians to American-style capitalism and electronic media acts out a different set of possibilities emerging in the spaces between commercial imagery and historical experience. Naficy gives the example of two children of Iranian exiles, displaced in different nations and speaking different languages, communicating through a shared familiarity with a Disney film (1-2). The point of this anecdote for Naficy is that rather than offering another instance of global domination by American media, it dramatizes the emergence of a new kind of transnational encounter mediated by screen language rather than completely determined by it. Without taking this example as another confirmation of the triumph of Western democracy or a realization of McLuhan's "global village," we are nevertheless compelled to explore what possibilities such a mode of communication might make available.

Iranian exile culture is produced in the liminal space that arises only through separation from the original location of one's culture. Exile cultures participate in the deconstruction of ethnic identity, insofar as they become self-conscious about the ways in which culture is "always already" on its way from one elsewhere to another. TV produces this liminal state through its electronic simulation of community. The difference between the German and Iranian examples lies in the perception of place: both media cultures idealize and fetishize the homeland, but the narcissistic attachment to locality becomes in the liminal space of exile a more palpably fragmented, partial, improvised, and intertextual construction. Both kinds of post(e) identity are operative in the North American context.

Certainly the children of immigrants, exiles, refugees, and minorities often engage — once they are invited to — quite openly with the kind of split subjectivity that Naficy theorizes with reference to the Iranian example. Moreover, once one introduces the question of ethnicity in the classroom it becomes clear very quickly that many of the students' cultural identities are composed of a mix of diverse backgrounds and experiences that defy the classification system

demanded of them by state institutions. The university is, after all, itself a non-place (and thereby might be associated with the notion of *chora*) that forcibly unifies through disciplinary and discursive formations a heterogeneous social body, and it is for many the space of their first encounters with cultural difference. Because of this, Ulmer argues in *Teletheory*, scholars and students alike need to mourn the losses undergone in the passage into the symbolic orders of schooling and print literacy. What electronic media introduce into this developmental process is a virtual *chora* by which identity can be renegotiated, although only by acknowledging the gaps and omissions that haunt its simulated wholeness. As in the case of exilic TV, it is between the homogenizing drive of global media culture and the differential economy of localized communities that chorography might be situated.

National Identity

How then can post(e) identity be explored drawing from the global language of televisual imagery and allowing for transcultural exchanges but without denying the strength of residual attachments to national identity? A new kind of *polis*, no longer located in a unified spatio-temporal zone but rather self-consciously in the liminal spaces made available by electronic media, would have something to learn from the cultural traditions that have developed in exile.

In the context of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of the New World, Ulmer takes up the problematic of national identity and electronic media with reference to the voyage of Columbus, which he sees as providing "the chief metaphor of research in Western civilization" (*Heuretics* 24). Comparing the dilemma posed by this Columbian metaphor for research to the blocked mourning experienced by Germans, Ulmer finds American identity bound to the image of Columbus and thereby to the extermination of America's indigenous peoples (94-5). Like Syberberg in *Hitler*, Ulmer proposes a therapeutic staging of libidinal attachments to mythic stereotypes that allows a working through, or mourning, of those attachments: "Columbus, a Method made in America" (95).

Ulmer's project in *Heuretics* implies that compulsive repetition and denial remain in some respects inevitable aspects of national identity without an active staging of those mythic identifications that supersede rational argument or analysis. The experience of self- or subjecthood amongst the contemporary proliferation of information networks will mediate the question of foreignness in new and not so new ways. How can the repetition of racist stereotypes, so visible in mainstream media, be effectively displaced in the classroom? Critical analysis may not be sufficient. It is this question about which Ulmer's post(e) pedagogy compels us to think.

Like the liminal zones of exilic cultures, the *chora* names an intertextual space in which hybrids form and a certain undecidability suspends ethical judgment and allows libidinal energies to be both called forth and disinvested through a playful engagement (like the process Freud observed in his grandson's

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game of *fort/da*). The solidarity with the victim that Santner emphasizes is evoked in Ulmer's account of Columbus by the "other scene" of the European arrival as witnessed by Native Americans. It is by opening the ideological identification with Columbus to a restaging that empathy with the victims of that historic encounter becomes possible.

I will mention two examples of student assignments that negotiate this question in different ways. In one a student juxtaposes the story of his family's arrival in the United States as Irish immigrants with his experience as a child on an American military base in Japan. The media icon around which these memories circulate is John Wayne, a culture hero whose status is traumatically subverted when the student encounters a mass ceremony commemorating the victims of Hiroshima. Around these narratives of heroism, displacement, catastrophe, and mourning the student stages a developing empathy with the foreigner, enemy, and victim. Another student, after a series of what she rejects as misrecognitions of her as "colored," discovers the lost history of her Native-American grandmother who has "assimilated" into European culture and surrendered her indigenous identity. In these two examples, the Hollywood imagery of the frontier takes on different inflections.

In the computerized classroom such examples can be viewed by the entire class but on individual screens. In this reconfiguration of private and public selves, foreigner and native, insider and outsider, encounter each other in an electronic space collectively defined by the particular group. While there is not space in this essay to discuss in more detail the many ways in which the introduction of computers transforms the intersubjective experience of the classroom, let me offer at least the following comments: the immediacy of oral group discussion is lost, but it has often been noted that voices more likely to be silenced in mainstream life — especially those of minorities — can emerge strongly when mediated by the new technologies. In fact, the power dynamic of majority and minority can be substantially challenged within the limits of the classroom situation. Such a change, however, does not come without the ever-present threat of a wholesale backlash against "political correctness" by those who see themselves as the victims of the change in climate.

Foreigners in the Classroom

"Which parts of 'Columbus' are *relevant* to America after 1992?" asks Ulmer (*Heuretics* 162), for Columbus has become an American emblem of invention (158) and of scientific discovery in general, at least since Francis Bacon's *Great Instauration*. Columbus survives today as a hero of an ideology of adventure that celebrates risk, exploration, and change (166) and serves as a central mythology of colonization and market capitalism. This invader's ideology affords an interesting comparison with the psychology of the foreigner, of whom Kristeva writes:

> Riveted to an elsewhere as certain as it is inaccessible, the foreigner is ready to flee. No obstacle stops him, and all suffering, all insults, all rejections are

indifferent to him as he seeks that invisible and promised territory, that country that does not exist but that he bears in his dreams, and that must indeed be called a beyond. (*Strangers* 5)

At a moment when demographic changes and global influences are once again recasting the ethnic identity of America (and many other nations), one might ask whether Columbus should be reimagined in the terms posed by Kristeva rather than those suggested by Bacon. Maria Rosa Menocal has recently emphasized that 1492 was also the year in which the Jews were expelled from Spain. For Menocal the tableau of Columbus departing from Palos in 1492 cannot be recalled apart from the "other scene" in the larger port of Cadiz thronged with Jews facing the final deadline of their expulsion (*Shards* 4). Indeed, 1492 can in hindsight be seen as a primal scene of European identity formation in which both the Jews of Europe and the indigenous people of the Americas are constructed as Other. So Ulmer's notion of chorography can be related to Menocal's evocation of those voices of diaspora, dispersing the Enlightenment master narrative of research and development (or genocide and imperialism) with hybrid cultures and lyric traditions in which the homeland is evoked always in the terms of a lost beloved. It is a legacy of the European Enlightenment that in technologically advanced Western societies today television and cinema screens both call forth and banish the Other as image. (The Gulf War was perhaps the most catastrophic example yet of that representational economy.)

In response to the cultural hegemony of mainstream media, the classroom needs to be reimagined as a space of foreignness. In the multicultural classroom both teacher and student can learn to renegotiate difference. The most common way to respond to diversity is usually by passing over it in silence: foreigners are thus effectively expelled. How can we effectively call forth the multitude of tongues (Naficy cites the figure of 96 languages spoken by students in Los Angeles [5]) inhabiting this common space? My proposition in this essay has been that understanding the classroom as an intersubjective space mediated by the electronic screen (whether it is the available medium of writing or not, whether the class is online or not) can direct us toward a pedagogical practice supporting a multicultural public sphere.

As new foreign cultures establish themselves in America or remake their traditions in hybrids with the images of electronic pop culture, the various traditions and discourses, the interfaces of global and local cultures, out of which our subjecthood emerges can be better understood and critically evaluated through an imaginative staging analogous to a psychoanalytic working through and to a Hollywood remake. Ulmer's term "chorography" names such a practice. Now I want to close my discussion by considering an example of a text that I have used as a model for chorography in the classroom: Theresa Hak Cha's *Dictée*.

Model: *Dictée*

> Assignment: Produce a collage/montage essay (or hypertext) modeled on Cha's *Dictée* that presents the formation of your cultural identity in relation to its different languages, institutions, communities, and their *ghosts*.

Cha's *Dictée* is a collage text that assembles disparate fragments of personal memories, family stories, and the history of her nation, Korea. The categories into which these fragments are collected — History, Epic Poetry, Astronomy, Tragedy, Love Poetry, Lyric Poetry, Comedy, Choral Dance, Sacred Poetry — combine traditional mythopoeic modes with a poststructuralist understanding of the subject as an assemblage of images and discourses. The lyric and choral modes of Cha's text recall what Santner refers to as the "elegiac labor of mourning" (151). Like Syberberg's *Hitler*, *Dictée* stages the myths of the national self. But *Dictée* is also a text of exile.

Dictée begins with a presentation of a classroom dictation exercise, the Korean student's first lesson in the language of the colonizer's culture, French. *Dictée* attempts to render the materiality of language as experienced by the body that by learning it must attempt to introject it. The first day at school is the first experience of becoming a foreigner. Just as the entry into language brings about the entry into society's symbolic relations and thereby the separation from the primal relation to the mother, to learn a new language is always also to mourn the mother tongue. At the same time, the urge to speak the unspeakable is figured as a drive to give birth:

> *It murmurs inside. It murmurs. Inside is the pain of speech the pain to say. Larger still. Greater then is the pain not to say. To not say. Says nothing against the pain to speak. It festers inside. The wound, liquid, dust. Must break. Must void.* (3)

The experience of enculturation is traumatic. The pain of first learning to speak and to write becomes a repressed memory that is reawakened by new experiences of separation and exile. In Cha's experience, with French came Christianity and an entire colonial ideology, against or next to which she invokes a national martyr, Yu Guan Soon, who led the Korean resistance against the Japanese. And after Yu, Cha presents another role model and precursor, her mother (a schoolteacher), who suffered exile in China. Catholicism and motherhood can be understood as forces of both repression and resistance. So the problematic of mourning in any postcolonial situation involves acknowledging our sometimes conflicting investments in different discourses and identifications.

I have taught *Dictée* in conjunction with *Swimming to Cambodia*, a text that also mixes personal and collective histories in the context of America's military interventions in Indochina. Gray's monologue dramatizes the rejection but also the repetition of conventional gestures of American heroism. *Swimming to Cambodia* is Gray's "remake" of *The Killing Fields* (a Hollywood film about the Khmer Rouge in which Gray played the American ambassador's aide) and is

thereby implicated in the pattern of exploitation and racist representations ana-
lyzed in other classroom discussions.

The problem for America, Ulmer argues in *Heuretics*, is essentially the same
as for Germany (the most problematic legacy in recent American history being
the intervention in Vietnam). In Santner's analysis the nation must seek "to
avoid the two extremes: global disavowal of identification with ancestors on
the one hand, revision of the past into a less abhorrent version, on the other"
(151). Without simply co-opting the place of the victim one must neverthe-
less attempt to learn the difficult lessons of "solidarity with the oppressed of
history" (162).

Rather than simply asking my students to accept *Dictée* as a "correct" his-
toriographical model and to reject the Hollywood one, I ask them to use *Dictée*
as a model by which to set forth the different identifications, discourses, and
histories that they perceive as having shaped them. For some of them this will
involve histories of oppression and exile; for others it will involve identifications
with heroes whom we have identified in class as participating in imperialist or
exploitive behavior. From the more controversial space of class discussion and
argument, the student is asked to move toward constructing a personal mythol-
ogy in which s/he may come to recognize those foreigners who reside within.

Cha edited an important anthology of film theory, *Apparatus*, and *Dictée*
also includes a meditation on the screen. An image from Carl Dreyer's *Passion
of Joan of Arc* brings together the image of Yu Guan Soon with the legacy of
Cha's French Catholic education but also invokes the famous sequence from
Godard's *Vivre Sa Vie* in which Anna Karina contemplates Dreyer's cinematic
image of the medieval martyr. Through this series of images, superimposed to
produce a *mise en abyme*, *Dictée* constructs an intertext of cinema, passion play,
and martyr drama and pursues a deconstruction of archetypal identifications.
So Cha mourns the fragments of her self and constructs a post(e) identity in the
hybrid spaces of community traditions and media culture. Yun Ah Hong has
made a video based on *Dictée* called *Memory/All Echo* that makes some of the
book's connections to electronic media more explicit, as it includes archival
materials such as historical footage of the Korean War and filmic representa-
tions of Korean domestic life.

While texts such as *Dictée*, which incorporates representational devices
from the avant-garde and explores non-European histories, are not enjoyed by
most undergraduates in the same way in which *Swimming to Cambodia* or *The
Killing Fields* may be, they can be made more accessible through explanation
and discussion. However, it may be that their very strangeness can help to
open up an unfamiliar but potentially rewarding mode of writing for students
to experiment with. Some students will be more sensitive than others to the
poetics of Cha's text or will identify more easily with her exilic sensibility. (I
was fortunate enough to have in one of my classes two students with Korean
mothers who helped make the text more understandable to the other students.)

The complexities of multiculturalism can never be completely resolved.
The dynamics of the classroom and writing experiences for African Americans
are different than for those with Korean or Cuban backgrounds. The daughter
of Cuban exiles attempts to mediate images of the lost homeland with those of

the American frontier; a southern black student explores the place of print literacy in her community around the figure of her culture hero, Zora Neale Hurston. As Santner comments with reference to the German example, the inability to connect with and "work through" our collective pasts leads to a generalized melancholy. Often students find such issues and assignments too threatening to respond to without a sense of victimization: "I blame my loss of cultural identity on the way my parents chose to bring me up"; "I envy those people with strong ties to their cultures." As a teacher one hopes that chorography might offer a sense of renewal to those who are able to engage with the fragments of identity and memory that it puts into circulation. One of the most challenging tasks of a post(e) pedagogy is to create an environment where this process can be made accessible to all. As an example of chorography, *Dictée* constructs interzones, liminal spaces where identifications can be mourned and reinvested in the form of documents: maps to chart a postconventional identity.

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Tears and Blood: Lady Wilde and the Emergence of Irish Cultural Nationalism

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The mid-nineteenth-century movement known as Young Ireland marked the emergence of an Irish nationalism that was more ethnic and cultural than civic and constitutional. Although the movement fizzled in the abortive rising of 1848, its cultural and political legacies were extensive. The poetry of Young Ireland was arguably the most popular body of literature in Ireland for the rest of the century (Morash, ed. 30), and Young Ireland's nationalism played a key role in structuring later movements. Critics such as David Lloyd and Sean Ryder have sketched out its major related features: Young Ireland was overwhelmingly bourgeois, organized around the production of identity, and heavily gendered, equating true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity.[1] These general features, far from rendering Young Ireland ideologically simple or monologic, determined the shape of its complexities and contradictions. The purpose of this essay is to examine one particular writer's engagement with them and in so doing to illuminate some aspects of Young Ireland's cultural nationalism that have been previously neglected by critics.

Young Ireland was associated with a group of figures that included Thomas Davis, Thomas Dillon, Charles Gavan Duffy, William Smith O'Brien, James Clarence Mangan, Lady Wilde and several other women poets. It originated in and emerged out of Daniel O'Connell's Repeal Association. Deliverer of Catholic Emancipation and campaigner for repeal of the Union between Great Britain and Ireland, O'Connell dominated, and indeed could be said to

have invented, popular nationalist politics during the 1820s, 30s and early 40s in Ireland. His primary method was a peaceful, pragmatic constitutionalism. When *The Nation* began publication in 1842, its leading minds were part of O'Connell's movement. Various disagreements developed, mainly over the question of violence and the issue of the nondenominational colleges the British government proposed to set up in Ireland. Young Ireland was more idealistic, more influenced by German romanticism, less shaped by Irish Catholicism, and tended to conceptualize the Irish nation in cultural rather than constitutional terms. Its members were more willing to advocate physical force openly and more hospitable to the "godless colleges" than O'Connell. In 1846 these tensions led to a split between Old and Young Ireland.[2]

Wilde was born Jane Elgee in 1821, to a conservative, middle-class, Protestant family in Wexford. She married William Wilde in 1851 and became Lady Wilde when he was knighted in 1864. As a young woman, she was part of the second generation of nationalist poets that rose to prominence in the late 1840s, after Thomas Davis's death in 1845. She published poetry and prose in *The Nation* under the pen name Speranza and was noted among her contemporaries as one of Young Ireland's most violent, emotional and inflammatory writers.[3] She published *Poems by Speranza* in 1864 and wrote a number of other essays and books during her life.[4] After the failure of the 1848 revolution, both she and William became disillusioned with Irish nationalism; later she concentrated increasingly on other literary projects and on her aspirations to run a literary salon. In the late nineteenth century, she was generally acknowledged as an important, if eccentric, figure in the Dublin literary and social scene. When her son, Oscar Wilde, toured the United States in 1882, headlines in New York's *Irish Nation* lamented, "Speranza's Son . . . Phrasing about Beauty while a Hideous Tyranny Overshadows His Native Land" (Ellmann 195). Ten years later, when W. B. Yeats wanted to praise the fiery eloquence of Maud Gonne's political speeches, he dubbed her "the new Speranza" (61).

Like many nineteenth-century women writers of sentimental fiction or parlor poetry, Wilde was considerably more visible to her contemporaries than she was to later cultural critics. Although her contributions to *The Nation* were nearly as popular as those of Davis, its most charismatic writer (Davis 85), she has been largely neglected by studies of Irish cultural nationalism as well. To the extent that she has entered literary history, Wilde has done so primarily as a figure defined by her gendered "excesses" — emotional, political, and stylistic.[5] These excesses are usually characterized as a surfeit of sentimentalizing emotion and an extravagant interest in violence, bloodshed and death: a constant sense that the history of Ireland was, as she wrote in a pamphlet on "The American Irish," "an endless martyrology written in tears and blood" (1). This essay will argue that Wilde's preoccupation with the dramatic shedding of these fluids reveals her particular engagements with the major structures and contradictions that distinguished Young Ireland from Old. In a letter to his constituents, O'Connell wrote: "My plan is peaceable, legal, constitutional; it is part of that general scheme by which I incessantly contemplate the regeneration of Ireland, and her restoration to national dignity from her present provincial degradation, without a crime, without an offense, without a tear, and, above

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all, without the possibility of shedding one drop of human blood" (Cusack 2: 414-5). In Wilde's works, Young Ireland's tenuous relation to the Irish masses, whom the movement both idealized and distrusted, its interest in and anxieties about subject constitution, and the masculinity of its ostensibly transcendent nationalist subject, are negotiated and structured through representations of tears and blood.

Tears

Wilde's nationalist poems are awash with tears — the tears of men, women and children; the tears of poets, patriots and peasants; the tears of sufferers, spectators and gods. These tears structure an important aspect of Young Ireland's construction of its project as subject constitution. David Lloyd's *Nationalism and Minor Literature* offers the most ground-breaking and insightful examination of this project. While Lloyd's work focuses mainly on issues of identity and unity in the work of James Clarence Mangan — unity as homogeneity between the individual and the nation, identity as the consistency of the subject over time — another way to think about subject constitution is as the production and organization of affect. Of course, most nationalisms are primarily "about" feeling; the question for the critic is how particular nationalisms conceptualize and organize "feeling." In most accounts of nationalism, its engagement with the question of feeling takes the form of an erotics.[6] This assumption tends to produce two related narratives of the relationship between gender and nationalism, both focusing on the nationalist practice of representing the nation as a woman. In the first, the nation-as-woman is an eroticized lover, and her patriots worship her with an ecstatic heterosexual devotion. In the second, the nation is figured as an idealized mother whose purity secures her sons' faithfulness and mediates their potentially dangerous homosocial attachments to each other (Innes; Cullingford; Valente; Ryder). The distinction between these narratives is one of degree and emphasis rather than kind; both involve suppressing homosexual desire between men and presenting heterosexual love as the appropriate model of national affect. Such narratives do form an important part of Young Ireland's cultural production, but they do not exhaust the functions of gender in nationalist writing, nor do they encompass all the ways in which cultural nationalism engaged with the question of national feeling. In addition, women writers often have an especially problematic relationship to such iconography.[7] While these representational patterns are not wholly absent from Wilde's work, they do not structure it in a significant way. Young Ireland also employed a different set of tropes for conceptualizing and organizing national feeling, one that was arguably more congenial to women writers. Through representations of tears, her poetry illustrates this alternative conception of cultural nationalism as subject constitution and that project's relation to gender and class boundaries.

While O'Connell wanted to achieve his political goals without shedding blood or tears, he was no less sentimental than Young Ireland; his nationalism simply imagined a different relation between nationality and feeling. O'Connell's movement relied upon a combination of feeling and reason.[8] His nation-

alism was largely a modernizing, Enlightenment project, and several critics have argued that disciplined, mass, constitutional politics in the British isles originated with his movement (Davis 2; Eagleton, *Heathcliff* 274). He emphasized the calm rationality of his own political arguments — "I am cool, and quiet, and deliberate; no bursts of passion sway my soul" (Cusack 2: 373) — and exhorted his followers to legal, orderly agitation. On the other hand, O'Connell also employed, and was shaped by, the nineteenth-century discourses of sentimentalism and melodrama. His speeches, especially at the "monster meetings" of the 1840s, were often calculated to arouse the passions of his audiences, and did so quite effectively. Even his written effusions, in a letter to his followers, on the death of Thomas Davis aspired to the status of a spontaneous, unmediated outpouring of feeling: "I can write no more — my tears blind me."[9] The main difference between O'Connell and Young Ireland, then, was that for O'Connell, although nationalism involved feeling, feeling was not the quintessential mark of national subjectivity. This was because O'Connell had little investment in Irish culture or identity as bases for political action or arrangements; his Irish nationalism was not primarily a project of subject constitution. He viewed the decline of the Irish language with equanimity, and, as Oliver MacDonagh observes, he would have found such concepts as "anglicization" or "mental colonialism" incomprehensible (*Emancipist* 137). For O'Connell, nationality was a matter of location rather than feeling. "The Irish people" simply meant all the inhabitants of Ireland, and the power and legitimacy of his movement rested on its mass character, rather than on its "Irish" character. He liked to intone, "I speak the voice of seven millions" (Cusack 1: 517).

For Young Ireland, speaking the voice of the Irish was more complicated. Many critics have remarked on the doubleness that characterizes discourses of the nation; these discourses assert that the nation already exists, and at the same time they seek to create it.[10] This doubleness assumed a particularly virulent form for Young Ireland. On one hand, an anticolonial nationalism has to work harder to illustrate the preexistence of the nation than a statist nationalism, and in the case of Ireland, sectarian division provided glaring evidence that a unified nation did not already exist. On the other hand, Young Ireland arose under circumstances that made the task of a didactic, transformative nationalist project particularly difficult, so the possibilities for creating the nation appeared slim as well.[11] For Young Ireland, "the Irish people" was a problematic, paradoxical entity, made up of subjects who were already, ineradicably constituted as national yet who, at the same time, stood in dire need of such constitution.

Wilde's representations of tears encapsulate this ambiguity. In some instances, tears are the mark of a suffering and passive populace that lacks national consciousness or feeling (these two being virtually equivalent for romantic nationalism). Such tears indicate the masses' inadequate response to their own conditions of oppression, conditions that cry out for political action. One poem asks, "But can we only weep, when above us lour / The death-bearing wings of the angels of power" (*Poems* 18). Another criticizes the "abject tears, and prayers submissive" (34) of the people who refuse to rise. In "Who Will Show Us Any Good?" tears literally blind the masses to their true identity and interests: "Suffering Ireland! Martyr-Nation! / Blind with tears thick as

mountain mist; / Can none amidst all the new generation / Change them to glory[?]" (59). Tears as the sign of colonial abjection are often gendered feminine; the same poem describes a passive Ireland as the "Saddest of mothers" (60). Such representations fit smoothly into the main stream of literature produced by other Young Irelanders such as Davis or Mangan. Another *Nation* poet put it this way: "Serf! With thy fetters o'erladen, / Why crouch you in dastardly woe? / Why weep o'er thy chains like a maiden, / Nor strike for thy manhood a blow?" (*Spirit* 17). Like Wilde, "Mary" (Ellen Downing) and "Eva" (Mary Eva Kelly) of *The Nation* also exhorted their men to nationalist fortitude by denigrating a weak and tearful femininity as the alternative; as Ryder has observed, their poetry "differs little from that of their male colleagues in its reproduction of bourgeois nationalist gender relations — the difference being that it often articulates such relations from a woman's point-of-view" (219).

Not all Irish woe was dastardly; Young Ireland's writers frequently invoked the tears of the suffering to describe the brutalities of English rule and the horrors of the Great Famine of the 1840s. Mary Eva Kelly's "A Scene for Ireland" describes a starving mother's inability to feed her baby: "She has no food to give it now / Save those hot tears outgushing" (Morash, ed. 61). But such a literature of Irish misery still equated weeping with helplessness, and thus lent itself to appropriation by a version of imperial sentimentality, exemplified by writers such as Ernest Renan and Matthew Arnold, that constructed the Irish as sensitive, romantic, and politically inept. Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies* illustrates the potential ease of such appropriations. Moore's work expressed enough nationalist sentiment to get him condemned by the conservative English press and quoted religiously by O'Connell. But Moore was a liberal unionist, and his poems were immensely popular in the drawing rooms of England several decades before they became household words in Ireland. Although he sometimes took up a nationalist call to armed resistance, at other times Moore portrayed the Irish as the nation of the smile and the tear. In this formulation, the purpose of Irish cultural production was to express the suffering of the Irish with such lyrical poignancy that "Thy masters themselves, as they rivet thy chains, / Shall pause at the song of their captive, and weep" (*Poetical Works* 237). This image perfectly captures the classic mode and dynamics of imperial sentimentality, in which the empire nostalgically cathects that which it is in the process of destroying.

Wilde's works attempt to navigate between the nationalist Scylla of tears that indicate contemptible helplessness and the imperial Charybdis of tears that indicate picturesque helplessness by transferring the imperative of nationalist subject constitution and action to the spectator or reader. Such a transfer is implicit in Young Ireland's laments for Irish suffering and in its privileging of popular forms like the ballad. It also accords with Young Ireland's project, discernible in a number of its intellectual structures, to transform the history of Irish suffering, national and individual, into a source of and blueprint for a gloriously victorious future. But Wilde theorized, more thoroughly than many of her contemporaries, the processes and mechanisms through which tears undergo this transformation. In her works tears constitute a spectacle of suffering capable of generating national feeling and spurring nationalist action; they also

signify that a viewer is reacting properly to that spectacle. As this description suggests, such representations of weeping are generically related to the late-eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility and their sentimental Victorian descendants, though they do not coincide completely with either. Terms like sensibility and sentimentality are notoriously hard to define; their political implications are even more slippery. Sensibility could be organized around individualistic, democratic, and liberal principles, or it could be mobilized in the service of "natural" social and political hierarchies (Jones; Johnson; Vincent-Buffault). The politics of sentimentality are similarly uncertain and in contention.[12] The various formulations of these discourses shared a conviction of the immediately political significance of feeling and a concomitant conception of feeling as the basis of the social bond. Thus when Edmund Burke attacked the French Revolution, the excesses of which are widely supposed to have irrevocably tainted the vocabulary of sensibility after the 1790s, he did it by claiming sensibility's terms as his own without acknowledging them, lamenting the elimination of natural sentiments and affections as the basis for a hierarchical and harmonious social order (see Johnson, especially 1-19).

Burke, Wilde, and various Victorian sentimentalists shared a double interest in feeling as a spectacle to be observed and as the response that a particular kind of spectacle should produce in the ethically and politically enlightened observer. The tears of the suffering object and the tears of the observing subject go together; the former produce the latter. Wilde's often millenarian vocabulary tended to interchange an earthly observer with a heavenly one. One poem urges, "Let us lift our streaming eyes / To God's throne above the skies, / He will hear our anguish cries" (17). In "The Voice of the Poor," the speaker claims: "If the angels ever hearken, downward bending, / They are weeping, we are sure, / At the litanies of human groans ascending / From the crushed hearts of the poor" (14). Similarly, "Ruins" predicts that the weeping of the poor will "Start the angels on their thrones" (40). If God and the angels could be trusted to respond with the appropriate sympathetic tears to the weeping of the oppressed, however, members of the Protestant Ascendancy could not. "The Faithless Shepherds" (45-7) castigates the landed aristocracy for its cruel indifference to the plight of the poor during the famine by asserting in a manner that resembles contemporary descriptions of Famine victims that the Ascendancy are the walking dead: "Dead! — Dead! Ye are dead while ye live; / Ye've a name that ye live — but are dead." This ethico-political (or national) death-in-life manifests itself as an absence of feeling — "For the heart in each bosom is cold / As the ice on a frozen sea" — and of sympathetic tears: "With your cold eyes unwet by a tear, / For your Country laid low on your bier." The absence of national feeling indicates the corruption of the current regime and presages its violent demise, just as the presence of such feeling in heaven suggests that the nationalist revolution is divinely directed or sanctioned.

"The Brothers," subtitled, "A scene from '98" (7-9), presents a spectacle — an execution — and revolves around its potential ability to generate national feeling, measured in tears, and the nationalist action such tears should also produce. Insofar as it is cast as an exemplary or paradigmatic spectacle, the kind

of scene supremely suited to produce the desired sentiments, we might also think of the poem as Wilde's equivalent to Burke's famous description of Marie Antoinette in *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. The prisoners of Wilde's poem, "two noble youths," are "in pride of life and manhood's beauty," bearing their fate with exemplary heroism. Christlike, they are "Pale martyrs" who die for the sake of their fellow Irish. The poem emphasizes its narrative of events as a national spectacle whose significance lies primarily in its effect on its audience. Before introducing the brothers, the first stanza describes the "pale and anxious crowd" that witnesses the execution and positions the reader among its members: "You can see them through the gloom." The second stanza also insists on the importance of the crowd, for whom the emotional effect of the spectacle is measured in tears: "All eyes an earnest watch on them are keeping, / Some, sobbing, turn away, / And the strongest men can hardly see for weeping, / So noble and so loved were they." The syntax equates watching and weeping, spectatorship and sympathy: "There is silence in the midnight — eyes are keeping / Troubled watch till forth the jury come; / There is silence in the midnight — eyes are weeping— / 'Guilty!' is the fatal uttered doom." The crowd's lamentations are an index to their level of feeling, but tears alone are not enough: true national feeling must express itself in action. As in Wilde's other representations of weeping as the mark of colonial abjection, tears that do not generate politically conscious resistance are feminizing: "Oh! the rudest heart might tremble at such a sorrow, / The rudest cheek might blanch at such a scene: / Twice the judge essayed to speak the word — to-morrow— / Twice faltered, as a woman he had been." The judge is moved, but the inadequacy of his feelings, which manifests itself as feminine weakness, is structural as well as personal, springing from his position as the imperial official presiding over the brothers' conviction and execution.

Wilde's poem thus explicitly rejects, in conventionally gendered terms, the imperial sentimentality that figures captors weeping over the chains of their victims as a positive conception of national feeling or identity. The penultimate stanza juxtaposes the crowd's passive weeping with the active intervention imagined by the narrator, a more advanced nationalist who sounds oddly like Burke:

> Yet none spring forth their bonds to sever
>   Ah! methinks, had I been there,
> I'd have dared a thousand deaths ere ever
>   The sword should touch their hair.
> It falls! — there is a shriek of lamentation
>   From the weeping crowd around;
> They're stilled — the noblest hearts within the nation—
>   The noblest heads lie bleeding on the ground.

The crowd's tears cannot prevent the spilling of the heroes' blood. The last stanza places the spectacle in the distant past for the first time in the poem. At the same time, it figures the execution scene as a kind of perpetual present,

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embodied in the heads that refuse to decay and in the continued appeal of the spectacle to nationalist sensibilities:

> Years have passed since that fatal scene of dying,
>   Yet, lifelike to this day,
> In their coffins still those severed heads are lying,
>   Kept by angels from decay.
> Oh! they preach to us, those still and pallid features—
>   Those pale lips yet implore us, from their graves,
> To strive for our birthright as God's creatures,
>   Or die, if we can but live as slaves.

Having transferred the burden of reacting properly to the scene from the weeping but passive crowd to the narrator, the poem then transfers this burden to its readers. The poem itself, as well as the events it features, exists as a permanent national spectacle, waiting for the reader in whom it will inspire sentiments and actions like the narrator's. Wilde locates the power to constitute the subject of Irish nationalism simultaneously in the timeless spectacle, which should produce it automatically in anyone, and in the contingencies of the poem's particular readership.

Weeping is thus a figure for the doubleness of the nation; it can signify either the ineradicable plenitude and force of the spirit of the nation, or their devastating absence. As a way of structuring Young Ireland's anxieties about cultural nationalism as subject constitution — defined as the production and organization of feeling — this ambiguity generates a problematic that differs substantially from the problematics produced by an erotics of nationalism. The erotics of nationalism raises the threat of homosexual (as opposed to homosocial) bonds between men; the possibility that the patriot will choose his wife over her sexual rival, the nation; and the specter of the woman-as-nation whose sexual betrayal or rape is equivalent to colonial conquest. The tearful strand of nationalism exemplified in Wilde's work, however, grapples with the danger that the signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent on who displays them. Wilde's work manages this ambiguity by constructing taxonomies of feeling based on gender and class distinctions. Thus Young Ireland's representations of tears also occupy the intersection between the movement's drive towards a transcendent national unity and its need to maintain the divisions that unity supposedly transcended.

Men and Women; Leaders and Peoples

Wilde's work is structured by two hierarchies of tears: the tears of men over the tears of women, and the tears of patriot leaders over the tears of the masses. While O'Connell's movement was largely for and populated by men, he was well aware of the potential intersections between feminine sentimentality and political reform. He was passionately opposed to slavery and once claimed that Thomas Moore's *Captain Rock* was to the struggle for Catholic emancipation

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what *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was to the abolition of slavery (MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 17). Maurice R. O'Connell has argued that the logic of Young Ireland's romantic cultural nationalism, which emphasized the uniqueness of peoples, militated against its sharing O'Connell's Enlightenment, universalist concern with American slavery and other instances of oppression outside Ireland ("O'Connell" 130-6). I would add that this emphasis on identity, and on a supposedly ungendered national subject that was actually a male subject, also militated against Young Ireland's embracing Stowe's "feminine" brand of reform. Like Stowe, Wilde insists that political change begins with and depends on conversion, a change of heart. Unlike Stowe, however, Wilde does not locate this change in the feminine, domestic sphere of the hearth or give women any special power to effect it. In Wilde's taxonomy of tearfulness, the most ethically and politically laudable tears are mainly the privilege of middle- and upper-class men.[13]

Wilde's acceptance of Young Ireland's equation of true nationalist subjectivity with masculinity means that while weeping as a sign of powerlessness or a lack of political consciousness is often feminized in her work, tears as evidence of positive national feeling are associated with masculinity: "Meekly bear, but nobly try / Like a man with soft tears flowing" (26). Similarly, while the tears of the populace often reveal its despair and pre-political stupor, the tears of patriot leaders embody the riches they can offer the nation:

> And woe to you, ye poor—
> Want and scorn ye must endure;
> Yet before ye many noble jewels shine
> In the sand.
> Ah! they are patriots' tears — even mine—
> For Fatherland! (99)

This impulse towards hierarchy and differentiation within the boundaries of the nation was the inevitable companion to Young Ireland's drive towards various kinds of unity — political, aesthetic, and ethical. While the latter impulse has received more critical attention, the former is particularly crucial to Wilde's work. Since the nation was always in the process of being forged, the nationalization of the masses was always incomplete. This was particularly true for Young Ireland, given its relative lack of organic connections to the Irish masses. O'Connell's movement, in contrast, had been more genuinely popular, with the emergent Catholic middle classes, particularly in cities and rural towns, as its backbone of support.[14] Young Ireland never achieved the popular following that O'Connell had; the enormous early success of *The Nation* depended in part upon O'Connell's Repeal Association, which distributed it. In addition, though O'Connell continued to have a popular following, the Famine destroyed his political machine (Boyce 171).

Accordingly, a number of scholars have read Young Ireland's project as an attempt to create in culture a unity that did not exist in the political sphere.[15] Thus Young Ireland's founding premise of a unified spirit of the nation located in the Irish masses arose as the chances of achieving such unity and politiciz-

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ing the masses were actually receding. But this compensatory response created
its own contradictions; it is not often observed that nationalization had to be
incomplete or it risked undoing some of cultural nationalism's other founding
premises.[16] Young Ireland's healthy respect for property and general economic
conservatism (with a few exceptions) set limits on its unifying, assimilative
ideals, and led it to privilege the leading role of the bourgeois intellectual. As
Wilde wrote in an essay on an anthology of Irish songs, "The utterances of a
people, though always vehement, are often incoherent; and it is then that men
of education and culture are needed to interpret and formulate the vague long-
ings and ambitions of the passionate hearts around them" (quoted in Wyndham
160). For Young Ireland, the relationship between leaders and peoples
demanded both that the masses assimilate themselves to the model of the lead-
ers and that this assimilation remain perpetually deferred.

As a result, the figure of the nationalist leader carries enormous weight for
Young Ireland, embodying both an ideal of unity and the continued significance
and the superiority of the bourgeois intellectual. Wilde's work is obsessed with
leaders — the current dearth of effective national leaders, the qualities and
techniques associated with leadership, the nature of the relationship between
leaders and peoples. Her poems refer to leaders with epithets such as "poet-
prophet" (53), "poet-priest" (25), "prophet-leader" (39), and "patriot leader"
(28); her leaders are heroic, Christlike, or Godlike. At the same time, her works
constantly return to the faults of the masses who have failed to assimilate them-
selves to the model offered by such leaders. "Have Ye Counted the Cost?"
sneers, "Let the masses pass on scorning, / Seek not courage in their mind; /
Self-devotion, patriot fervour, / Spring not from the craven kind" (34). When
she became frustrated with the national movement, she blamed the populace,
writing to Duffy, "I do not blame the leaders in the least. In Sicily or Belgium
they would have been successful" (quoted in Wyndham 31).

Along with other Young Irelanders, Wilde subscribed to Carlyle's dictum
that the history of the world is a series of biographies — the biographies of
great men. She wrote biographical essays about a number of figures, including
Thomas Moore and Daniel O'Connell. David Lloyd has explored Young Ire-
land's preoccupation with biography and autobiography, arguing that for Irish
cultural nationalism the hero's biography represents a repetition of the nation's
history, prefigures its destiny, and asserts the seamless continuity of the indi-
vidual with the nation (*Nationalism* 59-60). Wilde's essay on O'Connell exem-
plifies this pattern. His life, she wrote, was "one long gladiatorial wrestle
against oppression and bigotry in which every step was a combat, but every
combat a victory. . . . The life of O'Connell is, indeed, the history of Ireland for
nearly a century. . . . He lived through all, incarnated all, and was the avenger,
the apostle, and the prophet of her people" ("O'Connell" 180). This view of
Irish history as a series of gladiatorial triumphs was, to say the least, counter-
intuitive, and it may seem particularly perverse in the wake of the Famine. In
contrast, for O'Connell, the history of Ireland was a history of Irish patience
and reason in the face of British cruelty and provocation. For Wilde, O'Con-
nell's life was part of the incomplete process of resistance as well as an image of
its successful completion; it embodied a history of suffering and defeat and pro-

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vided a diagram of victorious revolution. The contradictions that inhabit such a formulation are compounded by the leader's relationship to the people, whom the leader must both represent and exceed.

Wilde's works foreground the question of the leader's success or failure in transforming the masses, invariably imagining this transformation occurring when the leader breathes the spirit of the nation into the populace through his passionate oratory. Thomas Davis's essays emphasized the skill of past Irish orators and encouraged present would-be leaders to study the character of their audiences and the techniques of oratory. Wilde described O'Connell's powers as an orator using a language of the mythical and the magical: "Never, perhaps, since sirens gave up sitting and singing upon rocks, did such witch-music fall on the ear of listener. The effect was magical — it acted like some potent spell. . . . Men were charmed, subdued, enchanted — forgot everything but him, and could not choose but listen, love him, and swear to do or die for him" ("O'Connell" 188-9). Although O'Connell was famous, in Parliament and in Ireland, for his oratorical skills, he was not inclined to think of himself as a siren. He theorized his effect on his audiences and his role as a leader in very different terms. O'Connell was well aware of something Benedict Anderson would theorize later: that print capitalism and increased literacy made the rise of his modern popular nationalism possible (Boyce 160). In 1839 he threatened his colleagues in Parliament by asking whether they realized "that the Irish people almost universally were now readers? — that where newspapers formerly hardly went out of the great towns, they were now to be found in every village, and almost in every cabin?" (Cusack 1: 536). O'Connell described the mass political power of the Irish as a nation using Anderson's figure for "the secular, historically-clocked imagined community" (Anderson 39) of the nation: the daily plebiscite of the newspaper. For O'Connell, the Irish people were no less a people, and no less a political force, for being apparently isolated, each in his or her own cabin. Luke Gibbons has pointed out that Anderson's argument requires some modification in relation to Ireland and other colonized nations which had important traditions of resistance in oral culture. In addition, newspapers like *The Nation* were often passed around and read aloud to groups. So, while Irish newspapers were central to O'Connell's movement, and their effective circulation and cultural authority was far greater than sales figures suggest (MacDonagh, *Hereditary* 208), they were closely connected to oral culture. But O'Connell did not privilege speech over writing, and he explicitly theorized the importance of print culture, rather than his own siren-like powers, to his nationalist project.

Although Young Ireland consciously promoted and exploited print media, set up Repeal reading rooms, and lauded its literary projects as part of the national struggle, its rhetoric, in contrast to O'Connell's, went to some lengths to conceal its dependence on print. Cultural nationalism's representations of the nation erased the mediated national community created by print and visualized by O'Connell as each Irish citizen reading a newspaper at home, and replaced it with the physical immediacy of an orator addressing a crowd. Young Ireland's definition of the leader as orator cast him less as the people's representative than as their hypnotist, or as Wilde put it, their siren. Although the

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people formed a natural and inevitable national community, they needed the leader's magical eloquence to make them aware of their nationhood and to give it political force. To imagine the orator relying on logic, persuasion or choice in mobilizing the people was tantamount to recognizing the nation as constructed and contingent, so Young Ireland described its orators using a language of mystical transformation, in which the masses simply "woke up" from the nightmare of their own ignorance and passivity. Wilde asks in one poem, "Then trumpet-tongued, to a people sleeping / Who will speak with magic command[?]" (61). Another poem calls for a leader to "Pass the word that bands together— / Word of mystic conjuration" and predicts the result: "And, as fire consumes the heather, / So the young hearts of the nation / Fierce will blaze up, quick and scathing, 'gainst the stranger and the foe" (31). The hearts of the masses respond automatically, irrationally and uncontrollably, like a field set ablaze, their reaction unmediated by distance, time, or thought.

As the repositories of the spirit of the nation and the instruments of that spirit's emergence in the people, poets and leaders were interchangeable in Wilde's work. "The Young Patriot Leader" describes the hero's eloquence as an overpowering natural (and ultimately supernatural) force, capable of achieving the transformation of the heart that sentimentalists like Stowe imagined in less violently martial terms: "As a tempest in its force, as a torrent in its course, / So his words fiercely sweep all before them, / And they smite like two-edged swords, those undaunted thunder-words, / On all hearts, as tho' angels did implore them" (29). Similarly, "A Remonstrance" asserts: "Flashes from Poet's words / Electric light, strong, swift, and sudden, like / The clash of thunderclouds, by which men read / God's writing legibly on human hearts" (52). In Wilde's works, the words of patriot leaders and poets burn, smite, act as "thunder crashes" (24) or "God's thunder" (30); they are both physical objects with concrete effects and fetishes, magical objects with absolute power to transform listeners. The greater and more Godlike the orator's transformative powers, however, the greater his distance from the masses with whom he was eventually supposed to be merged. Young Ireland's emphasis on the unmediated character of the orator's effect on the people formed the very vehicle through which to inscribe his absolute separation from them. Conversely, it was O'Connell's faith in the mediation of print that made it possible for him to imagine himself a member of the Irish nation, similar to other members.

Most of Wilde's works emphasize that the masses have yet to be transformed by the spirit of the nation. The exhortatory language of her work casts it as an attempt to generate that spirit among her readers. The didactic impulses of Young Ireland's project are well known. But in Wilde's case, representations of gender play a particularly important role in organizing those impulses. The recalcitrance of the masses, and the necessary, continued separation of the leader from them, are expressed in the discrepancy between the women poet and the male patriot leader. "Who Will Show Us Any Good?" laments: "Alas! can I help? but a nameless singer— / Weak the words of a woman to save; / We wait the advent of some light-bringer" (61). The female poet is the pale, inadequate shadow of the true inspirer of the nation, the patriot leader. The doubleness of the nation, which exists eternally yet remains to be created, is mapped onto a gender gap between them.

The first poem in *Poems by Speranza*, "Dedication. To Ireland" (iii-iv), introduces the volume by emphasizing this discrepancy. The opening stanza, written entirely in the conditional mood, details how the speaker would like to inspire the nation but also implies that she cannot:

> My Country, wounded to the heart,
> Could I but flash along thy soul
> Electric power to rive apart
> The thunder-clouds that round thee roll,
> And, by my burning words uplift
> Thy life from out Death's icy drift,
> Till the full splendours of our age
> Shone round thee for thy heritage—
> As Miriam's, by the Red Sea strand
> Clashing proud cymbals, so my hand
> Would strike thy harp,
> Loved Ireland!

The second stanza confesses: "I can but look in God's great face, / And pray Him for our fated race, / To come in Sinai thunders down, / And, with His mystic radiance, crown / Some Prophet-Leader . . ." The poem turns on the speaker's gender, which renders her an inferior substitute for a true poet-leader: "The woman's voice dies in the strife / Of Liberty's awakening life; / We wait the hero heart to lead, / The hero, who can guide at need." The poem's last stanza affirms the efforts made by the "woman's hand" of the speaker, while insisting on their limited efficacy. Even the reference to Miriam indicates that she will never achieve the status of a true poet-prophet. Miriam was Moses' sister, and her only prophecy was a song of praise for Moses after he parted the Red Sea. Later, she was punished by God for complaining that Moses had too much power; Wilde's speaker is unlikely to incur punishment for a similar offense.

Like the other women writers of *The Nation*, in general Wilde did not explicitly critique or resist the major structures of Young Ireland's cultural nationalism. Instead, I have been arguing that she inhabited their contradictions in a particular way. Wilde emphasized a sentimental rather than an erotic model of national feeling, but she did not make the claims to specifically feminine power that other sentimental literatures did. She used Young Ireland's gender conventions to mediate a bourgeois nationalism's necessary but problematic separation from the people, embodied in the weak feminine tears of the masses and the worthy, masculine tears of the true patriot. Similarly, rather than explicitly assert the worth of the woman writer, Wilde employed the figures of the woman poet and the male patriot to inscribe the doubleness of the nation and the ambiguous status and potential the masses had for Young Ireland. But if Wilde found a despairing, pre-national people problematic, she hardly found a mobilized, nationalist people less so, as is illustrated in her representations of blood.

Journal x

Blood

O'Connell struck (or, perhaps more accurately, failed to strike) an uneasy balance between threatening revolutionary violence and condemning it. Although the British political classes viewed him as a figure who deliberately aroused the passions of the mob, O'Connell feared and distrusted the masses who supported him, he hated social unrest, and he condemned revolutions and agrarian secret societies (MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 229-31; *Hereditary* passim). His speeches and essays counseled legal agitation, orderly mass demonstrations, and nonviolence: "Let there be no riot, no outrage, no violation of the law, and above all, no despair. We are eight millions" (Cusack 2: 394). He repeatedly insisted that "the best possible political revolution is not worth one single drop of human blood" (441). Much of O'Connell's pacifist politics was based, however, on the implicit threat of a mass uprising. His speeches sometimes employed martial language, especially when he wanted to whip up popular feeling at the monster meetings of the early 1840s. The meetings themselves, which scholars have compared to people's festivals, religious revivals, and theatrical spectacles, bristled with potential mass violence and encapsulated the tensions between violence and nonviolence in the movement. They were elaborately staged, with much pomp and pageantry, and audiences responded passionately to O'Connell's famed oratorical skills. Crowds were often organized into ranks and marched in step, in a display of quasi-military discipline that suggested their potential to become a real army.[17] It was this combination of O'Connell's ability to mobilize the passions of the masses and his skill in controlling them, in the manner of an inspired military leader, that many contemporary observers found particularly threatening.

In some respects, Young Ireland's warlike rhetoric simply stated plainly what O'Connell had been careful to suggest obliquely. However, the devastation of the Famine, England's largely uncaring and inept handling of the crisis, and the French Revolution of 1848 radicalized some of the remaining nationalists by the late 1840s. Wilde began contributing to *The Nation* just after the Famine began, and as the crisis worsened nationalist writers confronted the issue of how to represent death and suffering on an unprecedented, and nearly unrepresentable, scale. Blood, like tears, can illustrate the violent abjection of a colonized people, and the "excessive" carnage in Wilde's work is, in part, a response to the ethical imperative to render the excessive carnage of the Famine adequately.[18] Like tears, blood has other functions in Wilde's work as well.

While Wilde's representations of tears are inflected by the dominant discourses of feeling, her representations of blood are informed by the major impulses of contemporary religious discourses, the importance of which, as Maria Luddy has shown, can hardly be overestimated as a shaping force in the lives of publicly active nineteenth-century Irish women. Her preoccupation with blood, violence and death is structured by a Protestant millenarianism in which the apocalypse signals the end of this world, judgment, and the beginning of the new millennium. Chris Morash has pointed out that Irish Protestantism was heavily indebted to millenarian thought in the nineteenth century and that interest in millennial prophecy was especially high in the late 1840s.

Morash argues that although millenarian thought among most Protestants was reactionary and anti-Irish, it also offered Young Ireland a way of narrating the Famine that exposed the massive suffering it caused while also casting it as an apocalyptic harbinger of a utopian world (*Writing* 79-127). In addition, Young Ireland's conception of the nationalization of the masses as a magical transformation, its fetishistic emphasis on the power of words, and its vagueness about how revolutionary change was actually to come about are all characteristics Eric Hobsbawm associates with millenarian movements (57-107).

Like her interest in biography, Wilde's millenarianism is a way of writing the history of the nation and the individual as both a record of oppression and a blueprint for victory. The cataclysmic nature of the suffering involved becomes an index to the radical nature of the transformation it heralds. Poems such as "Foreshadowings" (17-19) graft the vocabularies and structures of millenarian thinking onto a discourse of nationalist resistance. The poem begins, "Oremus! Oremus! [Let us pray!] Look down on us, Father!" and conflates the horsemen of the apocalypse with imperial coercion and famine: "On rushes the war-steed, his lurid eyes flashing / There is blood on the track where his long mane is streaming, / . . . / There's a tramp like a knell — a cold shadow gloometh— / Woe! 'tis the black steed of Famine that cometh." "Signs of the Times" (21-3) claims, "By our prophets God is speaking, in Sinai's awful thunders, / By pestilence and famine, in fearful signs and wonders," and describes the rough beast that slouches towards Ireland as a successor to the French Revolution: "On its brow a name is written — France read it once before, / And like a demon's compact, it was written in her gore— / A fearful name — thrones tremble as the murmur passed along— / RETRIBUTION, proud oppressors, for your centuries of wrong." The signs of a better world are literally "written" — both determined and predicted — in violence, blood and gore. The Irish might be suffering horribly, but God, and the nationalists whose divine sanction was indicated by the interchangeability of the earthly and heavenly avengers that Wilde's poems constantly invoke, will judge the oppressors and avenge their crimes.

Analyses of cultural nationalism often associate its more violent-minded formulations with its nostalgic, mythologizing, backward-looking impulses (see for example Kearney). But Young Ireland's nostalgia for lost origins and pristine pre-colonial culture did not prevent it from needing, and embracing, however ambivalently, a modernizing, nineteenth-century narrative of progress. Hobsbawm points out that millenarianism is the most "modern" of "primitive" social movements, and can be fairly easily harnessed in service of modern political revolutions. Wilde's bloody millenarianism coexists with her commitment to progress, most often imagined as the "onward march of nations" (69) through history. "Who Will Show Us Any Good?" asserts, "Ireland rests mid the rush of progression, / As a frozen ship in a frozen sea," and laments, "we alone of the Christian nations / Fall to the rear in the march of Man" (61). In fact, her bloody rhetoric offers an alternative, apocalyptic narrative of progress rather than a backward-looking resistance to it. "The Year of Revolutions" asks, "Shall we, oh! my Brothers, but weep, pray, and groan, / When France reads her rights by the flames of a Throne? / Shall we fear and falter to join the grand chorus, / When Europe has trod the dark pathway before us?" (35). The apocalypse of

the Famine and the nationalist apocalypse it prefigures propel Ireland forward along the path of civilization.

Wilde imagines violence and bloodshed as both the mark of oppression and a sign that the nationalist cause is advancing. But while the tears that indicate the weakness of the masses become the enlightened tears of the patriot or reader/spectator, her representations of blood usually revolve entirely around the masses, organizing her conception of the masses' role, once mobilized, in nationalist politics. This conception is the logical complement to Young Ireland's impulses to limit (as well as to achieve) the merging of leaders and peoples. Her version of O'Connell's disciplined army, that is, of the Irish people mobilized as an effective political force, is a raging mob. She assumes that mass politics is by nature violent and irrational, so when she imagines the successful transformation of the masses, she emphasizes the unthinking and bloodthirsty propensities of the masses so transformed. Often, the mobilized populace becomes part of the landscape itself, taking the form of some blindly powerful and destructive force. "Signs of the Times" lists the "signs apocalyptic" (21) of a coming upheaval, comparing disturbances among the people to surging oceans and tempest-tossed forests: "When mighty passions, surging, heave the depth of life's great ocean— / When the people, sway, like forest trees, to and fro in wild commotion" (21). "Forward" threatens, "And the heaving myriad surges, / To and fro in tumult swaying, / Threaten death to all who vainly would oppose them in their might" (31), while "The Year of Revolutions" exhorts, "On, on in your masses dense, resolute, strong" (36). Wilde's descriptions of violent nationalist mobs as blazing fields, human oceans, windswept forests, thunder clouds and other powerful natural phenomena fit them into millenarian narratives of upheaval. They also embody Young Ireland's anxious conceptualization of mass politics as irrational and bloody.

Wilde's conception of mass politics as crowd violence makes a transition from tears to blood an inviting figure for the nationalization of the masses. "France in '93" (53-5) compares the French bread riots of the 1790s to the cry of the starving Irish during the Famine and describes the transformation of the abject people into a savage agent of crowd violence. The first stanza presents the lower classes as crude and lacking national consciousness: "Hark! the onward heavy tread— / Hark! the voices rude— / 'Tis the famished cry for Bread / From a wildered multitude." The "wildered multitude" signifies its helplessness and despair by weeping: "Thousands wail and weep with hunger." The second stanza traces their transformation into "an armed multitude." The armed multitude has exactly the same "heavy tread" and "voices rude" as the despairing crowd in the first stanza. The only visible mark of their transformation is that they have stopped shedding tears and have begun shedding blood: "Bloody trophy they have won, / Ghastly glares it in the sun— / Gory head on lifted pike. / Ha! they weep not now, but strike." Young Ireland's didactic impulses notwithstanding, they have not been enlightened; they have simply become enraged.

The poem gleefully addresses the guilty, aristocratic victims of the crowd's revenge, threatening and taunting them, as in "Calculating statesmen, quail; / Proud aristocrat, grow pale; / Savage sounds that deathly song," or "What! coronetted Prince of Peer, / Will not the base-born slavelings fear?" Through-

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out, the poem emphasizes the violent savagery of the revolution it depicts. In contrast to O'Connell's conception of violence in politics, the crowd's power lies not in threat or disciplined action but in its blind, uncontrollable hunger for violence: "Blindly now they wreak revenge— / How rudely do a mob avenge!" The poem points to hunger as the source of the riot, repeating words like "famished" and "bread." In Wilde's apocalyptic reading of the Famine, the masses' hunger for food — which represents their colonial subjugation — and their hunger for violence — which represents their mobilization as an effective political force — become indistinguishable. The dismembered bodies of aristocrats become strange fruit, to borrow a phrase from a later description of mob violence: "Ghastly fruit their lances bear— / Noble heads with streaming hair." The speaker imagines the carnage of the riot in terms of a savage "harvest" of aristocratic blood: "Royal blood of King and Queen / Streameth from the guillotine; / Wildly on the people goeth, / Reaping what the noble soweth." Thus the lines "Hunger now, at last, is sated / In halls where once it wailed and waited" have multiple referents: food, blood, blood as food. While national feeling among the male patriot leaders manifests itself as tears, national feeling among the masses manifests itself as a blind bloodlust as deep and instinctive as the hunger for which it is a metonym.

Current criticism often theorizes cultural nationalism's project of subject constitution as the formation of a centered subject whose autonomy prefigures national autonomy, and whose national feelings are embodied in unmistakable signs such as love of country. Wilde's work illustrates that, at the same time, Young Ireland's bourgeois nationalism also produced a different, more unsettling version of national subject constitution, particularly in relation to the Irish masses. In this version, the signs of national feeling are ambiguous, their meanings contingent and shifting. Moreover, this national subject's bodily integrity is tenuous — defined through shedding tears, spilling blood, even ingesting blood — and its autonomy dissolves into the unreasoning mind of the crowd. These divergent conceptions of subject constitution mark Young Ireland's ambivalence about the Irish masses; subject constitution as the achievement of individual integrity, autonomy and stable signification is the province of the elite. The necessary complement to Young Ireland's drive towards unity, its dreams of assimilation, and its faith in the people as the embodiments of the spirit of the nation is its reliance on class and gender hierarchies, its will to separate bourgeois leaders and intellectuals from the populace, and its fear that the masses cannot be constituted as national subjects, or that they can only be constituted as threatening, ambiguous kinds of national subjects. As a woman writer engaging with a deeply masculinist tradition, Wilde had cause to be particularly sensitive to the latter set of impulses — those that emphasized disjunction, distrust and hierarchy. The major tropes and patterns of Wilde's work embody, rather than resist, many of Young Ireland's gender conventions. Through those conventions, however, Wilde illustrates with particular clarity the disintegrative and divisive aspects of the contradictory formulations that distinguished Young Ireland from Old.

Notes

1. For extended discussions of these features, see Lloyd, *Nationalism* and *Anomalous States*, and Ryder.

2. On Young Ireland's origins, development, and intellectual structures, see Davis; Boyce 154-91; Cairns and Richards 22-41; Deane, "Poetry and Song" and "Famine."

3. The authorities considered her anonymous 1848 essay, entitled "Jacta Alea Est" ("The Die is Cast"), seditious enough to warrant prosecution, and tried Duffy for writing it, even though he was already in prison when it appeared. When Wilde disrupted his trial by standing up in the gallery and claiming authorship, the government declined to prosecute her, and four different juries refused to convict Duffy. For an account of the incident, see Ellmann 9.

4. She translated a novel, *Sidonia The Sorceress*, in 1849, translated Lamartine's *Pictures of the First French Revolution* and *The Wanderer and His Home* in 1850, published *The Glacier Land* in 1852 and *The First Temptation* in 1853. *Poems: Second Series; Translations* appeared in 1866. In 1880 she completed and published a book her husband had begun before his death, *Memoir of Gabriel Beranger*. *Driftwood From Scandinavia* appeared in 1884, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms and Superstitions of Ireland* in 1887, and *Ancient Cures, Charms, and Usages of Ireland* in 1890. *Notes on Men, Women, and Books* (1891) and *Social Studies* (1893) were collections of essays, all or nearly all of which had appeared earlier in journals.

5. Thomas Flanagan's *The Irish Novelists, 1800-1850* described her as "the silliest woman who ever lived" (quoted in Ellmann 18), and Terry Eagleton's play *St. Oscar* pokes fun at her vehement and sentimentalizing nationalism. While her work is included in a number of turn-of-the-century anthologies (for a list see Morash, *Writing* 112), later in the twentieth century her work was seldom anthologized. Hoagland includes only her most famous poem, "The Famine Year," and A. A. Kelly excludes her on the grounds that her poetry "[a]ppears turgid to the modern ear" (19). She does not appear anywhere in the first three volumes of *The Field Day Anthology of Irish Writing*. However, she is included in Leighton and Reynolds.

6. Parker et al. observe, "Whenever the power of the nation is invoked — whether it be in the media, in scholarly texts, or in everyday conversation — we are more likely than not to find it couched as a *love of country*: an eroticized nationalism" (1), and influential books such as Mosse's *Nationalism and Sexuality* and Theweleit's *Male Fantasies* take as their starting points the assumption that the feelings associated with nationalism are best conceptualized in erotic terms.

7. For a discussion of the Irish case, see Boland.

8. As a young man, the two books he was most influenced by were Godwin's *Caleb Williams* and Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling*, representing the cults of rational improvement and sensibility, respectively (MacDonagh, *Hereditary* 39).

9. Quoted in MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 272. MacDonagh also notes that for most of his life, O'Connell's favorite writer was Thomas Moore, famous for

his tearful sentimentalities on the subject of Ireland and the Irish (*Hereditary* 194).

10. See Lloyd, *Anomalous States*, especially 88-124; Eagleton, *Heathcliff*, especially 226-72; and Bhabha's influential formulation in "DissemiNation."

11. Radhakrishnan succinctly sums up this dilemma in the context of Indian nationalism: "The masses can neither be bypassed (for they are the real India) nor can they be legitimated qua people" (89).

12. For example, Douglas argues for the reactionary nature of sentimental fiction's tendency to reinforce nineteenth-century stereotypes of women, while Tompkins argues for its revolutionary potential because it locates the crucial scene of social and political transformation in the sphere traditionally associated with women: the heart and hearth. For another discussion of Victorian sentimentality, see Kaplan.

13. Similarly, Johnson argues that, rather than feminizing culture, politics, or men, the late-eighteenth-century discourses of sensibility entailed the masculinization of formerly feminine traits; those traits were legitimized only because and only insofar as they were recoded masculine (14).

14. Foster observes that O'Connell's origins, which "blended Gaelic clansmen and local Catholic gentry," allowed him to assert his organic connection to both successfully (300).

15. See for example Deane, "Poetry and Song," in which he argues that "[t]he political rhetoric could not be translated into action because it bespoke a unity of purpose that did not exist" (1).

16. The fact that this formulation echoes the ambivalence Bhabha has identified in imperialist discourses of native assimilation reminds us once again of cultural nationalism's formal similarities to imperialism. See *The Location of Culture*, especially 85-92.

17. See MacDonagh, *Emancipist* 229-31, and Davis 41. Some peasants in the south of Ireland actually interpreted an 1828 meeting and the agitation surrounding it as preparation for an uprising (Boyce 141).

18. For an insightful discussion of these issues, see Morash, *Writing*, and Morash, ed. 15-37.

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Consuming Trauma; or,
The Pleasures of Merely Circulating

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Wallace Stevens begins his poem, "The Pleasures of Merely Circulating," with delicious nonsense: "The garden flew round with the angel, / The angel flew round with the clouds, / And the clouds flew round and the clouds flew round / And the clouds flew round with the clouds." But I want to exit from these giddy circles and come down to earth, asking the reader to join me on a journey less certain of its pleasures. Come down, then; let us run the length of this field, sallying back and forth between two ill-matched citations: the first an inviting statement of purpose from a new academic journal, the second an oddly moving, oddly spectral statement from Derrida:

> *Journal x* is not committed to any particular set of answers or even approaches to the question of pleasure, only to the question itself. . . . Our immediate editorial goal is a good deal more modest, indirect, and open-ended: to serve as a sort of ongoing research archive into what Žižek might call "enjoyment as an intellectual factor" by publishing scholarly and personal essays that themselves give pleasure. (Kamps and Watson 2)

> First of all, mourning. We will be speaking of nothing else. It consists always in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present, in the first place by *identifying* the bodily remains and by *localizing* the dead (all ontologization, all semanticization . . . finds itself caught up in this work of mourning but, as such, it does not yet

think it; we are posing here the question of the specter, to the specter). (Derrida 9)

L'Allegro, Il Penseroso; gang of pleasure, gang of pain; Team Jouissance, Team Specter. Running over and through this field, I really want to run around it: to run, if nowhere else, amok. But for me there is no other way. If I am to write this essay, I have to navigate the work of mourning in order to arrive at pleasure's archive, sliding between opposing manifestos, hoping to create a small universe in which I can suture two inverse inclinations — namely, our irrepressible longing for pleasure and our traffic in specters: our omnivorous conversations with the implacable dead.

As I start to write this an announcement comes in from Pretoria. Five of the murderers of Steven Biko have confessed under the auspices of a general amnesty. A few days later, *The New York Times* article on Biko's death features a strange double picture from a museum exhibit in Pretoria. At its outer reaches the camera has recorded a grand, upflung portrait of Biko's head — suggesting a persona already classicized, at a distance, monumental, heroic. A didactic body, yes, but also, in its way, a body for pleasure, evoking identification with the spirit of a deeply ethical man. Beneath this picture the museum has flung another replica of Biko's person (this time solid, tactile, plastic, inert) depicting a body facedown, on the floor, bound, contorted, bleeding, opened: a terrifying representation of a person battered and left to die on the floor of a South African jail (Burns 4).

Between the heroic picture and its obscene plastic double, this exhibit attempts to instantiate two different versions of mourning. First, it offers a body that is easy to introject, to sublimate into a system of great, representative men. But beneath this sublime portraiture we meet something more tenuous and closer to home: a body that seems harder to swallow. Instead of Biko's greatness we are reminded of the power of his political adversaries and his own loss of agency: of flesh that is open to brutality, inertia, decay; of a world unapproachable through grief but openly melancholy over the body's vulnerability and its unfinished projects — a space with too much ancestry. In presenting a butchered body that refuses to be consumed (tipping the viewer back and forth between anger and melancholy, between heroism and the desuetude — the disquiet — of unusable grief), this double picture attempts, as Derrida says, to "ontologize remains," to give them density, spatiality, to identify bodily remains "by *localizing* the dead."

How do we speak to the dead? Or speak about them? What weight should they have in our texts? Last week I waved the picture of Biko's bodies at my students, trying to drive home the contrast between the semiotics of the upflung body and the relentless grotesque, trying to say, "Look, body politics is not just a topic in this course but a set of tropes we constantly deploy." And yet my voice breaks when I talk about the body that inhabits the bottom half of the frame, and I think, I don't like my dead to be this local. It upsets the balance, calls out too many ghosts. But every time I get rid of one ghost, another takes its place. This time I am shopping. I see a placard in the back window of a large van. "My son was killed by a drunk driver. I am MADD." Once again

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the unexpected ontologizing of remains, the making present, the relentless localizing. I want to walk away, and yet my own flesh surprises me with its vehemence, an anger directed not at the drunk driver, but at the narrator, the driver of this car. I think, "Why is she saying this to me?" before I construct the proper empathic response. Of course this woman has as much right to hurl invectives, to call out the ghost, as anyone.

What do we owe to the dead? For IRA nationalists (those who became political prisoners during the 1970s and supported Bobby Sands throughout the Hunger Strike of 1981), the dying demanded a special brand of silence; they aroused a painful new consciousness about the irrelevance of everyday speech.

> When a guy was on hunger strike in the wing, the noise level went down. Everybody was conscious all the time that there was someone next to you dying. When the food came around you had to be conscious about not shouting, "What do you think of the meat today?" Your complaints were relegated to something meaningless. You couldn't go to the door and shout, "There's something with this grub." (Feldman 248)

It seems all too clear what one owes to the dying, but with the dead, the case seems utterly different and perhaps more diffuse:

> The night Bobby Sands died was just . . . you never heard a sound for hours. Nobody spoke and nobody would go near the door. The way we knew he was dead, a screw came down and there was a grill at the end of the wing, and with his baton he started banging the grill slowly, Dong! — dong! — dong! — like a church bell. It was just a hollow sound. From that point on whenever someone died the screws would ring the grill and another one would walk up the wing slowly pulling a trolley behind him, saying, "Bring out your dead. How many dead do youse have for us today?": It was like the plague. (249)

Once we enter this hollow space and try to imagine Sands's slow and deliberate death, the thematizing question — what do we owe to the dead? — seems both impertinent and much too obtuse. And yet deferring this question seems equally counterproductive. We need to take note of the ease with which Bobby Sands's heartbeat, his voice, can be displaced by a screw, a prison guard, banging the grill slowly. As the guard cries out in his mocking voice, the empty space left by a man's death becomes frighteningly co-optable, available to others; it demands renewed efforts at counter-speech. Yet how do we narrate or speak for the dead? What allows this speech to grant them proper weight, substance, dignity? If this weight is too heavy, can we go on writing? Do we want to? If the weight is too light, can we do justice to the injustices endured by the specter?

In interviews with members of the IRA prison collective recorded in Allen Feldman's *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, we learn that for those who bore witness to Sands's death, "a new sense of urgency . . . set in all around. It meant that you were *scriobbing*

[writing] all day. . . . [I]t gave everybody a sense of doing something" (247). It is the question of writing, of finding proper tropes, that obsesses Sands's fellow prisoners:

> The Hunger Strike completed the textualization of the prisoner's body. As Bobby Sands and subsequent hunger strikers lay dying, the rest of the Blanketmen engaged in the intensified production of political texts that were smuggled out of the prison. These texts constituted a literature of conversion, letters to international organizations, political groups, unions, governments, and prominent individuals which publicized the Hunger Strike and asked support for the protest. Certain prisoners writing with pen refills on cigarette papers were able to produce 200 letters a day. It was a remarkable literary production which seemed to flow directly from the dying body of the hunger strike. (250)

The ventriloquism we lend to the dead, the tropes we clothe them in, can have the power to re-dress their bodies, to speak volumes.

Differently positioned (not only *not* incarcerated, but at relative leisure to pursue polymorphous political passions), liberal academics also reproduce for themselves and their students stories of trauma, structural violence, systematic injustice, slaughter, inequality. These painful stories — about deterritorialization, decolonization, people pushed past the margins, bodies brutalized, children victimized, populations dying, in exile — suggest a world of subsemantic history that demands the weight of political speech. At the same time (or within the same heterodox space but under another name), we inhabit an academic world that is busy consuming trauma — busy eating, swallowing, perusing, consuming, exchanging, circulating, creating professional connections — through its stories about the dead. We are obsessed with stories that must be passed on, that must not be passed over. But aren't we also drawn to these stories from within an elite culture driven by its own economies: by the pains and pleasures of needing to publish, by salaries and promotions that are themselves driven by acts of publication, by, among other forces, the pleasures of merely circulating?

From within this complex matrix of pleasure and pain, I want to come back to my earlier question. Given the danger of commodification and the pleasures of academic melancholy — of those exquisite acts of mourning that create a conceptual profit — what are our responsibilities when we write about the dead? In describing the fate of Bobby Sands, or the bodies of "cunts" (designated male victims of political violence) and "stiffs" (dead bodies that deliver a "message" of feminization to the other side) that have transformed Belfast's political geography, does Feldman meet these responsibilities, does he take the right tone? Do I? How are we allowed to taste the dead's bodies, to put their lives in our mouths? How do we identify the proper tone, the proper images, for holding — for awakening — someone else's bodily remains?

This question has been called forth unexpectedly, reluctantly, unpredictably, by the last issue — also the first issue — of *Journal x*. Turning its pages with a prospective happiness and dread (a bizarre, all-too-familiar happiness bred of proprietorship: there's my name, I'm part of this editorial board;

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there's my space, I've been asked to write a review-essay on "Reading for Plea-
sure"), I'm enjoying myself. I like reading about late-night TV in the essay on
Céline and "Lettermania"; I'm interested in Civil-War American freaks, and
then I turn to the next to the last essay, "Estranged Fruit: Making and Unmak-
ing in Mississippi's Jails" — thinking randomly, circumlocuitously (as I sit in
the dusky half-light of a midwestern afternoon, awash in that meditative fren-
zy bred of reading too much southern literature) — I think — oh, here's a piece
on the South, and I dive into the article, feet first, before my exuberance turns
to dust.

"Estranged Fruit: Making and Unmaking in Mississippi's Jails" is an essay
that begins with portraits of black men who have died in Mississippi's jails.
Andre Jones, the son of local NAACP activists, was brought to the Simpson
County Jail on August 22, 1992, on multiple charges that included carrying a
concealed weapon and possessing a stolen vehicle. He was 18. Less than twen-
ty-four hours later Jones was found hanging in his cell — dangling from the
shoelace of his own Nike sneaker.

Reading this essay about Andre Jones and other people who have died in
Mississippi's jails, I no longer feel able to write about my own acts of reading
for pleasure. Instead, I want to take up the status of griefwork, of the work of
mourning, in academic writing. What happens when we "textualize" bodies,
when we write about other people's deaths (or other people's cultures) as some-
thing one "reads"? The author of "Estranged Fruit," Barry Gildea, argues that
"jails are sites for complex and plural readings, especially where contested hang-
ings occur. The incidental death category marks the first opportunity to
explore a more imaginative or creative interpretation of the jail hanging as a
mythic and literary act of incidental annihilation through intentional civil dis-
obedience" (124). What does it mean to convert someone's death while in cus-
tody into a "literary act"? If this *was*, in fact, a suicide, how should we respond
to the suggestion that Jones's failure to leave a suicide note must be "read" as an
act of resistance? (That is, what constitutes proper evidence for drawing such
a conclusion? Who is doing the "writing" here — and why?) Or how do we
evaluate this conclusion: "By resisting the urge to determine and dictate the
meaning of his death, Jones has insured that he will be heard. He imposes no
meaning, but still 'imprisons' you within a text, a world of his own (un)making,
a world which soon becomes peopled with the texts of other hanging bodies"
(116)? In what sense can a hanging body be "a text"? What happens when
"imprisons" becomes a floating signifier that slips away from its referent so eas-
ily? No longer a description of the physical crisis experienced by a black man
in custody, it becomes a loosely held metaphor describing the psychological sta-
tus of an elite group of readers.

This transferability suggests a too easy equivalence between epistemologi-
cal prisons and actual ones, between the dead and the living. What are the dan-
gers inherent in figuring — or dis-figuring — the specter? How far should we
go in invoking the ghost, how far in consuming its traumas? If circulating the
suffering of others has become the meat and potatoes of our profession, if this
circulation evokes a lost history but also runs the dangers of commodification,
then how should we proceed? In producing figures that are either too vacuous

or too lurid, too theatrical or too theoretical, can one reproduce trauma or loss in the wrong way? To put this somewhat differently, how do we control our own acts of *écriture*, of seeming to read bodies, when we may really be reading, then acting upon (interpreting and reinscribing) our own figurations?

To answer these questions, my argument needs to extend beyond "Estranged Fruit"'s local strategies. To stay honest, I will have to turn back on my own mode of troping the death of Steven Biko, my own act of invoking the specter. (Is this a too opportunistic, too lurid way of inviting the audience into this essay? And who decides?) But I also want to focus on two urgent questions. First, what is the role of the critic's own writing in producing someone else's death as a "text"? Second, what resources should elites bring to bear in ventriloquizing the world on behalf of non-elites — how conscious should we be about usurping others' worlds with our words? These are questions with subtexts: in asking whether there are proper and improper styles for eliciting the stories of the dead, we need to reexamine the appropriations of anthropology's powerful methods within the burgeoning field of cultural studies. And in asking whether we can participate in critique without overriding the effects and affect of local mourning, we need to reexamine the thematics of loss that so preoccupies a post-Marxist academy. For if the abiding question of this essay is what we owe to the dead, this question has to be nuanced once again. The question is not only what is *our* stake in their narratives, but what is *their* stake in ours.

With these questions in mind, let us turn again to "Estranged Fruit: Making and Unmaking in Mississippi's Jails," for here is an essay that speaks about the recently dead, of a young black man, and then another black man, of white men and women, all found hanging. The deaths of these black men while in custody have been interpreted by their own African-American communities as lynchings but labeled officially as suicides. Gildea's verdict, as well, is that these deaths are suicides, that they "indicate a strong commitment to live or die by a *nomos* other than that of the state of Mississippi: namely, the dignity, honesty, and sovereignty of a pure form of American individualism. Inmate suicide is a singular act of subversion, both a renunciation and an enunciation of violence" (139).

Before launching into my critique — set off, in part, by disbelief in such purity — I should say that I'm convinced Gildea embarked on this essay with the best will in the world — that is, with every intention of making new space for the dead to speak. But for me the fine line between ventriloquism and depersonification (what I will later describe as the de-anthropomorphizing of the persons of black men who have died while in custody) gets breached here again and again, perhaps because Gildea is so eager to close the door on the possibility that these men were murdered; or perhaps because, in the specter's presence, "appropriate" acts of personification are hard to control. In any event, Gildea argues that the quick availability of southern narratives of lynching for describing deaths while in custody may cause politically minded, left-leaning critics to overlook the despairing sense of agency that drives some men and women to kill themselves while in jail. That is, enthralled by victims' stories, critics of state violence may fail to register an inmate's desperate attempt at embodied protest.

But the desire to construct this alternative scene of instruction is complex-
ly motivated. Gildea insists that the "theory" that Jones and his compatriots
were lynched "has abstracted the villains, so that all of white Mississippi is
implicated as a mob" (120). Indeed? What are the author's own transference
points, the nodes of racial crisis or white writing that motivate such observa-
tions? What anxieties might the narrative of a black man's "heroic" suicide
attempt to ward off? Later in this essay I want to generalize from the particu-
lars of this essay to explore the problems in transferential thinking that can
remain sublimated or subliminal within the current methodologies of cultural
studies. But for now, let me suggest that Gildea's argument about heroic sui-
cides in custody suffers from numerous epistemological glitches, including its
misapplication of a romantic version of unified selfhood (felt in the invocation
of "a pure form of American individualism"), its description of the possibility of
a purely instrumental response to prison trauma (in ecstatic tones reminiscent
of Byron's "The Prisoner of Chillon"), and its ends-dominated interpretation of
events (the notion that we're allowed to write history backwards, from results
we can see to intentions we can only intuit). But however strong my sense of
epistemological recoil at the model of history that constructs these conclusions
— the teleological assumptions about how history works, the transcendental
assumptions about how imprisoned subjects function — my first response, in
reality, was not this academic.

What disturbed me even more than this essay's facts or its argument is the
question of how the dead are narrated — how their bodies are glossed. The
pivotal, mediating figure, the point of transference that introduces this essay, is
Andre Jones, a black man found hanging by his own shoelace. The section
introducing his story begins with a subtitle, "Starting on a Shoe String," a string
of words that makes Jones's body the subject of cleverly nuanced academic play.
What is gained by this painful irreverence, by a pun that works over and
through a dead man's body with the cavalier bitterness of a good Gershwin
song? I think, what am I able to demand of the author of this or any essay, as
she or he holds open the bodies of others for my gaze? I think, language is dif-
ficult, and objects never go into their concepts without leaving something
behind, without leaving a remainder. But in this essay that so appalls me I find
something more than a remainder: I find too many remains. There are too
many bodies here, and too little care for them.

However bitterly or acerbically it is meant, the pun "starting on a shoe-
string" functions too glibly to lighten the burden of writing about the dead. In
taking a body already disfigured by violence and making a "figure" out of it —
a trope, a pun, a sleight-of-word — the author relocalizes Jones's death, his
bodily remains, within the entrepreneurial space of academic play. Elsewhere
in the essay this disfiguration seems even more dangerous:

> For Andre Jones, jail hanging may have been a somatic form of cultural crit-
> icism attesting to the incontestable reality of the pain and torture of Mis-
> sissippi jails. But as Scarry would predict, the "language" of this hanging
> event is not entirely clear. You cannot be sure what the hanging is "saying"
> about the pain of the inmate. This linguistic problem calls into question
> the source and agency of Jones's unmaking.

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Scarry's work emphasizes the importance of reading the body as a text, a valuable approach to the story of Jones's death. The posture of Andre Jones emphasizes the body in a way that cancels the contents of the world: the suspension of a body from the shower bar, dangling like fruit, fleshy, pulpy, a liquefying solid. The human involved is reduced from a sentient being into a mere body, matter, the object of gravity's pull. In the case of Jones, a single shoestring unmakes the made, for in his world shoes were both a possession of status and a position of plight, as in "I wouldn't want to be in your shoes." His hanging synthesizes each connotation so that the plight of pain becomes objectified and he becomes, like the shoe, something that dangles from a string. Andre Jones the sentient being disappears and is represented by a black Nike hightop sneaker, the kind young urban blacks sometimes kill for. Because of shoes, some urban teenagers kill others; by means of shoes, do some jailed urban teenagers kill themselves? Andre Jones did not kill for shoes but instead died by means of them, his Mississippi-made body transformed into both a shoe and a field of crisis. Unfortunately for Mississippi, however, the hanging of Andre Jones has the appearance of bearing the antecedent state insignia of lynching. (115)

These paragraphs ride on the same somatic techniques that the Pretoria museum exhibit uses to vivify Steven Biko's death; they swerve between a heroicizing classicism and the prurient anarchy of the grotesque. The author begins with a small gesture of heroism. If Jones has killed himself, this act becomes a form of "somatic cultural criticism": that is, in death his body is wedded to theory; it becomes a visceral act of cultural critique (it is "like" a cultural critic's acts of cultural criticism). But almost immediately Gildea retracts this violent yoking of unlike subjectivities, and his text moves dialectically to acknowledge that the remains of this death are bodily, not linguistic, so that any act of "reading" must come to a halt, at least until "theory" can come to the rescue. To cope with the subject's silence, the critic must borrow figures that permit the reading of this body as text: "a valuable approach." (But valuable for whom? Who profits when someone's else's body is turned into a set of tropes to be perused as an academic commodity? Here even silence can become a surplus value the reader can reap.)

Here two different modes of problematic thinking become visible. First, this paragraph appropriates figures from Billie Holliday's "Strange Fruit," a bitter song about the effects of lynching and mob violence in the postbellum South. In the initial verse of this song, death is almost made bearable — it is lightened — by displacing the traumas endured by once-living men onto an aestheticized object from the natural world: "Southern trees bear strange fruit, / Blood on the leaves and red at the root. / Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze, / Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees." But while "men" and "fruit" are so easily linked, what the song points to again and again is the distance between the living metaphor and the dead body. That is, the fact of displacement (the way that the personification of "fruit" is so eerily mapped onto the de-anthropomorphized bodies of black men) in itself makes a political statement. It suggests that these bodies have already endured such displace-

ment long before their death. In the pre-civil-rights South, African Americans, whether dead or alive, were barred from crossing the symbolic threshold into personification; from the perspective of the dominant culture they were forced to hover in the uncivil space between human and inhuman worlds. As Hortense Spillers describes the lives of black women during this period:

> Slavery did not transform the black female into an embodiment of carnality at all, as the myth of the black woman would tend to convince us. She became instead the principal point of passage between the human and non-human world. Her issue became the focus of a cunning difference . . . the route by which the dominant male decided the distinction between humanity and "other" . . . [decided that] black is vestibular to culture. In other words, the black person mirrored for the society around her what a human being was not. (76)

Billie Holliday's song defines the hanging bodies of black men as another point of impossible passage. That something as heavy as a body can be made so light, so irrelevant, so metaphoric, is the first ironic point of this song. The second is that this very lightness is only possible because African-American men have already been de-anthropomorphized by white society. Thus Holliday's allusion to the lynched bodies of black men as "strange fruit" resounds so caustically because these men have died several deaths. As metaphors, the song's spectral bodies offer a doubly mimetic space, the frightening specter of "emphasis added" to injury. This song not only calls out to the traumas endured by black men but opens a space for exploring the dehumanization (the lost personhood or personification) suffered by the African-American community at large. The re-imaging and de-animation of black bodies as "fruit for the crows to pluck" offers a commentary not only on the practice of lynching but on a white metaphysic that makes blackness vestibular to humanity.

My central critique of Gildea's "reading" of Andre Jones's body is that his metaphors are complicit in rather than critical of these older acts of dehumanization. He ignores what the Holliday song knows too well: namely, that the dangers implicit in the rhetoricization of a black man's body can have material effects — that the depersonification of African Americans is an ongoing, repetitive stratagem within American history. The argument his essay proposes — that in creating his own hanging death, Andre Jones "objectifies" himself on his own shoestring — seems too self-serving. In "Estranged Fruit" men are made into metaphors so they can be harvested by the critic.

To put this somewhat differently, the racially-marked bodies of Gildea's essay seem all too available for acts of rhetorical seizure and conceptual violence. Gildea begins his essay with the deaths of two black men, Andre Jones and David Scott Campbell, even though he wants to argue that the inmate "suicides" in Mississippi's jails are evenly distributed among black and white males as well as among black and white females. Color is esssentially effaced as a *topic* here, but it is all too present as the spectacular site of exoticism and readerly transference. What part does race (or ethnicity or sexual or religious preference) play in making bodies available for academic consumption? For example,

in the paragraphs just cited, Jones's body is said to cancel the world. (But does it? For whom? For his parents? His peers?) A string of metaphors follows, as if the body of a hanged man could dangle from a series of tropes, transformed from fruit to shoe to ghetto tough: a persona killed (or killing) because of his shoes; a person who is already depersonified.

And this is my second critique of the problematic thinking that makes these lurid figures possible.[1] While "world-canceling" is meant to suggest the world-negating capacities of suicide itself, this cancellation of the world offers a limit case for examining what happens when we read synecdochally, when a body becomes a "text," is excerpted from its context, and then asked to re-represent the meaning of this dissipated context. That is, this illusion of world-canceling marks the spot where Gildea's own prose starts to saturate the dead man's "evacuated" space; this is the beginning of a series of phrases that attempt to make trauma available for a certain kind of argument, a certain kind of consumption. What does it mean to turn bodies into rhetoric?

Let me give a brief overview. First, we are told that Jones's dead body is hanging, like fruit, like the hanged men from the old Billie Holliday song. But if it's "like" a fruit, it's also not like a fruit at all: a shower head is not a branch, a shoe string is not a twig, and Jones lived and died in a postmodern era, when even the Ku Klux Klan has its own web site. So, the author concludes, this body is not such "strange fruit" after all; instead, it is "like" a shoe — it hangs from a shoe string, doesn't it? And "young urban blacks" sometimes kill each other for their shoes — that's common knowledge, isn't it? — whether such "knowledge" is relevant to Jones's life or not. (Notice how cultural context returns in this selective way as the outgrowth of the textualization of Jones's body, of the selective pressures of a chosen field of synecdoches). Well, if kids kill themselves *for* shoes, then why not *with* shoes? All this demands is the shift of one preposition — not a big deal. The body becomes — not itself—but *an effect of reading*. It is transformed into an Ovidian site that can be manipulated for the sake of a certain form of academic mastery.

What I am trying to show, in crudely approximating the logic that drives these two paragraphs, is the way this narrative mimics a set of techniques that cultural critics use all the time, techniques that cultural studies borrows from anthropology and anthropology borrows from literary criticism: a method James Clifford calls "textualization." (It occurs in "Estranged Fruit" when a young man's body is excerpted from both its jailhouse and neighborhood contexts and made into the critic's own plangent metaphor: "a black Nike hightop sneaker.")

For Clifford, textualization "is the process through which unwritten behavior, speech, beliefs, oral tradition, and ritual come to be marked as a corpus, a potentially meaningful ensemble separated out from an immediate discursive or performative situation" (38). This corpus has extraordinarily mobile and metaphoric properties. By extrapolating one detail from a cultural context and making that detail into a "text" — a site for interpretation, for reading — what emerges is a gathering of synecdoches that can be read in isolation from their dialogic field, allowing a world to reemerge under the control of images that the critic herself chooses to emphasize. In other words, a part is used to reconstruct

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the meaning of the whole, but with content and context blown away. When context reemerges, it comes not as itself, but as a narrative spun out of the interpreter-anthropologist's poesis, her own acts of making.

The dangers of this spinning are obvious. That is, by extrapolating one detail from its "background" and designating that detail as a meaning-filled "text," what emerges is the invention of a tropological field that grows out of the abstracted detail itself. Even more disconcerting, the evacuation of a particular context can be disguised in tropes of abundance that both dehumanize the body and make it into an object so we can continue to "read" it — that is, to recreate it by piling metaphors and similes upon it so that it becomes something other than "itself."

This observation poses an additional problem. In perusing Andre Jones's death we can say that there is, of course, no "self" here at all. What happens when the corpus is really a corpse? You'd think the dead would be silent, over-easy, eager for the materiality bestowed by some critic's "texting." But the very opposite seems true, for the invocation of "Strange Fruit" has already summoned the borrowed figures of the dead into the margins of this essay — and once they are summoned, they will not bow down. "Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh / Then the sudden smell of burning flesh. / Here's a fruit for the crows to pluck. / For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck. / For the sun to rot, for the tree to drop. / Here's a strange and bitter crop." Holliday's song is acrid and heavy; it conjures the weight of the dead to testify around the "corpus" of another hanged man. Later, I want to address the problematic use of "Strange Fruit" as metaphoric space for imagining "the new" (here, as a set of metaphors that Gildea uses to construct an alternate theory of violent death while in custody). But for now, let me simply suggest that the ways in which this song is made formulaic and the subject of refutation has the effect of making the specter emerge even more palpably.

What does it mean to turn bodies into rhetoric? Rhetoric seems complicit in evacuating these dead men's worlds; it cancels the brutal facticity of the body's local fate for the appropriative potentials of metaphor. At the same time, some form of troping, of de- or re-anthropomorphizing, is inevitable whenever we speak of the dead. Given the fact that the dead can only live as tropes, as figures, for the remainder of this essay I want to explore the repercussions of this problem for cultural criticism.[2] I want to take on a series of open topics or questions.

1) How do we account for, and respond to, the weight of the dead and the potential dissipation of the body in writing?

2) What does it mean to make the dead into "texts"? Or, as my colleague Marlon Ross has asked, what are the dangers of doing anthropology with a dead subject?

3) What is the relation between reading (or writing) for pleasure and the specter? Marx suggests that the dead — not as the facts but as the "figures" of history — feed revolutions: their bodies are given leading roles in political movements and documents; their spectrality offers the metaphoric foundation of the new. If the specter provides the tropes we push off from, or push away from, in order to suggest other, more utopian orders, what can we conclude

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about the relation between the spectral and the pleasure of "the new"? Or, to make a more local intervention, how does excitement about new ideas (part of *Journal x*'s motive in creating a journal focused on pleasure) depend on the specter, rest on the spectral properties — the tropics — of the dead?

4) Finally, what is the status of griefwork and the thematics of loss within the *fin de siècle* academy? How should we respond to, and in what tones should we write about, our obsessive recoveries of subsemantic histories? Are we inventing new "brands" of transgenerational haunting? Or is academic consumerism an inevitable outgrowth of the culture of late capitalism that nevertheless makes a crucial space for recovering the lost topos of transnational, transinstitutional mourning?

1. The Weight of the Dead

The Communist Manifesto begins with a ghost: "Ein Gespenst geht um in Europa — a specter is haunting Europe." But in *Specters of Marx* Derrida stalks the ghost of Marx himself. He wants to conjure not only with the lost ghosts of communism but with Marx's own obsession with specters:

> Men make their own history [*ihre eigene Geschichte*] but they do not make it just as they please [*aus freien Stücken*]; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past [*überlieferten Umständen*]. The tradition of all the dead generations [*aller toten Geschlecter*] weighs [*lastet*] like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (Quoted in Derrida 108)

In calling out to the specter we encounter a new kind of nightmare: not the gothic terror of being haunted by the dead, but the greater terror *of not being haunted*, of ceasing to feel the weight of past generations in one's bones. That is, the words we use to hold the dead, to call out to them, are too porous, too leaky. Even the English version of Marx's phrase, "the tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living," has more heft in the German. In Marx's original text, the specter "'lastet wie ein Alp,' that is, weighs like one of those ghosts that give nightmares; the French translation reads simply 'pese d'un poids tres lourd,' weighs very heavily; as often happens in translations, the ghost drops off into oblivion or, in the best of cases, it is dissolved into approximate figures" (Derrida 108).

The problem haunting my essay is precisely the danger of this dissolution of the dead into "approximate figures." Take, for example, my own attempt to invoke the ghost in the paragraph on Steven Biko that begins this essay. Here I want to instantiate a physical dignity for the dead, to invoke the terrors of imprisonment and choicelessness (the nightmare weight that descends upon Biko) as well as the forces of history that Biko, in his political actions, sought to lift. I want some portion of this weight to descend on the reader's body, to create a burdensome space for thinking about the relationship between representational melancholy and political praxis.

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But as soon as I open this scene, something else starts to happen; I remobilize the specter for a different set of rhetorical ends. Planning to talk later in this essay about what happens to black men in prisons, I ask the invocation of "Biko" to set the scene. His body lends itself to the project of making this essay into a well-working object, an echo chamber for my most urgent ideas. In the midst of such considerations, where are we, how close to the ghost? And what happens to the work, the figuration of mourning? I write a sentence, then strike it out: "I wanted to name my son after Steven Biko, but couldn't, didn't — a martyr's name. But aren't half the names in the white man's canon martyr's names — just buried under centuries of overuse?" It sounds too personal, it breaks the tone, draws too much attention to my own psychic investments in this project when I want to draw out something more serious. But one of my criticisms of Gildea's essay is precisely the question of transference. In making a body into a text, what investments does the cultural critic bring to her work, and when should they become visible?

Meanwhile, I'm looking over my shoulder and thinking about audience: how well is my interpretation taking hold? Am I doing better than other interpretations? But before resolving this problem my efforts to invoke the specter are taken over by the sheer delight of thinking, by the spectacular lure of analysis. Invoking the ghost, I become half-acrobatic, take pleasure in associative vertiginousness and move farther from the lure of the specter. That is, the very act of thinking about the spectral object makes it even more spectral. Theodor Adorno defines the problems that the thinking subject encounters in each act of definition or analysis in his *Negative Dialectics*:

> The spell cast by the subject becomes equally a spell cast over the subject. Both spells are driven by the Hegelian fury of disappearance. The subject is spent and impoverished in its categorial performance; to be able to define and articulate what it confronts . . . the subject must dilute itself to the point of mere universality, for the sake of the objective validity of those definitions. It must cut loose from itself as much as from the cognitive object, so that this object will be reduced to its concept, according to plan. The objectifying subject contracts into a point of abstract reason, and finally into logical noncontradictoriness. (139)

This is a ponderous passage containing a crucial idea. First Adorno marks the impoverishment of the subject, of the "texting" person. In seeking definitions or articulations with "objective validity" the subject cuts herself loose from the cognitive object. This object, in turn, is cut loose from everything except for its "concept," its dematerialized idea. In writing or thinking we experience a need to turn things into concepts so that they can be spoken about. But this very need casts a spell that breeds disappearance: both subject and object are diluted and spent when they are described under a common denominator. Both object and subject "contract," in a simultaneous disappearance of two different contexts. This is the very problem that the double-bodied exhibit in the Pretoria museum is trying — so awkwardly — to make intelligible. Neither of these bodies allows Biko to haunt us sufficiently; each flirts with the problem of disappearance.

I seem to have come to a binary impasse: either the ghost speaks, or we must endure — that is, become complicit in — its silence, the attenuation of the dead within the oblivion of approximate figures, figures designed to communicate but always encountering the emptiness of the concept, the flatness of theory, the excess of lurid projections, or the instrumentality of the body made spectacle. But there is a third possibility, one narrated by Homer in *The Odyssey*, in the scenes where Odysseus journeys to Hades to talk with the dead. Abandoning Circe for Ithaca, Odysseus is faced with another detour; he requires "the strengthless heads of the perished dead" to learn "how to make your way home on the sea where the fish swarm" (10.540). Faced with this journey, "the inward heart in me was broken, / and I sat down on the bed and cried, nor did the heart in me / wish to go on living any longer, nor to look on the sunlight. / But when I had glutted myself with rolling about and weeping, / then at last I spoke aloud" (496-9). Odysseus must find a form of speech not overburdened with grief, with figures of glut or excess. In fact, his strategy for getting the dead to speak will involve a similar self-regulation. Approaching Hades, Odysseus digs a pit and pours libations for the dead, "first / honey mixed with milk, then a second pouring of sweet wine" (519-20). Finally this pit is filled with the blood of the living:

> Now when, with sacrifices and prayers, I had so entreated
> the hordes of the dead, I took the sheep and cut their throats
> over the pit, and the dark-clouding blood ran in, and the souls
> of the perished dead gathered to the place, up out of Erebos, brides, and
> young unmarried men, and long-suffering elders,
> virgins, tender and with the sorrows of young hearts upon them,
> and many fighting men killed in battle, stabbed with brazen
> spears, still carrying their bloody armor upon them.
> These came swarming around my pit from every direction
> with inhuman clamor, and green fear took hold of me. (11.34-43)

This "dark-clouding" blood becomes the locus of a bizarre plenitude; it provides three different conundrums for thinking about the "approximate figures" of the dead.

First, why is this blood necessary? It would seem that the dead can only speak when they partake of the things of this world. If the images clothing the dead are important, it is because these figures are the gateway to their availability. At the same time, the dress that we bestow upon the phantom is inevitably our own. That is, the trace of the specter's speech resides neither in the dead's wished-for presence nor in their oblivion, but in their inevitable hybridity. They must be fed on the life blood, the figures of the present, if they are to speak.

And here we come to a second conundrum. Odysseus offers this sacrifice so that the dead can become substantial. But when the phantoms begin to swarm, Odysseus instructs his men to draw their swords. Initially, only a handful among the restless "hordes of the dead" are allowed to drink; the rest are withheld figuration. Here we face the question of both posthumous harm and

equal access to figuration: how do we choose *who* can speak, how do we account for the missing persons of the dead? This gatekeeping function or archival censorship provided by historical narrative is also the source of Walter Benjamin's famous call for a materialist, interventionist history, one that reestablishes a possible voice for "those who are lying prostrate," that refuses to celebrate either the victor's monuments or his specters. "To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was' (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. . . . Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins. And this enemy has not ceased to be victorious" (255). For Benjamin "the way it really was" is always an invention of the victor's culture. We find an example in *Z Magazine* in a parodic portrait of an anchorman reading the evening news: "This just in, a Pakistani jet crashed into a Libyan cruise ship killing all 5,000 passengers instantly." In the next frame he looks irritated: "I don't get it . . . where's the story?" A hand juts into the frame with an update and suddenly the anchorman reads with renewed emphasis: *"There were three Americans on board! Oh the Humanity!"* (17). For the phantom to speak, it must participate in the *telos* of Odysseus's journey, in his country-seeking quest.

Given this *telos*, is it surprising that, among those originally withheld figuration and left in the margins, is Odysseus's mother? When Odysseus sees her, "I broke into tears at the sight of her and my heart pitied her, / but even so, for all my thronging sorrow, I would not / let her draw near the blood until I had questioned Teiresias" (11.87-9). When his mother speaks, Odysseus wants nothing more than to hold her: "Mother, why will you not wait for me, when I am trying / to hold you, so that even in Hades with our arms embracing / we can both take the satisfaction of dismal mourning? / Or are you nothing but an image?" (210-14). What kind of mourning is this? Why does Odysseus, who at first refuses to talk to his mother, now long for her embrace? In addition to the question of gatekeeping, Homer opens a space for meditating upon the image as a way of both "holding" and "holding off" the material presence of the dead.[3]

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau suggests that we are always at the margins of Hades, always surrounded by meditative spaces that hold open (and speak for) the dead. "There is no place that is not haunted by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can 'invoke' or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in" (108). But in a letter that questions these enchantments (at least as they were depicted in a recent essay collection on *The Geography of Identity*), my friend Richard Godden demurs:

> Concerning your account of place as haunted with the residues of wasted work: the problem is that ghosts are the evacuees of memory and that to obtain substance they must be shed by the actions (and thoughts) of those who live. Unless spectres materialize through lived institutions, they will make no path, leave no track and evaporate. I have always been simultaneously impressed and skeptical over Volosinov's claim that "no word forgets its path" — would that this were so. Surely the linguist meant "no word should be permitted to forget its path."

In search of such memories, what forgiveness, what reprieve? In recognizing that every space is haunted, we are still at one remove from the enormity of transgenerational haunting. It is only when someone bears witness or gives the specter its due (its space of political and institutional articulation) that the empty images of the dead can be held up and held open. Given the importance (and impotence) of writing from within the complexity of our own killing fields, is "textualization" really so bad as a strategy? Isn't the task of abstraction a potential response, a valiant attempt to answer Benjamin's plea for a politically responsible history, one that reaches out deliberately, blindly, to respond to a moment of danger?

2. Doing Anthropology with a Dead Subject

To answer, I want to look at a series of books that ask whether it is possible to theorize other bodies, other cultures, while holding open a space for mourning, for the lost object. What relationship to theory will help us explore our repetitive love for the specter, our continual pleasure in being haunted by someone else's dead?

E. Valentine Daniel refigures these questions in *Charred Lullabies: Chapters in an Anthropography of Violence*, a book that frames a new anthropological discourse to describe the results of nationalist violence in Sri Lanka. Daniel began the research for this volume in 1982, when he planned a trip to collect folk songs by Tamil women who worked on Sri Lanka's tea estates. But instead of lullabies, Daniel encountered a country torn apart by an unstoppable conflict between Tamil minorities and a Sinhalese majority. He begins *Charred Lullabies* by invoking the results of this ongoing war:

> Many have died. To say more is to simplify, but to fathom the statement is also to make the fact bearable. Tellipali, Nilaveli, Manippay, Boosa, Dollar Farm, Kokkadicholai — mere place-names of another time — have been transformed into names of places spattered with blood and mortal residue. . . . Many have died. How to give an account of these shocking events without giving in to a desire to shock? And more important, what does it mean to give such an account? That is the burden of this book. (3)

Encountering these suddenly archaic remains, Daniel begins to question not only the narrative strategies of anthropology but its deepest structures. In confronting atrocities, what good are methods or theories "designed to enhance" our understanding of *coherent* social units such as castes or clans? These ordinary, structure-seeking explanations "had suddenly become inappropriate," forcing the anthropologist to turn to more urgent questions. First, how does one write an ethnography of violence "without its becoming a pornography of violence"? Theory seems to offer one alternative. It provides a flattening-out of affect: abstraction instead of prurience. But theory also extracts a cost, namely, "the price of betraying those victims of violence (and in at least one instance, a perpetrator of violence) who wished to communicate with the

anthropologist and through him to the outside world some part of the experi-
ence of the passion and the pain of violence in its brutal immediacy" (4).

The burden of describing the pain of another is daunting, and Daniel
describes the impotence any writer feels in the face of this demand. A possible
solution would be to do nothing. But is this an adequate response to the
anthropologist's dialogic contract with his or her subjects? The questions go
on. How does one protect the anonymity of storytellers whose confessions will
single them out as informers? Will Daniel himself be able to return to Sri
Lanka after writing so frankly about the costs of civil war and human torture?

On these several points, Daniel judges his book a failure — the prurience
of violence leaks in and theory is advanced with a vengeance. But in this delib-
erate space of imperfection something haunting emerges. By refusing the easy
marriage of theory to world, what we get is a *nervous* system, an anthropology
anxious about its own logos, a writing that recognizes its own status *as writing*,
as "anthropo*graphy*."[4] For Daniel any theory pretending to account for the grim
facticity of violence or death must stand both under and apart from the mate-
riality it theorizes. Interpretation must proceed *without* complacency about its
own accuracy; theory must never explain or evacuate "its" events. Instead, they
must come together as "jarring juxtapositions."

While Val Daniel opens a space for contemplating the performance of a
"nervous" ethnography, I want to open a coequal space for becoming nervous
about the strategies of reading implicit in some forms of cultural criticism. To
situate the need for a metapraxis both bold in its interventions and edgy with
stutterance, I want to provide a quick overview of the historiography of ethnog-
raphy that James Clifford supplies in *The Predicament of Culture*, in which
"authoritative," "interpretive," and "discursive" anthropology offer three differ-
ent sites for interpolating a cultural field.

Clifford begins by mapping the techniques deployed by the ethnographer
of the 1920s and 30s, an empiricist who embraced the fiction of an "authorita-
tive anthropology." Defying the contradictory status inherent in the role of
"participant observer," confident that the monograph could control the dialog-
ic textures of other cultures, anthropology became a social "science" based on
the belief that social systems could be abstracted from empirical evidence —
and that these systems were separable from the anthropologist's own aesthetic
practice. Since observation could amass a discrete body of data to get at social
truth, the eccentricities and discriminating habits of fieldworkers went unsung.
That is, the authoritative anthropologist made herself into a specter. Without
noticing, she provided another culture's phantasmatic ground.

In the work of Clifford Geertz and Company the field shifts toward "inter-
pretive anthropology" and the figurative nature of "the poetic processes by
which 'cultural objects' are invented and treated as meaningful" comes into
greater focus (38). We have already seen that "textualization," an act of abstrac-
tion in which an event or behavior is separated out from a larger strata of mean-
ing, comes to be understood as the "prerequisite to any act of interpretation."
But in this system of deliberate poesis, there are also blind spots. Material that
is excerpted as "text" immediately assumes a stable relation to "context"; there
is insufficient anxiety about the leap to synecdoche. When texts (parts taken

for wholes) hold still, the ethnographer can assume the role of the traditional
critic: someone "who sees the task at hand as locating the unruly meanings of
a text in a single coherent intention." But without problematizing "the actual-
ity of discursive situations and individual interlocutors," what gets lost is the
colloquy of the colloquial, the dialogic, the situational basis of all fact-seeking
interactions. In a sense, there are two contexts missing: the ethnographers' and
the informants'.

And so Clifford clamors for an anthropology of the incommensurable: for
"discursive anthropology," a mode of writing concerned with "situations of
interlocution" (42). Even here the ground is sticky and the specter may go
missing. How does one "resist the pull toward authoritative representation of
the other"? How "to maintain the strangeness of the other voice" as well as the
quiddities of the exchange that produced that voice? If what emerges in both
"authoritative" and "interpretive" anthropology is the problem of doing anthro-
pology not only with abstracted subjects but with a dead or missing anthropol-
ogist, discursive anthropology also has its pitfalls. In trying to give the subject
enough headroom, a discrete space of dialogic response, the anthropologist
compensates with ample quotation. But the danger here is in using quotation
in a subordinate fashion, as confirming testimony (50). How does one write an
ethnography where the subject talks back? (Even worse: how does one write
such an ethnography with the dead?)

Kathleen Stewart's *A Space On the Side of the Road* provides delicious if par-
tial answers. This is a book addressed from the coal mining regions of West
Virginia, a space lacking monumental stature within an American imaginary
where "African-American culture has become the talisman of 'cultural differ-
ence.'" Stewart wants to rethink this dialectic of othering from within the space
of an "Appalachia" texted from both inside and out as a backwater, a space on
the side of the road. To make this space almost visible, Stewart argues for the
clashing of epistemologies — "ours and theirs" — and she uses that clash
repeatedly to reopen "a gap in the theory of culture itself so that we can imag-
ine culture as a process constituted in use." "Culture" is redefined as a site "hard
to grasp"; it can never be found in "the perfect text and the quick textual solu-
tion" (5).

To prevent this fallacy of "perfect texting" Stewart projects a mixture of
voices. The rhythms of her book move back and forth between the imperative
voice — "imagine this, picture that" — and fragrant lists that conjure fragments
of places. Jumping from someone's front porch to a meditation on what it
means to report "place" in this way, Stewart swerves into theory and then back
again, meditating all along on the arc of her own voice. In reporting dialogue
she tries to remember the circumstance of the telling, including her own "aggra-
vation" at the "constant proliferation of stories" that will not hold still. Elabo-
rating on one community's self-description as "an old timey place," she conjures
yards filled with broken washing machines, scraps of metal, and cars belly up;
she demands that we arrest the gestures of "academic essentialism": "the desire
for decontaminated meaning, the need to require that visual, verbal constructs
yield meaning down to their last detail" (26).

In refusing to galvanize everything "into an order of things" Stewart tries
to deflect "transcendent critique long enough to recognize the practices of con-

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cealment and forgetting inherent in all modes of explanation, description, and analysis" (71). What if, instead of transcendent codes and systems, "there was only the anecdote"? What if we refused transcendent theories of culture and instead flooded our own markets with contaminating voices? What if every academic appropriation grew "nervous in the wake of its own partial under-standings and dense under the weight of its own political unconscious" (210)? What then?

Stewart's call for a nervous system, her refusal of singular, duplicable mod-els, makes for breathtaking reading, but what does it suggest about the specter? Doing anthropology with a dead subject already means that one is well outside the dialogic, talking with someone who can never talk back. "Interpretation is not interlocution. It does not depend on being in the presence of a speaker" (Clifford 39).

I feel this absence most acutely in Feldman's *Formations of Violence*, a book on the recent political struggles between Republicans and Loyalists in North-ern Ireland. Here, again and again, terrifying events are torn from their con-text and "textualized." Often this involves an extraordinary feeling of violation. Feldman anatomizes a scene of violence and then theorizes the psycho-social sources of this violence, with little apparent concern for its victims, those defiled by inventive brands of territorial fury. At the same time, the very sub-ject of this book is reflected in its methods. Feldman wants to unpack the volatility of violence, the way it escapes and fractures disciplinary structures, hacks its way into normative sites of legitimation. A question *Formations of Violence* dodges is, how can we talk about those who are offed by political vio-lence without replicating its dehumanizations? Within the apparatus of *For-mations of Violence*, theory itself becomes a kind of torture machine that processes the dead like so much odd filigree. And yet Feldman's insight into the particularly virulent world of injustice within Northern Ireland also "legit-imates" his book's violent method. We learn that sanctuaries function both to "territorialize violence" and to create zones of "reversible violence" that contin-ually change the terrain of "barricaded communities" (36). The complex ethics of "hardmen" (an old breed of Irishmen who handled conflict with fisticuffs) changes under the pressures of insurgency and counterinsurgency into the vio-lent ethos of "gunman" bent on a new species of genocide. Feldman argues that the political violence that ricochets throughout the urban environments of the Irish North offers an underanalyzed mode of transcription that "circulates codes from one prescribed historiographic surface or agent to another. . . . Struggles will occur over competing transcriptions of the same body," fractur-ing any vision of the body as "organic" or "natural" and accelerating one's sense of politicized subjectivity (7). In a sense, there is no space for griefwork here because this book's own accelerated rhythm of analysis reenacts the circuit in which violence becomes its own site for intensifying still more circuits of vio-lence.

And yet I also want to argue that something like a "holding" of the violent, violating, violated subject also occurs in the nervous interstices between Feld-man's own theories and his recorded interviews with IRA activists imprisoned by the British government. Here we find a particular intensive example of "tex-

ting." For example, Feldman describes the prison's rectal exams as "a ceremony of defilement and the highest expression of the prison regime's optical colonization of the captive body" — returning us to the question of the pun and whether the academic writer should abandon the temptation to hypertextualize an already violated body (174). To refuse to mark this "colonic" space — that is, to refuse to notice or emphasize a pun already half-present, half-visible, describing the prisoners' "colonized" anuses — opens a site of readerly risibility; once noted the pun is so obvious, so very much there. And yet to cite it is to make the bodies of others too available to the reader's objectifying gaze. That is, to pun about rectal extrusion and intrusion (to make the context of bodily invasion and privation so playful) is to risk excessive figuration. But *not* to mark this space of punning violation seems just as reprehensible. As Feldman argues, for Republican prisoners reduced by this continued defilement, the colon became wonderfully powerful, allowing colonized bodies to fight back using the only means available — colon-ically.

The story behind these vagrant figures is textured and complex. Beginning in 1976 the "Blanketmen" (those IRA prisoners Feldman interviewed who refused to wear prison uniforms that could divest them of their political status by labeling them common "criminals") began their terrible vigil. When prison authorities refused to grant them political standing, numbers of men lived for years divested of clothing, shivering in coarse blankets, their nakedness a political protest against continued deterritorialization. But without the protection of everyday clothing, these men became extraordinarily vulnerable. They were terrorized by guards who had easy access to their bodies, so that every available opening became a portal for excavation. Responding to repeated beatings and brutal searches of their anal cavities whenever they used the latrines, prisoners began to cover the walls of their cells with their own feces — to stink the guards out.

Feldman's thick descriptions of these atrocities suggest a mode of creative interpretation stretched past the limit:

> The prisoners' refusal to wear the uniform has been the first interruption of optical circuits. The guards responded by transforming nakedness into an obvious surrogate tool of visual degradation in place of institutional clothing. The No Wash Protest by the prisoners reclothed their naked bodies with a new and repellent surface of resistance. The fecal cell, which the guards tended to avoid and mainly entered to inflict quick terror, also interrupted compulsory visibility. In its soiled condition the cell was no longer a unidimensional and totally transparent optical stage. The stained walls and the stench endowed the cells with a sensory opacity, resistant depth, and blackness within which the prisoners could shelter. There was a strong analogue between the hiding of contraband by the prisoners in their rectal cavity and the withdrawal of the Blanketmen into the repelling depths of the scatological cell. Denied the surfaces of the inmate's body and the interior of the inmate's cell by fecal defilement, the prison regime extended its optic to the colon-ization of the physical interior of the prisoner with the rectal mirror search. (175)

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Here, I would argue, the practice of "texting" may go too far, but it also fails to go far enough. That is, Feldman's own colonic text defamiliarizes and disgorges a context so habitually violent that words can barely contain it. In stretching one's figurative capacities on behalf of bodies also stretched to the limit, in inventing puns that insistent on making rhetorical capital out of someone else's body by means of an extravagant and objectifying poesis, Feldman's text becomes frighteningly mimetic. That is, in immersing us so thoroughly, so viscerally in cloacal politics (running the gamut from highbrow theory to lowbrow wordplay), Feldman's version of "interpretive" anthropology veers deliberately off course and becomes, I would argue, "discursive." This is thick description with an alienation-effect thrown in: rhetorical cavities held wide, figures violent and awkward, attempting to make readable (and therefore disruptable?) the space of the all too terrible and strange.

In criticizing the hard-troping, theory-hungry bent of Feldman's prose, I'm also arguing that its "evacuation" of griefwork or mourning is oddly compensated for by Feldman's own far-fetched and farcical figurations — images that jolt us out of a too redemptive, too stultifying pathos. Given this self-contradicting conclusion, however, why do I object so strenuously when Gildea constructs equally "creative" and objectifying figures to inscribe the mute surfaces of Mississippi's dead?

My objection is this: while Feldman tries to find a space to reinscribe the fecal contexts deliberately created by his informants, Gildea participates in a form of cultural criticism that doesn't recognize its own lack of information: namely, the complexities of doing anthropology with a dead subject who cannot talk back. In the face of this silence Gildea creates a system that forgets to be nervous about its own certainties:

> A convict who commits suicide out of the depths of despondency is an artist enacting a dream of expressive freedom upon his or her own body. In the complex creativity of these forty-nine men and women, you can see a reenactment of the whole history of human thought and art. . . . They perceived another form of sleep in their bedsheets. They found a new way to wear their old jeans. (132)

> [S]elf-violence in jail . . . needs to be witnessed to be validated as art. In large part because of the debate over their authorship and their journalistic depiction as unmakings, the Mississippi jail hangings have not been presented to a public audience as works of art. Once revealed as makings, however, the power of their iconic imagery rises before you. It speaks of stillness, of liminality and resistance. This is more than giving the finger to the establishment, or burning the flag, this is offering a dead body as an installation piece in a disciplinary space designed to be utterly devoid of artistic expression. (133)

Gildea describes the victims of violent deaths while in custody not only as "texts" but as self-texting integers (the ultimate fantasy of the body as text, of a body eager for the critic's resistant readings). Those who have died ambigu-

ously in jail become death artists, deliberate artificers of their own transcendental critique.

But where are the voices of Gildea's informants, where is his nervous system? To make such a grand argument out of anything but thin air, the cultural critic needs to cover a great deal of empirical ground, spending time in at least two different material contexts: in the streets, houses, and offices where incarcerated subjects roamed before their incarceration, and in the inferno of Mississippi's jails. Otherwise the dead offer a too timely Rorschach for the writer's own fantasies — especially those deaths whose causes remain ambiguous. Any ventriloquism or versioning of these now spectral lives must be largely theoretical or imaginary — and must acknowledge the potential arrogance and inaccuracies of its own hoped-for theories. Might we not see in these still bodies subjects who, meeting themselves on the way to jail, become frightened, confused, fragmented, insufficient — suggesting deaths that are just messy and meaningless rather than blithely agential and perverse? Might we not hear, in the margins of this essay, the murmurs of bodies that *do not* speak, because they did not ask to be unmade but were tortured or murdered or pushed into suicide? What kind of "installation space" would this make? "Estranged Fruit" needs to stutter here, to explore the possibility that some of these forty-nine men and women might experience their "texting" as posthumous harm, might not consent to the critic's own figurations. Without this discursive doubt, without an excavation of the critic's own transferential need to reanimate the dead "as art," the critical ecstasy and self-certainty that spin off these spectral bodies tells us too much. It creates the possibility that these hanged bodies tell us more about Gildea's own investments, and still more about the easy commodification of the dead in the face of a critic's own desire for an "installation piece."

3. & 4. The Academy and the Commodification of Loss, or the Dead as the Source of the New

The source for this essay has been a gap, a space on the side of the road, in the margins of the first issue of *Journal x* where I lost myself two months ago and started writing. Turning from Gildea's penultimate essay on hanged men to Gregory Ulmer's playful and erudite "Exhibit X: Hoopla Dreams," I felt lost. Is it permissible to make this trek from trauma to pleasure by just turning a page? What is the status of academic consumerism, of a world of words where we can channel-surf from trauma to pleasure and back to trauma again with so little cost?

Trying to reflect upon this discontinuity, I can recognize these feelings as something perpetual; they recur, for instance, during those dim moments of (pseudo-)consciousness I have while reading *The New York Times*. I'm horror-struck reading an article about Mexico, or Dakar, or Des Moines, or Dubuque, and then I glance at a body clothed by Lord and Taylor and feel reprieve (or anger, or desire, or bare nausea). On a really self-conscious day, shocked at the gargantuan presence of these ads next to tiny-print copy about people in pain,

I think, what kind of world is this? and why do I buy into it? — before butter-
ing my bagel, folding the paper and putting my thoughts away. How can these
modes of protest and packaging coexist in the same paper, in the same con-
sciousness, on the same page? Why is it so customary to mix our pleasures with
our horrors?

Reading the *Times*, I know from Benedict Anderson, is a much more com-
plicated act than simply gathering fads and facts about the world. To marry the
apocalyptic delights of consumerism (brassy women in boas, quiet young
women buckling their bras, young men staring back at me with their sweet,
erect nipples) and the chaos of the recently dead or the long dead or the soon
to be dead is a ritual of nationalizing identity. I open my paper and the family
across the street opens theirs — or used to, in any event. A sense of collectiv-
ity, of shared facts and shared modes of consumption (of consuming objects
with our trauma) locates the self in a series of self-disciplining spaces.

There is, of course, something similar about the sociology of an academic
journal. Collective acts of reading construct a community, as, in fact, *Journal x*
has begun to construct its community around the question of pleasure:

> *Journal x* instructs its reviewers to make pleasure an explicit criterion for
> acceptance and publication, alongside the more orthodox academic criteria
> of originality and responsibility. To poach upon Wallace Stevens's descrip-
> tion of the supreme fiction, the *Jx* essay *must give pleasure*, must bring the
> thrill of discovery that has always alerted readers to the presence of a first-
> rate intellect engaged in the exploration of new territory and the definition
> of new problems and paradigms. (Kamps and Watson 2)

What does it mean to give an academic audience "pleasure"? After thinking
hard about "Estranged Fruit" and the anthropography of violence, I've begun to
suspect that such pleasures have a great deal to do with the dead. As Marx
comments in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*:

> And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and
> things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such
> periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the
> past to their service and borrow from names, battle cries, and costumes in
> order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured dis-
> guise and this borrowed language. (103)

Marx suggests that "new problems and paradigms" depend upon the dead's bor-
rowed names. This means that revolutionary thinking is "never free of anxiety";
or, in Derrida's haunting of Marx, "conjuration is anxiety from the moment it
calls upon death to invent the quick and to enliven the new, to summon the
presence of what is not yet there" (Derrida 108-9). I would add that such nar-
ratives seek an infusion of pleasure by instigating a powerful and satisfying
"out-sourcing" of pain, an observation based on the self-gratifying cling-ons of
late commodity culture. The Nike swoosh manufactured under subhuman con-
ditions in Vietnam, the Barbie dolls made in Malaysian sweatshops, represent

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an ultimate out-sourcing of the pain and alienation of labor that a "flexible" economy makes possible. Do academic communities that are pleasure-based work in a similar way? At the very least, the out-sourcing of pain into the traumatic narratives we read and write so freely may have the effect of creating a safely pleasurable source of self-shattering.

In thinking about *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Derrida makes two more observations. First, those dead generations who weigh so thoroughly upon the "brains of revolutionaries" have a severe spectral density. "To weigh (*lasten*) is also to charge, tax, impose, indebt, accuse, assign, enjoin. And the more life there is, the graver the specter of the other becomes, the heavier its imposition. And the more the living have to answer for it. *To answer for the dead, to respond to the dead . . .* in the absence of any certainty or symmetry" (109). But this debt of responsiveness to spectral thinking creates a strange paradox. The more "the new" demands change or crisis, "the more one has to convoke the old, 'borrow' from it." The *spirit* of revolution depends upon, even as it tries to repudiate, history's *specters*. Facing this obstacle, Marx hopes for a sea change — a moment when the true revolutionary will find "the spirit of [a] new language . . . without recalling the old." But is this anything other than a happy pipe dream?[5] According to Derrida, "Marx intends to distinguish between the spirit (*Geist*) of the revolution and its specter (*Gespenst*), as if the former did not already call up the latter, as if everything, and Marx all the same recognizes this himself, did not pass by way of differences *within a fantastics as general as it is irreducible*. Untimely, 'out of joint,' even and especially if it appears to come in due time, the spirit of the revolution is *fantastic and anachronistic through and through*" (Derrida 112).

Can the same thing be said about the spirit of pleasure? Certainly in "Estranged Fruit" the new can only be mediated, made conceptually profitable and figuratively pleasurable, via Billie Holliday's old song. As Gildea comments: "Through the haunting beauty of her singing, Holliday was able to 'harvest' black southern lynchings of the 1930s and 1940s for a national audience, reaping jazz genius and political outrage from those barbarous acts. In recent times, Mississippi has produced fresh fruit from new nooses. . . . Now that these forces of estrangement have been descried with the help of theories of both unmaking and making, it is at last possible to harvest the fruit of these Mississippi jail hangings" (139). This is not just a question of taste, although "fresh fruit" is a painful figure (whether it describes murdered bodies or death artists). Nor is it simply a question of what we owe the dead, although this is important, too. Instead, I want to return to the image itself as commodity. In troping or turning death into figures, writing is once more exposed as an act of commodification and consumption: a space where death is converted into pleasure.

Suddenly, we are in the territory of psychoanalysis, of Freud's death wish and pleasure principle, where it is customary to be swept away by gallows humor so reprehensible and consoling and giddy that it can only repeat itself. That is, in the very act of telling or troping, the object world is refigured not as a source of pain but of pleasure: its tension veering toward zero. Can one write and remain in the unpleasure of death? A question terminable and interminable.

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Daniel responds to these puzzles in his chapter on "Embodied Terror." In describing the pain of those tortured (by the Sri Lankan Army and by Tamilese militants), Daniel notes the peculiar de-animation of the men and women who describe their own torture to others. "There were no signs of contained passion. Rather, attempts to extract information were met with expressions of utter listlessness. Months later I found out that it was not so much boredom that weighed down on the victim as it was the overwhelming sense of the sheer worthlessness of all attempts to communicate something that was so radically individuated and rendered unshareable" (143). But Daniel goes on to argue that those who have endured enormous pain may find some reprieve in terror — in the felt remembrance of pain. In "second" or therapeutic terror, "a seismic aftershock" goes through the body, terrifying those who are present when a torture victim is suddenly wracked by sobs or anger or violent shaking or numbing withdrawal. These convulsions have been described by a Siddha physician as "the pain coming out . . . the trembling and fear that comes through remembering terrible acts" (144). This terror is not an emotion that is simply gothic or void of knowing but an overdetermined site for coming to deal with (not to heal — it offers no promise of healing) feelings so traumatic that they seem incommunicable, even to the self who endured them. In second, or therapeutic, terror, experiences that seemed utterly alinguistic become something the psyche can discharge, recharge, find access to, if not control.

By the end of this chapter Daniel discovers, in the poetry and street theater that flourished during this period, another opening where pain can be dislodged "from its fixed site." Pain stuck "at the brink of language" can be freed into beauty, riding swiftly into our lives "on metaphor and icons of affect" (153). But just as swiftly, Daniel pulls back from the affective tug of his own aestheticizing argument. "Too easy," he insists, much too easy. In seeking comfort in the process of recovering trauma for culture, we "need to ride our consolations between two echoes. . . . Poetry, prose, theater, and painting are not the only aestheticizing agents. The poesis of culture itself is a narcotic, and as such it summons us to respond to Emily Dickinson's charge that 'Narcotics cannot still the tooth / That nibbles at the soul'" (153). It seems that we can never be nervous enough.

Seeking such nervousness, let me turn to the letter "x." When I first heard about *Journal x* — about the wonderfully new and borrowed name of this ambitious new journal — I felt a small shock of pleasure. The "x" seemed so *au courant* and flexible, so wonderfully twenty- and thirty-something, so outmodedly modish. But thinking about this journal now, as I do, through the scrim of pleasures derived from hanged bodies and the hard-to-read "scene of the gallant South," I seem to see another "X" in the shadows: namely, the site of privation and violence that marks the loss of the African name. The capitalized "X" of a Black Muslim idiom is not cited here, and yet it resounds in the journal's margins, an unknown *in*variable that conjures up specters from the Middle Passage and beyond. What do we look for when we seek out the "x"? Do we seek the *pleasure* of the spectral unknown, or its *burden*? Perhaps, as a way of short-circuiting the proprietorship of the name, this "x" must resonate in both contexts, "between two echoes."

Let me end with an echolalia — with something like a parable. Last night at dinner we were playing a "Know Your US Presidents" game with the kids. I asked Kiri, the 7-year-old, "Which president freed the slaves?" and Noah, just 3, shouted, "Santa Claus!" We burst into laughter at his vehemence, his certainty, and his obvious pleasure in having such a good answer. He is learning his history from our culture's Old Masters — discovering, in ways that I'd never thought possible, the stinging pleasure, the consuming narcotic, the deadening hope, of recirculating the commodified name.

Notes

1. On the subject of hanging, Paul de Man, and lurid figures, see Hertz.

2. In a moving essay about the the wrinkles and odors that still inhabit the garments of the dead, Peter Stallybrass writes about inheriting Allon White's clothing — and inheriting with it the grief and pleasure, the lingering of someone else's "human imprint," even after his death. Stallybrass suggests another mode of continuity between the living and the dead: "Bodies come and go; the clothes which have received those bodies survive" (37).

3. To investigate this idea in depth, Christopher Bollas's *The Shadow of the Object* seems achingly relevant. Bollas asks how we are held by aesthetic objects, by the shadow of the maternal other that haunts every work of art. He describes our early environment as "the experience of an object that transforms the subject's internal and external worlds" (28). But in talking about, or thinking with, the dead, one faces the burden of having to become the transformational object oneself. That is, one reshapes material that seems at once too full and too empty, in need of transformative labor but unable to respond to such labor — an unknown invariable (see the penultimate paragraph of this essay).

4. The phrase "anthropography" is borrowed from Daniel's subtitle. Taussig details numerous nervous systems in his description of the social as an ongoing state of emergency.

5. This is gorgeously glossed by Gibson-Graham: "When Marx attempts to banish the specter, in that same moment he sets himself up for a haunting — by all that must be erased, denied, cast out, mocked as chimerical or belittled as inconsequential, in order to delimit a certain objectivity. Indeed, the attempt to banish the specter creates the possibility and the likelihood of a haunting. In the very moment of exorcism, the specter is named and invoked, the ghost is called to inhabit the space of its desired absence. The more one attempts to render it invisible, the more spectacular its invisibility becomes" (240).

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